

Heb. x. 31: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." It is a fearful thing so to fall *unprotected by a covenant*. But it is not so to the true believer, who falls asleep with his hope full of immortality, and who, like Paul (Philip. i. 23), desires to depart and be with Christ. What could remain to apostates thus unable to re-enter into covenant with God, and finding no more sacrifice for sins remaining, "but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, which shall devour those exposed to it"? (Heb. x. 27). Such persons may by God's *uncovenanted* mercy be saved, but they cannot in this life enjoy assurance of their salvation. Somewhat similar is Paul's declaration to his Galatian converts, that if they persisted in receiving circumcision (Gal. v. 2), in addition to their profession of Christianity, "Christ would profit them nothing."

It must be remembered, too, that the class thus contemplated must necessarily be a small class, consisting, as it does, only of those *advanced* Christians who apostatize, lit. *go on sinning* (*ἀμαρτάνοντες*) voluntarily (*ἐκουσίως*, Heb. x. 26). The early Church was certainly right in taking the more merciful view, and readmitting to communion, after probation, those who had lapsed (*ἀκουσίως*), involuntarily, from physical terror in time of persecution. They were certainly not guilty of such an apostasy as is contemplated in the above passages of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

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ART. III.—HIGHER RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

A MOVEMENT is in progress in our southern dioceses about which very little has been said in print. It is none the worse for that, but the time seems to have come when discussion in public will help it, not by giving it impetus—of which there is no lack—but by comparison of methods and results. The movement for promoting "higher religious education" corresponds to similar movements for promoting higher education of a general kind by means of reading circles and University extension classes, and in some districts has decidedly gained the start of them. The classes who have some degree of leisure and education, especially the women of these classes, have of late years been called on by the Church to do much for others, and the Church now proposes to do something for them. It is not because they are deficient in knowledge, but because they are educated and cultivated, that it is proposed to help them to go further. Their existing culture and education constitute their claim.

Why should this particular endeavour be made on their behalf? What need is there of higher religious education? There are two considerations deserving of notice before we come to the main answer to this question. Much has been done of late to quicken the devotional life by stimulus on the side of the affections, and no doubt with considerable benefit. But this requires to be accompanied by like endeavours to stimulate the devotional life from the side of the understanding. Such a compensation is necessary if the religious life of the Church and the individual is to be sound. And there are many minds which are best reached on this side, persons who rise from the study of some thoughtful treatise, or great character of Church history with more sense of God's nearness and love, than any strictly devotional literature could awaken.

Again, a critical study of the Bible and the history of the Church in a general way, and without reference to special errors, is, paradoxical as it may seem, the best apologetics that can be recommended. It is not by inquiring what will defeat such and such arguments, but by seeking to know the truth, that faith is really fortified. It is by encouraging and guiding a wide and general study, and not by putting special prophylactics into their hands, that we shall best arm our forces against unbelief.

And yet it cannot be said that the movement for higher religious education has arisen from the conscious contemplation of either of these advantages. It is rather the case that there is a demand on the part of our laity which has been perceived and anticipated by the Church. Education in secular subjects is more liberal, more thoughtful, and more sympathetic, than it was. Language, history, and mathematics are treated in a way which appeals more to the intelligence, and depends less on an acquiescent memory. Religious education must move, and has moved along with this development. And not only must religious knowledge be taught more thoughtfully and less catechetically at schools, but when the young man or young woman has completed the preliminary and necessary training, and goes forward to the voluntary and lifelong culture which should be the ideal of every Christian, the need of wider and freer methods of study and more competent guidance is felt in the department of religious knowledge more than in any other, because its problems are not only more difficult and elevated, but of transcendent importance to the soul.

In its clearest form this demand comes only from a few who stand in the van, but in a less definite and half-conscious way the want is widely felt. What attitude is the Church to take up with regard to this demand? Shall we take our stand on the position of simple authority, and say, "This is no matter for

your studies and inquiries. You need not concern yourselves with theology, with exegesis, with criticism. What is needful for you shall be delivered to you, cut and dried, in the most approved form. You need do nothing but learn it by heart" ? Or shall we welcome the demand, and strain every exertion to provide for it, even though to do so may call away strength from other work which we have been accustomed to regard as of greater importance? Shall we recognise the danger to which such interests will expose students if they are misguided or not guided at all? Shall we fearlessly open to those whose intellectual powers are capable of it, the questions which have tried our own minds, and the solutions at which we have arrived? Shall we show what positions in popular theology have never been expressly sanctioned by the Church, and are not vital to the Scriptural completeness of her faith, and emphasise those which are to be held at any cost, not because they will damage an adversary or edify a Christian, but because we are convinced of their truth?

