

is true, and some corresponding proof ought to be forthcoming, if Church operation and ministration are so vital. "By their fruits ye shall know them," seems a sound principle to go by. But in this case there are no fruits, else we should have had them pointed out. The barren fig-tree only is suggested to our minds.

Now I say, this unproved, unproveable, but—in our time and place—much bruited claim set up and maintained by our priests, makes me fear for the near future of Christianity. Reasonable men will not long continue to believe or regard it. Perhaps, outside the clergy themselves, there are not many thinking well-informed men who do so even now. Many are tolerating the pretensions of the clergy on the principle that "it pleases them and doesn't hurt us"; and affirm that their *laissez-faire* is true wisdom. But this will not last long. A theory or belief that cannot justify itself by practical substantial proof; still more, if it has no *shew* even of practical proof—will be washed away by the restless and rising tide of question and enquiry characteristic of our age.

I know this priestly claim has arguments in its favour: scriptural arguments, historical arguments, such as they are; but such there have been for many delusions that have long swayed mankind, and then vanished away. Example: *Witchcraft*. That delusion held its place in the world till quite recent times; in New England till little over a hundred years ago. The Church had believed it from the beginning; in the middle ages the Church fostered it; it was a "real manifestation of the power of Satan on the earth." This reality was maintained eloquently, scripturally, convincingly; and facts of a kind were produced in evidence. Consult the relevant history, and you will find that I overstate nothing. But the superstition could not bear strict examination; *scriptural proofs could not save it*; and it was at length, after being the cause of incalculable cruelty and other evil, remanded to the limbo of vanities and lies.

The *sacerdotal idea*, familiarly known to students of heathen literature, it can hardly be doubted, will in like manner perish; but Christianity itself may for a time be involved in its ruins. It has begun to be so already. The intelligent classes in Western Europe, where Roman Catholicism is dominant, have already very largely turned away from it; and *no religion at all* has come for the time to be the prevalent belief. The deference or tolerance shewn to it is mainly due to the fact that the Pope, with his backing of clergy, is still