

TRIED BY ITS FRUITS.

Being Thoughts on Luke vi. 44.

BY THE

REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

Christ Church, Oxford,

RECTOR OF HELMINGHAM, SUFFOLK.

Author of "Living or Lead?" "Assurance" &c.

IPSWICH:

WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

LONDON:

WERTHEIM & MACINTOSH, 24, PATERNOSTER ROW.

NISBET & Co., 21, BERNERS STREET.

Price Two Shillings per Dozen.

M.DCCC.LVI.

TRIED BY ITS FRUITS.

“Every tree is known by his own fruit.”—(LUKE vi. 44).

OUR lot is cast in times when there is a tendency to try all ancient institutions by their results. Schools, colleges, universities, corporations, old endowed charities, all are successively put into the crucible, and placed in the furnace. “Will an institution stand the fire? Is the result of the operation dross or good metal?” These are the only questions which men require to be answered.

Now, I wish to apply this great principle to the religion which our Lord Jesus Christ brought into the world nineteen hundred years ago. Some men tell us that it is an effete and worn-out thing, utterly unsuited to the twentieth century. Christianity, in short, is regarded with contempt by many who call themselves leaders of thought in modern times. Like an old almanac, its work is done, and it may be thrown aside! Its Bible and its Sundays, its ministers and its worship, its prayers and its sacraments, all are unworthy of the notice of intellectual men, and may be safely neglected, smiled at, and handed over to the ignorant and the poor! Such is the line of thinking, writing, and talking in too many quarters.

Now, my simple object in this paper is to point out the unreasonableness, not to say dishonesty, of ignoring the enormous results and effects which Christianity has produced in the world. I ask the sceptic and the agnostic to try Christianity by its fruits. I defy them to deny the existence of those fruits. I say that mankind owes a huge debt to Christianity, whether mankind knows it or not, of which the amount can never be calculated. In short, the fruits of Christianity are an unanswerable proof to my own mind of its Divine origin, and a stupendous difficulty in the way of infidelity, which has never been fairly grappled with or explained away. They demand attention. They court investigation.

There are only two points to which I shall invite the attention of my readers.

I. For one thing, *let us consider briefly some of the fruits which Christianity has produced in the world.*

II. For another, *let us consider the leading doctrines by whose agency these fruits have been produced.*

I do not for a moment pretend to bring forward anything new or deep. I am going to speak of ancient, familiar things, which anyone of average intelligence can understand. But it is precisely the simplicity of my argument which makes many overlook it. We have so many great swelling words in this day from the enemies of Christianity, about “laws of nature, development, matter, germs, force,” and the like, that we are apt to forget the immense mass of evidence in favour of revealed religion which is lying close by our side.

I. In the first place, *what fruits has Christianity produced in the world?*

We are not fit to consider this question, unless we realize the actual condition of the world when Christianity was introduced. We must remember that the Augustan age, when the Lord Jesus Christ was born and His Church founded, was the era when heathenism had carried art and literature to the highest pitch of excellence. Even at this day the temples of Luxor and Carnac, the Parthenon at Athens, and the Coliseum at Rome, are among the most remarkable buildings in the world. The works of Homer, and Herodotus, and Thucydides, and Aeschylus, and Sophocles, and Euripides, and Plato, among the Greeks,—of Cicero, and Tacitus, and Virgil, and Horace, among the Romans,—are admired and read by almost all educated men, and in their way are unsurpassed after nineteen centuries have passed away. In short, if the education of mind, and reason, and intellect, and the cultivation of art and literature, could make men holy and happy in this life, and give them a good hope for the life to come, the world, before Christ, did not need the introduction of Christianity.

But what was the world before Christ, even the most polished and refined portion of it, in the matter of religion and morality? That is the question. The answer may be given in the words of St. Paul, “The world by wisdom knew not God” (1 Cor. i. 21). Darkness, thick darkness, covered the earth. Athens and Rome were full of magnificent temples, in which men worshipped images of gold, and silver, and wood, and stone, the work of their own hands. The greatest philosophers, such as Socrates, groped, as in the night. The doctrine of the Being of the true God seems to have been completely lost, and in its place the most debasing idolatry and grovelling superstition universally prevailed.

