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THE PRESENT ASPECTS OF INFIDELITY, ESPECIALLY AS
THESE AFFECT THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.*

BY THE REV. JAMES HARPER, D. D.

In entering upon the discussion of the theme assigned to me, namely, "The present aspects of Infidelity, especially as these affect the Christian Church," I deem it advisable to determine the sense in which the word "Infidelity" is to be understood in the sequel.

Sometimes this word is used to signify the denial of the Divine origin and authority of the sacred Scriptures, without implying any denial or doubt of the existence of God; the word "Atheism" being employed to denote the belief that there is no God, or no sufficient evidence of the existence of such a being. According to this usage, every atheist is an infidel, but every infidel is not an atheist. Hence in past times it was customary, and to some extent is still, to call an infidel, in the sense just indicated, a "deist," in order to keep before the mind the fact that, while he rejects the Bible, he does not call in question the truth of the Divine existence; and, as if to make amends for this unfair monopoly, the term "Theist" has been by tacit consent appropriated to mean one who believes that there is a God, and that the Bible is from him.

The word "Infidelity," again, is used as a general designation of the views held by all those who reject the Bible as a Divine revelation, and thus conveniently covers atheism, pantheism, skepticism proper, and the other shades of opinion which characterize many who refuse to accept the Bible as the word of God. In this wide sense we shall understand and apply the term in the present essay.

It cannot be expected that in the compass of a brief review, a refutation in detail shall be presented of the varied forms which infidelity assumes in our day, or indeed of any one of them; nor am I required by the terms of the theme prescribed to me to make the attempt. Instead of undertaking such a task, I shall seek to classify and sketch the phases which the infidelity of our time exhibits, and show how these do in fact, and how they should influence or affect the church of Christ.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE FORMS OF INFIDELITY.

Looking at the different schools of infidelity, I reckon them to be reducible to three, namely: the Metaphysical, the Critical, and the Scientific. In

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this classification regard is had to the outstanding and more marked features of each school; for a metaphysical principle or assumption lies at the foundation of the objections urged upon critical and scientific grounds against Christianity. Prominent among the forms of metaphysical infidelity stand materialism, atheism, pantheism, intuitionism, and positivism.

Materialism recognizes but one substance, namely, matter, while it seeks to show that the assumption of a different substance, called spirit, is unnecessary and unphilosophical. This view seems to find congenial soil among those classes in society whose daily occupations call them peculiarly to the study of mere material forces. It circulates extensively among mechanics, physicians, and men devoted to scientific pursuits generally. Darwinism seems to rest finally on this basis.

Atheism, though suggested and abetted by the scientific school of infidelity, yet is peculiarly the product of metaphysical speculations.

Pantheism, which is the identification of the universe with God, is simply atheism disguised; for both the pantheist and the atheist deny the existence of a living, intelligent, free, supramundane God. At the root of pantheism, viewed as a speculative system, lies the definition of substance as given by Benedict Spinoza, the great prophet of pantheism in modern times. "Substance," says he, "is that which is in itself, and conceived by itself, and to the conception of which nothing else is necessary." Assuming the correctness of this, he proceeds to elaborate the uni-substantial doctrine, which, though called pantheism, is virtually materialism and atheism; a doctrine which, though comparatively new in the Western world, is one of the hoary theories of the East. This system, like a subtle poison, is diffused extensively through the literature of the day, and is thus insensibly acting in many quarters where the word pantheism is hardly understood.

Intuitionism, called very generally spiritualism, but which, for the sake of avoiding ambiguity, I prefer to name as I have done, is infidelity growing out of certain notions as to the way in which the mind apprehends moral and spiritual truths. By the advocates of this view, an authoritative revelation of moral truth in book form is reckoned an absurdity. "The supreme and only authoritative guide," say they, "in moral matters, is the inner light which every man possesses," and therefore the Bible is superfluous and powerless.

Positivism, which professes to be rigorously and exclusively scientific, belongs radically to the metaphysical school; for it rests ultimately on the principle that final causes are undiscoverable, and therefore that man has to do simply with facts, as revealed through the senses, and should abstain from speculations as to the origin and the end of things.

The Critical school, to which we now come, deals directly with the Bible, and seeks to neutralize, while seeming in some degree to recognize, its authority. It includes three leading sub-divisions: the Rationalistic, the Mythical, and what, for lack of a better name, we shall call the Eclectic. The pregnant principle out of which all these grow is the impossibility of a miracle, and they are attempts in different ways to reconcile with this dogmatic assumption the retention of a Bible in which miracles are commonly thought to occupy a conspicuous place. The rationalist tries to do this by proposing conjectural alterations in the text of Scripture, and showing that the corrected text, when rightly translated and interpreted, does not teach that

miracles have ever been done. The advocate of the mythical theory admits that the miraculous is countenanced in the Bible, but alleges that those parts of that volume which bear this aspect were the product of simple, uncritical minds, affected by certain hazy traditions. The eclectic, again, while availing himself of many ideas characteristic of the rationalistic and mythical theories, or rather hypotheses, labors especially to show that the religion taught in the Bible is but the natural outgrowth and development of sentiments which had been floating around in the so-called heathen systems of religion, and that in fact there is no necessity of referring the productions of prophets and apostles to any supernatural inspiration.

To accomplish its ends, the Critical school in its various divisions has expended immense stores of learning, amazing ingenuity, and enormous toil.

To the Scientific school belong numerous sub-divisions. Its aim, in general, is to show that the Bible is contradicted by the facts of the physical universe. The astronomical section of this extensive school seeks to make the stars fight against the Bible in their courses, alleging that the vastness of creation, as now ascertained, precludes the idea that this comparatively insignificant globe should have been so greatly distinguished as the Scriptures teach, and that the vulgar notions as to the age of the universe, notions traceable to the Bible, do not afford the time requisite for the transition of light from stars which are now visible to us.