An answer to this demand has been given in some of the southern dioceses by the formation of societies on more or less the same plan. This matter is one of those in which we feel the gain of that diocesan unity, life, and independence, which is the growth of recent years under the hand of a more active episcopate. Diocesan unity makes such a movement possible, and enables it to take its place in the general system of Church work, while diocesan independence ensures the trial of different methods, adaptation to different circumstances, and some measure of healthy competition. As a consequence, the dioceses which begin later gain something by the experience of those which have gone before.

The movement first took shape in the diocese of Oxford, and was in a great measure due to two clergymen at Wokingham, the Revds. A. Carr and J. T. Brown. The Church History Society there founded was intended, as expressed in its title, to promote the study of Holy Scripture and of the Prayer Book, as well as that of "Church History," and is as much a society for higher religious education as any of those which have followed its initiative. The arch-diocese of Canterbury was the next to move, and the lines adopted were very much those of Oxford. In October, 1887, the diocese of Winchester began work with a plan in which four divisions of study—Old Testament, New Testament, Church history, and Prayer Book—were more distinctly recognised as alternatives for choice, and no special prominence given to Church history. The diocese of Salisbury followed in 1888, and here the syllabus has been still further enlarged by the recognition of Doctrine and Missionary history as subjects of study. Societies have been or are being formed

in the dioceses of Exeter, Bath and Wells, and Hereford. There may probably be others which are beyond the knowledge of the writer. A summary of the objects and plan of the Winchester society is given in the note below,¹ with a syllabus for the current year. In this account the examination offered may appear to be a leading feature, but it should be observed that it is only taken by a very small proportion of the members, and that the value of the society's work lies mainly in the definite course of reading which it offers, the suggestion of useful books, and the guidance afforded by occasional papers and lectures.

It will naturally be asked whether practical evidences of success are forthcoming. The second report of the Winchester society, now in the press, shows that 1,700 members have been enrolled and 19 centres established. The courses of lectures (3 to 6 in each course) delivered during the past session have amounted to 55, besides 14 other courses of a more conversational

¹ The object of the society is to encourage definite and systematic study in higher religious knowledge with special reference to the books of the Old and New Testaments, the Book of Common Prayer, and the history of the Christian Church. It accordingly prescribes a course of study for each successive year in these subjects, and recommends certain books to be read in connexion with them. Members are expected to read at least one of the four prescribed subjects, whether they contemplate being examined or not. Those who wish to be examined may offer all or any of the four subjects. Candidates will be known to the examiners by numbers only, and those who pass will receive certificates (of three grades of merit). In order to assist students in the work of preparation, occasional papers are issued in the course of each year to each member, giving notes on the course of study and suggestions as to the use of books. Intermediate papers (of questions) are also issued for practice in writing answers. When thirty or more members have been enrolled in one town or neighbourhood, a "centre" of the society is established there, and a local secretary appointed, who is supplied with a set of the recommended books for the use of members. These secretaries may apply to the council for courses of lectures to be given at the centres, and may arrange with the clergy of the parish for the establishment of classes on the prescribed subjects, which classes shall be of an informal and conversational character. The annual subscription is 2s. 6d., except for the clergy and those engaged in Sunday-school teaching, who pay 1s. The same amounts, in addition to the annual subscription, are paid by those who enter for examination.

The syllabus for the year 1889-90 is as follows:—*Old Testament*: Pss. xx.-xlv. in Prayer Book, Authorised and Revised Versions. *New Testament*: The Epistles to Colossians and Philemon, in Authorised and Revised Versions. *Prayer Book*: Litany, with Prayers and Thanksgivings, and Communion Service. *Church History*: Early English Church, from the Mission of St. Augustine to the Norman Conquest, inclusive. After this follow two lists of books, the first consisting chiefly of shorter manuals, and the second of books which "will be found useful by those who have leisure and inclination for more thorough study." The general secretary for Winchester diocese is the Rev. F. T. Madge, and it may be added that the secretaries of the Oxford and Salisbury Societies respectively are the Rev. A. Carr, and the Rev. J. D. Morrice.