The following passage from Bishop Wilson admirable Lectures on Christian Evidences (vol. 1, p. 47, 2nd edition), contains a picture which I believe is not one bit over-coloured:—“Whether you consider the barbarian nations, or those which were most polished,—whether you look back to the earliest times of which we have any authentic history, or those nearer the birth of our Lord,—all was one thick, impenetrable mass of moral disorder and ruin. The most abject and disgusting idolatry, the worship of the beasts and birds, of stocks and stones, the deification of kings and warriors, of human virtues and vices, of insects and creeping things, and even of that most disgusting of all reptiles, the serpent, prevailed. Practices the most flagitious were interwoven with the histories and ceremonies of these wretched deities. From this source, aided by the corrupt heart of man, flowed out a torrent of vices and abominations in public and private life. Fraud, theft, rapine, revenge, suicide, fornication, adultery, murder of infants, unnatural crimes, the atrocious cruelties of war, the slavery and oppression of captives, gladiatorial shows, not only abounded, but were patronized, countenanced by the great body of men, connived at, if not practised, by statesmen and philosophers—publicly reprobated by none.”

Hear what the worthy Bishop says in another passage,—“The heathen were impure and abominable even in their religion. Their gods and goddesses were profligate, impure, revengeful, odious. ‘The very light that was in them was darkness.’ For what could the histories of Jupiter, Juno, and Bacchus, and Mercury, and Venus teach, but vice and drunkenness, and lewdness, and theft, and fraud? What were the Floralia, and Bacchanalia, and Saturnalia? ‘It is a shame,’ observes the great Apostle, ‘even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret’ (Ephes. v. 12). Christians, as individuals, may be wicked and unjust, and, alas! often are so. But this is notwithstanding their religion, and in spite of it, as Bishop Warburton has fairly remarked, and therefore cases of the grossest iniquity are rare. The heathen, on the contrary, were impure and abominable in consequence of their religion, and because of it; and therefore a depravity of which we have scarcely a conception prevailed, and cases of virtue and comparative purity were rare and uncommon.”

Now I believe this terrible picture of the world before Christ is not one bit overdrawn. I believe it would be easy to confirm its accuracy by reference to Greek and Latin authors. But it would be impossible to do so without bringing forward things of which “it is a shame even to speak.” I only ask Christians to remember that the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, which is often not read through in public, contains a plain, unvarnished description of heathenism as it really was in the days of St. Paul.

But what was the agency by which this awful state of things in the heathen world was altered, amended, and gradually swept away throughout all the Roman empire? That it has been swept away is a simple historical fact. But what wrought the change? What was it that emptied the heathen temples, destroyed the vocation of the idolatrous priesthood, raised the whole standard of morality, and, to use the words of Scripture, “turned the world upside down?” (Acts xvii. 6). I answer, unhesitatingly, the introduction and progress of Christianity. How vast, and wide, and deep the change was we can hardly realize at this present day. What is before our eyes in Europe we know. What was, when heathenism reigned supreme, we cannot grasp and take in.

I ask your attention to the following eloquent passage from the pen of a writer.

“The argument which meets us first in surveying the history of Christianity, and in estimating the outstanding and singular features of its success, is its early, wide, and within certain limits absolutely irresistible diffusion. Other facts attest this: but I select one as to which there can be no controversy, the extirpation by it of idolatry such as existed in the old Roman world. That system, from the Euphrates to the furthest shore of Britain, from the Nile to the forest of Germany, has utterly passed away. The whole regions around the Mediterranean, to the limits of civilization, and beyond them, ‘have changed their gods;’ and,