Geology, again, it is confidently affirmed by many of its ardent votaries, impinges directly on the teachings of Genesis touching the age and early history of our globe.

Finally, and not to be too tedious, it may be observed that most strenuous efforts are employed in the lines of paleontology, physiology, archæology and philology, to invalidate the testimony of Scripture, as commonly understood, touching the unity, origin and age of the human race.

GENERAL REMARKS SUGGESTED BY THIS SURVEY.

The hasty glance now taken at the dim outline merely of the serried ranks drawn up in battle array under the flag of infidelity, suggests sundry reflections, a few of which, as subservient to the object we have in view, I shall take time to offer:

1. The versatility of infidelity in our day deserves notice. The shapes it assumes and the methods of warfare it adopts, are manifold. There is hardly a department of human inquiry in which it has not sought and found a foothold. Every branch almost of study is rendered subsidiary to its purpose. On almost every field of investigation to which the intellect of man has been turned, it can rally an army of attack, and find the means of ensnaring, or, at least, perplexing souls. In its armory it has ready for use implements suited to every taste and condition, some rude and rusty, yet easily wielded and effective; others keen and polished as a Damascus blade, adapted to the more delicate hands of masters of the arts of controversy. Minds incapable of being much affected by abstract, metaphysical subtleties, may be quite alive to arguments against the Bible drawn from the physical sciences, or from antiquarian researches. This cyclopædic character of infidelity renders it imperative upon the defenders of Zion to go round about her walls, and with sleepless vigilance guard at every point against assaults. Familiarity with every branch of human knowledge is demanded of those who would enter the lists with unbelief in our time.

2. The activity of infidelity is not to be overlooked. Destitute of any extensive organized form, it yet is wielding in its interests, as if by concerted effort, the press, the platform, and, to some extent, even the pulpit. As we contemplate the diversity of its operations and the unity of design which underlies them, we cannot help perceiving the presence and influence of one master mind who, filling with his own spirit the hearts of men, lends to them unanimity in evil work, apart from, and in the absence of a compact external organization. The interests of infidelity may be well subserved by simple silence as to certain points in the treatment of particular themes, but still more by inuendoes and half-suppressed, half-uttered sneers. The brigade of lecturers who now scour the country in all directions, are, with many honorable and marked exceptions, practically, if not purposely, disseminating in the community infidel sentiments. In some cases disguise is hardly assumed, and unbelief, unabashed and unrebuked, babbles in the ears of young and old its folly.

The press, however, is peculiarly relied on by infidels for the propagation of their sentiments. The daily secular journals that are with prodigious energy pouring out their sheets—

“Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks
In Vallombrosa”—

are in many instances the vehicles of infidel theories and jibes; the conductors of them, even when they mean to be respectful to Christianity, not seeming to know what the system is. While we heartily acknowledge the force and enterprise by which the leading newspapers are characterized, and the good service they do in diffusing much useful knowledge, in exposing corruption and protecting men in their rights, yet we must deplore the ignorance, to say the least, which marks most of them when they venture to touch, as they are not slow to do, upon questions of a religious nature. Not seldom, too, their tone is that of contempt for the real doctrines of the Christian faith—a contempt restrained from expressing itself in strong terms simply by the still powerful Christian sentiment of the public. Yet so wedded are many Christians to certain political views, that, for the sake of these, they will tolerate almost any thing in their newspaper, and permit the poison of infidelity that accompanies the politics to distil drop by drop upon their own minds and upon those of their families.

Through reviews and magazines of different hues and sizes, moreover, is a subtle spirit of infidelity gradually and imperceptibly diffused. Through the medium of such periodicals, false social and religious theories, dressed up in the graces of a flowing style, are insinuated into the favor of many who would recoil from the more palpable utterances of unbelief.

Through the channel, too, of works of fiction, which form so largely the reading matter of multitudes, covert, if not open, attacks are made upon Christianity, and infidel sentiments conveyed. The representatives of true Christianity introduced into the pages of the novelist are too generally made repulsive and loathsome. They are depicted either as hypocrites and designing knaves, or else as austere and gloomy fanatics, whose acerbity of spirit is heightened by artistic contrasts with the amiable sweetness or dashing generosity of those who own no allegiance to Christ, or reverence for his word. And one thing which lends force to such caricatures is that some of those who furnish them aspire to the rank of philanthropists and great social reformers;

nay, put themselves forward as the advocates of the juicy, as distinguished from the shrivelled, type of Christianity. Doubly to be deplored is it that some who bear the name of Christian ministers are engaged, whatever may be their motives, in misrepresenting the Christianity they profess. Some of the most insidious fictions of the day are from the pens of men who claim to be ministers of the gospel. George Macdonald, for example, under the guise of evangelism, is corrupting many an unwary soul with the gospel of universalism, a gospel not unpalatable to the infidel.

Nor is it only in the channel of periodical, or of lighter literature, that currency is given to an infidel sentiment. Treatises distinguished by beauty of style and acuteness of reasoning and affluence of learning, but pervaded by the spirit of infidelity, issue from the press in thick succession. The deepest questions of natural and of social science, of morality and religion, are discussed in the interests of unbelief with a subtlety, force, confidence, and apparent candor withal, which might well make us tremble for our faith, did we not deem it under the protection of the Father of Lights. It happens, too, that the opponents of Christianity are, in many instances, conspicuous for lucidity and exquisite beauty of style. In this respect Renan, Huxley, Spencer, Darwin and Tyndall, have no superiors in our time, as their predecessors, Rousseau, Voltaire, Hume, Gibbon and Bolingbroke, had none in their day. Thus, with an energy that seems never to flag, with a courage that appears to rise only with defeat, with a subtlety and a suavity unsurpassed, yet, in certain quarters, with an arrogance and ferocity which tend to make weak minds quail, infidelity strives to rid the world of Christianity.

