

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

EDWARD F. WILLIAMS

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THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

An Appeal for Its Acceptance

BY

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EDWARD F. WILLIAMS

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Libr. of relig. thought.



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PREFACE

The pages that follow are from the pen of a man who has found comfort and strength in accepting Jesus Christ as his Saviour and friend. He earnestly desires that others who have not had an experience like his and especially that those of his acquaintance who do not look to Christ as their Saviour, would without prejudice of any sort read anew and study thoroughly the record of his life and teachings as found in the four gospels and see if his claims to be the Son of God are not fully justified by what is said there.

CONTENTS

I	The Problem of Creation.....	9
II	The Relation of God to Man.....	13
III	Criticisms of Christianity.....	15
IV	Essential Truth of The Bible.....	20
V	The Book of the Jews.....	23
VI	Conditions In the New Testament...	27
VII	The Church of the Middle Ages.....	33
VIII	The Church of To-day.....	37
IX	Judging the Gospel.....	43
X	Our Place is the One We Occupy....	61
XI	Agnostics and Materialists.....	63

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An Appeal for Its Acceptance

I. THE PROBLEM OF CREATION

A GREAT deal is said these days about efficiency. The idea of efficiency for one's self and for others is prominent in sociological and in most religious writings. No question can be more important for us than how we can make the best use of our faculties, and in what way they can be the most harmoniously, the most completely, and the most usefully developed. This is a question we are compelled to answer. We cannot put it aside and be true to our generation, or to ourselves.

The world in which we live is full of attraction for us and full of mystery also. About its real constitution, about the nature and extent of its forces, we know comparatively little. What we do know adds to the amount we do not know. We realize that our life here is very brief, hardly more than a dream. The wind passeth over it and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more. For the beginning of this life we are not

responsible, only for the use we make of it. Nor can we prevent its coming to an end. Whence we came, we do not know. If, as some have affirmed, from a pre-existent state we have no memory of it.

If this life is all, as many others affirm, then it not infrequently seems as if it were hardly worth the sufferings and disappointments connected with it. It is very difficult for us to be content with the present alone—Even in this life we are constantly looking forward to better days, to more lucrative employment, to increased honors, to a happier and more satisfied state of mind. It is only natural that we think of a life after this, larger and better than any we have known here.

In fact, it is well nigh impossible for us to persuade ourselves that we exist for this life alone, that we came into this world by chance, are in a world which itself came into being by chance, is without a plan and is governed by laws which are the result of chance. Whatever our theological or our scientific views, however indifferent to religion we may be, we live and act on the principle that the laws of Nature are permanent, can be trusted, and must be obeyed. We approve these laws and treat them as if they had an intelligent origin. That is, we, unconsciously perhaps, believe that the world and the universe to which it belongs, had a beginning and are controlled by a mind at once intelligent and powerful. The world

came into existence, we think, because it was created by a personal being who had a plan in creating it, and in subjecting it to certain laws. We think of ourselves, also, and of the men and women of our generation, and of preceding generations, as possibly subject to some higher law than that which prevails in matter, as if in the intelligence we possess and which others exhibit, there are hints of another kind of life than that which seems to be determined by the laws of matter only.

In other words, we feel as if we were connected in some way with a Creator by closer and different ties than those which we perceive in either the vegetable or the animal world. We do not think of ourselves as material, but as intelligent, moral, spiritual beings. For as we cannot think of the Creator of the world as having visible form or as confined to any definite locality, so we cannot think of ourselves as identical with the body which bears our name, but as having a body in which we dwell. We are led logically to think of the Creator as a spiritual Being, and of ourselves as beings with a spiritual nature, and we ask if it be not possible and desirable that we come into conscious relations with this spiritual Being, so that while living in a material realm, we may live in a spiritual realm also! Thus we think of life as coming from a Creator who is Spirit, as partaking of his life, as existing apart from the material things which

surround us, as superior to the destructive forces which are seeking to bring this life to an end, as lasting beyond the grave. . . . The more thoughtfully we consider what we are, the more earnestly we ask whence we have come, why we are here, whither we are going. The older we grow, the wider our experience, the more anxious many of us are to find satisfactory answers to questions which differentiate us altogether from beings with a merely material nature. In spite of ourselves we are religious. We form a creed, a theology of our own. We are not content till we do. Why then should we not consider, carefully and without prejudice, a theory which explains our relations to our Creator, to the world in which we are now living, to our fellow men, and which gives answer to questions concerning our own nature and our relation to the future?

II. THE RELATION OF GOD TO MAN

The aim of every religion has been to bring men into right relations with their Creator. From the oldest historical records we learn that the most ignorant and the most superstitious races, as well as the more cultivated, have sought to come into harmonious relations with a Deity in whom they have some degree of confidence. Through gifts, sacrifices, forms of worship, vows, personal service, they have sought to obtain favors from a supreme being, invisible indeed, but able to bless with his gifts or to injure by withholding them.

That the Christian religion should aim to create right relations between man and God, is what we might anticipate. We are not surprised when the apostle tells us that Jesus Christ came into the world to bring men back to God. They were, as we are further told, servants of sin, wanderers from their Father's house. Christ came to seek and save the lost. Are we among the lost? We may not feel that we are sinners, and yet we cannot put aside a feeling that we are not quite sure that we are on the right road to our Father's house. Why not listen to one who has found the way and is ready to point it out to us?

