

CHRISTENDOM'S ANXIOUS SITUATION.

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WE SEE, in many pleasant respects, just what the Fathers saw. The old Christian flag is still waving; the old Christian creeds still maintain their places; the old Christian sanctuaries are still open every Sabbath; ministers preach and pray in them still; there are still prayer meetings, and sacraments, and Sunday Schools, and Bible Schools, and Salvation Armies, and Northfields, and Bible Leagues, and Christian Endeavorers. It is not a surface Sahara by any means.

And yet the condition of things among us is very serious – so serious that it would be the height of unwisdom to blink it. Beneath the fair crust of Christian forms and professions boils and tosses an amazing amount of un-Christian and anti-Christian thinking. We do not know exactly how much; but that it is formidably great we do know. Every now and then eruptions occur which startle us as with a blow. Latterly, these outbreaks have sometimes come in groups and with almost volcanic violence; and the impact on us has been as when the smith with both hands smites the anvil. We are shocked – shocked at the mass of destructive material belched out from most unexpected quarters; from pulpits noted for orthodoxy; from seminaries supposed to be bound to the old Gospel by more than seven green withes, which not even a Samson could break; from Associations, Presbyteries, Conferences where grey heads listen patiently to attacks on the Bible, which a few years ago would have raised a storm of astonishment and protest.

Lo, the new departures of a few years ago have expanded into the "New Christianity" of the Higher Criticism, the destructive criticism of the Bible. Under the aegis of the Christian name this unwelcome immigrant has come to great estate among us. Its shadow covers and chills great denominations, great presses and great educational institutions. To multitudes the Old Testament is gone and

the New Testament is either gone or going. Not a few deny or question fundamental Christian doctrines – the Messiahship of Jesus, his miraculous birth and incarnation, his miracles, his atonement, his resurrection and ascension, and even his reliability as a religious teacher. Many whose standing in the ministry is still unchallenged question all these doctrines; and very many more are plainly feeling their way to the same depths at various stages of descent. These men, even the most radical of them, are preaching their views without hindrance in our churches and presses. They occupy chairs in our colleges and seminaries. The defection is so great that no ecclesiastical discipline is attempted. Courts, civil and ecclesiastical, have been appealed to in vain to prevent the perversion of trust funds defended by oaths and creeds as strong as human ingenuity could make them. In spite of ironclad creeds and quinquennial paths rationalism has appropriated many strategic positions in the high places of the field. The leading colleges of New England invite to their chairs and pulpits the most radical Unitarians, Universalists and Rationalists; and, as if the home supply was not large enough, are at the trouble of importing them. Whole Associations, Presbyteries, Conferences are dominated by views of the Bible which defy all the Protestant confessions and which would, a few years ago, have been met by storms of protest and excommunication.

In view of this general situation the friends of the old Bible naturally look with anxious eyes to see where stand their Missionary Societies. What do they find? I will speak only for Congregationalists. Other Protestant denominations must speak for themselves. **[R3465 : page 356]** Just now they may find themselves much better off than their neighbors; but they will, at least, find that they are being menaced by like conditions. We should at least serve as a warning.

OUTLOOK OF CONGREGATIONALISTS.

What do Congregationalists find? They find that the higher criticism now sits at the council board and swarms in the

constituency of each of their three missionary societies. Whoever sees that much sees reason for grave apprehension. All these societies are on the brink – liable to be crowded over it at any moment by the pressure from behind....

Is there not cause for uneasiness? Have not evangelical churches reason to fear that as little discrimination is made in the laborers sent into the home mission fields as exists among the men sending them? Is it not certain that men who think that higher critics of an extreme type are suitable persons for the championships and directorships and presidencies of missionary societies will think them suitable for mission work in the field? Our misgivings are very great. Our fears are stronger in the battle than our hopes. We are willing and even anxious to contribute to send the old Gospel into all fields, believing it to be the power of God unto salvation; but we are not willing to do as much for another Gospel. It is forbidden us. So we feel obliged to query with our two home missionary societies: "What are you doing with our contributions? What sort of men are you sending into the mission fields in our names? Let us know. It looks more and more as if you must be sending forth men whom it is against our consciences to send and support. Is it so?"

