

Talks about Books.

THE Christian man of the day should be a thoughtful and active-minded man, for the air is full of conflict, and only he who keeps his intellectual weapons sharp and polished can hope to engage in it successfully. One of the battles not long since ended is the controversy between Christianity and Agnosticism. On the side of belief, stand the Rev. Dr. Wace of King's College, London, the Bishop of Peterborough, somewhat dragged into it, and Mr. W. H. Mallock, who, like the Paulicians of old and the Anabaptists of Reformation times, has been steadily energizing towards the light. On the other side are Professor Huxley and Mrs. Humphrey Ward, but Professor Huxley has four papers to Dr. Wace's two and to two microscopical answers from Bishop Magee. Perhaps a little goes a long way from a bishop. The controversy began with Dr. Wace's paper on Agnosticism before the Anglican Church Congress which Dr. Magee approved, stigmatizing Agnosticism at the same time as cowardly. Professor Huxley vainly tries to show that an agnostic is not an atheist, disavows Comte, Harrison, Laing, Spencer, in fact everybody but himself on his side, and maintains that it is not cowardly to be true to your convictions. To the last of these Mr. Mallock replies, maintaining that Agnosticism shirks the problem in all its aspects, present and future, presented by the moral and spiritual phenomena of the world. Professor Huxley says he can't accept the New Testament account of Christ on canons of literary criticism, and, with a great show of learning of the Tübingen order, tries to prove that the gospels are not original but compilations, probably from apocryphal sources in part, that they were made up in the second century, and repeats uncritically and *ad nauseam* all that work of imagination called the higher criticism which Westcott, Gausson, Salmon, and even Reuss and Renan have shewn, by a great weight of historical and literary testimony, to be baseless as the fabric of a vision. Next, he tries the gospels by the canons of historical criticism and finds them to abound in marvels similar to those described by Eginhard, the secretary and biographer of Charlemagne. No doubt Mrs. Ward supplied the Agnostic Jove with this thunderbolt, for it is exactly in the line of Robert Elsmere and her contribution to the controversy entitled *The New Reformation*. In reviewing her work last winter I dealt with this argument, putting Sulpitius Severus' *Life of Martin of Tours* in opposition to the Gospels. Sulpitius died in the early part of the fifth century, Eginhard in the middle of the ninth. The periods when these compared