Jesus claims to have come into the world as

a teacher sent from God. Can He make good his claims? Multitudes think so. And those who thus think are anxious that those of their acquaintance, as well as others, should consider the grounds on which their conclusions rest. They ask that the four Gospels be read thoughtfully, that the statements there made, be pondered, that the conditions upon which promises are made be carefully and honestly complied with, so that, in their own experience those who read may discover the truth of the New Testament religion. They see men of pure character, of the highest social and civic standing, of rare intelligence, in their daily lives in the home and in the community, exhibiting the most noble and the most amiable traits, and yet rejecting, or at least taking no apparent interest in the religion of Jesus Christ. They seem to be open-minded men, free from prejudice, charitable, watching oftentimes for opportunities to express their sympathy with the suffering and to furnish help for the needy. . . . Outwardly they seem to be living as if they loved God and their neighbor, as if they were not far from the kingdom of God. Would that they might take the step which would bring them into it!

III. CRITICISMS OF CHRISTIANITY

Why are they not open followers of Christ? Some of them are indifferent to the claims of any religion. Their religion consists in doing what they think is right and in giving no thought as to a reason for their action. Some call in question the historical grounds upon which the Christian religion rests, look upon Christ as a man, sincere perhaps, but mistaken in his estimate of his mission. That others should be mistaken also in their estimate of him is, they say, altogether natural. Others assert that to accept Christ and deny one's self in this life for the sake of blessedness hereafter, is to take a commercial view of religion, is selfishness and ethically immoral. The excuses given for refusing to look upon Christ as a Saviour and to live as one of his disciples are of great variety, well nigh innumerable. Is it possible to overcome them? We believe it is, but only if those who give them are willing to consider with absolute fairness the claims which the Christian religion makes upon every intelligent person. . . .

We are willing to admit that in the lives of many sincere Christians, as in the lives of those who call themselves Christians, there are good reasons for not a few of the criticisms that reach

our ears. Not all the representatives of Christ are worthy the position they hold. Not all who honestly seek to serve Him are without fault. The Christian ideal is very high. Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven. Who among us dare claim to have reached that ideal? Then, too, statements are made, as if sanctioned by the Master, as to the nature and requirements of the Gospel which are without New Testament authority. There are believers who in spite of their faith in the Lord Jesus still breathe the atmosphere of the Old Testament, who in their thought of the laws of Moses, and their efforts to meet the demand for form and ceremony, have deprived themselves of the freedom and peace which the Gospel gives. Let not the nature of the Gospel be judged by such lives as these, or indeed from any human representation of it.

By some, the Bible is rejected because, if read as a book of science which it certainly is not and was not intended to be, it contradicts laws of Nature which observation and experience prove to be true. As a book of ethics, we are told its principles cannot be accepted, and we are reminded of commands and deeds recorded in the Old Testament from which our moral sense recoils. We grant that the standards of duty in the Old Testament are not such as we always can approve, or as are found in the New Testament. Is this sur-

prising? Why should the advocates of the doctrine of evolution, as most of these critics are, overlook the fact that there has been an advance in the domain of morals and religion, no less truly than in the realm of nature, an advance which Christians gratefully recognize, an advance which may be traced from the days of the Decalogue to those of the Sermon on the Mount? Is it fair to judge the religion of Jesus and that of the apostles by the opinions and conduct of patriarchs and law-givers, by the beginnings of a religion rather than by its aim and its latest teachings?

How is it that so many seem to forget that Christianity is a living religion, a life from God imparted to a human soul, which appropriates to itself day by day whatever is truest and best in moral conduct and philosophical thought? The disciple of Christ in the twentieth century ought to have a broader outlook on the moral and spiritual needs of mankind than the wisest of his followers in Palestine or within three hundred years of the crucifixion or in the Middle Ages or in the time of the Reformation or even in the last century. The increase in knowledge in various fields has been by leaps and bounds. The believer of to-day ought to understand Christ and the nature of his teachings better than the believer in any past era. He ought to be more charitable and tolerant in his judgments of religious thought, to have a saner

and juster view of the meaning of the great events in human history than those who have preceded him. It is the Christian religion of the present time which we wish the unbelievers of our day to consider, the claims which Christ makes for himself in his Gospels, the claims which Christian experience reports as uplifting and purifying, the claims of a faith which appreciates and accepts all that is true in science, beautiful in art, noble in action or conducive to human welfare, but which finds its nourishment and strength in clinging to Jesus as one sent from God.

A very great deal of the criticism which meets us now, and upon which so many seem to base their unbelief in Christ may be set aside at once as resting on inadequate and false views of the nature and demands of his gospel. It is not the low standards of morals which seem to have prevailed in the earlier periods of the Old Testament times, the peculiar or far-fetched interpretations of certain passages in the New Testament, the opinions of men who have justified on the ground of Christian fidelity the horrors and cruelties of religious wars, which genuine believers wish their fellow-men to accept. What they desire for themselves and for others is that the real Christ be known and trusted. It is to Him that they ask their fellow-men to direct their thought.