though something, as time advanced, may be claimed for Mohammedanism, the great decisive, all-prevailing impulses have come from Christianity. The classic Paganism, Greek and Roman, the Assyrian, the Egyptian and North African, the Druidic, and ultimately the Teutonic, have all fallen to rise no more; and at this moment there is not on the face of the earth a single worshipper of the 'great goddess Diana,' or, 'the image that fell down from Jupiter,' of Baal or Dagon, of Isis or Serapis, of Thor or Odin. They are preserved in imperishable literature, and in equally imperishable art. Homer and the great tragedians have enshrined them. Virgil and Ovid record them, and even Milton in his *Paradise Lost*; to say nothing of that wonderful Book, which, in revealing their abominations, will be found to have carried furthest and widest their memory. But not a single shrine remains to them in the proper sense of the word, not even where the Apollo, or Venus, the Minerva, or Hercules, enchain universal admiration. They are abolished as idols, while immortalized as relics; and not even the exquisite beauty lavished upon them can hide the moral deformity to which they owe their downfall. It is long centuries since one simple soul regarded them with anything of the feeling with which the African trembles before the rudest fetish, or the Hindoo before the most unsightly of his divinities. Another conquest so complete and absolute does not mark the history of the world. All ranks and classes passed through the revolution. The husbandman had to give up his offerings to Liber and Ceres, the sailor his votive tablets to Neptune, the soldier his chaplets to Mars. The youth had to forget his place in the procession, the virgin her part in the dance, or secular games. The senator had to forego his libation on entering the senate, the general his search after the omens before battle, the very emperor the honour of his own coins and titles of divinity. What but an immense and boundless power could have wrought this change, and wrought it, not by constraint, but willingly, through the force of persuasion?" (*The Success of Christianity*, by Principal Cairns, pp. 5, 6).

Will any of those who profess to deny the truth of Christianity deny the facts which this passage contains? It is impossible. He will find all history against him. But if he cannot deny the facts, he ought to tell us how they can on his principles be accounted for. We say they are irrefragable and unanswerable proofs that Christianity came down from God.

Great, however, as the fruits of Christianity have been in the overthrow and destruction of idolatry, they are fully equalled, if not surpassed, by the enormous practical results which Christianity has produced on the moral standard and social conduct of mankind. About human life and property,—about women, children, servants, and the poor,—about justice and equity between man and man,—about decency, purity, and charity,—about all these subjects the standard of public opinion has been entirely changed since the Gospel leavened the Roman world.

Once more I ask attention to a passage in which another writer has ably summed up the practical results of Christianity.

“We fear no challenge when we affirm that in its purest form Christianity has fostered the ideas, and encouraged the habits out of which all true civilization springs. It has fostered regard for man as essentially a noble being, having an immortal soul made in God’s image, with boundless capacities of expansion and improvement; regard for woman as the helpmeet and companion of man—not his drudge, or slave, or concubine; regard for marriage as a holy contract entered into before God, not to be lightly set aside; regard for children as the heritage of the Lord—not burdens or encumbrances, but lent by the Lord to be brought up for Him; regard for the family as a divine institution, intended to be a fountain of holy joys, and a nursery of all estimable habits, and all kindly affections: regard for the sick, the infirm, and the aged, whose sorrows we are ever to pity, and whose privations we are to make up in some measure from our more ample stores. The very word Christian, in its true spirit, has been identified with all these ideas and habits; in that sense it has a glory all its own, and no more damaging criticism can be passed on persons outraging truth and rectitude, than that they are a disgrace to the Christian name.” (*Christianity and Secularism*, by Dr. Blaikie, p. 5).

It would be perfectly easy to add to the statements contained in this passage if time and space permitted. The difficulty in the matter is not so much the discovery of evidence as the selection of it. The mass of facts which might be adduced to show the rich and blessed fruits of Christianity is simply enormous, and I pity the sceptic who refuses to look at it. To those who care to investigate the subject more fully I strongly recommend two volumes which have recently been published. One is called “*Gesta Christi*,” by an American writer named Brace. The other is called *Modern Missions and Culture*, by Dr. Werneck, a German. Each of these volumes contains a vast quantity of valuable information which is accessible to few English readers, and will richly repay perusal.

I admit, most fully, that there have been periods during the last nineteen centuries, when the fruits of Christianity have been miserably scanty and poor, and the tree which bore them has seemed rotten and only fit to be cut down. I do not forget the corruption of faith and practice in the dark ages,—the hideous immorality of many bishops of Rome,—the vile doings of many monasteries and nunneries,—the ignorance and superstition of priests,—the grovelling superstition of laymen. These are things I do not pretend to deny. I grant that the tide of truth sometimes ebbed so low that it was almost out of sight, and the light was so dim that it was well-nigh extinguished. But it must be remembered that in the worst times there were always some men who protested loudly against the wickedness around them, such as Bradwardine, and Grostête, and Wycliffe, and John Huss, and Jerome of Prague, and Savonarola. And there were always some scattered bodies of Christians who, by life and doctrine,