3. The infidelity of the present day exhibits a combination of boldness and cunning. This feature of it has been incidentally sketched in the close of the preceding paragraph, but I deem it worthy of a distinct enunciation. Perhaps never before was there a cooler avowal of atheism, or of principles which plainly imply it, on the part of thoughtful and, in many respects, reputable men. At the close of the last century, France, by the voice at least of a dominant rabble, voted herself atheistic; but that was a period of frenzy and passionate upheaval, the product in a great degree of civil and ecclesiastical oppression.

In the age which witnessed the rise of the Reformation also, atheism prevailed to a great extent, especially in Italy; the dignitaries of the Romish communion not being free from the imputation, nay, some of them hardly caring to shun it. That, however, was a time in which the pure light of the gospel was sadly obscured, and when, to be an atheist did not imply such a resistance to the truth as that condition does now. Yet in our own day, when the Bible is unbound, and a multitude of proofs have been given of its purifying power, men in calm blood and in the presence of the truth, both written and exemplified, are found audacious enough to proclaim to the world that they believe there is no God, or at least that they see no satisfactory proofs of his existence.

Then, moreover, the pertinacity with which men of the highest standing as scientists strive to prove man to be but a natural development from the lowest form of life, evinces a daring which amounts to recklessness. The spirit of destruction seems to be let loose, and to riot in the ruin it works or anticipates.

Yet, on the other hand, it is remarkable to what an extent unbelief stoops for its own ends to clothe itself in Christian garb, and use the language of Ca-

naan. Thus the pantheist, who in reality denies the existence of God in the sense commonly attached to the word, does not hesitate to speak of Jesus as divine, of apostles and prophets as inspired men, and of an ever-present Deity. The craft and guile, as well as daring of Jesuitism, are not wanting in the ranks of infidelity; a circumstance which suggests to us the necessity for caution, no less than for courage, in dealing with it.

4. The thought forces itself upon us as we consider the appliances and achievements of infidelity that notwithstanding its conceded ingenuity and industry in recent times, it has produced, of late, very little in the form of argument that is really new. The objections to the Bible, when thoroughly analyzed, resolve themselves into a very few points, most of which were long since urged with as much force as they are to day. Even Tyndall, in his latest proclamation of scepticism, could find no better exponents of his views than Democritus and Lucretius. The poet's vision seems already realized:

"The infidel has shot his bolts away,
Till his exhausted quiver yielding none,
He gleans the blunted shafts that have recoil'd,
And aims them at the shield of Truth again."

Many of the difficulties alleged to attach to the Bible turn on questions of chronology toward the solution of which the Scriptures afford no certain aid; so that the supposed difficulties pertain not so much to the Bible as to men's conjectures relative to its import.

Not a few of what may be called "the ethical" objections to Christianity derive whatever semblance of force they possess from a persistent confounding of genuine Christianity with the corruptions or spurious imitations of it. Papist and Protestant, heretics and orthodox are conveniently massed together, and then the Christian religion is adroitly charged with the perversions and abuses which lie at the door of the worst part of its professors. This, of course, is no new device; although it is one of the most effective which infidelity has yet employed.

When, on the other hand, we consider the resources accumulated within a few years for the defense of Christianity, the mass of facts which recent research has discovered corroborative of the Bible, the contrast is palpable. From some of its favorite fields of operation, infidelity has of late been effectually driven; while from not one of its lines of defense has Christianity been compelled to retire. We turn now to inquire:

HOW THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IS AFFECTED BY CURRENT INFIDELITY.

That prevalent infidelity would exert some influence on the church, might be assumed; for the physical law of gravitation, and that of action and reaction, have analogies in the moral world. While in some respects the atmosphere of unbelief which invests the Christian Church may be an occasion of benefit to it, we cannot doubt that it has been the cause of much injury to it.

1. The presence of infidelity exerts on some a chilling and intimidating effect. Those thus affected are fain to rid themselves as much as possible of the distinctive badges of Christianity, and, by concession and compromise, to avoid collision with the formidable foe. Hence, some would be disposed to surrender the alleged historical facts of Christianity, and, withdrawing from these outposts, fall back upon the spirit of the system, as if Christianity was not a religion of facts, and of principles flowing from or involved in the facts.

Some again would recede from the rigorous doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, in the hope of thereby appeasing the enemy, and acquiring a more tenable position. Even Christlieb, one of the ablest advocates of our faith, would have us adopt this policy; a suggestion which I count the chief blemish in his admirable treasure, "Modern Doubt and Christian Belief."

Others, moreover, counsel the assumption of an appearance of unity on the part of professing Christians, in order to deprive infidelity of the argument drawn from the dissensions among Christians

Thus in various ways, according to the diversity of dispositions, does pusillanimity, sometimes misnamed prudence, suggest a policy; while every manifestation of this sort in the camp of Christianity only stimulates and emboldens the occupants of the counter camp. So far as the church is affected in the manner described, there goes up from it no hearty, ringing cheer, the precursor and, in a measure, the procurer of victory; but, instead, it is marked by stiffness and dry, critical formality, or else by a shrinking, morbid mysticism.

