

Other Protestant journals besides the Presbyterian *Outlook* have been lately engaged in an intellectual and spiritual stock-taking; and they have reached precisely the same conclusions as those advanced by our Dunedin contemporary. The New York *Weekly Witness*, for example, an almost rabidly Protestant paper, declares in a recent issue that Gospel preaching is almost a thing of the past so far as Protestant pulpits are concerned, and that present-day Protestantism is honeycombed with doubt and unbelief. Its remarks are based on an article in one of its contemporaries—the *Christian Work and Evangelical*—in which the question is asked: 'Is the failure all with the churches?' Dealing first with the efforts that are being put forth by the various Protestant bodies, the New York paper replies: 'Much effort is being put forth certainly, but we fear that very much of it is put forth along unspiritual lines. And as to preaching the "real Gospel," our impression is that the preachers who are doing that are in a minority. There is a very strong temptation to the preacher to adapt his preaching to the trend of popular thought. No man likes to be looked upon as an old fogey. Every man likes to win approbation instead of criticism. And therefore it is very difficult for preachers who still believe the Gospel of Christ as it is set forth in the Bible to preach it fully.' That is to say, even the ministers who believe, and who have the will to preach the old Gospel are practically tongue-tied. And there are others. 'And we are under the impression,' continues this frank exponent of current Protestantism, 'that a majority of the younger preachers do not believe the Gospel that was preached by Peter and Paul and John. Our impression is that some of the larger theological seminaries are teaching their students a modernised Gospel which either repudiates or practically ignores the truth that God gave His Son as a voluntary sacrifice to make atonement for our sins. And when that fundamental truth is left out the Gospel of Christ is emasculated.'

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The paper then proceeds, with praiseworthy courage and candor, to trace the genesis of the deplorable unbelief now prevalent in the lay and ministerial circles of Protestantism. 'How can the Church work miracles if in all the people there is a deadening unbelief?' the *Christian Work* had asked. To which the New York journal answers: 'Clearly the Church cannot compel people to believe. But what is the cause of this prevalence of unbelief? Have not very many of the preachers of the larger churches encouraged the spirit of unbelief by disparaging the teaching of the Bible, or at least, treating it with silent contempt—wherever that teaching does not agree with their own ideas. How can any preacher expect the man on the street to accept any religion which has no higher authority than the pulpit or the theological seminary at the back of it. Christianity without an authoritative revelation to support it would soon be as impotent as Confucianism, and Protestantism without such a revelation is not as good a religion as Roman Catholicism with an authoritative revelation. When a preacher discards the authority of the Bible, he virtually kicks his pulpit out from under him and stands on nothing, beating the air in impotent zeal. "Is it altogether the blame of the Church that Christ is failing to-day?" asks *Christian Work*. Yes, it is. It must be, unless we are prepared to assume that Christ is unable to accomplish that which He has undertaken to accomplish—the conquest of the world. The churches are honeycombed with scepticism, with worldliness and with indifference because they are not making it their first duty to be loyal to the truth of God as taught in the Book of God. Without loyalty to the revealed character and will of God there cannot be any authoritative standard of obligation on the part of man.'

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Other witnesses, even more weighty and authoritative, have voiced precisely the same views as those above set forth regarding the decline of Protestantism and the increasing vitality of Catholicism. Sir W. R. Nicholl, editor of the *British Weekly*, the greatest

exponent of Protestantism in the English or possibly in any language, in an address delivered at the Congregational Union in May last, declared 'that the churches—Established as well as Nonconformist—were losing rather than winning. For the first time the Presbyterian Church of England this year reported a decrease; for the first time since the "disruption" the great Church of Scotland made the same acknowledgment; the attendances at public worship had become in many cases very small. A well-known Wesleyan Methodist minister, who preached in many chapels, reported that the forenoon attendances averaged one-sixth of the seating accommodation, and he had never seen that reckoning challenged. There was only one exception—the worshippers in the Roman Catholic Church were undoubtedly increasing, more rapidly, perhaps, than the members. They were confronted with the fact that four out of every five children in the Sunday school failed to join the church.'

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These are Protestant witnesses on Protestantism—witnesses of unimpeachable standing and integrity. They testify, with all the emphasis of sincerity, to the fact that all is not well with Protestantism; and that, if the dry rot be not stayed, the doctrinal system evolved at the Reformation will soon crumble into dust and nothingness. It is the duty of an honest and earnest Protestant, confronted with such facts, to speak out—to cry aloud and spare not. Yet our Presbyterian contemporary, because it has had the courage to draw attention to the true state of affairs, is already coming in for criticism from its friends. An overture is to be submitted to the Presbyterian General Assembly which meets in November complaining of 'the un-Protestant character of the *Outlook*,' and praying the Assembly to take the premises into consideration and deal with the matter 'as in its wisdom may seem best.' It is a bad thing when a patient is sick and does not know it; but when the patient turns and rends the physician who tries to diagnose the ailment and suggest a remedy, the case is well nigh hopeless.

Notes

The Petitions

In connection with the petitions now in circulation we remind those concerned of the necessity of pushing on the work of obtaining signatures with the utmost possible expedition. Those in charge of the petitions should not hang on to them until they have the whole of the forms signed; but the petitions should be returned to the Secretary, N.Z. Catholic Federation, P.O. Box 958, Wellington, in batches as they are completed. This will enable him to see that all is in order and arrange the forms in numerical sequence as they arrive. Any surplus forms should be returned to the Secretary, who will probably be able to get them signed, and will thus be in a position to present the petition without any missing numbers. Once again we impress upon those in charge to get the forms signed and returned with the least possible delay.

Wanganui Workers

Our traveller in the North Island reports that our subscribers' list in the Wanganui district—where the *Tablet* had already a strong footing—has been doubled on the occasion of his recent visit, this result being mainly due to the interest taken by the clergy and to the energy displayed and the splendid spirit shown by the members of the St. Vincent de Paul Societies of Wanganui and Aramohe. One enthusiastic member of the latter society gave up a very considerable portion of his time for the purpose of personally showing our representative round. Hats off to the Wanganui Catholics! And we naturally ask, if this can be done in Wanganui, why not elsewhere? We hope the Wanganui spirit will prove 'catching.' The *Tablet* is making an honest effort to cater for the young men, and we look confidently to them to make fitting response.

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