

Pastor and People.

UNBELIEF IN THE PRESENT DAY.

Below we place before our readers the paper on this subject read before the Pan-Presbyterian Council, by Rev. Prof. Patton, D.D., of Chicago, described by the Edinburgh Review "as a masterly resume of the leading lines of attack by which the Christian faith is at present assailed."

WHAT IS FAITH?

I. Unbelief as it concerns the question of personal faith in Christ.—The doctrine of the Bible is salvation by faith. Faith is persuasion of the truth; when it terminates on propositions, we call it assent; when on persons, trust. Saving faith is not faith in propositions, but trust in a person. It is confidence in a Divine Christ. This is the heart of the gospel. Hence the ethical significance of unbelief. In the presence of the appalling amount of unbelief of this kind, no question is more important than the inquiry, How are we to deal with it? What are we to do? (1.) In addition to the presentation of motives to men to believe in Christ, by showing that Christ is entitled to their confidence, we can show that conceiving of God as embarking in the work of man's redemption and providing for his salvation, the most natural thing in the world is that he should ask men to have confidence in Him. This removes the subject of the arbitrary aspect which it sometimes seems to have. (2.) While representing faith in exercise as a very simple thing, it is but right that we should recognize that the state of mind which we call confidence in God is when we look at it as a psychological marvel. This will serve a double purpose. It will expose the fallacy of those who represent us as conditioning salvation in external acts too trifling, as they think, to affect the salvation of the soul, by showing them that it is the state of mind which presupposes the act, and not the act itself, to which God looks, and it will pave the way for the next point which I wish to present. (3.) We must recognize the sovereign nature of regeneration in an act of God's Holy Spirit, and do ample justice to the office work of the third person of the Trinity. If by an act of will we cannot bring ourselves into a state of confidence in him who does not have our confidence, we may reasonably argue that it is not in our power to bring ourselves into the attitude of confidence in God, particularly in view of these Scriptures which describe us in our fallen nature as at enmity with God. And, finally, in undertaking to explain why men do not believe, we must be careful lest, in referring to the neglect of the Church, the want of consistency among Christians, we overlook the generic cause of unbelief in the subjective state of the sinner; a depraved nature which, in the first place, makes him undesirous of hearing the gospel; in the second place, puts him in a false argumentative attitude in respect to the gospel, and in the third place prevents his hearty acceptance of the gospel, though intellectually convinced of its truth.

II. Unbelief as it concerns the question of the Divine authority of the Bible.—The unbelief which discredits the Bible comes naturally after the view of unbelief just considered. For when asked to believe in Christ, a man may inquire, How do I know I need salvation, and how do I know that Christ and Christ alone will save? Our answer is—Because God has said so in His Word. Hence faith in the Bible and faith in Christ are so closely allied that sometimes there is confusion of thought in regard to their relations. Saving faith is

CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST,

and not belief in the authority of Scripture. The two things are distinct; for a man may believe the Scriptures and not trust Christ, and a man may trust Christ who never saw the Scriptures. We must keep these things separate, for two reasons.—(1.) Lest we rashly misjudge that a man thus lost his hope in Christ because he has never held, or has ceased to hold, the received view in regard to all or a part of the Scriptures. (2.) Lest in our anxiety to serve the truth we put ourselves in a false argumentative position. For I hold that if a man's Bible should be reduced to the three synoptic gospels, it would still be his duty to believe in a risen Saviour and to trust Him for salvation. And if the cause of Christianity is so strong when reduced to such a compass, how unassailable its claims when we have all the Books, and all the Books inspired? To tie faith in Christ to faith in the canon and the inspiration of it is a dialectical blunder which we should guard against. We say this while yielding to none in our belief in the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, and in our appreciation of all forms of unbelief which grow out of or which necessitate a denial of the infallible authority of the Word of God. We cannot enter here upon the question of modern doubt respecting the Bible. But men are forming conclusions which ignore, contradict, or exclude the truths of the Bible. The reasons for this are various. (1.) Men are adopting philosophical opinions which exclude the Bible. There is no use for the Bible among men who believe in nothing but their five senses. (2.) They are led by what is called the higher criticism to discredit books or portions of books which compose the Bible. (3.) They come, with foregone conclusions, which make them incapable of receiving the teaching of the Bible. These categories would probably accommodate most of the unbelief of the present day, and the general errors with which they are all chargeable are two.—(1.) Mistake as to the proper office of reason in matters of faith. (2.) Mistake as to the proper attitude of mind in respect to evidence. I cannot say much on these points, and with reference to the first I need not. The denial of the right to make a subjective standard of truth is one of the common-places of apologetics. We are entitled to ask three questions in regard to a proposition to which our assent is asked.—(1.) Does it contradict known truth. (2.) Is it vouched for by adequate and appropriate evidence? (3.) What does it mean? That is all. And men make mistakes in regard to evidence in that they do not recognize the mental and moral obligation to believe well-attested truth. They play the advocate instead of judge,