They ask the intelligent people of to-day to

study without prejudice the character and claims of Christ as He is presented in the Gospels, to consider his theory of morals, his ideals of life, his standards of duty, his promises for the future. They make no appeal for any particular church, historical or national, for any denomination or religious sect, for any religious leader however gifted or devoted he may seem to be or to have been, or how many followers he may have won. What they ask is that the four Gospels be read in the light of present day knowledge, that the genuine words of Jesus be carefully studied, that the influence of those words upon the lives of the men who heard them and upon the lives of men to whom they have been repeated generation after generation be considered, and that the question be put to their best judgment whether a religion whose influence has been for good for so long a time and among so many different people can rest on a fictitious foundation? Let reason as well as patience have her perfect work and there need be no fear for the result. It cannot be repeated too often that the thoughtful believer of to-day, the man who believes because his personal experience bears witness to the reasonableness of his faith, is anxious that others, and especially the men whose esteem and friendship he prizes so highly, should find for themselves a treasure he has found precious.

IV. THE ESSENTIAL TRUTH OF THE BIBLE

Let the critics be heard in all they have to say. Smile at the ignorance and stupidity with which many present the claims of the gospel, reject as unworthy of confidence the blindness and folly of those who aver that a revelation from above has been vouchsafed to them, make due allowance for whatever influence the time or environment may have had on the form in which the truth we are asked to accept has been given to the world, criticize freely whatever weakness or frailty or ill-doing can be discovered in the character or conduct of Christians. True we look to them as examples of the kind of lives those who profess to be disciples of Christ ought to lead.

But do not forget that what they are, is not the truth we are asked to accept. The truth is Christ himself. "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." His teachings alone are to be taken as the foundation of our religious belief. The intelligent believer of our time does not ask any one to do violence to an enlightened judgment, to disregard the verdicts of true scholarship, to overlook and condemn the good there is in the world and among unbelievers: he asks for fair consideration of the claims of the

faith which rests on Jesus Christ as its basis. Scholarship, as he knows, has shown the gradual growth of the Old Testament, has detected and pointed out the work of different authors in books that are ascribed to a single author, has given a late date to books which were formerly affirmed to have been written much earlier. Christian scholars do not define inspiration in the old terms, or deny that God raises up leaders of thought and action at different times and in different countries for special purposes whose words may be worth careful comparison with those found in the Scriptures. They doubt if an audible voice was heard with every "Thus saith the Lord" which meets us in the Old Testament, nor are they willing to assert that historical or scientific errors are entirely absent from the books that compose it.

Christian scholarship looks upon these old Jewish books, which the Council of Jamnia A. D. 90 accepted as sacred, as forming a book of religion of exceedingly great value. They point to the fact that it traces the religion of a peculiar people from rude beginnings through a long period of time. They emphasize the human element in its formation and are not shocked by the assertion that these books were written as other books are written, and are to be criticized as other writings of their time are criticized. But they believe that if read in the light of present knowledge, these

writings will not only prove to be fascinating as literature, but illuminating and inspiring for religion.

V. THE BOOK OF THE JEWS

The Bible claims to be a truthful record of the religious life and belief of a small nation whose God was wiser, purer, more powerful than any the gods of the surrounding nations, the God of a nation which looked upon itself as an object of his special thought and favor. It was little that the people saw at the beginning of their history. Their God as they thought of Him was moved as by human passions, was jealous of neglect, cruel to the enemies of his people, did not seem to care for the welfare of the major part of mankind. It is not strange if we take facts into consideration that it should have been so. How could it have been otherwise? Is it surprising that prominent men, priests, judges, kings should share in the thought of the people, were under the influence of the spirit of the times, were selfish, cruel, and full of religious bigotry, not infrequently indifferent to the demands of justice or morality?

Is it surprising that the prophets should meet with serious and constant opposition on the part of the representatives of the national religion in their efforts to teach a higher morality than had usually been observed and speak of God as a God of righteousness? Yet, admitting the imperfection

of the authors of the various books of the Old Testament, especially of those which are called historical, its careful reading will bring before our minds many a noble thought, many a heroic deed of self-sacrifice, many a command which if obeyed will aid in forming a righteous character. The reading of the story of the servitude in Egypt, of the deliverance therefrom, of the life in the desert, of the giving of the commandments, of the history of the beginnings of the worship of a spiritual Being, of the aspirations of the authors of many of the Psalms, of the warnings of the prophets combined with their hopefulness, cannot fail to be helpful to those who read sympathetically and are willing to put themselves back in the place of those to whom the story first came.

The experiences which are related in the Old Testament prepare us for those which meet us in the New Testament. Here we are in another atmosphere, purer, more invigorating, an atmosphere which stimulates us to right thinking and right doing. Here we discover that the chosen people and the true seed of Abraham are those who love God supremely and their neighbor as themselves. That here and there even in the New Testament writers, a trace of the old Jewish spirit is discernable, is not denied. That its writers were men of their day is evident. Apart from their morality and their spirituality, from the faith

they cherished in one whom they were worshipping as the Son of God, from their confident expectation of a future life, they were in no wise unlike other men of the class to which they belonged. Yet their spirit is that of Him who came into the world to save sinners, to meet them in their daily lives and furnish them the aid and encouragement they needed. . . . Did it matter if to a Gentile, a Christian who had once been a Jew spake with a Hebrew accent, if he insisted that in his Saviour he had found the Messiah long promised to his people?