Again our three missionary societies are so linked to a fourth that whatever patronage is given to one is measurably given to all. They present themselves for patronage in a lump, make a common appeal, have a common publication, divide among themselves certain common expenses and receipts, and are thinking of a common anniversary. We cannot bless one without blessing all; cannot help the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions without helping the Congregational Sunday School and Publishing Society.

And yet this latter society, acting in the name of all our churches, and at the expense of all of them, is engaged in publishing books and Sunday School helps and a weekly newspaper notoriously and

grossly in the interest of the Higher Criticism – the newspaper presumably bought and supported, in part at least, by denominational funds and claiming denominational authority. Moreover, this society has just come into avowed alliance with a well known organ of the Higher Criticism; namely, "The American Institute of Sacred Literature," for the purpose of capturing in its interests our Sunday School teachers.

Such is the society which all our churches are now being urged to support liberally – urged by the common voice of all our denominational societies, as expressed in innumerable circulars, in a plan for having a special agency for each society in each church, and in the actual appointment of a field secretary to give his whole time to the work of swelling the contributions of all the churches to all the societies – not excepting the most objectionable. Is this tolerable? Do not the other missionary societies see that their working in harness with such a society, and even helping to gild and draw its special chariot, is fitted to disturb confidence in themselves? Would not all evangelical churches feel wronged at having their contributions so used if they were aware of it? **[R3466 : page 356]**

But they are not aware. For some reason the shepherds have not spoken, or have spoken the wrong thing. Even watchmen who have clearly seen the enemy entering the gates in force, and have deplored the fact, have not seen their way clear to put trumpet to their lips. Wonderful silence! And so the churches do not know that the Philistines are upon them. Are not misgivings (or more) in order under such circumstances? Unless something is done, in due time our whole city will be taken, our whole lump will be leavened with unbelief, at the expense, largely, of believers. Are believers ready for this?

"RATIONALISTIC SEMINARIES."

Another fact gives us even profounder concern – gives vast weight and exasperation to our other sources of anxiety. If all our

educational institutions were in the hands of believing and faithful men, backsliding missionary societies would not mean so much. They must soon retrace their steps or die. But, as matters now stand, they threaten to go from bad to worse by endless reinforcement from behind. All the leading colleges in the East, and all our technical Congregational seminaries both East and West, are in active sympathy with the principles and methods of the Higher Criticism – as is shown either by the position of those who control them, or by publications of their professors, or by the reports of their students, or by the radical critics invited to their lectureships and decorated with their honors.

This is the condition of things which actually exists among Congregationalists, and threatens all our Protestant denominations. It is a very serious condition – so serious that to realize it almost takes one's breath away; only leaving breath enough to exclaim, "When the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do!"

Of course rationalistic seminaries must be expected to produce, mostly, rationalists. Here and [R3456 : page 357] there, one heavily reinforced by a sound conversion and a sound home training, will resist the influences of the seminary; but such cases will be few. Practically, the entire output of our seminaries at present is higher critics. What becomes of them? Somehow the Congregational public absorbs them all. Some, by grace of easy-going councils, become pastors of self-supporting churches. The rest are being sent forth by our missionary societies. How can it be otherwise? From what other sources than their seminaries can these societies draw their recruits? They must take higher critics or none. As matters now stand they must do it or go out of business. But they have not gone out of business. They are still busy at sending out appeals and missionaries – sending them out at the expense of all the Congregational churches, nearly or quite all of whom, in the older States, have evangelical creeds and histories. Are we content with this? Ought we to be?

NEW MISSIONARIES INFIDELS.