and they are determined that error shall have the benefit of the doubt. I maintain that our duty in argument ceases when we have made a case of moral certainty, and that if, after that, a man insists on our carrying the matter to the point of a mathematical demonstration, we weaken our position by continuing to argue. The man who says he will go to sea on a raft because I cannot demonstrate that the Commodore will carry him safely, must go on a raft. The literature of apologetics wants a book which will expound Bishop Butler's aphorism—"Probability is the guide of life." And now, how is unbelief of the sort of which I am speaking to be dealt with? 1. We must understand the province of argument. It will help the man who wants light, but it will not help the man who is blind. Where unbelief is not due to lack of evidence, increasing the evidence will not help him. He that hears not Moses and the prophets will not believe though one rose from the dead. You cannot cure a man's eyes by operating on his ears. (Laughter.) 2. We must make clear our position in respect to faith, for the very terminology we use is being turned into an argument against us. An object of faith—see Tennyson's "In Memoriam"—is regarded as something believed but not known, believed but not seen, believed but not proved. And so men come to look on it as a profession of ignorance. We deny this.

FAITH IS PERSUASION

of the truth. And there are these three reasons for being persuaded: (1.) A thing may be an irreducible fact of consciousness. (2.) It may be attested by competent and trustworthy witnesses. These are the grounds on which we are persuaded of the truth of Christianity, and the conclusions of science rest on no other if they are sound. We deny the antithesis between faith and knowledge, and where bad use is made of our terminology, we will substitute for it the inspired dogmatism of the apostle and say—We know. (3.) We must meet unbelief. It will not do to say that we must offer no protest against the false philosophy by any direct discussion of its errors. [Applause.] To do it wisely may be difficult, but it will not do to say that it lies beyond our province as ministers of the gospel. If cerebral psychology was against the soul, we must war against it. If utilitarian ethics are undermining religion, let us help those who are making a stand for intuitionism. If infidel erudition is trying to discredit the books of the Bible, let Christian erudition go to the rescue. There is, however, another and, perhaps, a better way. If we can defend the historical gospels, every thing is secured. For we go at once from the integrity of Christ's manhood to His Supreme Divinity. And if Christ is God, we have in His Word God's veto against Materialism and false philosophy, and the higher criticism as well. There is hardly a controversy which may not be fought and fought victoriously on the battle ground of Calvary. [Applause.] (4.) We must make more use than hitherto has been made of the argument of congruity. The Christian system furnishes the only consistent explanation of all the phenomena of life and history. The key that fits the lock is the right key. Materialism explains some facts, but it leaves a great many unnoticed. There are no facts in the physical, mental, moral, and spiritual world which are not compatible with the Christian scheme. And no other scheme will adjust these facts one to another. It is time for our apologists to turn their attention to this matter. If we may venture to say it, there is not much to be gained beyond interesting information in isolated illustrations of the argument of design. The argument is good, but it is a mistake to suppose that its argumentative value is in the ratio of the illustrations of it we gather. The man who sees no design in the watch of an ordinary maker, will not be likely to see it in a chronometer. It is design as seen in a cosmical system of thoughts and things which we wish to see illustrated by some one who has the information and the generalizing power which will qualify him for the task.