So far as we know, the original disciples were Jews by birth and education. They had lived among Jewish people. They had known very little of any other people. Whatever they did or said would indicate their nationality. That they clung to Jewish forms of worship, used images and illustrations familiar to Jewish thought in their ministry and in their writings, may be accepted as a matter of course. Paul was a Jew prior to his conversion and he never lost his love for his brethren after the flesh, or ceased to labor and pray that they, like himself, might receive Jesus as the Messiah of promise. That Paul was a genuine man, a man to be trusted, a man who preached what he believed to be true, a man who had proved the truth of his teachings in his own experience before presenting them to others, no

one who peruses his letters or traces the history of his life subsequent to his conversion can doubt. Testimony from a man like this is not to be lightly rejected.

What wonder if in his writings, composed often in haste and under the pressure of ardent feeling, words and arguments show traces of a training which preceded his Christian experience? Is the book of Hebrews, with its Christian spirit and aim, less valuable because of the use it makes of the old Jewish Scriptures? Need it surprise us that doctrines current among devout Jews, apocalyptic and peculiar to their race, should be woven into the thought of the New Testament writers? These writers, like the apostles, were men like ourselves. They were dull and slow of hearing. They did not easily see truth in its full perspective. Nor is our spiritual vision entirely clear. Yet this early testimony to the ministry of Jesus has produced marvelous results.

VI. CONDITIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

It is difficult for us to picture to ourselves the conditions of life when the apostles began their ministry. The world, at any rate the Roman world, was at peace. The people as a rule were prosperous. The burdens which the government imposed were not grievous. . . . Within certain limits its subjects were free to think and act as they pleased. Only in test cases were they required to pay homage, as a token of loyalty, to the Emperor. But with all these outward marks of prosperity there was a vast deal of inward corruption. Divorce was common. Immorality was common and provoked little criticism. In the great cities the poor had become slaves and their condition was anything but fortunate. True there were freed men who obtained great power, but they did little to improve the condition of those among whom they had served as slaves. The distinction between classes was never sharper. There were the very rich and the very poor . . . those who gave themselves up to every kind of pleasure and those who did not know from day to day where to find their bread. To prevent outbreaks among the poor, corn was distributed in Rome at regular times and in specified quantities. Games were

established for the delight of the thousands who found their sole amusement in witnessing them. Quiet as everything appeared to be on the surface, even provincial governors were not always free from anxiety. They were well satisfied to have things remain as they were. They did not welcome new thought or any change in the manner of life which could suggest in the least the worth of a human soul.

This was the fullness of time when Christ came, when after his death and resurrection his followers went out into the world with a gospel of life and peace. They addressed men as if each one of them were a child of God with an immortal destiny, as if in the sight of God, the God whom they trusted and were trying to serve, all were equal, as if in his presence and at his judgment-bar the rich and powerful would have no preference over the poor and weak. For men of learning, for those who had won literary fame, for the philosophers and scientists of that day, for men high in favor with the Emperor, or occupying an important political position anywhere in the empire, the preaching of the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth would have little interest. To its warnings and promises they would turn a deaf ear. And yet a Herod, listened to a John the Baptist, and often sent for him that he might hear him in private. Felix trembled at the reasonings of Paul,

and Festus could find no fault in him. A centurion summoned Peter as a herald of good news for himself and his household, and the apostle to the Gentiles had no difficulty in obtaining a hearing among the officers and soldiers of the army even at Rome.

It is only necessary to read the New Testament with care to see the success which everywhere attended or followed the preaching of the gospel. Recall the number of conversions which occurred within a few weeks of the Resurrection. Follow the results of the persecution and martyrdom of Stephen when the apostles went everywhere telling the story of the Saviour who had died for them and had risen from the dead. Study carefully the history of Paul. Mark the change in his character and in his spirit and aims after his experience on the way to Damascus. Accompany him on his visits to Jerusalem, to his home in Tarsus, to his year's service with Barnabus at Antioch, go with him on his missionary journeys in Asia Minor, in Europe, on his way as a prisoner to Rome. Sit by his side as he writes his letters, listen to him as he preaches, as he talks with the men whom he meets casually, observe how he emphasizes the fact that the Jesus whom he had persecuted is the Messiah for whom the Jews had long looked, the Saviour who had come into the world with the gift of eternal life for those who would receive it.

So confident was he of the truth of his message that he shrank from no hardships or dangers which stood in the way of delivering it.

The effect of that gospel on many of those who heard it should not be overlooked. Recall the names of those who were associated with Paul in his labors, men like Barnabas, Timothy, Silas, of noble women not a few, of the churches called into existence, through his and their agency, perhaps the seven in Asia Minor, at any rate the church at Philippi, one at Thessalonica, another at Corinth, those at Lystra and Derbe and Iconium, churches whose influence was felt for centuries and always for good. From Paul men heard that they were sinners, in need of forgiveness, and that the power to break away from sin and lead a righteous life could come from God alone. Were the apostles fanatics? Had their preaching no foundation upon which to rest? Was the change wrought in the character and conduct of men through the hearing of the Gospel and at the outcome of faith in its author unreal? And yet the Christian thought and enthusiasm of centuries was the outcome . . . the beginning of institutions and societies from which a new civilization arose.

