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SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

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WE have often lately noted the signals of distress which are being raised by the Church to avert the "progress of infidelity," and have listened with grim pleasure to the wails of the Bishops and Archdeacons as, during their progress from town to town, they have cried aloud to Baal, and have cut themselves with metaphorical knives as they leaped upon the altars, while there has been no voice from heaven, neither any that regarded, and "the sound of the coming chariot-wheels of the Son of Man," heard three months ago in Leeds by the Bishop of Ripon,

grows no nearer to lighten the hearts of his weary and despondent worshippers. In vain have Bishops appealed; in vain have Archdeacons lamented; in vain does Parliament pass Bills to create new Sees, when it cannot pass Bills to create congregations as well; yea, and in vain has even the Christian Evidence Society piped unto people who will not dance, and mourned unto a nation that will not lament. All weapons have failed; all struggles are fore-doomed to defeat. The tide of scepticism rises higher and higher around the Establishment, and in vain do ecclesiastical Canutes forbid the rolling waves to advance. At last, even inter-Christian hatred has given way before the common danger, and in the archiepiscopal palace of Lambeth a conference has taken place, composed of elements never before united. The Archbishop of Canterbury convened the meeting, and in answer to his summons came the following bishops: London, Winchester, Gloucester and Bristol, Bath and Wells, Norwich, and Peterborough; and with these princes of the Church, these peers spiritual of the realm, came the leaders of English Nonconformity: Dr. Punshon, erst President of the Wesleyan Conference, and Dr. Allon, a great Congregationalist; together with men so well-known as Drs. Stoughton, Angus, Donald Fraser, Raleigh, and Oswald Dyke; the Revs. Newman Hall and W. B. Boyce. How terrible must be the pressure of unbelief when it forces together individualities so antagonistic as these. Only Mr. Spurgeon and Archbishop Manning were needed to make the happy family complete. Surely the millennium days have arrived, and the leopard of the Establishment lies down with the lamb of Nonconformity, and the lion of Anglicanism eats straw like the ox of Methodism. Yet of this genial gathering the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* is cruel enough to write: "The principles which separate Conformists and Nonconformists are nearly as vital as those which divide

believers from infidels." Perhaps another conference, to consider the spread of Ritualism, might be convened, and it might be well to invite to it some of the leading Wesleyans and Baptists, the editor of the *Rock*, a few Unitarians, M. D. Conway, and two or three "Agnostics." It would not be a more incongruous assemblage than that of Lambeth. Surely in a holy war against the Ritualist the *Rock* would join with the *Signs of the Times*. Listen how it thunders: "The Ritualistic heresy—that withering curse which is so rapidly and insidiously blighting all that is good in our social and religious conditions. . . God is not dead that He will thus allow His holy name and attributes to be defiled." The editor is thanked for "the able and vigorous manner in which you defend our Protestant landmarks, and levy war on the foe," *i.e.*, on our fellow Christians. In an editorial note we are told that St. Peter's, a Ritualistic church in the East-end, is likely to be closed for want of funds, and "after what we have seen and heard of the ritual and teaching at St. Peter's, we cannot think that even if these came to a sudden end there would be very much to regret." The Christian editor thinks that drunkenness and savagery are preferable to Christianity of a complexion different from his own. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another." On the other hand, the *Church Times* sneers: "Archbishop Tait, who thinks it so shocking to 'encourage a spirit of insubordination on the part of the clergy,' has been holding a caucus of Dissenting ministers at Lambeth!" See how these Christians love one another. Not only is the Church bewailing herself because of this terrible spread of infidelity, but she is also sad because of the lack of men to carry on her banners. In the Report of the Lower House of Convocation it is said (Easter, 1876): "331 curacies are now vacant from inability to find men to fill them." What a confession

from a highly-paid and dignified Establishment! Her subordinate posts are a drug in the market. The places are there, but not the men to fill them. Yet there are prizes in the Church, fat livings, comfortable deaneries, wealthy bishoprics. From what arises the lack of candidates to share in this feast of good things? Partly from the spreading scepticism, and the consequent dislike of men to wind fetters round their brains in early youth, and to stereotype their thoughts of twenty-three as the intellectual outcome of their life, any change made in a second edition being accounted heresy and disloyalty to their "vows." Partly, also, the small favour shown to brain-ability and devotion, and the large favour shown to birth and ministerial relationship. The good things of the Church are not for the reward of merit, but for the comfort of the brother's son of the Prime Minister's wife, and the question asked about a candidate is "Who is he?" not "What is he?" Men of talent will not enter a church where thought is tied down to sixteenth century posts, and where patronage goes by interest in high places. Freedom of expression and *la carrière ouverte aux talents* would give the Establishment a new lease of life, but then she would no longer be the Church, and she will cling to her antique theology until she falls buried under its ruins, and until Freedom sits enthroned where once the Arch-tyrant reigned.