witnessed faithfully against corruption, such as the Valenses and Albigenses, the Waldensian Churches, and the Lollards. And, after all, if the state of the Roman world in the days of the Apostle, and the state of the world at this day could be fairly compared, there is not the slightest doubt what the verdict would be. The change for the better would be found so vast that no words could describe it. The fruits of Christianity are such, in spite of all failures and defects, that the moral difference between the world before Christ and the world after Christ is the difference between gold and dross, sweet and bitter, white and black, darkness and light.

The plain truth is, that we are all so familiar with the public blessings Christianity has insensibly conferred on the world, that we cannot realize the condition of things from which it has delivered us. Few men take the trouble to read or think about anything except eating, drinking, dressing, business, politics, recreation, money, and temporalities. The many never reflect on the enormous debt which they daily owe to the effects of Bible religion, and the very Christianity which so many pretend to despise. Does the infidel, who lies in some hospital for weeks, tenderly nursed and cared for, reflect that without Christianity there would have been no hospital at all? I doubt it. Does the British workman, who never goes to a place of worship, and never reads his Bible, and often sneers at parsons, reflect that without Christianity he would never have been sure of his wages, and would have often been treated as a bond-slave and a serf? I doubt it. Does the high-born woman of fashion, who makes a god of dress and amusement, and regards “religious people” with ill-disguised contempt, ever reflect that without Christianity she would have enjoyed little liberty of action, little independence of thought or choice, and her very honour would have been little respected. I doubt it. Does the scientific agnostic, who sits at home at ease, or travels about on Sundays, and despises churches, clergymen, and Bibles, and ignores his soul,—does he ever fairly and honestly reflect that without Christianity he would have had little safety for property, home, or person, little liberty of thought, and little chance of justice if he came in collision with the ruling power? Does he, I say, think of all this? Once more, I say, I doubt it. In short, I am firmly convinced that of all the debts which have been repudiated since creation, there never was one so shamefully ignored and repudiated as the debt which the world owes to Christianity. If revealed religion could only be fairly tried by its fruits, there is no doubt what the verdict would be. Secularism, agnosticism, scepticism, and infidelity would be confounded and silenced for ever.

II. I will now turn to the other point which I undertook to consider. Let us inquire what were the leading doctrines of Christianity by the agency of which its fruits have been produced.

I regard this point as one of great importance. It is certain that not everything called Christianity is the Christianity which was taught by Christ and His

Apostles. It is equally certain that nothing but “the tree” that they planted will ever bear good fruit. To expect good fruit from the grossly unscriptural religion of pre-Reformation days, or from the vague, hazy, broad, boneless, jelly-fish teaching, which many call religion in the twentieth century, is unreasonable and absurd. Such religions never yet bore good fruit: they never can and they never will.

Fruit-bearing Christianity has never been a mere vicarious religion. By that I mean a religion which teaches men to put their souls in the hands of a priest, and to leave him to settle matters between them and God. Nor yet has it been a mere formal and ceremonial religion. By that I mean a religion which teaches men to rest in the observation of times and seasons, and gestures and postures, and bodily acts, in which the heart and soul have nothing to do.—Nor yet has it been a religion of mere asceticism. By that I mean a religion which teaches men and women that the way to please God is to shut ourselves up in monasteries and nunneries, and leave the world to itself. Nor yet has it been a mind-cramping religion. By that I mean a religion which teaches men that they must not think and read for themselves, but must shut their eyes, and hear the Church, and believe whatever they are told. Christianity of these kinds, I repeat emphatically, has never borne good fruit. Whenever and wherever it has prevailed, in any country or at any era, such religion has done little or no good to the world. It has made no mark on lives or characters. It has been no better than a refined and polished heathenism, a stuffed carcase, a whitened sepulchre, a body without life. It has certainly supplied no evidence to silence the sceptic, or to prove the truth of Divine revelation.

The Christianity which I call fruit-bearing,—which shows its Divine origin by its blessed effects on mankind,—the Christianity which you may safely defy infidels to explain away,—that Christianity is a very different thing. Let me show you some of its leading marks and features.