2. Some professing Christians, harassed by the objections of infidelity, resort to Popery for quiet and refuge. It is a somewhat remarkable circumstance that the age of Renan, Strauss, Herbert and Darwin, should have witnessed the promulgation of the dogma of infallibility. But there is more than a chronological connection between the two facts alluded to; for one extreme generates another, and when people have been shaken by the surges of infidelity, or have seen others swept away by its turbid waters, they are very apt to seek tranquillity and security in superstition and pretentious dogma. Infidelity and credulity are near of kin. Recoiling or receding from skepticism, men readily run to Vaticanism. It is possible that a knowledge of this feature of human nature may have emboldened and prompted the crafty Jesuits to ply all their arts to have the decree of infallibility pronounced even in the face of a wide-spread infidelity, which looked on with amazement at the fatuity of that course. They may have reckoned that now, when, in Popish countries particularly, a deep tide of infidelity flows, it was the wisest plan for Rome to speak out with startling boldness, and assert the prerogative of infallibility, because minds weary with doubts and discussions would be likely to seek relief at length in blind submission to her claim. The time had come, they may have thought, when men, tossed to and fro on the sea of doubt, would welcome any haven which promised them calm, however malarious the atmosphere pervading it; and if they so calculated, I do not doubt that, for a time at least, events will vindicate their forecast. Some minds the overshadowing dogma will only repel and hurry into more bitter antagonism to all that bears the name of Christianity; but to others a sense of relief will come when they reflect that here a corporation, hoary with age and gorgeous in ritual, undertakes to think for them, and guarantees their salvation, if they only commit themselves to its tender care. Thus Popery on the one hand creates infidels by the enormous demands it makes on human credulity, and on the other recruits its ranks from the circle of those who have either felt the emptiness of skepticism, or become alarmed at its progress.

In the history of the two brothers, J. H. and F. W. Newman, of England, we have an instructive illustration of the processes of moral attraction and repulsion at work in our day. One of these men, J. H., alarmed by the onsets of dissent and radicalism upon the Church of England, and engaging in

her defence, gradually verges towards Rome, and at length falls a victim to her lures and his own sophistry. The other, F. W., probably disgusted by the course he had seen his brother take, and the absurdities he had seen him swallow, becomes a champion of intuitionism, and spurns at once the fact and the idea of an external revelation.

It is not uncommon for Papists, and even for the Pope himself, now pronounced infallible, to impute to Protestantism the prevalence of infidelity. Guided by the precarious rule of evidence, "Post hoc, propter hoc," they point to the outbreak of unbelief in the last century, and to its extensive spread in the present century, as manifest fruits of the Protestant principle of the right of private judgment. They forget that some of the leaders of skepticism flourished during the noon of Popery, which was coincident with the midnight of the Dark Ages. They forget, too, the condition of Italy in particular before the rise of the Reformation, where bishops, cardinals, and Popes were wont to deride Christianity as a fable, although, as one of the number facetiously remarked, a profitable fable to them. They affect to be ignorant that infidelity grows rankest on the soil which Popery has longest tilled; nor do they seem to consider that as Protestantism stirs the mind in all directions, and quickens slumbering energies, infidelity, if existing at all, might be expected to share in the common impulse; just as the same sun which promotes the growth of grain, vegetables and fruit for the use of man, and gives vigor to the human frame, may further the growth of noxious weeds, and hasten the putrefaction of the dead carcass.

These strictures, although somewhat aside from our main object, I have deemed it wise to make, in order to guard against the notion that because infidels, in not a few cases, seek relief from their doubts in the Romish communion, as we have just been stating, the inference is warranted that Popery presents the true rest to the human soul, or is better adapted to grapple with infidelity than is Protestantism.

3. Another effect which the prevalence of infidelity has upon the Christian church is to secure for apologetics a special, perhaps an undue, prominence. The great eruption of infidelity in the 18th century was attended by this result in Britain, and, in some measure, on the continent of Europe. The sermons and theological treatises which have come down to us from that period, are very largely occupied with the answering of infidel taunts and cavils. The defenses thus reared have, doubtless, been of great utility; yet there is reason to fear that the attention given to the outworks of the citadel of truth was accompanied by a neglect of the inner condition of the fortress, and that, while ramparts were rising around, sickness and death were raging within the limits of Zion. The defence of the gospel system absorbed the attention of the church so much that she neglected to present the gospel itself, by which the soul lives, and began to lose her interest in it. Thus the singular spectacle was witnessed of the church herself becoming more imbued with the spirit of skepticism, as the argumentative successes of the champions of the Bible became more complete. Satan knows that an army can be wasted as readily by famine as by the sword, and in the digging of trenches as well as in direct conflict on the field; and I do not doubt that he would gladly have us all abandon the direct teaching and preaching of the gospel for the work of defending it. If all the able-bodied inhabitants of a country should devote themselves to the arts of war in order to defend their soil, and the fields in consequence remain untilled, disaster would ensue even

more certainly than if the defenses had been neglected. At the present day there is some risk lest the ministry allow themselves to be turned aside from their proper work of sowing the seed of the word, to the controversy with infidels. Reviews, magazines, religious newspapers, and sermons maintain an incessant fusillade against the pretensions of infidelity; while colleges professing to be swayed by Christian principles, and, of course, theological seminaries, are expected to play a conspicuous part in the repulse and defeat of the common enemy. Ministers of the gospel, it is said, are the principal readers of infidel works. I am concerned, however, at present rather to note, than comment upon, the fact that we live now in what may, not unaptly, be called the age of Christian apologetics. It is very useful to ascertain the nature, direction and velocity of the moral current on which at any time we are borne along; for devoid of such knowledge we drift, but can hardly be said to steer.

4. Infidelity threatens to deprive the church of the vantage ground which a quiet Sabbath affords.

It would be extravagant to allege that the church cannot subsist and advance in a community which accords no civil recognition to the Sabbath; for we know that in the early centuries Christianity lived and spread in the midst of dominant Paganism, and that to-day in many countries where the Sabbath receives either no civil acknowledgment, or but little, the grace of God is doing marvels. But this we may say that in such circumstances the impediments to the progress of the church are indefinitely increased, and hence that the efforts which infidels are putting forth in this country and in Britain to abolish the restraints which Sabbath laws now impose, do very seriously menace the interests of the church of Christ. It is hardly needful to adduce evidence to prove that a spirit of hostility to the Sabbath in the proper sense of the word is now abroad. The number of stores open on that day in the larger cities for the transaction of business, the noise and stir produced by vehicles bearing pleasure-seekers to and fro, the plying of excursion boats on rivers and lakes, and the whistle of the locomotive disturbing the stillness of the Lord's day all over the land, are so many practical violations of the Sabbath, and indications of the spirit which exists in relation to the observance of that day.

