#### THE AGE OF DOUBT.

the Existence of a God.

NOT ALL ARE MORALLY CORRUPT.

Many Are Led Aside by Sentiment and

Others by Reasoning. PROGRESS IN MATERIAL KNOWLEDGE

[WRITTEN FOR THE DISPATCH.

The essential assertion of all religious is the assertion of the existence of God. This assertion is so essential that if it were taken out of religion there would be no religion left. It is the heart of all the creeds.

This essential assertion cannot be evaded by declining to deny it. It demands statement and will not be satisfied with anything short of resolute belief. Wherever this is not given there is an end to religion. This essential assertion of religion has never lacked questioners. So long as the body is more tangible than the soul, and the world is more visible than God, and the interrogation mark continues to be used in human speech, there will be people who will be in doubt about it. There are a good many such people now. There are three gates by which doubt gets en-trance into the mind: By the gate of conscience, by the gate of sentiment, and by the gate of reason. If the watchman by the gate of conscience proves a traitor, in comes doubt. That is the testimony of ex-A man who has something the matter with his conscience is pretty sure to have something the matter with his creed, His lips may put the words of it into speech; he may not falter into ominous silence, like the demon bridegroom in Mrs. Browning's poem, when he ventures into prayer. But his heart is dumb. Only the pure in heart can see God; only the good can

MORE THAN INTELLECT NEEDED. Into all the higher judgments which men have to make there must more be bright than acuteness of intellect, if the judgment is to be just. The logician is not fitted by his logic alone to pronounce upon the excellence of music. Something more than metaphysical shrewdness is needed for the appreciation of poetry. It is said that a popular declaimer against the Christian Inith came back from Europe and declared that all modern appreciation of the old art masters is a delusion. Nobody, he affirmed, can really see in those dim pictures any-thing to admire. But that did not settle the matter. The American artists did not evacnate Rome. It settled only one thing namely, that the critic's mind was so that artistic beauty of that kind made no impression upon it. Into all judgments upon the assertions of religion the moral nature must

It is not true, however, as some say, that all unbelief means moral defect. It is not true that doubt always gets in by the gate of conscience. Padre Agostino, whom they call the modern Savonarola, began his second lecture in Florence two years ago, with these words: "My brethren, the reasoning faculties of mankind, Christian civilization, the welfare of our country are now being subjected to a very hard trial. They are all alike threatened by the sacreligious attack of atheism. Misguided men, refusing the universallyaccepted tradition of a long course of centuries, and the instructive lessons of history, trampling under foot all the teachings of philosophy, the interests of society, the law of the land, and the rule of their own conscience, have declared open war against God. Day by day they pursue their iniquitous campaign, carrying it with vindfetive pertinacity and implacable hatred into every province of the human intellect. They not only refuse to know God, but they deny

A ONE SIDED VIEW. Presently he declared that exceptions to

the general rule that all men believe in God "can only be found among men of corrupt morals and diseased conscience." Where this eloquent monk got his ideas about the character of modern doubt, whether from books or from men, I know not. But I venture the opinion, from these words of his, that he has studied more with his eyes than with his ears, and more by lamplight than by daylight—unless men are different. Italy from the men whom we all know. It seems as if he must have known better, if he had gone out of his mounstic cell into the streets. Nobody to-day, who knows men, could quote these words with any commendation. It would be a happy state of things if none had a doubt about God except the vindictive, the iniquitous, the ignorant, and the vicious. But we may as well face the plain fact. There are mea and women to-day who are not willing to affirm that God exists, whose pure, unselfish, helpful, upright lives are evident to everybody. They are Christians in all except

There is a second gate. The gate of sentiment. One summer morning, under a blue sky and beside the binest of all seas, was enacted one of the strangest ceremonies of modern times. A dead body lay along the sand, and a little company of men were biling up a heap of wood beside it. They made the wood into an aitar, laid the un-clothed body on it, poured out wine and oil as a libation to an unknown god, set the wood on fire, and watched the body burn to ashes. It was a pagan sacrifice. But the dead man had not been even so much as a pagan. He who lay there dead had stood once upon a peak of the Alps, and looked out over the glories of nature about him and up into the illimitable sky above him, and had set his name in bold letters on the face of the cliff, with a title after it—"Percy Shelley, Atheist."

