

The Church Guardian.

Upholds the Doctrines and Rubrics of the Prayer Book.

"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."—Eph. vi. 24.
"Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."—Jude: 3.

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SCEPTICISM AND PRAYER.

Language is to thought what the body is to the soul; that which gives form to its outward phenomena, and whereby it finds its expression in the material world; while it at the same time circumscribes the scope of its energies and clogs its highest aspirations. It is by thought that man approaches to the image of his Maker. Thought, which is illimitable, unfettered by time in its anticipation of the future and in its retrospect of the past, and knowing no bounds of space in its infinite range of energy, is the dim reflex image in man of the One Omnipotent and Eternal. Thus thought, the Divine *inflatus* into man, partakes somewhat of the Divine nature, and is endued to a certain extent with the Divine power of creation. But as soon as it finds expression in language or in action it loses at once the Divine attribute of creation and becomes merely reproduction, the alchemist compounding and recompounding in his crucible elements already pre-existent. In more vigorous ages, and in more vigorous individuals, thought, like a giant exulting in his strength, ranges untrammelled through regions where it finds no footprints of precedence; while in less vigorous times, and in less original individuals, it helplessly clutches to the support of authority. This latter condition is in a very large measure to be met with in the present day—in this, which is an age rather of learning than of speculation; of scientific rather than metaphysical research. Persons are now disposed rather to adopt ready-made the thoughts of the great thinkers of bygone times than to think out truths for themselves. A proposition is accepted, not so much because it commends itself to the mind as true as because it may be supported by one or more received authorities.

This tone of thought has produced its natural result in an exaggerated criticism of authorities; a system which is neither creative or even reproductive, but purely destructive. Hence arises the widespread scepticism of our day—a tone of thought so prevalent that, were it asked, "What is the nature of that which arrogates to itself the title of modern thought?" the answer would be that it is sceptical.

Scepticism is at best but an inferior mode of thought. It strikes out no new lines for itself since its course must be a retrogression along lines of thought already traced; it cannot like man's noblest intuitions, be self-existent, since its very existence requires pre-existent thought upon the matters with which it is conversant. Truth is self-existent and eternal, and to man's generous thought aspiring after truth is imparted somewhat of these Divine attributes. But scepticism is the parasite of truth.

The Gnosticism of later times would fain reverse the order of creation; and, instead of God being the Creator of man, its pride would make man the creator of his God. The mind of man cannot grasp the Infinite; and therefore God has revealed Himself to man in His attributes. As man rejects one by one these attributes, which are beyond the range of his finite faculties, he debases the idea of God to the measure of his own finality. The residuum which is left is atheism—an atheism which, if it stop short of an absolute denial of God's existence, is yet a denial of His providence.

Take, for instance, the particular subject of prayer. Deny the existence of God altogether and you make prayer an impossibility; acknowledge

His existence and you make prayer a necessity. For, if you allow His existence, but deny the efficacy of prayer offered to Him, to support this negative hypothesis you must start with the premise that He does not exert an ever-watchful care over His creatures, or you must arrive at it as your only logical conclusion. Such a premise can only be assumed by forming an idea of God, not according to His own revelation of Himself, but according to the requirements of the limits of human intelligence. And such a conclusion can only be arrived at by a process of inductive reasoning which must rob God of all freedom of action, and make Him the slave of a resistless necessity.

Scepticism is more conversant with the expression of thought than with thought itself. And thus it would overthrow the dogma of the efficacy of prayer, not by the enunciation of a truth, which would make this dogma untenable, but by a cumulative weight of adverse evidence; this evidence being gained by an inductive reasoning from an analysis of the laws of the universe, in which it can find no trace of the operation of prayer. But this reasoning, to a great extent, overlooks or ignores the great Principle of Life in the formation and government of the universe, while it follows it along the lines of instinctive choice, but not of intelligent will.

It is not maintained that prayer operates otherwise than through the Divine economy of natural laws. These laws operate under the action of forces; so much so that rest is not the absence of all force, but the equilibrium of active forces. And inefficacy of prayer could be successfully demonstrated only by an exhaustive analysis of the initial impulse of these forces.—*Selected.*

FREE CHURCHES.