THEOLOGICAL PROGRESS.

III. Unbelief as regards misinterpretation of the Bible.—Men may accept the Bible as authoritative, but through misinterpretation fail to believe its teachings. It may seem as though we had no right to make our interpretation the rule by which we judge another man's unbelief. But we do not hesitate to say to a man, You ought to believe in the Divinity of Christ because the Bible teaches it, and you do not exonerate him from the duty because he says, I do not believe that the Bible teaches it. Men ought to believe what the Bible teaches. But the Bible teaches this, that and the other (in our opinion). There is no escape from this except we are prepared to say that these are open questions, and that our own creeds are only held in a tentative and provisional way. Before we consider any doctrinal aberrations as culpable, there is a prior question, and that is, whether we regard our formulated statement as true. We cannot be safe in our measurement of men if we are not sure about the unit of measurement at the start. Hence it is that a more important and practical question can hardly be imagined than that which concerns the fixedness and finality of doctrinal formulas.

1. The first thing needed in dealing with fundamental error within the Church, and arising out of misinterpretation, etc., is a clear apprehension of the question so much mooted to-day, and which is known under the general name of progress in theology. We all agree that there is no room for progress in theology so far as objective revelation is concerned. The canon is complete, and we do not allow that we can make any contributions to its teachings by any Church authority, or by individual speculation. And we must all agree, moreover, that so far as the apprehension of the meaning of Revelation is concerned, the history of the Church has been a history of progress. This needs no comment. The question is, How much territory in the domain of dogmatic theology remains unoccupied, or whether old conclusions are to be reconsidered? On these points this may be said.—(1.) No one denies that there are depths of the Divine Word we have not fathomed, and meanings we have not penetrated. (2.) No one

denies that well-ascertained facts in the physical world may help us in the interpretation of Scripture, and even modify our formerly received interpretations. (3.) But it must be apparent, at the same time, that it does not follow that there is room for progress in the apprehension of the Bible because there is room for progress in the investigation of the physical system. The two fields of inquiry overlap each other only to a very limited extent. Yet the analogy, notwithstanding its argumentative weakness, has a very popular effect. And more than this. We believe that in regard to the doctrines which constitute the Reformed or Calvinistic system our conclusions are final—that is, that we know what the Word of God teaches. If we should say, We believe that Christ is God, and say at the same time, We believe that our views on the subject may change, we should in effect be saying that Christ is God and Christ may not be God. To be persuaded that a doctrine is true, is to be persuaded that our belief is indefeasible. Now, this belief that the doctrines of our Reformed system are true, and stand in no need of being reconstructed or recast, is quite compatible with the recognition of the fact that the sea of human opinion is restless, and that men do not think to-day precisely as they did in times past. We have witnessed the

SUBSIDENCE OF OLD ISSUES,

and new ones are attracting attention. Calvinists are Calvinists still and Arminians are Arminians still, but the points which differentiate them are not those around which controversial interest gathers to-day. The stream of religious thought among those who recognize the Bible at all seems to run in three great channels. We have the socinian with salvation by character as his watchword, the sacramentarian with a gospel of mediation and symbol, and the evangelical emphasizing the incarnation, a sacrificial atonement, and justification by faith alone, doing battle against the other two.

Again, we have the same truths in different polemic surroundings. The same figures on the canvass, but in different perspective. If we were making a confession of faith to-day we should put in the chapter on the Scriptures, but we should, if we wrote it after the style of the Westminster divines, guard against rationalism as well as against Romanism. We should not change the statement of justification by faith, but we should pronounce against the mystical and socinian theology of to-day, as well as against the Trinitarian theology. We should introduce the doctrine of the future state, but annihilation would receive attention as well as purgatory. It is impossible to deny that our confession is not only a dogmatic statement of truth, but a statement of truth together with polemic relations to contemporary and earlier error. We have no fault to find with this, but it is a fact which serves to illustrate the sense in which it is true that the theology of to-day is different from the theology of yesterday. In the sense referred to in this paper it is true; in the sense that our doctrinal conclusions are provisional and uncertain it is not true. And if it were it would be impossible to go a step beyond the assertion that men should believe the Bible without undertaking to say what the Bible teaches. It is the bearing of the subject upon our treatment of those who challenge our interpretation, or the Calvinistic, or the Protestant, or the Christian, interpretation of the Scriptures which justifies the introduction of these remarks in a paper on unbelief.

