

every shape."* Dean Church speaks of the same characteristic of the age: "A new generation was rising into influence, to whom the old church watchwords and maxims, the old church habits of mind, the old church convictions had completely lost their force, and were almost become objects of dislike and scorn."†

Tennyson, according to Ward, "lived his most active mental life in the very midst of the dissolution of the spirit of belief, and has ever been regarded as specially sensitive to the intellectual conditions of his time."‡ What he did was to interpret the era to itself, reconciling the conservative to necessary changes and checking the radical from rash innovations. He was one of those wedded to "the new scientific interest," who yet apprehended danger from the unsettling of faith without establishing it on a surer foundation. While showing the inconsistency of Christians—"plucked one way by hate and one by love"—he noted the inconsistency of skeptics in tearing down without replacing, in overstepping the bounds of ascertained knowledge and arrogating to themselves superior judgment.

In the oft-quoted section cxiv. of "In Memoriam," which marks out the province and limits of natural science, the poet deplores the loss of reverence along with the growth of knowledge. He notes regretfully the encroachments of the secular on the sacred, evidently characterizing the shallow iconoclasts who scrupled not to take away the light and peace that glorify human life. Not revering the majesty of the Most High, they assailed the very citadel of religion, the grounds of faith in the unseen, thus making an end of what Lowell calls "the spiritual hope and consolation of mankind."

There was another kind of criticism whose value Tennyson appreciated, distinguishing it from the supercilious, carping infidelity that attributes insincerity to professed believers and questions altogether the reality of conviction. The philosophic skepticism of John Stuart Mill can hardly be described as "blind unbelief" in the meaning which Cowper attached to this expression. Mill's reasoned unbelief, like that of Hume and Gibbon, aroused Christian philosophers to reexamine the foundations of their faith. Thus the literature of theology and philosophy has been incalculably enriched with works of exceptional value. Some of Mill's contemporaries—Grote, Harriet Martineau, George Eliot, and other writers for *The Westminster Review*—rendered Christianity more or less service by exposing the inconsistencies and "crudities of popular religion." They not only subjected certain objectionable types of piety to the test of common-sense, they stimulated the habit of close thinking, which resulted in fuller knowledge and a more rational understanding of the claims of religion.

"Honest doubt" has a field and work of its own. If there be a mood of mind which favors insight and leads to the discovery of truth,

* "W. G. Ward and the Oxford Movement," p. 48.

† Church, "The Oxford Movement," p. 67.

‡ Ward, "Witnesses to the Unseen," p. 15.