We know that intense earnestness sometimes may be mistaken for fanaticism. A half-educated Christian may proclaim doctrines, which while they convey great truths to his mind, and to other

minds like his, contain errors which a disciplined mind cannot fail to perceive and to reject. The gospel as it comes to us directly from the New Testament is expressed in language which to some minds conveys little of its true meaning. It is one of the excellencies of the gospel that it comes to every one in his own language, in those terms, and in that grade of thought which he can appreciate. So it was at the first. The people heard the Lord gladly. He spake as one having authority and not as the scribes, with the uncertainty and indecision of mere interpretators.

If thousands in Jerusalem very soon after the resurrection believed, there were among them, we are told, a great number of priests, doubtless representatives of the best educated people in the city. The associates and helpers of Paul were evidently men and women of the best class in society. The churches they founded were left in the care of their members. Among these members, self-governing as these churches were, there must have been persons fitted to plan and direct their work. A church in a heathen city like Antioch or Pisidia or Derbe or Iconium or in Galatia, a church in any Roman city, occupied a place of distinction. It stood for new religious doctrines, for an entirely new standard of life. Such an organization would be criticized severely. Of this fact no one was more truly conscious than Paul.

Hence his subsequent visits to the churches. Hence the letters to them from which succeeding ages have profited. That the bishops and deacons which were ordained out of the converts, none of whom could have been of long standing, were men of ability, if not always men of wealth and culture, is evident. Ignorant and weak-minded men could not have filled the positions these men held. The work which many of these churches accomplished long after the apostle's death is testimony to the wisdom with which it was conducted.

VII. THE CHURCH OF THE MIDDLE AGES

We are wont to think of the church of the Middle Ages as corrupt and worldly, as lacking almost entirely the graces of character and the sympathy with the poor which we associate with the churches of our time. Three things the mediæval church did. It preserved in its monasteries and among its priests and monks the learning of previous generations. Greek, Roman, and 'to some extent Oriental thought and literature were kept alive in these religious centers. Out of them came the impulse from which the universities of Paris, Italy, and England arose. In them were gathered and preserved the libraries of the time. Here precious manuscripts carefully were copied and treasured.

To these monasteries the poor came as to the only place where relief could be found for their sufferings. . . . These monasteries fed the poor, clothed the naked, and sent out visitors to the sick and in prison. In the nunneries were women who were even more serviceable to the needy than priests or monks.

Naturally enough, hospitals were connected with these religious homes and men and women were trained in them through experience as well

as by careful study, in medicine and surgery. If methods were crude and imperfect, they were the best that could be followed. They prepared the way for methods in our day which are prolonging life by many years. But we have no right to suppose that the nursing in the hospitals of the Middle Ages was less sympathetic or Christian than that of our own time. In those quiet institutions, notwithstanding imperfections, genuine piety was found.

Neither the Roman nor the Greek Church, full of faults in doctrine and life as many of their members were, were without examples of true Christian consecration. There were in them men and women who gave up everything that they might serve their fellow men. Their consecration assumed different forms. It was seen in the zeal of the evangelist, the research of the scholar, the self-denial of the missionary. Piety was kept alive and nourished by the service of scores and hundreds of men and women who withdrew from the world, that through their withdrawal from it, they might the better serve it.

Of the missionary history of the Middle Ages, apart from the reports made to Rome, we have no full and accurate knowledge. We know that in every generation the Church of Rome has sought to give the Gospel as she has understood it, to the remotest parts of the world. The Crusades were

in a way missionary undertakings. The infidel was to be overthrown that the believer might reign. Foolish disputes there were over trivial points of doctrine; men prominent in the councils of the Church were notorious for their vicious lives; the desire for wealth and political power was apparent; the words of Dante in condemnation of the Church are not too strong, and yet many a saint lived in its atmosphere and was nourished by its teachings. He who would understand the position and work of the Church in either its Western or its Eastern division must carry himself back in his imagination to the centuries in which they were the sources of the best civic and religious life of the time.

Prior to the Reformation, the Western Church represented the best thought of the era. It was the home of earnest and gifted men. It trained the men who laid the foundations of the great public schools of western Europe and of the universities of France, Italy, and England. In it were educated such men as Martin Luther, Zwingle, Reuchlin, Erasmus, Melanthon, and scores of others, who loved and served their generation. Luther did not at first intend to break with the Church. He sought to free it from superstitious and errors, in the hope that its life would deepen and be enriched through a sincere faith in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of men. It

was a very simple gospel which he sought to preach; that men were sinners and could be justified by faith alone. What his preaching of the gospel, as he interpreted it, accomplished, appears not only in the history of the reformed churches and the history of protestantism throughout the world, but in the new and purer life which sprang up in the mother church. For the work of Luther and his associates wrought a very great change in the Roman Catholic Church, both in its doctrines and in the spiritual life of many of its members.

VIII. THE CHURCH OF TO-DAY

But objections are to the church of to-day, Protestant as well as Catholic. It is granted that both churches have been useful, have done not a little towards making this world a better world in which to live, that it has suggested and ordinarily put into operation nearly all the benevolent agencies in which we take pride. Few people, however, have any adequate knowledge of the character and extent of the missionary work of the church during the past and the present generation. Many, while admitting, or at least not exactly denying all this, yet speak of the church and its ministers as the defenders of outworn dogmas, and without sympathy with present day needs.