2. There is another thing to be done by those who would defend the truth against an insidious unbelief. For that an insidious socinianism is in the Protestant churches, and is seeking to undermine the faith of God's people, particularly in the atonement of Christ, there can be no doubt. The inspiration of the Scriptures, the doctrine of the atonement, the doctrine of future retribution—these are the doctrines which are giving orthodox people most trouble, and these are the doctrines which are most open to the attacks of false teachers. It is important that men should know the sources of doctrinal aberration. False assumptions, one-sided views of the truth, and the tendency of thought to logical consistency—these are some of the causes which explain the progress of heterodox belief. The last is the only one I can notice. The question was discussed in our papers on the other side of the Atlantic whether there had not been a mutual approach on the part of the Unitarians and some of the orthodox churches. It was argued that the charge that this approach has taken place was untrue, since, in the latter Churches the divinity of Christ was still preached. But what is the fact? The fact is that a thoroughly socinian view of the atonement is creeping into the Churches. Now a socinian doctrine of the atonement has no need of a Divine Christ as its doctrinal correlative. And the doctrine of a Divine Christ will not live in a creed very long after it ceases to be needed.

3. A revival of the study of dogmatic theology and of doctrinal preaching is needed. I do not speak of dogmatic theology as distinguished from exegesis. For dogmatic conclusions must rest on exegetical premises. But we must study the Scriptures not in the way of reading isolated proof-texts or even of reading books of the Bible after the commentary style. We must carry on an inductive study of the Scripture in order that we may ascertain what is the mind of the Spirit in the points of inquiry. Dogmatic theology is an inductive science, but like other inductive sciences it is deductive too. And if the people are to be strong in the faith, they must not only see individual truths supported by appropriate proof-texts, but they must see these truths in their relations and correlations, supporting one another. When a man sees that the doctrine of the atonement takes hold of other doctrines, he will be careful how he gives up the orthodox doctrine of the atonement, because he will see that if he gives that up, the contiguous doctrines will go too. It is perhaps a misfortune that the prejudice against dogma has been fostered until the people get less of it than they need. [Hear, hear.] In this connection, and before I close, let me advert to the common mistake of supposing that to deal in system and deductively, is to deal speculatively with truth, and in a

way which disparages God's Word. To arrange the truths which God has given in the works of nature and the Bible under their proper categories, is not only a proper thing, but a thing of the highest importance. If we were looking for a new argument in support of the doctrines of our system, it would be hard to find a better one than the logical concatenation of truth in a system would furnish. Herbert Spencer's philosophy has been attractive to men, not because of the great dialectical power it displayed, but because he brought a constructive mind to systematizing of the facts of experience. His work is a failure, as any work must be which does not take cognizance of all the facts, and in taking cognizance of them does not give the right place to the personality of God, and does not read human history as the incarnation of Divine ideas. But who shall say that the time will not come when some one with God's two books before him—the book of nature and the Bible—shall co-ordinate facts of both in a system which will show that God executes His providence in the sphere of material order on the one hand, and in the sphere of moral order on the other. Who shall say that a new argument for the Christian system shall not be presented when some architect shall take the materials which are furnished by specialists in the various fields of inquiry, and build them into a cathedral whose majesty and symmetry shall be its best vindication. [Applause.]

Imitations.

We sometimes see on the labels of articles that have attained a wide popularity, the not unnecessary caution—"Beware of imitations." Because an article has proved itself a good thing, unscrupulous dealers would take advantage, and give the unsuspecting consumer something that is more or less nearly similar, but that is not genuine. The whole business, of course, is fraudulent. For however good the imitation article may be, it relies for its sale, not upon its intrinsic worth, but upon the name of something else. The chances are that it will be not only deceptive, but harmful.