(a) For one thing, fruit-bearing Christianity has always taught the inspiration, sufficiency, and supremacy of Holy Scripture. It has told men that “God’s Word written” is the only trustworthy rule of faith and practice in religion, that God requires nothing to be believed that is not in this Word, and that nothing is right which contradicts it. It has never allowed reason, the verifying faculty, or the voice of the Church, to be placed above, or on a level with Scripture. It has steadily maintained that, however imperfectly we may understand it, the Old Book is meant to be the only standard of life and doctrine.

(b) For another thing, fruit-bearing Christianity has always taught fully the sinfulness, guilt and corruption of human nature. It has told men that they are born in sin, deserve God’s wrath and condemnation, and are naturally inclined to do evil. It has never allowed that men and women are only weak and pitiable creatures, who can become good when they please, and make their own peace with God. On the contrary, it has steadily declared man’s danger and vileness,

and his pressing need of a Divine forgiveness and satisfaction for his sins, a new birth or conversion, and an entire change of heart.

(c) For another thing, fruit-bearing Christianity has always set before men the Lord Jesus Christ as the chief object of faith and hope in religion, as the Divine Mediator between God and men, the only source of peace of conscience, and the root of all spiritual life. It has never been content to teach that He is merely our Prophet, our Example, and our Judge. The main things it has ever insisted on about Christ are the atonement for sin He made by His death, His sacrifice on the cross, the complete redemption from guilt and condemnation by His blood, His victory over the grave by His resurrection, His active life of intercession at God's right hand, and the absolute necessity of simple faith in Him. In short, it has made Christ the Alpha and the Omega in Christian theology.

(d) Last, but not least, fruit-bearing Christianity has always honoured the Person of God the Holy Ghost, and magnified His work. It has never taught that all professing Christians have the grace of the Spirit in their hearts, as a matter of course, because they are baptized, or because they belong to the Church, or because they are communicants. It has steadily maintained that the fruits of the Spirit are the only evidence of having the Spirit, and that those fruits must be seen,—that we must be born of the Spirit, led by the Spirit, sanctified by the Spirit, and feel the operations of the Spirit,—and that a close walk with God in the path of His commandments, a life of holiness, charity, self-denial, purity, and zeal to do good, are the only satisfactory marks of the Holy Ghost.

Such is true fruit-bearing Christianity. Well would it have been for the world if there had been more of it during the last nineteen centuries! Too often, and in too many parts of Christendom, there has been so little of it, that Christ's religion has seemed extinct, and has fallen into utter contempt. But just in proportion as such Christianity as I have described has prevailed, the world has benefited, the infidel been silenced, and the truth of Divine revelation been acknowledged. The tree has been known by its fruit.

This is the Christianity which, in the days of the Primitive Church, "turned the world upside down." It was this that emptied the idol temples of their worshippers, routed the Greek and Roman philosophers, and obliged even heathen writers to confess that the followers of the "new superstition," as they called it, were people who loved one another, and lived very pure and holy lives.

This is the Christianity which, after dreary centuries of ignorance, priest-craft, and superstition, produced the Protestant Reformation, and changed the history of Europe. The leading doctrines which were preached by Luther and Zwingli on the Continent, and by Latimer and his companions in England, were precisely those which I have briefly described. That they bore rich fruit, in an immense increase of general morality and holiness, is a simple fact which no historian has ever denied.

This is the Christianity which, in the middle of last century, delivered our own Church from the state of deadness and darkness into which she had fallen. The main truths on which Whitfield, and Wesley, and Romaine, and Venn, and their companions, continually insisted, were the truth about sin, Christ, the Holy Ghost, and holiness. And the results were the same as they were in the primitive days, and at the era the Reformation. Men persecuted and hated all who taught these truths. But no one could say that they did not make men live and die well.

This is the Christianity which is doing good at this day, wherever good is done. Search the missionary stations in Africa, India, or China. Visit the great over-grown, semi-heathen parishes in colliery districts or manufacturing towns in our own land. In every case you will find the same report must be made. The only religious teaching which can show solid, positive results, is that which gives prominence to the doctrines which I have endeavoured to describe. Wherever they are rightly taught, Christianity can point to fruits which are an unanswerable proof of its Divine origin.

