

where the members can take their meals; and in connection with many "Cercles" there are savings banks, sick clubs, and the like.

. It will be seen even from this general review of these institutions that they combine the principles of union and submission to authority with self-help and mutual control. A kind of religious freemasonry unites the members. Viewed apart from the canon of Romanism, which unhappily pervades them, they seem to be admirably designed, and in a country where vice and infidelity abound must be a valuable boon to well-disposed operatives. Socialism is being thus in a measure met on its own ground and opposed with its own weapons. How far similar clubs on a sounder basis could be worked with advantage in this country, is a question worthy of consideration. Certainly one great want of our times is a fuller recognition of religion in the workshops. Christianity is the only bond which can effectually draw together the too widely sundered classes of employers and employed, and the Church of Christ is the one centre where they can meet.

W. BURNETT.

ART. IV.—THE AGE OF APOLOGY.

IT cannot be doubted that we live in an age of apology. The atmosphere, religious as well as social and political, is charged with the electricity of stormy discussions, and darkened by showers of arguments and counter-arguments on every kind of question; controversies, making a severe demand on time and thought, thicken about us, and subjects once held sacred, and safe from all intellectual curiosity, are now taken up and handled with complete freedom. Certainly the *Zeitgeist* is a creature of argument. The spirit of the French Revolution, still active among us, has laid all subjects open for unshackled debate. Free discussion is no doubt a good, and there is no reason why Christianity should not be prepared to face it; but it unquestionably inspires, even in the most Christian disciple, an apologetic tone. The lines of defence, moral, historical, rational and spiritual, are made more prominent than they were, both by those within and those without the Christian camp. The pulpit of to-day has become more controversial and less dogmatic. In those who are practically at work on the problems of the times, or who are obliged to meet, in life or literature, the doubts and difficulties of their fellow-men, the natural result of this clamour of argument is the disappearance of those quiet moods of un-

questioning acceptance that once prevailed: The modern Origen is beset by the constant demands of men eager to know whether it is true that the lamp of religion has flickered and gone out, leaving them to grope amid the vacant tombs of an unsatisfying past in the dusk of an eternal twilight. And the consequence is that, though his own faith may be unshaken, it takes up of necessity a new attitude and works with fresh methods. On the other side even those who have reached a state of apparently settled indifference, or are safely encased in mature scepticism, often feel again the breath of controversy and are so stirred by

A sunset-touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
A chorus-ending from Euripides,

that they are obliged once more to consider and reconsider the old problems.

The questioning spirit of the century has been due to many causes. There has been the French Revolution, with its assertion of the rights of the individual and its determined resistance to all political and religious authority; the rapid spread of education, influencing all classes, but particularly the lower; the growth of materialism, following in the train of modern discovery and invention, and the triumphs of mechanical art; and, above all, the use of the historic method, the appearance of a new criticism, and the development of physical science, with its theories of heredity and evolution. To these I should be inclined to add, as a less obvious cause, the increasing self-consciousness of the age. With such causes at work, we cannot be surprised if belief is found more difficult than it once was. Whether there is more *deliberate* unbelief, or conscious rejection of Christ's example, it is perhaps impossible to judge, especially in view of the growing activity and improved services of the Church, and the remarkable revival of energy and enthusiasm among the clergy. But, whatever the truth may be in that respect, it is clearly the duty of every Christian, in days like these, to be a Christian apologist; to appreciate, so far as he can, the modern criticisms; to be prepared with the best answers or solutions within his reach; to be, in a word, ready to satisfy every man that asks "the reason of the hope" that is in him.