The *Jewish World* has been publishing a series of articles on two great English statesmen, Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Disraeli, and in one of these are some acute remarks on Mr. Gladstone's theological position that are worth reproduction. We read:—

"On the whole the religious utterances of Mr. Gladstone—even the most recent of them, which intermingled with his general remarks the other day at King's College (London),—irresistibly force upon us the impression that he is yet a good way from *settled* theological convictions. He has read too much

of that 'advanced' theological literature which is most prominently inscribed in the orthodox *Index Expurgatorius*, to be satisfied with popularly-received conclusions; and he has not yet thought and read enough on the heretical side to feel impelled to renounce Christian orthodoxy *en bloc*, as an excrescence on the higher sentiments of humanity, and feel complete emancipation, peace and harmony reigning throughout all his faculties, derived from the ample, perennial, and satisfying resources of natural law in the universe."

It is well known that Mr. Gladstone is well-read in modern unbelief, and is much interested in the phases of advanced religious thought. His mind, ever restless and inquiring, forces him into the investigation of questions from which habit, education, training, all drag him back, and the consequence of the ever-renewing conflict is certain indeterminateness of religious belief, now shaken to its foundations by the brain, now passionately re-asserted by the emotions. The writer in the *Jewish World* is probably correct when he judges as follows:—

"In his somewhat vague and impassioned cautions delivered to the youth of King's College, against the prevailing tendency to exercise reason without duly recognising the claims of authority, we read occult self-rebuke, freely administered by the speaker; we read also an ill-disguised inward struggle to beat down, by lecturing himself, the strong proclivities to rationalism which, of late years, we venture to believe—despite his wish to the contrary—have ever and anon been obtruding themselves upon his consciousness."

Writing on Disraeli, the outspoken Jewish organ is caustic and disdainful, for he has "forsaken the religion of his ancestors," and writes in favour of Christianity. His remarks on the more modern creed are keenly ridiculed. Disraeli has written that "to hold that the second person of the Trinity could teach a different morality from that taught by the first person of the Trinity, is a dogma so full of terror that it may, perhaps, be looked upon as the ineffable sin against the Holy Ghost." "Like all great divines," sneers the *Jewish World*,

“ He is evidently very intimate with the domestic relations of the Three Persons of the Trinity. He had previously spoken of the God of Sinai and the God of Calvary as the same, but whether he considers that the former was the first or second person of the Trinity is not clearly apparent. He instructs us, however, that the person who ‘*blended in his inexplicable nature the divine essence with the human element*’ (here, by the way, he is falling into the heresy of ‘confusing the substance’ and forgetting his Athanasian Creed in a way Samuel would have trembled at) was ‘a sacrificial mediator,’ ‘appointed before all time,’ and ‘purifying with his atoning blood the myriads that preceded and the myriads that will follow him.’”

Evidently Mr. Disraeli’s theology does not recommend itself to those of his nation who cling to the elder creed. Nor is the Prime Minister more admired when he pleads on behalf of the Jews that they could not help crucifying Jesus, and ought not to be blamed for it:—

“ He then, by way of showing that the Jews were meritorious rather than otherwise in their part of the transaction, asks: ‘If the Jews had not prevailed upon the Romans to crucify our Lord, what would have become of the atonement?’ We cannot but exclaim, What, indeed? ‘But the human mind,’ he continues, ‘cannot contemplate the idea that the most important deed of time could depend on human will. The *immolators were pre-ordained*, like the victim.’ ‘Could that be a crime,’ he asks, ‘which secured for all mankind eternal joy, which vanquished Satan and opened the gates of Paradise? Such a tenet would sully and impugn the doctrine that is the corner stone of our faith and hope. Men must not presume to sit in judgment on such an act; they must bow their heads in awe and astonishment and trembling gratitude!’

Our readers probably will not care to study more of our author’s doctrinal peculiarities.”