Just now, on all the mission fields, are many men to whom no exception can be taken – men of an earlier and better training. *But they are becoming fewer every year, and their places are being filled with their opposites.* If the present condition of our seminaries continues, and our missionary societies continue to do as they are now doing, and have been doing for some time, what but the Higher Criticism, with its eviscerated Bible, will occupy the field at home and abroad? Can evangelical churches be reasonably asked to assist such a result by their contributions? It is asking them to commit suicide.

Are we invited to bear in mind that all the forms of Higher Criticism which the seminaries are engaged in teaching, and the missionary societies are engaged in distributing, are not equally gross? We do bear it in mind. We remember that some higher critics are standing on the crumbling edge of the precipice; that others are clinging to its ragged sides at various stages of descent, and that very many are lying on the jagged rocks at the bottom, all broken to pieces. No – all are not as yet broken to pieces; but all are in imminent danger of being so. For, they all decline to treat the Old Testament as Christ treated it, and, in the treatment of both Testaments, all approve and act on those general principles and methods of Biblical criticism whose logical and historical terminus is a Bible without supernaturalism and without authority.

"THOROUGH-GOING INFIDELS."

And, somehow, the most broken of these critics manage to do their work under shelter of the old creeds, and while wearing the purple robes of Christian professors and ministers. We do not see how they can put this and that together. To us the man seems like a thorough-going infidel. He talks like an infidel in private; he writes like an infidel; he is doing the work of an infidel; and infidels rejoice over the work he is doing and call him Brother. But he denies the

kinship. He says that he is a Christian and doing Christian work. Does he not subscribe to a Christian creed, hold a high Christian office, draw a Christian salary, sometimes praise the Christian Bible to the skies? Though he rejects all the fundamental Christian doctrines and tears the Bible to tatters, he says to all the azimuths that he is the best of Christians. It looks to us extremely like saying that black is white; that falsehood is truth, that sin is holiness, that infidelity is Christianity. We tremble for the dictionary as well as for the Bible. Have words no meaning that can be depended on? Are we all at sea in the use of the English language? The Son of Man was betrayed with a kiss – perhaps our friend, the enemy, will take it hard that we remind him of that ancient tragedy. In war, the soldier who, being in command of a fortress for his king, busies himself in making breaches in its walls and hewing down its gates in the presence of the enemy is not called a loyal subject though he continues to fly the king's flag and wear his uniform and eat his bread.

NO "TRUMPET" IN CHRISTENDOM.

In view of the foregoing facts, are not the friends of the old Bible justified in grave misgivings, even anxieties, as to the future of their missions and churches? But these anxieties may well be enhanced when they consider that the churches in general do not as yet fully realize their danger. Individual laymen, here and there, have come to know and feel the peril; but the churches, as such, are not awake. No trumpet has sounded – at least none to which they are tuned. They are not given to reading controversial theology, bristling with technicals and subtleties and dead languages. In a dim sort of way they may know that the Bible is under fire; and they experience that lowering of spiritual tone and activity that naturally comes from living in an atmosphere largely charged with impurities of doubt and cavil, but they do not realize the extent to which ministers and institutions have fallen away from the Fathers and the Mayflower. They are still relying on certificates of church membership, of seminary training, of licensures and examinations and approvals by

councils and associations, to protect their pupils from fundamental errorists. Once these were reliable safeguards. They are such no longer. But the laymen are not awake to the fact; do not understand that now, at least in New England, there is little or nothing to hinder errorists of the most radical sort from appearing in their pulpits. The doors are wide open – wide open. [R3466 : page 358]

AN ILLUSTRATION IN HYPOCRISY.