Few of those who make the charge undertake to prove the truth of it. That might be somewhat difficult. On what foundation does it rest? Where is the new thought of which non-believers so often speak, more carefully studied, and, if found to be true, more readily received than in our Christian colleges and seminaries? Where are the men found who are mastering the thought of the time and encouraging with their words and their money those who in well nigh innumerable directions are searching for the truth, if not in or closely connected with the church? Who are the men who

have been uncovering the treasures of Egypt, Palestine, the ruins in Mesopotamia?

They are Christian men chiefly. The classical scholars who care for nothing so much as something in Greece or Italy that will throw new light on some favorite author, are for the most part supporters of the Christian Church. The exceptions are comparatively few in number. To whom are we indebted for the fresh interest in Biblical study and the new thought which is following it if it be not to Christian scholars? They are the men who are welcoming the discoveries which are adding to our knowledge of ancient times, are modifying our views in many directions, and who shrink from no conclusions supported by facts. They are lovers of truth. That they will follow, let it lead whithersoever it may.

It is the Church itself, the protestant branch of it, that sustains and rejoices in the new learning. It cares for the truth and the truth alone. But it cannot be asked to give up the old for the new, simply because it is new. If it accepts the new it must be because the new is true. If this undermines some old doctrine very dear to us, we let it go without a moment's hesitation. A religion without a basis of fact on which to rest is worthless. The Christian Church of our day was never more confident than now that its foundations are secure and immovable. Hence its promotion of research,

the encouragement it gives to criticism, the readiness with which whatever seems to be true is accepted and made a part of its belief. But it insists that the new be proved to be true before it is willing to put it in place of former belief. This is the attitude of the Church. Its members desire their friends to unite with them in its service for mankind because they find in it the truth which satisfies the intellect, purifies the heart, stimulates to self-denial, forms moral character, creates sympathy with suffering and need the world over, and because they find in it the men whose greatest happiness consists in striving to diminish pain, mental, or physical, and by gifts of money or personal service to supply every form of human need.

It is to Christian men and women that the world is indebted for whatever is best in its thought or its life. And yet some intelligent people among us are rejecting the gospel as untrue or as unnecessary, as making no appeal to them, inasmuch as neither in its teachings nor in its aims does it interest them. They turn away from it as having no value in itself, as something which appeals neither to their physical nor to their moral needs. A large number are indifferent to the gospel, who in reality know very little about it. To them the Bible is a sealed book—they do not read it. They know that there are Christian churches, Christian schools and colleges, that many hospitals have

rather an intimate relation with Christian people, that these same people have established hospitals in foreign lands as a part of their Christian work, but precisely what this foreign work is, or how far it extends or what it has accomplished, they do not know and are taking no pains to ascertain.

How can intelligent people excuse themselves for this ignorance, or for the attitude which accompanies it? Churches are found in nearly every village in the United States and western Europe. Persons connected with these churches have in general taken the lead in support of institutions of benevolence, the circulation of good literature, the framing, passage, and execution of good laws. That there are exceptions we do not deny. As a rule the churches of a community are its best asset. This means that most people look upon religion as something desirable. Communities without churches and unwilling to sustain them are not attractive communities in which to live. Unbelievers, however firmly fixed in their convictions that the gospel has no historic ground upon which to rest, do not seem to be eager to settle in these communities or to have their children brought up within their limits. Indirectly, unconsciously perhaps, they testify thus to the value of Christianity by establishing their homes among those who look upon the gospel as true, and who try to live in accordance with its precepts. In communities which

have been long established there will of course be a considerable number of people who, if not outright opposers of the church, still are indifferent to it. Let them have credit for the blameless lives which they seem to be living, but let them ask themselves if they honestly have investigated for themselves the grounds upon which the gospel bases its claims, if in fact for what they are themselves, the ideals they cherish, the upright life they are leading, they are not indebted to the Christian religion?

What we ask is that Christianity be so fairly studied as to be understood. Let the faults of those who represent it be fully exposed. Let its failure to accomplish all, or even a small part of what had been expected of it, be admitted. Give due credit to critical scholarship, recognize the errors which have been taught as truth in the name of religion, select the worst specimen the church of any era has to present, a fair consideration of all that the church has been and has sought to do in any given period of time will show that her influence has been good and not bad, that she has favored learning, benevolence, pure living, kindly treatment of others, in short has favored the best and most self-sacrificing life known. This we believe to be true of the church of to-day.

We must not forget that Christianity has been doing its work for nearly two thousand years, that

it has effected changes in our thinking, in our standards of morals, in our sense of duty to others, of which ordinarily no account is taken.

To the extent to which people are affected by universal Christian thought, or by what is often called natural humanity, we are not insensible. Modern society owes a large debt to the many who give and labor not as Christians, but as men and women who sincerely desire and seek the welfare of others. Some of them, we think, are not far from the Kingdom of Heaven. We would they were in it, would take the step which would bring them into it, would study the gospel long enough and thoroughly enough to see that its claims do not interfere with enjoyment of the best this life affords, or with their doing the best of which they are capable for the uplift of the present and future generations. There is nothing good which the gospel does not seek to give: the best in education, the best in physical development, the best in character-building, the best in society, the best of which a perfectly developed man is capable. With all this and all that it implies, the gospel is in full sympathy. It seeks to give life, and that more abundantly. Life here in this world and not alone in another. For the gospel, as the apostle saw, has the promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come.