Now it seems to us that there is need that in our spheres than in the manufacture of the class of articles referred to, the caution be held up—"Beware of imitations." We have a great respect for the genuine article. The imitation is very likely to be a delusion and a snare.

Here, for example, a man engaged in successful business feels led by the spirit of God to give up his business, and devote himself to evangelistic work. Subsequent events show that he was divinely guided. He is instrumental in accomplishing very much good. His name becomes a household word in two hemispheres. He went forth into the work literally without purse or scrip; but he has been taken care of. Sought after, made much of, lauded, his efforts successful to a degree sufficient to turn any head not governed by a heart in which the Holy Ghost was dwelling, he has borne himself with singular modesty and self-restraint, and has unaffectedly given the glory to God.

This man's name, as the reader has surmised, is Moody. He is the genuine article. But now just because he is so genuine, and so successful, is there no need of the caution, "Beware of imitations." The genuine Moody has been, and is still—and may be long continue—a blessing to the church. The sham Moodys, for there are and will be imitations, will be anything but a blessing.

There is in England, one George Muller, who has instituted and carried on for a series of years an orphanage, which has grown and prospered, and done much good. In all these years he has never—so he says—asked any human being to contribute to this work, and he was without means himself. He has simply asked the Lord, and money to the amount of thousands of pounds has come into his hands as he had need. The Providence of God led him to begin the work in a very small way, years ago, and he has simply gone on step by step, as the Divine Hand has pointed the way.

But now does it follow that every charitable and Christian object is to be supported in this way? It seems to us not. George Muller is the genuine article, albeit he takes good care not to hide what he is doing from the knowledge of the Christian public. We believe he is animated by the genuine spirit of trust, and that he has followed the guidings of the Spirit. But beware of the sham Mullers! What has been the true rule in the one case, is not the rule that is to prevail in every case. The genuine Muller, even though his example is not to be implicitly applied in every case, or in many, has yet taught the Church a lesson of trust. The imitation Mullers would simply show how trust can degenerate into trifling with Providence.

The simple fact is that while we seek all the light we can get from the example of successful servants of Christ, we nevertheless seek more to be guided by the developments of Providence in our own individual cases. God wants each man to be himself. He gives "to every man his work." He wants Moody, and he calls him out of the boot and shoe business, and sends him forth as an evangelist. But he has no place and no work for sham Moodys. He means that the majority of men shall stick to their ordinary business, and serve him as they have opportunity, even while they continue to sell boots and shoes. He needed Muller, and he made him care for a few orphans, and then for a few more, and he opened the heart of one and another to provide the means, till the great Bristol institution attained its present proportions. But he needs no imitation Mullers. When missionary operations are to be forwarded, when Bibles are to be distributed, when a religious literature is to be circulated, Christians are to be informed of the world's need, and their contributions solicited.

Faith, consecration, self-forgetfulness, holy zeal, are the genuine articles. We need them. Flippant pietism, absorbing self-consciousness, desire for notoriety, disgusting cant, are the imitations. We think there is need to hold up the genuine articles to the view of the Church, and say emphatically—"Beware of imitations."—N. Y. Illustrated Weekly.

There is no outward sign of courtesy that does not rest on a deep moral foundation.

Thankful Readings.

If we profess to know God, and in our lives deny Him, our profession is a lie, and our doom will be that of the hypocrite.—Mead.

If you have any curiosity to know how subtle the devil is, you need not ask your neighbors. Just take a quiet survey of your own life and you will find out.

"Who will guard the guards?" says a Latin verse: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* I answer, the enemy. It is the enemy who keeps the sentinel watchful.—Mme. Swetchnine.

This is most true, and all history bears testimony to it, that men may second fortune, but they cannot thwart her; they may weave her web; but they cannot break it.—Machiavelli.

It often happens that men are very pious without being very good. Their religion expends itself in devotional feelings and services, while the evil passions of their nature remain unsatisfied.—Mme. Lodge.