A man enters. Who is he? Possibly, a higher critic of the grossest kind. He has no Old Testament at all. As to the New Testament, he has little of that left – no incarnation; no miracles; no resurrection; no ascension; no atonement; no infallible teacher – nothing but a poor sort of Buddha loaded down with blasphemous pretensions and speaking a bit of the Sermon on the Mount. If his parishioners could hear him talk in private, or in ministerial circles more or less sympathetic, they would be astonished and dismayed. They would say, "This man is an *infidel* – as much so as Tom Paine." And they would say the truth. An infidel is what he really is. But it is not what he appears to his hearers. He appears at first to them as a devout Christian. He comes to them in the name of Christ and his Christianity. He marches under a Christian banner and wears a Christian uniform. He wears clerical clothes and manners, stands in what has long been an orthodox pulpit, has orthodox looks and tones and words in preaching and praying, has actually joined their local church with its Puritan creed. Must he not be all right? Being victims of appearances, his hearers are likely to say Yes; are likely to receive the man for what he appears to be – a teacher come from God, an angel of light. They will have open ears for what the angel will have to say.

What will he say? The people expect serpents to hiss, dogs to bark, lions to roar and infidels to advertise themselves with a trumpet. This infidel will do nothing of the sort. Nothing startling nor disturbing will come from him at first. He has been taught better. His

teachers have shown him by example, if not by precept, a more excellent way. It is a prudent way, a cautious way, a way of preparation and education by littles and littles. He will introduce a new newspaper. He will recommend a new book. In due time he will confess that he does not think so highly as some do of creeds and dogmas and heresy trials. So he proceeds by easy stages from hesitations to insinuations, from insinuations to plain doubts, from doubts to denials – at last the whole camel follows the nose. He has prepared his way just as his teachers did theirs. He has walked in velvet slippers for a while; for a while has been careful not to tread on ancient and rheumatic toes. To the last he continues to pose as a true sheep whose fleece is of the finest and heaviest; as a warm friend of that Bible whose integrity and authority he is engaged in shredding away. Is it to be wondered at that he meets with a measure of success; perhaps warps over a majority of his church into rationalism – all but the impossible elect? **[R3467 : page 358]**

Behold a church stripped of all safeguards and then exposed to the sharp practice of a supposed friend! No wonder if it falls an easy prey. Caesar, without his shield and cuirass and mail, easily falls when friend Brutus strikes.

The fact is that the misgivings and anxieties warranted by the present condition of our colleges and seminaries and denominational societies, great as these anxieties are, should be much enhanced when we consider that our churches generally are not aware of the extent of the ministerial apostasy, have lost the ancient safeguards against it, and are now being attacked from within by enemies who swear by all the evangelists that they are best friends.

"A GIANT SPECTER."

Such is the state of things in the constituency of our Congregational Missionary Societies. It is at least a condition that threatens all the Protestant denominations. One part of the people have lost all faith in the Bible as a supernatural book; and they are

largely the leaders of the people. Another part is uncertain what to believe. And still another part that believe as firmly as ever have, at the very least, great misgivings as to what their societies are actually doing; whether they are not sending forth another gospel, and sending it at the expense of the evangelical churches. All parts are breathing an unwholesome atmosphere, misty with doubts and cavil and venturesome speculations. Is not this sufficient cause for almost any amount of falling off in missionary contributions and ministerial supply?

And yet the managers of our missionary societies ignore the anxious situation altogether. They express surprise that their operations are so poorly supported. What can be the matter with the churches! Why are they giving rills instead of rivers! Not an audible word comes from officialdom to show that they understand the situation. Neither in their official organs, nor in the formal reports and appeals at anniversaries, is there anything to show but that they have before them the public of fifty years ago. They do not even recognize the presence anywhere in their fields of such a thing as the Higher Criticism. Is it possible that their eyes are holden so that they do not see *a giant SPECTER stalking* through the Protestant world and smiting the very foundations of Christian Missions? It is not possible. They are aware of "the pestilence that walketh in darkness and the destruction that wasteth at noon day;" but, for some reason, they think it best, on the whole, not to manifest their knowledge. They may be right. But if all friends of the Bible should do the same – should neglect to give the plague its true name, to warn the public against it, and to take measures for quarantining and suppressing it – common sense would be outraged, the Truth and Christ betrayed, and the whole land become a charnel house. Which may God and his people forbid!

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