Surely Judas ought to share in this somewhat late act of reparation? True, he betrayed his friend like a scoundrel, and sold him to his foes, but then “what would have become of the atonement” if he had remained faithful? Judas should be picked up, mended, and restored to his niche among the twelve apostles, and he should be delivered from Lucifer’s

mouth, where Dante placed him, and no longer have his head crunched for ever between the massive teeth of the fiend. As for Disraeli's suggestion that there can be "nothing revolting to a Jew to learn that a Jewess is the Queen of Heaven," the *Jewish World* sharply retorts: "We can only say for ourselves that the association awakened in our minds is that of a certain Astarte, or Ashtaroth, denounced by our prophets." The *Jewish World* might have added that the Virgin Mary was a lineal descendant of Astarte, and numbers Isis and Ceres among her ancestors, the belief in a virgin mother being as ancient as that of an incarnate God. It is said that an "anti-Jewish League" has been formed in New York State to "prevent the progress of Jews in social and political circles," and that "several prominent clergymen are connected with the movement." It seems scarcely possible that anything so disgraceful should take place to-day in Republican America, eighteen years after Monarchical England has abolished all disabilities affecting our Jewish fellow-citizens. If, however, the report be true, the American *Index* should investigate the matter, and should pillory the names of the offenders: such a League would be a disgrace to a civilised country.

Why does not Lord Derby study Daniel and the Apocalypse, under the leadership of the *Rock*, when puzzled how to deal with the Eastern question? Then everything would be clear to him, and he would have the lamp of prophecy, as a light shining in a dark place, to show him how to move through the endless complications of the Turkish maze. "Turkey is no longer a 'woe' to Christendom," says the Low Church seer, "for the time of her power is gone by;" as a matter of fact she is a terrible "woe," but matters of fact are outside questions of prophecy. The shoes of reality must be taken off, for the place whereon we

stand is holy ground. The exhaustion of the Turkish Empire is "symbolised by the mystic Euphrates," which is dried up when the sixth vial is poured out upon it (Rev. xvi. 12); thus "the operation of the sixth vial is manifest in Turkey's rapid exhaustion;" nay more: "the vials overlap [Who ever heard before of overlapping vials, and how do they do it?], and we have already experienced some severe shocks of the 'great earthquake,' and more will follow:" the Christians must have had the earthquake all to themselves. Looking over the vials, we cannot find the outpouring of Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, all of which ought to precede No. 6; it seems that vial No. 1 brought sores, and vial No. 2 made the sea blood, and vial No. 3 made the rivers blood, and vial No. 4 made the sun scorch men with fire so that they blasphemed (that might have been in July, only then No. 6 would precede No. 4), and vial No. 5 makes darkness, and men gnaw their tongues for pain. It seems curious that, out of all the vials, only one has had any apparent effect on the world, and even then it ought surely to be Turkey in Asia which would be symbolised as Euphrates, and not Turkey in Europe? The outcome of the prophecy is, however, comforting: "The effusion of the seventh vial should occupy a considerable space of time, for it extends over several verses of the prophecy; we dare not, therefore, with Dr. Cumming, affirm that the most solemn of all events is *close* at hand; but it can scarcely be very far off." The "evening" comes and goes in confusing fashion; now, it is just upon us; presently, it is not far off; then, it has faded away again almost out of sight. When the matter is definitely settled, perhaps the Christians will kindly let us know.

The Burial Question still agitates Convocation; the Lower House wanted a "silent service," *i.e.*, no service at all, but permission to outsiders to have a hole

dug in the churchyard and to throw the coffin in and shovel down the earth on it and go away; the Upper House suggested that the mourners should be allowed to sing hymns at the grave side, if they so pleased. The two Houses could not agree, and they met together in conference on the matter. The Bishop of Oxford frankly said that he thought "any service might be safely used. There was no responsibility on the clergyman, who might leave his Christian brethren to do as they pleased." Of course the Bishop was only speaking of permission to be accorded to orthodox Dissenters, but still so rare a thing as a tolerably liberal and sensible thing from a bishop—other than he of Manchester—deserves to be recorded. Our old friend, Christopher of Lincoln, objected to hymns, as was only to be expected; he would permit no comfort to mourners, and if they would not drink out of his pitcher they might go thirsty. A Rev. Mr. Sadler was against hymns, for "In a parish with which he was until lately connected a woman died who had a secularist son, and under the proposed change he might have come and held a service. (Horrible to imagine!) . . . He knew it had been said that there should be some security for decency in the performance of such a service; but what, he would ask, was the greatest indecency that could be perpetrated in a churchyard? Was it not that a service might be held which denied or ignored the great doctrine of the resurrection of the dead or the life everlasting? Under the very shadow of the Church those great doctrines might be repudiated—at all events in substance. Such things might not happen frequently, but they might happen many times during a year, and he could not imagine a greater scandal." The spectre of infidelity threatens these unfortunate clergymen everywhere; infidels have the impertinence actually to die as they have lived, and to find their creed "good to die by," and