IX. JUDGING THE GOSPEL

Is it too much to ask that the common way of judging the character of the gospel be reversed? We criticize the error which has attached itself to it, but do not take the trouble to detach the error from the truth; we judge of the influence of the church upon the world by studying its influence in its corrupt and least spiritual eras rather than in its best eras. So of its men. We take its worst specimens, its most corrupt popes or cardinals, its worldly-minded bishops and priests, and condemn Christianity because some of its representatives are what a lack of Christianity has made them to be. Of such men as Paul, Francis Assisi, the early messengers of Christ to England and the north of Europe, the pioneer missionaries of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, we have little to say. We do not stop to consider the fact that in his effort to heal the open sore of the world, David Livingstone revealed Africa in its true light and in so doing rendered it possible to sweep away forever the last vestige of heathen darkness from the minds of men living in the Dark Continent.

Have such men as the late William Booth made no contribution to the world? Is there another man of his time who has contributed more? There

have been great men in science, great explorers, great warriors, great statesmen, but what man in the nineteenth century did more to uplift and help the lower strata of his race than William Booth in the foundation of the Salvation Army? He saw human need in its worst forms. He saw vice in that section of society where it is most completely at home, among people who had no other comfort than what came to them in evil doing. In that section of London where he began his ministry, those who needed the help he sought to give were more numerous than those who counted themselves righteous. To them he went with the gospel. If he carried it to them in a way which they who received it never had known, it was yet the gospel which wrought a change in their lives, which opened their eyes to a new world, a world of whose existence they had not even dreamed. That gospel, he and his followers, many of them among the lowest of the low, have carried round the world to find that everywhere its power with men has been the same. It has freed them from the fetters of sin. It has made new people of them. It has dragged them out of the strongholds of vice and temptation, set them on their feet, made them heralds of Him who sought and saved them.

The message they have delivered has been very simple. It has been without form or ornament.

It has been a message from man to man, testimony alone, the testimony of experience, a man in moral health telling one who is sick how he was cured. Believe. That is all. Believe Jesus Christ, friend, brother, helper, healer, unseen yet truly present. One is sinking in deep water. Seize the outstretched hand and be saved. Simple indeed is the first step. Explanations neither are given nor sought. Make trial. That is enough. Observe the change in that man's life. See what he is to-day. All know what he was not long ago. Look into his home. See how comfortable it is. Ask his wife and children about him. How unlike all is from what it was a few months since. What has brought about the change? Acquaintance with the Salvation Army. A lad, a lassie perhaps, brought news of an invisible yet powerful helper. The message was not understood at first. The needy man was persuaded to ask help. It came. How? Is there need to know? It came. And the messenger who brought it kept in constant touch with the person to whom it came, and with tact and untiring patience unfolded more and more of the gospel till at last, with clear vision the one saved was ready to go out with his message to others.

Has the gospel power? Visit London. Is it a dream? Visit London. Enough can be seen there to satisfy any one that some power beyond what is commonly exerted by man has made itself felt

in the lives of thousands of degraded men and women.

Soldiers in this same Army, making use of the same kinds of weapons, following similar methods of attack, have won similar victories in every large city into which they have gone. Nor has their advance been limited to nations in which the English language is spoken. Victories hardly less marvelous have been won wherever they have gone. They are winning them now day by day. During these efforts to win followers of Christ, men have been shown how to live in comfort here in this world, how to make use of the capacities with which they have been endowed. These effects cannot be explained as the effects of personal magnetism, however prominent that at times may have been. It is not the influence of mind upon mind, although that has not been without effect. It is due to a new nature, a nature which has taken the place of the nature which was all powerful before. Old things have passed away. Behold all things are become new. Hundreds of thousands of witnesses there are, speaking in almost all the languages of the civilized world, and not a few in the heathen world, who ascribe the change in them of which they are conscious and for which they are grateful, to an invisible power which has come to their aid and which remains with them to help them as they have need. Even the most skeptical

will not deny that good has been wrought. Why not admit that for these people, and such as these, the gospel has a message, and a message which they do well to heed?

Is there no call for others than among those to whom the Salvation Army usually ministers to heed this message? Everywhere there is a middle class who need the gospel. The members of this class are not remarkable for learning, for ability to appreciate sharp distinctions in criticism, fine points in literature, arguments for or against the existence of God. They are for the most part sane in their thought, distinguished for good judgment, or what is called common sense, people who know a good thing when they see it, and are not unwilling to use the means necessary to secure it. Among the men and women of this class, the changes which take place in character are often very striking, are not less remarkable and effective than in those who belong to the class below them. From this middle class come the larger number of those who devote themselves to the work of spreading the knowledge of the gospel throughout the world. They do not labor for the conversion of men alone, but for their development as members of a race to whose mental and moral progress, so far as we can see, no limit has been set. Hence their interest in schools, in hospitals, in every form of benevolence that can reach and aid

mankind. Hence gifts increasingly large as the years go by and the belief on the part of the giver that they are serving a Master who has chosen them to be his stewards, and who are looking for a steady and permanent betterment in the world in which we are now living. True they believe in a world to come. But to prepare themselves for enjoyment in it they think they should live and act as if this world were the only world in which they are to live.