kind, and in some cases the lectures have been attended by audiences of 80 to 100. The accounts from the Salisbury society are no less encouraging. It already numbers nearly 1,000 members, and, notwithstanding a much more sparse population, the lectures are well attended. The secretaries state in the *Salisbury Diocesan Gazette* for September, 1889, that "the Society has received an amount of support which greatly exceeds the expectations of those who originated it." But the evidence of success does not consist merely of statistics. Much interest has been awakened, and there is no better proof of this than the complaints which are heard from certain districts, where, through apathy on the part of those who should take the lead, the society's work has not been set on foot. Another satisfactory piece of evidence is the excellence of the examination work, which is, in some cases, up to a fair University honour standard; and the intelligence shown in the voluntary answers to questions set by the lecturers.

It may be objected to the work of the societies as at present carried on, that in the main they only reach women, and that few men take advantage of them. The Salisbury Society deprecates such a view of its work, and in some instances repeats the afternoon lectures in the evening on purpose to draw in men. But while the Winchester Society acknowledges that its work is mainly for women, it does not acknowledge that this is any proof of failure. The fresh recollection of the wide effect for harm produced by one woman's novel may help us to estimate the value to the Church of a great body of highly-educated women, who are learning to hold fast their faith not merely on the authority of their spiritual guides, but also on the ground of their own study and reasonable conviction. It is through such study on the part of those who are to teach the next generation, that the difficult question will be solved, which asks how the results of a cautious and devout criticism are to permeate our religious teaching, and secure the faith of our children from being overthrown. In conclusion, it may be worth while to mention some matters which experience has shown to be of importance in the management of such societies.

In this, as in all other *diocesan* organizations, much depends on the active participation and interest of the Bishop himself. The working of the society involves a considerable amount of voluntary labour, which will be much more readily given to a movement which the Bishop is known to watch and have at heart. At any rate, the council should consist of men sufficiently eminent and respected to make a request from them for co-operation regarded as an honour. Again, the lecturers should be chosen by a person or persons strong enough to choose fit lecturers and reject unfit ones. A quite unreasonable importance

is attached to delivery by most audiences in estimating lectures, as in estimating sermons, and qualified lecturers may be really of little use if their delivery creates a prejudice. It is worth observing that financial difficulties may arise from the smallness of the subscriptions asked, and that the best way to meet this will probably be to encourage the centres to fix independently higher rates of subscription for those willing to pay them, and to remit only the 2s. 6d. or 1s. to the central secretary, retaining a part for local expenses. Much will depend on the efficiency of the local secretaries, who should be chosen from the laity, and not from the clergy, who have generally too much on their hands to throw themselves into the work as a lady secretary would do. A question which causes some difficulty has been whether the society should keep in view in its teaching, papers, etc., the more highly or the less highly educated among its members. Possibly the temptation to think most of the cleverest has been sometimes unduly yielded to. However this may be, such a society cannot retain respect and influence if there be not a thoroughly scholarly tone in all its work. It is not newness or complexity of thought, but want of clearness in treatment, which disappoints and perplexes students.

This article may be fitly closed and supplemented by the weighty and thoughtful words in which the Bishop of Salisbury commended the movement to his diocese :

The primary object of the society is to promote the study of religious subjects, particularly of Holy Scripture, amongst those who are responsible to God for two great gifts—the gift of education and the gift of leisure. The age in which we live is certainly distinguished for the interest which it takes in religious questions, and the readiness with which it enters into the discussion of theological problems, particularly those respecting revelation and inspiration. But it is also too often impatient of study, and too much inclined to approach these questions with a fitful intellectual curiosity, rather than to treat them as involving grave duties to God and man. But, in reality, the possession of the gifts to which we have referred renders their possessors just as much accountable in the sphere of thought, and in regard to the propagation of religious truth, as the possession of wealth, public station, or influence in regard to the duties of practical life. Every man is a debtor to God for what he has received, and for his use of it towards the ends for which it was given. Inasmuch, then, as God is the highest Truth, those who have gifts which enable them to reach forward to Him, even in a small degree above their fellows, cannot be content to let their talent lie idle without endangering their own spiritual position and that of the Church of which they are members.—*Salisbury Diocesan Gazette* (Supplement), January, 1889.

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