Infidels clamor for the abolition of all civil enactments made in behalf of the Sabbath; while multitudes who would not go so far, lend aid practically in neutralizing the wholesome restrictions already on the statute-books. Add to this that Popery, the Judas of Christianity, betraying while kissing, helps infidelity both by example and political influence to break down the quiet and sacredness of the Lord's day. Witness the parades and processions with the accompaniment of bands of music on that day which have such a charm for the devoted subjects of Rome. On almost all the measures directly affecting the preservation of the Sabbath and the maintenance of a pure morality in general, infidelity and Popery in this land combine their forces; and hence, in estimating the resources which infidelity can wield against the Sabbath, we must not overlook the Papal auxiliaries. Through the co-operation of these confederates, and the unfaithfulness of many who profess some respect for the Sabbath, the young under our care are growing up in an unwholesome atmosphere, and we are all in danger of losing, in a measure, our sense of the sacredness of that day which is associated with the greatest triumphs of our religion. We may proceed now to inquire,—

HOW THE CHURCH SHOULD FEEL AND ACT IN VIEW OF
INFIDELITY AROUND?

This is a question of great practical interest, and should receive the careful consideration of all who love the cause of Christ, and especially of all who hold office in his church. In reference to it, I remark,—

1. An earnest effort should be made to confront and counteract infidelity by solid argument.

Christianity is a system in harmony with the highest reason—one that courts examination, and shrinks from no legitimate test. Its friends should take pains to set forth its claims aright, to refute the numerous objections pertinaciously urged against it, and to expose to merited contempt the substitutes for it, or rivals of it, which men fertile in invention, and aided by the subtle adversary of all good, have proposed. Zeal for the glory of God, and love to erring men, should excite us to most strenuous efforts to maintain the truth, and vanquish all who rise up against it. Those, especially who, like Paul, are “set for the defence of the gospel,” should take measures for counteracting the blighting power of infidelity in their respective fields of labor, and wherever they can reach it. From the pulpit and the press this war is to be vigorously waged.

At the same time, I should not reckon it wise, unless in exceptional cases, for preachers of the gospel to devote much time in their public ministrations to formal refutations of infidel opinions. Better is it in general for them to expose the fallacy of current infidel sentiments in a passing way, to give a sudden thrust at a pernicious principle, or turn unexpectedly a jet of confounding light on some pretentious position of scoffers. The impression produced upon the common mind by elaborate efforts in the pulpit in refutation of infidelity is very apt to be, that if there was not much truth in the principles opposed, it would not be so hard to refute them. Besides, comparatively few, even of those who may rank as persons of intelligence, have the patience to follow in such matters a long and subtle train of reasoning; and to this it may be added that all ministers do not possess the power of conducting such a process in a clear and convincing manner. Much depends on the character of congregations, and the qualifications of ministers. What would be injudicious in one place and man, might be altogether prudent in another. There is more propriety, perhaps, in closely investigating in Bible classes certain infidel notions, and setting forth the evidences of Christianity. Yet even in such classes care should be taken not to make apologetics the staple of our teaching, or in other words, our “hobby.”

The sum of our suggestions on the point before us is that the great business of the ministers of the gospel is to preach the gospel, not defend it; that yet they should seek in such times as the present to familiarize the minds of all with at least a few broad principles fatal to the assumptions and deductions of infidelity; and that in certain circumstances it may be their duty to discuss minutely in the pulpit, or the Bible class, the claims of infidelity in general, or of some of its more obtrusive features. These offices they should perform, partly to put the people under their care, especially the young, on their guard against the wiles of the devil; partly to pacify any minds that may have been disturbed by the audacious assertions or subtle sophistry of unbelief; partly to recover those who may have fallen a prey to infidelity; and partly to prepare all who bear the Christian name for speaking a word in season in behalf of the truth, and in opposition to error.

But teachers qualified to discharge creditably the functions indicated do not spring up spontaneously; and in order that men may be fitted for acting as efficient leaders of thought in an age of so much thought as ours, (for it is an age of thought,) colleges and seminaries must render aid. Very much of the infidelity which prevails among the educated classes is imbibed by them at college. A skeptical professor, who only hints objections to Christianity, can do incalculable mischief to the young minds entrusted to his care. He is like one who scatters firebrands and death. Nay, a professor who is simply negative, neither attacking nor defending Christianity while dealing with topics that touch it, may exert an influence not much less injurious than that which the hardly disguised scoffer wields.