WHATEVER may be said about social considerations, the question of finances, etc., no one can deny that this system is in every way akin to the spirit of the Gospel. Whether the question be one of free invitation, or of regarding nothing as common or unclean, nothing is more natural or obligatory than to bring that Gospel which is to be preached to every creature within every creature's hearing. If you cannot fill God's House without going out into the highways and hedges and compelling people to come in, how can you hope to fill it in face of so many barriers within by which to keep them out? What use that the Spirit and the Bride say, "Come, and whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely," if it is but too evident from the arrangement of the Church that very many of such people are not wanted? If Jerusalem from above is free, which is the mother of us all, what should be so perfectly free and open as those temples in which He Who tasted wrath for every man, and Who is no respecter of persons, would make them equally welcome and an equal sharer in His grace and redemption? Now, supposing it to be true that the Church is losing hold of the masses, what could more certainly repel them than the feeling that their admission to the temple and to the circles of discipleship depends more on wealth and social considerations than on anything that Christ took account of in dying to save them, and in opening to them the kingdom of heaven?

No more is it to be denied, again, that the free Church system was the system of the early Church, while probably no other was ever thought of. How would it have looked, at least, for an Apostle to

have exclaimed, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money"—when everybody knew his coming depended on a large amount of money in the way of pew-rents? No such barriers existed in the Jewish Church, and they certainly exist in the Christian Church only as a late and, at least, questionable innovation. It will not do to say that pews first came in with the Reformation, for we hear of them as far back as the thirteenth century; while Bishop Bale, in his "Image of both Churches," speaks of "shrynes, images, Church-stoles, and pews that are well paid for," referring to the condition of things in the Roman Catholic Church. As far back as 1287, a Canon made at Exeter rebukes quarrelling for a seat in a church, and decrees that none shall claim a seat as his own except noblemen and their patrons. Gradually, however, seats were appropriated by other members of the parish, to the injury of the poor and the multiplication of disputes. By the common law, however, each parishioner has a right to a seat, and the Churchwardens or other officers are bound to place each one as best they can. The system according to which no one feels entitled to a seat unless he has paid for it, however it came in with the Reformation, certainly did not come in with Christianity, and doubtless came along gradually like other ecclesiastical abuses, or, if it sounds better, ecclesiastical experiments.

At any rate, by whatever method the Early Church got on, it can get on again, unless the spirit of the early Church has departed. Neither earlier nor later can the Church run any risk in acting out the plain spirit of the Gospel and in falling back on a principle and not on expedients: It may be said, of course, that the money question is the great obstacle in the way of carrying on free churches; but the right of things first, and the finances second. Besides the true capital of the Church is not money, but spirituality. Have the Spirit of Christ and you will have the spirit of giving; and by as much as you dare entrust yourself to a righteous principle all other things, as in seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness, shall be added unto you. Certainly the Church cannot greatly err in returning to that primitive way which, at least, is not the way of exclusiveness and pride, and which makes it, like the Gospel, free to all.—*Selected.*

THE *Century* has a remarkable paper, called "The Jewish Problem," written by a Jewess. The authoress, after reviewing the history of her people since the destruction of Jerusalem, and defending them from the charges of meanness and avarice usually brought against them, expresses a happy conviction that the time when the Israelites will again form a united nation is in fact approaching. "While a few years ago the most enlightened Jews, yielding to the indolent apathy of comparative security, would have ignored or ridiculed the vision of a restoration, to-day it is no exaggeration to say that whenever two Israelites of ordinary intelligence come together, the possibility, nay, the probability of again forming a united nation is seriously discussed."

It is also to be noted in this same connection that a better feeling exists among the Jews in all parts of the world towards Christianity; while the Church of England and her daughter in America are particularly active in presenting the Gospel to their notice. We may hope, therefore, that the restored nation will be a nation which recognizes Jesus Christ as their King and God.