I do not propose, in this place, to suggest the special lines of argument which an apologist for Christianity might use. Such a task would be obviously impossible. Yet it may not be unserviceable to touch upon some of those general considerations which, just because they are frequently lost sight of, he ought always to keep steadily in view. Nothing is so often forgotten as the fact that the lines of Christian defence are

continually shifting. In one age we find some special problem very prominent; in another it is quite a different question that absorbs attention. Matters that once appeared difficult in the region of faith—for a time, perhaps, almost fatal to belief—are now found to be so no longer; while many of our latter-day problems arise from contemporary circumstances either new in themselves or demanding a new setting of old truths. Among these problems there are some which, at any rate in their present form, would hardly have appealed at all even to the last generation. This, therefore, is the normal condition of things, as revealed in the pages of history—that every age has had its own doubts and difficulties; that, however modified in form it may have been to suit the requirements of a given standard of knowledge or of thought, the essence of the Christian faith has met and survived an unbroken series of transient and changing criticisms; and that there is no reason why we of to-day should be the first to expect immunity or look for peace. Here is one of the swords which Christ has sent upon mankind; and it must be always flashing, unsheathed, in the darkness of the earth.

If this be true, it is clear that no great service can be done by the Christian apologist unless he is thoroughly acquainted with the spirit of the times. He must be able to examine the condition, and to sympathize with the needs, of the men of his own day. He must study the aspects under which the Christian faith actually appears to them, the attitude they adopt towards it, and the special kind of difficulties which they find in it. And to solve or relieve these difficulties he must be perfectly at home with the facts and arguments, the presentations of truth and the forms of statement, to which they will lend the readiest and least prejudiced ear. The despair of the true apologist is to see the Church, or any influential section of the Church, discussing ancient or mediæval questions as though they were the burning questions of the hour. Unfortunately, such a sight has been very common in the history of the past; if it is not so common now, it is because the modern awakening of good sense and genuine religious feeling is proving, as a rule, too strong for the indulgence in this childish frivolity. There can be little doubt that, in every case in which Christianity has had a lax hold upon the life and affections of men, its weakness has been largely due to the stupid or wilful irresponsiveness with which its own supporters have confronted the interests of society. Elaborate discussions on minute points of ritual or dogma will never satisfy "the hungry sheep" that "look up and are not fed;" nor will they ever flock to a fold that is guarded by thorny regulations and fenced by forms of statement which, however valuable once

are now only forbidding. If the Church is not to lose her power she must be modern, without disloyalty to the essentials of religion; and without losing the inspiration which she draws from the past, she must know how to be in touch with the present, and even with the future.

It is a probably true contention that our modern difficulties are not more vitally important than those of former generations. Christianity is very often referred to as if it were now, for the first time, finally disposed of; as if, with the growth of modern science and thought, and the multiplication of modern interests, religious belief is fast becoming, if it has not already become, impossible, except, perhaps, to a very small minority. That there is slight ground for so conclusive a supposition will be apparent to anybody who takes the trouble to consult the analogies of the past. Such an examination shows us, in the first place, that some difficulties, commonly supposed to be new and original with ourselves, are in reality of great age. Many periods of history have been able to show traces of an Agnosticism which, if different in its basis from the Agnosticism of this century, has been not less sweeping in its scope nor less fundamental in its principles; and I doubt whether any of our modern Agnostics will leave a deeper mark on philosophy, or take a more lasting place in literary history, than the Greek Agnostic Gorgias, who lived four hundred years before Christ. Yet large numbers of people are firmly convinced that Agnosticism is the brand-new creation of Professor Huxley and Mr. Spencer. As a matter of fact, its elementary principles are considerably more than two thousand years old, and there can therefore be no good reasons for believing that such a phase of thought is fatal to true religion. The clamour which surrounds it (and here historical comparison teaches us another lesson) is not without its counterpart in previous times. Again and again in the growth and development of human thought, there have arisen critical moments when exactly the same feeling has been abroad, that Christianity could not possibly survive the shocks which it was forced to meet. Again and again we find the same quiet assumption that the whole matter is now finally and irrevocably settled. In the well-known preface to his "Analogy," Butler writes: "It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much a subject of inquiry, but that it is, now at length, discovered to be fictitious. And, accordingly, they treat it as if in the present age this were an agreed point among all people of discernment, and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world."

Stronger words than these of 1736 could hardly be penned; yet more than a century and a half has passed since their author found it necessary to write them.