On the other hand, who can duly estimate the influence for good which one earnest Christian may put forth, who ably fills a professor's chair in a seat of learning? Who can tell what an amount of budding infidelity has been checked, what vexatious doubts have been dissipated, what yearnings for truth have been fostered and satisfied by teachers in our own colleges who might be named, and by such men as Dr. Tayler Lewis, of Union College, Dr. M'Cosh, of Princeton, and one who, though much younger than those named, is not unworthy to be placed alongside of them—Dr. Gregory, of Wooster University? To provide for such as are seeking a liberal education, a college course which shall be pervaded throughout by the spirit of Christianity, is one of the wisest measures the church can employ for maintaining herself in this age of intellectual conflict. Hence we should deem it a part of our duty to the cause of Christ to try to equip our own colleges well, in which, all along the course, care is taken to throw a salutary moral and religious influence around the student. To allow them to languish and droop will be to pursue an ostrich policy, which sooner or later will bring retribution. Moreover, in theological seminaries provision should be made for such a training as would fit young men for dealing intelligently with the different forms of infidelity and other errors, which they must encounter in the prosecution of their calling as ministers of the gospel. In order to secure so desirable a result, sufficient time should be allotted to the course of study. Instead of curtailing the period of study in theology, as seems now the tendency, we should be disposed rather to extend it, so that students might have time to digest and assimilate the instructions given; in other words, might be educated, and not merely prepared to pass a desultory and hurried examination. The remark just made suggests another, namely, that the examinations of candidates for the ministry by Presbyteries should be much more thorough and searching than they are, as now conducted. To our shame it may be said that the examinations at West Point, where young men are trained to be officers in the army, are much more exact and exhaustive than are those to which Presbyteries subject persons about to be invested with office as teachers and rulers in the church of Christ. It behooves us also as a church to use great vigilance in this matter; for the ability to maintain ourselves in the face of so many contrary currents, depends largely on the character of the men who represent us in the ministry. We can survive the impact not only of infidelity, but also of other Christian denominations from which we differ in sundry points, only by sending out men as our standard-bearers who are well prepared to give a reason for their belief, and to command by their intellectual furniture and force, as well as by the holiness of their lives, the profession we make. Denominations that depend largely for

success on appeals to the senses and the feelings, on sensuous and sentimental appliances, may, perhaps, afford to dispense with the careful training and testing for which I contend; but those which, like our own, make their appeal rather to the judgment and the conscience than to the feelings or taste, shall soon succumb, if they fail to provide a truly educated ministry.

And yet, while thus strenuously insisting upon the thorough training of candidates for the ministry, I would not favor the devotion of a large proportion of time, even in theological seminaries, to apologetics. There is danger lest, awakening suddenly from false dreams of security, we become unduly excited, and fancy that nearly all the time spent in teaching students of theology must be employed in the refutation of the numerous forms of infidel speculation which float around. I reckon it one of the best ways of defending Christianity just to show what the system is; for the gospel possesses a self-evidencing power. It is in a weighty sense its own witness, and I believe with Mr. Spurgeon that in many quarters it has received too much defending. While not heedless of the assaults made upon it, and not remiss in teaching candidates for the ministry how to repel them, we should rely much more for its defense on the display of its real import, and be peculiarly concerned to give our young men who study for the ministry a just apprehension of the depth and wealth of that system which we urge them to propagate and maintain.

As a measure which would reach and perhaps favorably affect a wide class of somewhat educated and thoughtful people, it might be suggested that pains be taken to bring out lecturers, who, though not handling themes directly religious, would yet discuss the subjects chosen, whether in the department of science, of art, of history, of politics, or of morals in the spirit, at least, of true religion. In this way entertainments in the form of lectures might be made a vehicle of good, and a host of those who now spice their lectures with insinuations unfavorable to the Bible, might be driven from the field. Some of those who now prowl about the country as lecturers are more or less openly scattering broadcast the seeds of infidelity and immorality.

It might even be advisable for the church to provide a fund out of which help might be given to men peculiarly gifted as controversialists, that they might devote their talents, whether as writers or speakers, to the special work of combating infidelity. This, though some may deem it rather visionary, is not a new or an untried expedient; for the Reformed Church of France in her best days was accustomed to single out men peculiarly qualified, and appoint them to employ their pens in defense of the truth against Popish errors, at the same time pledging to them pecuniary compensation for the labors performed. In this way originated one of the most elaborate and exhaustive treatises extant on the Romish controversy, the *Panstratiæ*, by Daniel Chamier.

Secular newspapers also, conducted in accordance with Christianity and in its favor, should receive the encouragement of the church in all appropriate ways; and newspapers breathing a different spirit should be discountenanced. And at this point, I take pleasure in adverting to one secular paper, "*The New York Witness*," both a daily and a weekly paper, which is conducted on Christian principles. While not agreeing with every sentiment advocated in this paper, I admire its fearless integrity, and the loyalty to Christ which obviously pervades it, and should reckon it a disgrace and

a disaster to our common Christianity, should a journal so meritorious be permitted to languish in the midst of Christian churches, while other papers that hardly deign to hide their hostility, or at least indifference, to Christianity flourish.

Thus far we have been showing that the church should enter the lists in direct conflict with infidelity, but we proceed now to suggest another method in which she may deal with it.

2. In view of abounding infidelity, the church should furnish in her varied ministrations a fuller and warmer display of the truth in its positive or affirmative form. Believing that there is in the gospel a self-witnessing power, I would urge as a means both of preventing and counteracting infidelity the clear and thorough exhibition of the system of truth contained in the Bible. Apart altogether from any reference to theoretical infidelity, this is needed; for it is by the truth, as a means, that men are saved. But there is no surer way of silencing the murmurs and cavils of unbelief than that of unfolding in its symmetry and beauty the doctrinal system of the Scriptures. The poet's lines descriptive of the gospel system, are no less true than beautiful:

"Oh! how unlike the complex works of man,
Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan;
No meretricious graces to beguile,
No clustering ornaments to clog the pile,
It stands like the cerulean arch we see,
Majestic in its own simplicity."

To the method of coping with infidelity now commended pertains the two-fold advantage that while it tends to protect, it also tends to nourish the church. A man equipped in an impenetrable coat of mail might pine away with hunger; and so the church clad in all the panoply of argumentative defenses might languish for lack of nutriment. But by exhibiting the riches of gospel truth, we provide not only protection, but food for the church; and at the same time use the means best adapted to turn her enemies into friends. When the apostle Paul visited Corinth, where various schools of philosophy adverse to Christianity existed, instead of entering into abstruse discussions with them, for which he was well qualified, he determined to know nothing among them "save Jesus Christ and him crucified." This gospel being the power of God unto salvation, our chief dependence under the Spirit of God for defense and advance must be on the direct, full and hearty proclamation of it. There is reason to think that few of the assailants of Christianity understand, even intellectually, the gospel system, a system so unique and marvellous as to bear on its face the marks of its celestial origin.

