

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

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The Christian Religion by George Park Fisher

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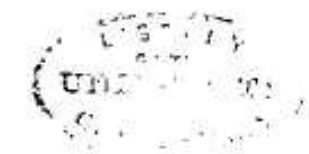
GEORGE PARK FISHER

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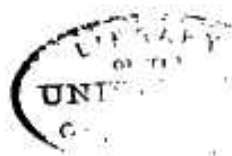
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** * The required books of the C. L. S. C. are recommended by a council of six. It must, however, be understood that recommendation does not involve an approval by the Council, or by any member of it, of every principle or doctrine contained in the book recommended.*



THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

I SHALL not enter the lists as a combatant against any of the recent assailants of the Christian Religion. Religious controversy is sometimes necessary : it is often useful ; but it is always exposed to disadvantages. It is very apt to draw about it a multitude of readers whose interest in it is akin to that which animates the spectators of a cock-fight. It easily degenerates into a game of fence, where the vivacity and expertness of the competitors in the duel are of more consequence than the justice of the cause. Christianity is a large matter ; the Bible is a large book, or rather collection of books forming a connected whole. It is easy for an ingenious mind to bring forward objections, suggest difficulties of greater or less weight, and propound mistaken or

half-mistaken assertions. Of all warfare, guerilla-fighting is the least satisfactory. It is proverbial that a question respecting any system, however well founded, may be asked in one line, which it may require pages to answer. To reply to a medley of such objections one by one is like the business of picking up pins; and, even when the work is really done, the impression left is that made by an apology, according to the fine old maxim, "*Qui s'excuse s'accuse.*"¹ Most of the popular objections are not in the least novel. A critical attack, peculiar in its character, has been made on Christianity in recent times in Germany by Strauss and Baur. It has been renewed in France in a modified form by Renan. Materialism, either in a bald shape or in its agnostic dress, has made itself a prominent antagonist. But assailants of Christianity in American journals frequently take up last-century weapons which have been cast aside by adversaries of the gospel who are abreast of the times. To

Old
objections
renewed.

¹ He who excuses himself accuses himself.

confute attacks of this sort, such as were common in the old deistical controversy, would be to beat straw already well thrashed. In truth, it is remarkable how many of these objections were made by Celsus as early as the close of the second century,—for example, the objection from alleged discrepancies in the Gospels,—and were successfully disposed of by Origen, the great Christian scholar of that day.

I prefer a more positive method of handling the subject. As there is a variety of topics to be touched upon, it will be convenient to separate them by numerical designations.

1. Christianity is not a new thing. It is not contending for a foothold on the earth. Its roots are deep in the soil. It is a great, long-established, wide-spread, and still advancing religion. It is the faith of the enlightened nations, incorporated in them at the beginning of their existence, helping to create them, presiding over their growth. It has moulded to a great extent their political and social institutions, their sentiments and usages, and leavened their

Power and
influence
of Chris-
tianity.