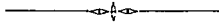
What is now, therefore, has been before, and will probably be again. Throughout the past there has been a constant recurrence of periods when the world has been forced to accept, at the hands of history or philosophy or science, new ideas which seemed at first quite destructive of Christian truth, and yet in the end have been either found capable of easy assimilation or discarded as wanting in value and interest. The discovery that the earth moves round the sun, appearing, as it did, fatal to the Church's dearest beliefs, produced for a time an absolute dismay in the ecclesiastical world. To men who saw in the revolution of the sun round the earth a signal mark of God's care for human souls, and of the love that culminated in the Christian revelation, such a discovery might well seem to involve a complete upheaval of the principles of faith. To-day we are able to smile at their narrowness of view, and wonder at the curiously rigid conceptions which were so easily disturbed. For ourselves, we see clearly enough that the position and movements of the earth can have little or no bearing on the facts of the spiritual life; and that, whatever the truth may be about time and space and the other conditions of the visible world, the invisible world must for ever lie outside the influence of these. Perhaps we do not see so clearly that, on other subjects and in other ways, our own religious ideas may be as crude and circumscribed, and our own difficulties as shallow, as those which we are so ready to deride.

If we require further evidence to show that we are not more exempt than others from the chronic infirmities of human nature, we find it in the fact that the very same assimilation of ideas which has taken place in the past can be seen going on among us in the present. Modern science has offered us, especially in the theory of evolution, certain conceptions which at first sight have been pronounced incompatible with the teaching of Christianity. These doctrines have been received, according to an invariable rule, with a loud and foolish outcry, in which, I fear we must admit, the clergy have been very prominent; and their authors have been charged with immorality and infidelity, and handed over to final condemnation. Now, however, the world is gradually finding out that, however influential these new theories may prove with regard to certain modes of statement, they do not and cannot touch the essence of Christian truth. Biblical criticism, for example, is no doubt destructive of the *theory* of purely verbal inspiration; it is not destructive of the *principle* of inspiration. So far from being deadly foes, science and research are in fact helping

us to get rid of some formal and mechanical theories, and to state truth in a more real, living and spiritual way. The evolution theory itself, whether it be or not an adequate account of the phenomena of the organic world, seems likely to help us considerably in the escape from materialism. It is at least, as we now see it, tending to detect, beneath all the forms of life, something akin to the workings of a rational and spiritual agent—a *spiritual*, because, as the learned scientist insists with no less emphasis than the unlearned theologian, life, as far as we know, is the ultimate fact of nature; and a *rational*, because in a scheme of evolutionary progress we see more and more clearly revealed the traces of a guiding purpose, of a ruling master-spirit, of something beyond a blind instinct and an unconscious aim—some far-off ideal to which the real is ever tending, some standard of perfection by which the imperfect is ever being formed. And thus materialism, the really great theoretical and working opponent of religion, is daily becoming more insecure in its position, and therefore less dangerous in its influence.

The practical result of such thoughts would seem to be that the Christian apologist ought to have more patience in the present, and a better and more tranquil hope for the future, than he sometimes shows. We are not after all, we discover, so sublimely wise as some of us have fancied; nor need we suppose that wisdom has been born with us, or that we have reached the apex of truth. There is no occasion, therefore, for clamorous alarm at the sight of every doubt suggested or difficulty proposed. It is far better to exercise a quiet confidence, to make an intelligent and sympathetic study of the problems of the day, and to remember, above all, that Truth, and Truth only, must be the object of our search.

SIDNEY A. ALEXANDER.



ART. V.—A SCHEME TO FACILITATE AND REGULATE THE EXCHANGE OF BENEFICES.

IT is remarkable that although the custom of the Exchange of Benefices has extensively prevailed for several centuries, no systematic scheme has been successfully formulated in order to facilitate and regulate them. It is thought that the details of a plan submitted to the London Diocesan Conference by one of its Committees, and approved by the Conference in principle, may help the consideration of the subject by the Authorities of the Church and their Advisers.