Nor must we present this glorious gospel in a timid, hesitating tone, but courageously and fervently as if we ourselves believed what we professed and propound. The attempt also to conciliate the foes of truth by a policy of suppression and compromise should never be made. Every such concession, instead of appeasing, will only whet the appetite of the adversary for more, while it weakens our entire line of defense. In some respects it is easier to defend the whole truth than a part of it; for the truth is self-consistent and harmonious, every part of it contributing to the strength and beauty of the whole. Instead of compromising let us grasp every truth of the Scriptures with a tenacity proportioned both to its intrinsic importance and to the attacks made upon it; not forgetting at the same time that the same authority which binds us to receive and hold one truth of the Scrip-

tures binds us to receive and hold fast all their teachings. Let it be our aim to present to friend and to foe the system of divine truth in its purity and luminous fulness. And when the din of strife arises around, let us not betray distrust of our cause, but rival in self-possession, if not in attitude, the Roman senators who, when the Gauls were at the gates and ready to rush in, ordered their ivory chains to be placed in the Comitium before the temples of the gods, and there sat down clad in the robes of state to await with royal calmness the onset of the foe; or let us evince the confidence of Jeremiah, who, when Jerusalem was girt around by the triumphant army of the Chaldeans, and he himself was within the city, and a prisoner besides, purchased a piece of land which lay almost beneath the feet of the invading host, and had the transfer made according to the exact, technical forms of Jewish law.

Let all professing Christians be incited by the presence and activity of infidelity to greater diligence in acquiring a broad, comprehensive acquaintance with revealed truth, and in imparting to the young whom they have in charge, or may be able to reach, the knowledge of this truth. To furnish in the family or in the Sabbath school instruction in respect to ancient customs and geography with a view to the elucidation of Scripture is within limits, very proper; but we must beware of allowing the gospel to be suffocated or supplanted by mere antiquarian lore, however useful in its place this may be. Let the youthful mind be saturated with gospel truth, and we need not greatly fear that theoretical infidelity at least, shall succeed on soil so prepared. But it may be questioned whether, with all the machinery now at work, the children of the church at least, are receiving as good a training in the doctrines and precepts of the word of God as did their fathers in a less fussy age.

3. The prevalence of infidelity should make Christians more circumspect and holy.

When iniquity abounds, the love of many waxes cold, but the reverse should be the case. When he saw wickedness rampant, the Psalmist was filled with grief and horror. The more the law of God was dishonored, the stronger did his affection for it become. "It is time for thee, Lord, to work," says he, "for they have made void thy law." "Therefore," said he, "I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold."

A deep sense of our responsibility should make us watchful not only to avoid casting a stumbling-block in the way of others, but also to present such an aspect of true piety as might arrest the attention, stop the mouths, and, with the divine blessing, win the hearts of opponents. The logic of the life is peculiarly convincing. There is no fact that can more justly stagger the carpers at Christianity than that of its purifying, elevating practical influence. Were the system false, and, if false at all, it is the most daring tissue of falsehood ever fabricated in the world, it cannot be supposed that it would tend to make its dupes truthful and noble. The pity is that so many professed, and even real Christians, by their inconsistencies, deprive us of the full force of this argument, giving color, as they do, to the taunt that Christians are no better than others, or that infidelity can produce as noble specimens of manhood as Christianity itself. We may, indeed, parry this thrust, and even turn it to our advantage, by showing that the Bible itself warns us to beware of pretenders in the garb of Christians, and teaches that even Christians themselves are in this life imperfect, and if there were

no hypocrites and halting Christians the Bible would be proved false. Still, while we may thus utilize to some extent the defects of Christians, it must be acknowledged that their conduct too generally has given the adversary occasion to blaspheme. A higher tone of piety on the part of the church, a greater measure of the spirit of that Christianity which infidels oppose, would effect more in the way of refuting their objections, than all the logical arguments we can spin.

Much stress has been laid by unbelievers on the dissensions of Christians, and the acrimony growing out of doctrinal differences between them. And it cannot be denied that in this particular, Christians have supplied the common enemy with a formidable weapon. An evil lies in this direction which we should earnestly deplore and seek to remedy.

Yet I do not concur in the counsel which many give, that, in order to obviate the objection founded on the internal disputes of the Christian church, we must agree to suppress all our controversies, and abandon, or hold in practical abeyance all opinions about which Christians may differ. This, I deem it, is impossible, and would be wrong even if not impossible. Loyalty to the truth is as much our duty as is love to the brotherhood; and we must not, even for an object so good as that of silencing seoffers, consent to sell the truth, or to be silent when it is opposed. I have no sympathy with the pretty prattle and sentimental cant which we hear so often about the evils of controversy, and the duty of burying, or appearing by intercommunion to bury, all differences of opinion. The cure for controversy is not sitting down together at the Lord's table, but sitting down together to the study of the Lord's revealed will, and joining in sincere supplication to him for light. Infidels, also, are too shrewd to be imposed upon by a mere external unity ceremonially symbolized, while a thousand conflicting sentiments seethe under this show of harmony. All that can rightly be insisted on is that our controversies, if different views do exist among us, be conducted in the spirit of candor, meekness, courtesy and love, without a disposition to exaggerate the points of difference, and with a hearty recognition of all that seems truly Christian in those with whom we contend. And I fully believe that disputes between Christians carried on in the temper described, so far from begetting a prejudice in the minds of those who are without, would operate rather to commend the gospel to them, through the proof thus given of the love to truth which Christians cherish, and the love to one another which they bear, notwithstanding the questions that separate them. It is highly to be desired that all Christians were of one heart and of one mind in the truth; but, that not being so, the best thing to be done is to evince an unswerving love for the truth, deny it who may, exemption from the influence of carnal affection in maintaining it, and just brotherly regard for those from whom we feel constrained to differ.