at the very side of the open grave, where the Church thought herself the strongest, the quiet steadfast tones of the children of Nature are heard, and they give back into the arms of the mighty mother the life that issued from her womb. It was suggested that there might be a special service for those outside the Church, in which "the difference could be made very marked. The service would be less jubilant and less hopeful." Even this was too much for the fiery Archdeacon Denison: "It was for the first time in the history of the Church Catholic that a priest of the Church Catholic had been asked to perform the services of the Church over the body of an unbaptized person. He thought it was monstrous that such an issue should come out. . . . God helping them, let them uphold their position, for which he was prepared to die!" Heroic Archdeacon; but, unfortunately, no one wants to kill him, and the protest sounds, in consequence, rather bombastic. The Archdeacon is an invaluable man; he makes his Church so supremely ridiculous. He is almost as useful an ally of scepticism as is his worthy brother, Christopher Wordsworth, Bishop of Lincoln. Long may the pair live to undermine the Church!

The perversion of the second son of Earl Nelson to the Roman Catholic Church has again aroused the old cry of "No Popery"—a cry which has in it much both of good and of bad. In the House of Lords the subject was brought to the front, and Lord Oranmore moved that a humble address be presented to Her Majesty for a copy of the Report of the Committee of the Upper House of Convocation of the Province of Canterbury with regard to confession, agreed to in the session of 1874. Lord Oranmore made a strong and telling speech against confession, urging that the bishops took no steps to put a stop to the practice; that notices were openly posted on churches that the

clergy attended at stated times to hear confessions and to give absolution; that the habit of confession was widely spread, and was undermining parental authority and home peace. The Bishops who spoke in the ensuing discussion made, as usual, a melancholy exhibition of themselves. They tried to neutralise the effect of some painful cases cited by Lord Oranmore, and feebly acknowledged the insubordination of their clergy. They thought that Roman literature would not be sold so freely if the public would not buy it (!), and hoped the public would mend its ways. Magnificent episcopal recognition of the law of supply and demand. It may fairly be urged as to repression of the habit of receiving confessions in the State Church clergy, that Parliament may forbid the practice; to forbid the practice in general it has no right, since, if people will be mean and unclean-thinking enough to receive and to make confessions, they have a right to do so every day if they so choose; if they think it pleases God, it gives one more argument against the moral utility of Theism; but no one has the right to interfere with them in carrying out their beliefs. But if the State pays for certain services, it *has* the right to define those services, and to forbid its paid servants from doing that which it considers injurious to its citizens. Confession saps a nation's virility, and destroys its purity: it makes coarse-minded women and effeminate men; it creeps between husband and wife, mother and child; it poisons home confidence, and makes trust impossible between wedded man and woman; the priest overhears the whispers murmured in the privacy of the chamber, and scans and criticises the love which unites the husband to the wife. May the day be far from England which domesticates this foul offspring of priestcraft in our midst; and may English homes be spared from the spreading of a moral pestilence which would destroy the nation's strength!

“Not content with having once tasted the blood of School Boards,” as the *Examiner* says, “the Government thirsted for more, and, by accepting at the eleventh hour a further amendment of Lord Robert Montagu’s to modify the famous 25th Clause, a complete victory was won over the godless principle of School Boards, the clause has become a dead letter, and Lord Sandon has relighted the flames of sectarian strife, in full view of the consequences, to please the reckless bigots of his own party.” Amongst these *bigots* must be reckoned the Bishops, and amongst those who openly rejoiced at this narrowing of the basis of free education is the Bishop of Peterborough, who congratulates Mr. Pell on the success of his scheme, and, commenting on the spirit of bitterness and anger it evoked throughout the country, Dr. Magee declared “this was a very good ‘sign of the times,’ and it gave him the greatest satisfaction as evidence of the zeal and *love still felt for religion.*” We must believe that not only Dr. Magee, but all our “Fathers in God” are driven to their wits’ end in defence of their Church and order if in the uprising of the whole Nonconformist body against “priestly tyranny and clerical assumption” they only see in it “a most encouraging sign for the future of the Church.”

As encouraging and hopeful as the *signs* referred to by the Bishop of Guildford in his late charge, who found “that, in spite of so much *apparent* difference and contention amongst us, there is a greater degree of accord and sympathy between clergy and laity than there ever was before.” With Dominie Sampson we exclaim, “Prodigious!”