

II. What is the character of the age to which we are to minister? What is its theological trend? Where there are so many currents and counter currents, it is not easy to indicate the general drift. But as a glance back along the railway track reveals the grade unnoticed from the window of the car, so a glance at the past will help us to understand the trend of thought to-day.

The "ages of faith" were ages when faith was sadly overlaid with superstition. In the 15th century, Humanism sought to discard faith and exalt reason unduly. The Reformation sought to give faith and reason each its due. It was natural, however, that rationalism should seek to assert itself in those times of recoil from the ignorance and oppression of mediæval days. But it was not until the 18th century that it attained to power. In the early years of that century there was a great uprising of it in England. Its watchword was the denial of the supernatural, and, as deism, it was openly and aggressively anti-Christian. It spread to France, where also it was anti-Christian, and often atheistic. But a strange thing happened when, later in the century, it entered Germany. There it was welcomed at the Court, petted in the Universities, and found a home within the Church. Since then it has had a strangely chequered history and has been marvellously kaleidoscopic. Sometimes it has been eagerly historical, and again it has disregarded history; at times it has dragged religion at the chariot wheels of philosophy, and again it has eschewed philosophy; at one time it would submit itself to physical science, at another it would treat science with disdain; it has sometimes run into blank atheism, and sometimes it has approached orthodoxy. Almost every conceivable theory for accounting for Christianity on purely natural grounds has found learned and able advocates.

This rationalism, within the pale of professing Christianity, has had many fine things to say of Christ, and has claimed to place faith in Him on surer foundations. Accordingly the attack on the supernatural has been turned chiefly against the Bible. Gigantic efforts have been made either to eliminate the supernatural from it altogether, or to reduce it to the smallest possible proportions. At times it seemed as if these efforts had succeeded, insomuch that, under the pressure of the attack, even the ortho-