The method of arresting the progress of infidelity which we have now been inculcating, that, namely, of holy living, has this feature in its favor, that it is a mode of argument which the humblest may use and appreciate. There are some kinds of argument which only acute and educated minds can ply or feel, just as there may be kinds of armor which only giants can wear and wield. But this is a species of argument which a child may use, and a child may comprehend. Every professing Christian may, by his manifest purity and nobility of life, be rearing a rampart around his faith, and weaving an argument for it more effective far than any forged in the workshops of the schools.

4. Prayer to God for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a duty to which, in view of surrounding unbelief, the Christian church should feel impelled.

We are too apt to think that argumentation, keen and weighty, is alone sufficient to overcome infidelity, forgetting that the heart as well as the head, or, in other words, the feelings, as well as the intellect, can influence our belief. The intimate connection between the different powers and tendencies of the human mind must not be overlooked. We have a wondrous facility in believing what we are predisposed to believe. There is much to justify the poet's words:

"What dotage will not vanity maintain?
What web too weak to catch a modern brain?
The moles and bats in full assembly find,
On special search, the keen-eyed eagle blind."

Men do not like to gain or retain the knowledge of the true God, or of the true religion, and in order to the production in them of a real belief and thorough acceptance of the Christian system, they must be made new creatures; for, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." While, therefore, we should ply the weapons of truth with all our skill, we must not depend on them, knowing that, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." It is possible to beget in men unrenewed a rational conviction of the truth of Christianity, and this we should strive to do; but the deeper conviction which carries with it the current of the soul's affections, is produced only by the saving operation of the Holy Spirit. Mere argument cannot cure the blindness of the mind, or change the real bent of the heart. Nor is any man proof against the wiles of infidel strategy, unless one who has tasted and seen that God is gracious.

There is, however, a power that can change man's fallen heart and give him an appetency for the truth, and the exertion of this power can be secured by the fervent prayers of the righteous men however obscure. The triumphs of grace in the past may serve to inspire us with confidence in our cause. The ability of God to still the turmoil of rebellion, and to fill our world with peace and love and Christian faith has been amply attested. As obstinate cases of unbelief have been encountered as any probably that are yet to occur, and if Christianity has in bygone days disarmed opponents and turned them into friends and champions of the Christian faith, may we not feel emboldened to pray that God would arise and plead his own cause? May we not also accept of conquests already made in the name of Christ, as an earnest of greater victories yet to be achieved?

"The groans of nature in this nether world,
Which Heaven has heard for ages, have an end.
Foretold by prophets, and by poets sung,
Whose fire was kindled at the prophet's lamp,
The time of rest, the promised Sabbath, comes."

It is a matter for rejoicing that the same Spirit who can make men Christians, can, and does, keep them so, when made, notwithstanding the sophistry which subtle minds may use to pervert them. Christianity can boast of many a captured and converted infidel; but infidelity can boast the conquest of no real Christian. By faith, however, the Christian stands, and only through the grace guaranteed to him in the everlasting covenant is he impregnable; but the Spirit of grace, who gives and fosters faith, works in re-

sponse to prayer. All who can in the Spirit pray for the effusion of the Spirit, may render most welcome and effectual help to the cause of Christ. From the chambers of the faithful, energies may proceed that shall travel round the globe. Thus the least conspicuous member of the Christian brotherhood may help in calling down those hallowed influences which can neutralize the blight of infidelity, and change the desert of the world to verdure. In hope of such a consummation in God's time and way, let us be "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."



THE TITHE LAW.

BY THE REV. W. P. M'NARY.

III. UNDER THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

The Christian dispensation differs from the others in that it is in every sense superior and requires a more spiritual service. The law of development applies to Christ's kingdom as to almost every thing within the range of the Divine government. Moses came not to destroy the Law given to man before his time, but to fulfil its requirements, expound its spirit and to modify and define its forms of service. Christ came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil, to expound and to modify, to make the service of the church less formal and more spiritual, less legal and more voluntary. The Christian dispensation differs from the others in that it requires a more complete consecration. Under the Mosaic the first-born were consecrated, or one tribe being substituted for the first-born, became a consecrated tribe. But under the new dispensation, the church is called the church of the first-born, a kingdom of priests, a consecrated people. Surely, then, the sacrifice required of Christians is not less than that required of the Jews. If the service is less burdensome, it is not because less is required, but because it is performed in a different spirit.

Now, with reference to the tithe, we have shown that it is a natural moral law, adapted to the wants of man under every dispensation. That it was not instituted by Moses, but was part of the Divine Law from the beginning, and only such peculiarities as Moses added on to it, to suit the worship of the Jews, were ceremonial, and liable to be abolished with that dispensation. We claim for the tithe law, therefore, that it still remains in force—that it is not less obligatory because it is now enforced by the Spirit and met by the penalties of the Mosaic law. We claim also that the teaching of the New Testament receives additional perspicuity and force by being interpreted in the light of this hypothesis.

It is said that the giving of the tenth is nowhere commanded in the New Testament. We answer that neither is there any command in the New Testament for the observing of the Sabbath under the new dispensation, but there is no intimation of its being abolished, and there is much evidence that its binding obligation was taken for granted; and the same is true of the tithe law. Almost the last words of the Old Testament were a solemn warning to observe the tithe law; and Christ himself gave it his decided sanction in his day. It is true that this was still under the old dispensation, but it was on the very threshold of the new, and there was a good opportunity of intimating that it was about passing away. If such had been the intention, when he said concerning the Pharisees paying tithes of mint, anise and cummin, "These ought ye to have done," he spoke as if the law was universally recognized; and it will certainly add perspicuity to all that is said on the subject of giving in the New Testament, if it be interpreted in the light of this general recognition.