THE STORY OF PERCY SHELLEY.

Shelley was an atheist by stress of sentiment. He hated conventionalism; he re-belled against the tyrauny of tradition; he loved liberty. He wanted to do his own thinking and to make up his own mind. This kind of gate for doubt swings wide in the minds of bright young fellows in college, end in the minds, also, of a good many thoughtful young men and women out of college. They have made the discovery that man is a reasoning being, and they want to make further experiments. They come upon new books and new ideas which contradict what they have learned at home. They want to be wide-minded, liberal, hospitable to new truth. They want to stand on their own feet, and to work out

their own conclusions. That state of mind is, of course, eminently hopeful; but its first turn is apt to be toward unbelief. The new, for a time, drives out the old. After awhile, in the experience of most young people whose judgment is well balanced, the old is recognized as true after all. The new is not abandoned, but rather helps to a better understanding of the old. That is what makes intellectual progress possible. For a time, however, as I say, through the gate of sentiment comes doubt. This whole generation is in the sophomore year. It is in the era of discovery. Nothing has equaled it since that wonderful remaissance time whose four hundredth anniversary we are just now getting ready to keep. In such a general frame of mind, new ideas crowding daily upon men's attention, new triumphs daily being won—scientific, political, intellectual, seclesiastic, theological—old theories being discredited, old confessions of faith being assailed with hard names. "Whither?" the universal question, and nobody quite able yet to answer where—under such mental conditions doubt is perfectly natural. It is inevitable. It comes in by the wide It is inevitable. It comes in by the wide

THE GATE OF REASON. Doubt enters also by a third gate, the gate of reason. The fact may as well be taced that there are sober-minded and thoughtful men and women to-day whose reason tells them that the whole question as to God's existence is a doubtful matter. Willingly and gladly would they be-lieve, but reason, as they understand its

voice, forbids. There are genuine intellect ual difficulties in the way.

These difficulties are most of them as old as the race, but they are emphasized by the peculiar intellectual conditions of our time. The greater part of the thinking which is being done in this generation is in a ma-Men of All Classes Are Questioning being done in this generation is in a ma-terial direction. The emphasis is on the physical side. Whoever looks back 50 years, whether as an observer of social mat-ters like Mr. Walter Besant, or as an observer of scientific matters like Prof. Huxley, is very sure to lay stress upon the won-derful progress and betterment which has affected the things which can be seen, and handled, and measured. Within our own memory two new and most significant words -evolution and electricity-have come into the vocabulary of common people.

> THE GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS. So much has been achieved by men of

So much has been achieved by men of science that they seem to a good many people to deserve the title which Gordon's soldiers had in China—the Ever-Victorious Army. So many old ideas have been disproved, so many ghosts laid, so many extraordinary things shown to belong after all to the ordinary course of nature, so many mysteries brought into the revealing light, so many "bottomless pits" proved to be exactly such and such a number of feet deep, that it seems sometimes as if everything would by and by be measured and accounted for.

The Society for Psychical Research be-lieves that there is really something behind the ghost stories, something which they will be able to explain to everybody's satisfaction in a year or two. And a great many people belong to an unorganized society for theological research, and believe that there is really something behind the universal faith in God, something which can be traced back one of these days to the suggestions of a dream, or to the sighings of the wind, and adequately explained away. The lust of explanation has hold on all our thought. We want to understand everything. We are suspicious about whatever cannot be made plain. This prevalent intellectual condition affects our theology. There is doubt, to-day, in the

very air.

Having said thus much about the need for the defending of the essential assertion of religion, I purpose next week to come to the defense itself, to the argument for God. GEORGE HODGES.

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