So much for fruit-bearing Christianity. I leave the subject with one remark about it. Let it never be forgotten that its leading principles are those which are least likely to please the natural man. On the contrary, they are precisely those which are calculated to be unpopular and to give offence. Proud man does not like to be told that he is a weak, guilty sinner,—that he cannot save his own soul, and must trust in the work of another,—that he must be converted and have a new heart,—that he must live a holy, self-denying life, and come out from the world. Surely the mere fact that this kind of unpopular teaching characterizes successful Christianity, and bears fruit in the world, is a strong evidence that Christianity is a Divine revelation, and really comes from God.

And now I will conclude this paper with four words of practical application, which I shall address to four different classes of people.

1. In the first place, I have a word for those who are tempted to give way to scepticism and unbelief, and are half disposed to throw overboard Christianity altogether. What shall I say to you? Listen, and I will tell you.

I entreat you, before you go any further, to deal honestly with the religion of faith and those who profess it, and try it by its fruits. That there is such a religion in the midst of us, and that there are thousands who profess it, are simple facts which nobody can deny. These thousands believe without doubting certain great truths of Christianity, and live and die in their belief. Let it be admitted that, in some points, these men of faith do not agree,—such as the Church, the ministry, and the sacraments. But after every deduction, there remains an immense amount of common theology, about which their faith is one. On such points as sin, and God, and Christ, and the atonement, and the authority of the Bible, and the importance of holiness, and the necessity of prayer, and self-denial, and the value of the soul, and the reality of heaven and hell, and judgment,

and eternity,—on such points as these, I say, these men of faith are very much of one mind.

Now, I ask all sceptics and agnostics, is it honest to turn away from these men of faith and their religion with contempt, because they have many weaknesses and infirmities? Is it fair to despise their religion, and wrap yourself up in unbelief, because of their controversies and strifes, their feeble literature and their party spirit? Is it fair to ignore the fruits of peace, and hope and comfort, which they enjoy? Mark the solid work which, with all their faults, they do in the world, in lessening sorrow and sin, and increasing happiness, and improving their fellow-men. What fruits and work can unbelief show which will bear comparison with the fruits of faith? What good has secularism, or agnosticism, or deism, done to mankind? What missions have they sent forth to the world? What cities or countries on earth have they civilized, purified, and made more holy and happy? What have the gods which some despisers of revelation seem to worship,—evolution, development, matter, force, destiny,—what have they done to enable men to meet the many ills to which all flesh is heir? What aching consciences have they relieved? What broken hearts have they bound up? What sick-beds have they cheered? What bereaved parents and widows have they comforted? We ask in vain. We shall get no answer. Look these facts in the face and deal honestly with them. Systems ought to be judged by their “fruits” and results. When the so-called systems of modern unbelief and scepticism, and free thought, can point to as much good done in the world by their adherents as simple faith has done by the hand of its friends, we may give them some attention. But till they do that, I boldly say that the simple, old-fashioned religion of faith has a just claim on our respect, esteem, and obedience, and ought not to be lightly esteemed, ridiculed, or despised.

2. In the second place, I have a word for those professing Christians who have no life or reality about their religion, and are only nominal members of Christ’s Church. I need hardly say there are myriads of people in this condition. They are not sceptics, and would be justly offended if you called them infidels or agnostics. Yet, if truth must be spoken, except going to church or chapel on Sundays, they give no sign of Christianity. If you mark their daily life, they seem neither to think, nor feel, nor care for their souls, or God, or eternity.

Now, I warn any readers of this paper who are in this state, and I say it with pain, that you are the true cause of a vast proportion of infidelity. I remember a careless sceptic saying,—“Do you think I am going to believe your Christianity when I see so many of your church-goers behaving as they do? Do you mean to tell me that they think their creed is true, and that they really believe in a resurrection and a judgment to come? It will be time enough for me to believe when I see your people really believing. At present your Christianity seems a great sham and a mere form.” Alas! such talk as this is only too much justified by facts. Nothing, nothing, I am convinced, does so much to help the progress of

modern infidelity as the utter absence of reality and earnestness among professing Christians. Men and women who crowd churches on Sundays, and then live worldly selfish lives all the week, are the best and most efficient allies of scepticism. "If you believed what you repeat under the pulpit," the sceptic says, "you would never live as you live at home." Oh! that people would think of the mischief done by inconsistency. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead." It is bad enough to ruin your own soul. But do not add to your sin by ruining others.