LET my faith go forth in works;
Let my works my faith fulfil;
All my heart Thy Spirit breathe;
All my life but do Thy will.
Heart and life to The be given;
Christ my life; His life my heaven.

The Congregationalist admits that "certain questions of church discipline and procedure have occasioned some damage" to the Congregational system of late, but is comforted by the thought that "soon the unity of Presbyterians will be broken in upon by some act of ecclesiastical power."

The salvation of the soul is not a small work, but a great one. In order to accomplish it God sent his Son into the world to live and die, and he has provided wonderful agencies and instrumentalities, to be used in bringing the sinner to accept the Saviour. It is a great salvation; shall we not all hasten to receive it?

PRAYER is a haven to the shipwrecked mariner, an anchor to them that are sinking in the waves, a staff to the limbs that totter, a mine of jewels to the poor, a security to the rich, a healer of diseases, and a guardian of health. Prayer at once secures the continuance of our blessings and dissipates the cloud of our calamities.—Oryzotom.

It is an unhappy division that has been made between faith and works. Though in thought I may divide them, just as in the candle I think of both the light and the heat, yet as when the candle is put out, both the light and heat are gone, and neither remains without the other, so it is with faith and works; in the Christian life they are inseparable.—Selden.

"CLEANLINESS is next to godliness," is a well-worn maxim, and antiquarians are discussing who first put the thought in this compact form. It occurs in a sermon by John Wesley, and a member of the English Parliament has been "pulled up" for attributing it to the Apostle Paul. A book-worm has unearthed it in one of the Rabbinical books, and its origin is therefore Hebrew.

As an evidence and illustration of the difficulties through which churches are now fighting their way we notice the following:—"The Congregational, Presbyterian, and Freewill Baptist Churches in Prairie City, Ill., have suspended services for the present on pecuniary considerations, and worship with the Baptists and Methodists." "Pecuniary considerations" are very controlling considerations in the churches at present.

It is to be feared the most of us pray without entertaining any distinct hope that what we ask for will be granted. We observe a form and feel we are doing a duty, but have little thought of the fact that God is waiting to respond to all who will call upon him in sincerity and truth. Every now and then, as if to rebuke our want of faith, God is answering our petitions, and compelling us, amid our astonishment, to see and admire His goodness.

HAVE I so received Christ Jesus into my heart that the faith which I profess is carried out and evidenced by a holy life? Is my faith a living faith, the main-spring and source of my works; and are my works the clear evidence of the reality of my faith? Do I believe and trust as though all depended on Christ? Do I live as though only a holy life could give a title to heaven? Does my faith lead to holy obedience? Is my obedience the fruit of a living faith?

The glory of heaven will be in seeing Jesus. "A little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go unto My Father." "Where I am ye shall be also." When we return home after a long absence, it is not the house, or the furniture, or the fireside that awakens our joy. It is meeting the loved ones. If they have gone, every forsaken room or empty chair is an agony. So in our Father's house, it will not be the pearly gates or the streets of gold that will make us happy. O, how transcendently glad will we be when we see our Lord. If we ever weep in heaven it will be tears of joy at meeting Jesus. Perhaps in that "upper room" also He may show unto us His hands and His side, and we may cry out with happy Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"—T. L. Cuyler.

THERE is with some persons a chronic fear of what they call denominationalism. So sensitive are they that they can hardly endure the least reference to the distinguishing features of the churches of which they are members, unless it may be, perhaps, to condemn them and wish they were out of the way. There are others who find no joy equal to that of thrusting forward their ecclesiastical peculiarities, and of pushing them offensively against their religious friends and associates. They are never at rest unless airing the distinctions. It is hard to tell which of the two is least to be admired. The one class will give up everything in the interest of a false gentility, the other will sacrifice all for the sake of a narrow zealotry. A well-balanced Christian can love his denomination, be true to its doctrines and tenets, assist in its work and edification, and at all times and in all places magnify its character and mission, while recognizing and honoring everything that is good, true, and Christ-like in the world about him.