

Current Topics

The Failure of Protestantism

It has been said that France won the war, from a military point of view; Great Britain, from a political; the United States, from an economical; the Jews, from a cultural; and the Catholic Church, from a religious. Where does Protestantism come in to the picture? After all the efforts of the P.P.A. and the Orange Lodges, and of the servile daily press which helped them so nobly to spread their calumnies of Catholics and to cause dissension during war-time, it would seem that it comes in where it ought. The Reverend Adolf Keller, a Swiss Protestant pastor, well known in the United States, frankly confesses that Protestantism was among the losers. Considering how certain parsons and the daily papers that published their attacks on us, helped Germany, this seems to be but justice. The Swiss clergyman says it is now on the wane throughout Europe, and, in several countries, almost on the point of extinction. What he tells us of the Continent seems borne out by the recent Presbyterian wail that those awful Irish are capturing Scotland for the Pope.

While he sees "nearly everywhere a tremendous increase of Roman Catholic influence and power," Dr. Keller reports, on the other hand, that the evangelical churches and their welfare institutions are in the most difficult situation since the Reformation. The great distress prevailing in many countries threatens especially the Protestant charitable and benevolent organisations, some of which have already been closed. The religious press is reported to be "rapidly dying." In one country not less than 300 church periodicals have disappeared during the last six months. Church buildings, not only in France, but also in Galicia, and Latvia, are still in ruins, or badly damaged, while in Czecho-Slovakia many of the evangelical parishes formed by the new evangelical movements have no buildings of their own in which to meet. In Saxony, Brunswick, Lippe, and in certain parts of Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Jugoslavia, Italy, and Hungary, the condition of the Protestant pastors is "acutely alarming." In some countries, such as Austria, Poland, and Hungary, the chief anxiety is for the preservation of the evangelical schools. The general feeling of desertion and desolation is deepened by the physical condition of the people. Dr. Keller reports that four-fifths of the children in certain cities are undernourished, and that nearly half are tuberculous, while the middle class, the most affected by the war, "is vanishing—a social phenomenon of far-reaching significance."

Ignorance of the Middle Ages

The Middle Ages were really the ages of learning and culture. In them science, scholarship, painting, medicine, and architecture flourished wonderfully, and to be uneducated was as rare among decent people as it is for a P.P.A. parson to be educated to-day. Hence, ignorance of the Middle Ages can mean only one thing—the ignorance of rangers of the type of Pötter, M.P., about them. We are glad to see that a learned Protestant professor, Mr. Lynn Thorndike, of Western Reserve University, has been trying to convince his readers that they might well study the Middle Ages and learn much from them. This professor has for twenty-five years, devoted himself to the study of the period of which he writes, and his work, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era*, is said to be one of the most scholarly books published in America since the days of Sir Walter Raleigh. He points out that the only reason for misunderstanding the Middle Ages and for the utter misconception of their real import as a great period of development of mankind, is the existence of old fashioned notions and traditions acquired in all

sorts of ways, and retained because of this very conservatism which President Jordan mentions. Professor Thorndike says very frankly:

"We must abandon the absurd prejudices against and ignorance of the Middle Ages which we have inherited and poll-parroted from narrow Italian humanists, from Protestant reformers and Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, or from the eighteenth century deists, Voltaire and Tom Paine; we must correct and expand our notion of 'modern progress,' and subject the period before America was discovered to impartial open-minded scientific investigation. The historians of art have done this and found Gothic architecture first in quantity of noble remains and second to none in quality. The philologists have done this, discerning in the Middle Ages the cradle of our modern languages and literatures."

Manifestly it is time for the scientists of other departments to make similar serious studies.

The most interesting feature of this subject is that the prevalent ignorance of the Middle Ages on the part of scientists is due to religious prejudice. Many of the scientists who are most ready to condemn this epoch have quite given up the positive side of their religion, but they still retain its prejudices as firmly as ever. This is not surprising. These prejudices were fairly drunk in with their mother's milk. They have never had the time to devote to such serious study as would enable them to correct their false notions. Accordingly for them the Middle Ages are simply a blank in the matter of science, and in their ignorance, the Church is made the scapegoat. So the assumed failure of science to develop is set down to Church opposition.

Professor Thorndike is willing to admit that in the earliest medieval centuries there was "a time of retardation in scientific development analogous to the depression which has prevailed in architecture and sculpture since, say the seventeenth century." He would consider this doubtless due to the same reason, a lack of interest, for the moment, in these phases of human achievement. He proceeds: "The remainder of the medieval period has abundant extant materials for the history of science more so probably than for any other side of human life, except religion and perhaps art."

Here is the declaration of a scholar who spent a quarter of a century in the study of the subject. Let us hope that others will come to recognise and appreciate at their proper value the actual facts of history that are behind such expressions. Of course there is no hope that those now above forty years of age will change their minds in the matter. They will cling to their old prejudices and traditions in accordance with the ways of human conservatism at all times. Perhaps the rising generation may be brought up in different traditions. Meanwhile it is important that the older men shall not be allowed to disseminate their curious false notions without immediate contradiction, and there is an abundance of authoritative material in Professor Thorndike's work to furnish arguments for this purpose.

Our Catholic Teachers

People are prone to think that the pioneers of the Church are the priests and bishops ordained by God to rule or to minister to his flocks. A little reflection will show that it is only after the standard of the Cross has been set over a new country that the pastors and bishops are sent to maintain and defend it. By emigrants from old Catholic lands, by exiles driven from their homes, by men who were treated as felons either for their religion or for their love of country, the seed of the Faith is usually first planted and the early harvest watered, often in tears and blood. It was in this sense that von Huebner said that if it was apostolic work to spread the Faith of Christ in foreign lands, there were no greater apostles in the world than the poor Irish peasants who fled beyond the seas from persecutions at home. Once a Catholic population is found in a district, faithful shepherds will hurry to attend to the spiritual wants of the flock; and, in due time, an organised community will appear, churches will be erected, and in every one of them there will

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