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AN EPISCOPALIAN MINISTER'S VIEW

At the Baltimore Conference of the P.E. church, recently held, the annual sermon was preached by one of their number, A.R. Stuart, D.D. "His theme was The Perils of the Church at the present time;" and the following extracts from his discourse, clipped from the Baltimore press, indicate that at least one in the P.E. church sees as clearly as the M.E. bishop, quoted in our last issue, that the blind leading the blind in the nominal church are stumbling into the ditch of unbelief as truly and as surely as the Jewish Church at the first advent. We quote as follows:—

"Never was there an age in which there has been more fervid zeal in connection with the church than in this—more energy, more self-denial, greater munificence, greater exertions or greater sacrifices. The working bands, the parish organizations, and religious agencies of every kind, the multiplied services and communions of this nineteenth century have never been equaled or surpassed in days gone by. Is it possible that vital godliness can be on the decline in the midst of so much ardent and pious enterprise? What better evidence than the foregoing can be produced to show that the church is as firm as a rock, and that there is no reaction against the reformation, and no movement toward atheism or papalism?

"I concede the strength of this position and the force of argument sustaining it, but I am not afraid nevertheless in defense of my assertion and belief that there is a falling away; notwithstanding all this wonderful zeal, to point out the fact that godless ambition, baptized worldliness, strife and vain glory, party spirit, sordid motive, selfish interest, simple bigotry, or all combined, may lie at the root of much which seems so laudable.

"With the men of this generation for the most part the practical work they are engaged in with zeal and energy does not and can in no measure supply what is all the while really lacking in their faith. This they are discovering, and it is sending many of them away sorrowful—some to seek refuge under the baneful shelter of a semi-pagan system, and others to dismally flounder about in the rayless, bottomless pit of blank negation.

"The church is growing in power and wealth, and yet there is much to cause dread in the minds of thinking men. The perilous times of which the Apostles spoke having come and there can be no doubt but that great danger is at hand from Italianism and infidelity. It is true there never was a time when the church was more active in good works. The practical and pressing question now is Are we going back to Judaism? are we holding on to a too slavish respect for the ordinances of men? It looks like we are, and it is this that is driving many into Romanism and others into the

arms of infidelity. There is a loss of simplicity of faith; men are laying too much stress upon what they call religious duty and

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what they are doing for God, instead of contemplating what He has done for them and placing their trust in Him. Instead of relying upon the pure gospel their minds run to forms and they soon descend to semi-paganism, or blank nothing.

“In the light and strength which we find in the Gospel, *and nowhere else*, may we hope to lead a life of true devotedness to God and goodness in the fellowship of the life of our Lord. In that light and strength will we certainly come to know that the essence of a true church does not consist in the length or the brevity of its title; in its being called Protestant, or called Catholic, or called neither.”

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— September, 1888 —



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