3. In the third place, I have a word for those sincere but weak-minded Christians who are surprised and frightened at the unbelief of these latter days, and live in a constant state of panic and alarm. What shall I say to you? Listen, and I will tell you.

I ask you, then, to look to your Bibles, and lay aside your fears. There is nothing in unbelief which ought to surprise you. Search the Scriptures, and you will find that the unbelief of the twentieth century is only an old enemy in a new dress, an old disease in a new form. Since the day when Adam and Eve fell, the devil has never ceased to tempt men not to believe God, and has said, directly or indirectly, "Ye shall not die even if you do not believe." In the latter days especially we have warrant of Scripture for expecting an abundant crop of unbelief:—"When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"—"Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse."—"There shall come in the last days scoffers." (Luke xviii. 5; 2 Tim. iii. 13; 2 Peter iii. 3). Here in England scepticism is that natural rebound from semi-popery and superstition, which many wise men have long predicted and expected. It is precisely that swing of the pendulum which far-sighted students of human nature looked for; and it has come.

But as I tell you not to be surprised at the widespread scepticism of the times, so also I must urge you not to be shaken in mind by it, or moved from your steadfastness. There is no real cause for alarm. The ark of God is not in danger, though the oxen seem to shake it. Christianity has survived the attacks of Hume and Hobbes and Tindal,—of Collins and Woolston and Bolingbroke and Chubb,—of Voltaire and Payne and Holyoake. These men made a great noise in their day, and frightened weak people: but they produced no more effect than idle travellers produce by scratching their names on the pyramid of Egypt. Depend on it, Christianity in like manner will survive the attacks of the clever writers of these times. The startling novelty of many modern objections to Revelation, no doubt, makes them seem more weighty than they really are. It does not follow, however, that hard knots cannot be untied because our fingers cannot untie them, or that formidable difficulties cannot be explained because our eyes cannot see through or explain them. When you cannot answer a sceptic, be content to wait for more light; but never forsake a great principle. In religion, as in

many scientific questions, said Faraday, “the highest philosophy is often a judicious suspense.” We can afford to wait.

4. In the last place, I have a word for all true believers who lament the spread of unbelief, though their own faith is unshaken. What shall I say to them? What advice shall I offer? Listen, and I will tell you.

I must plainly say, and I say it with sorrow, that we who profess faith, and are never troubled with unbelief, are not altogether free from blame. Too often our faith is little better than a mere “otiose assent” to certain theological propositions, but not a living, burning, active principle, which works by love, purifies the heart, overcomes the world, and brings forth much fruit of holiness and good works. It is not the faith which made primitive Christians rejoice under Roman persecution, and made Luther stand up boldly before the Diet of Worms, and made Ridley and Latimer “love not their lives to the death,” and made Wesley give up his position at Oxford to become an evangelist of England. We are verily guilty in this matter. If there was more real living faith on earth, I suspect there would be less unbelief. Scepticism, in many a case, would shrink, and dwindle, and melt away, if it saw faith more awake, and alive, and active, and stirring. Let us, for Christ’s sake, and the sake of souls, amend our ways in this matter. Let us pray daily, “Lord, increase our faith.” Let us live, and move, and have our being, and deal with men, as if we really believed every jot and tittle of our creeds, and as if a dying, risen, interceding, and coming Christ were continually before our eyes. We may depend on it the old saying is true,—“the inconsistency of believers is the infidel’s best argument.”

This, I am firmly convinced, is the surest way to oppose and diminish unbelief. Let the time past suffice us to have lived content with a cold, tame assent to creeds. Let the time to come find us living, active believers. It was a solemn saying which fell from the lips of an eminent minister of Christ on his death-bed,” We are none of us more than half awake.” If believers were more thorough, and real, and whole-hearted in their belief, there would be far less unbelief in the world.

The words at the head of this paper contain a mine of truth,—“Every tree is known by his own fruit.” If the tree of Christianity bore more fruit, the axe of infidelity would never harm it, and would be laid to its root in vain.