On the ground of this faith we have our churches, our Christian education, our mission service at home and abroad, our standards of duty, our codes of law, whatever is high and inspiring in our civilization. . . . No claim is put forth for the rare intellectual ability of those to whom we owe these priceless gifts. We recognize the debt which we owe them, and we try to pay it by passing on the treasure which has come to us to another generation. Everywhere we go we have examples of strangely complete and beautiful self-denying lives. And with it, yes as part of it, and the most prominent part of it, contentment, a peace and satisfaction in life which make themselves felt in every word and act.

There is no need to name examples. Memory is full of them. They are among the choicest of our friends. They are the persons to whom we go in trouble, on whom we rely for counsel, after

whose conduct we fashion, to a considerable degree, our own. Out of this class come not a few of our most prominent men of wealth, our most eloquent and effective orators, our statesmen, the men who fill the professions, our artists, authors, and scholars. If of the very rich, the very noble, the very learned, the wise of this world, not many are called, some are called, have responded to the call, and are bearing the message which they have heard to those about them, to those with whom they associate daily. The changes observable in them are quite as real as in those who are not in their social rank. With every opportunity for research, with leisure for study, with minds enlarged by wide reading, extensive travel, constant association with members of the most cultivated society, they too cherish a sincere faith in one who declared that He came into the world to seek and save the lost. The example their Master has left them they do not hesitate to follow.

Whatever some of those who pass for the clearest thinkers of our time may say, to whatever extent in view of the discoveries and the finds of scholarship, the mere letter of the gospel may be modified, the gospel itself is untouched. Its message is the same from age to age and to all alike. It is a message from a heavenly Father to children who for a time are living in this world and who have wandered far from Him. He asks them

to come home, and as they heed the voice and turn their faces toward Him, He goes out to meet them. Distinguished names there are, many of them of those who in intellect, in discipline of mind, rank among the first, whose faith in Christ is that of a little child. It is useless to deny facts. If there are many who do not believe, there are multitudes who do believe. If there are some who doubt and criticise and reject, there are multitudes equally gifted and equally well disciplined who accept the gospel and rejoice in it. Not a few eminent scientists, many who are prominent in philosophical thought, men who have led nations as their prime ministers, men who have exhibited the highest bravery in battle, have enrolled themselves among the servants of Christ. Men born to the enjoyment of every advantage that family and wealth could furnish have willingly left all to witness the more effectively to the blessing which the gospel brings to the world.

This is something for which fanaticism cannot account. Nor can any one deny that in countries which are called Christian, life is richer, property safer, morals higher, knowledge more eagerly sought, more highly prized, made more useful, than in other countries; that in these countries, from the first Christian century to the present, the world has been becoming better. . . . Consider for a moment what Christianity has brought to

these countries. Not alone in change of thought, in different and purer standards of moral character, in juster and more beneficent laws, in institutions of benevolence where misfortune, sickness, poverty, suffering of every kind, is alleviated, but in its effect upon literature and upon the estimates men form one of another.

Take out of any generation since Christ came, the effect the preaching of his gospel has had upon men, how great would be the loss! Almost beyond the power of calculation! Take its influence away from any community with which we are acquainted, out of all the books we have read, or are reading, out of the lives of those around us, banish Christianity from among us—What would there be left? Could we be content to remain among people with no faith in God, or in moral obligations, or in anything beyond that which we can see and feel? Were we to determine to live with people like these, would it not be that we might bear witness to a higher and richer life than the one they were leading?

What have we to-day in our land that we do not owe to the Christian religion? Our love of liberty and our enjoyment of it. The Red Men who were here before us had more freedom than we have ever enjoyed. Did this mean liberty or did this liberty mean for them what it means for us? What use did they make of it, apart from self-

gratification? What contributions through it did they make to the well-being of their tribes? Of what value was this part of the world to the rest of it while in their possession? Their liberty was the liberty of nature. Force in others was the only power that could restrain it. For this kind of liberty civilized men cherish no desire. Why not? Perhaps because it has no other recognized limits than those of force and selfishness, because it has not felt the leavening influence of the message of good will, of brotherly love, of Christian self-denial. At any rate on all grades of common life we most readily admit that the gospel has exercised a power for good. That in our communities which makes life worth living is due to Christianity. Why then should we not all accept it? Why not the most intelligent as well as those who are looked upon as the least intelligent? Is intelligence justified in rejecting it because it condemns the gratification of those passions in us which we have in common with the brutes? Because it sets before us standards of attainment which require a life time even approximately to realize, because it purifies and mellows, and renders attractive, disagreeable, well-nigh ungovernable characters, because it stimulates even the best of men to press forward toward the realization of ideals which the word perfection only can fitly describe? Thought-

ful people, some of them, very probably will say, "For the ordinary person undoubtedly religion is a good thing. Even if its teachings do not rest on facts, so long as faith in them produces good results their acceptance should be advocated. But for those who think, who are unwilling to accept any religious belief which has in it even the least suspicion of untruth, Christianity is impossible. For the lower classes we approve it just as we approve of policemen for the unruly." But only for people who feel the need of a religion, who want to have some sort of assurance about the future, or lean on authority, is Christianity desirable. Few people are able to detect errors in the biblical records, fewer still care for them when detected, but for those who do care it is not possible to have confidence in them.

This intellectual objection to religion is not based upon unwillingness to be subject to a severe standard of morals or to a demand so to regulate life as to make it contributory in the highest degree to the welfare of others, or to make it fruitful to the last extent for one's self. Many who turn away from the Christian religion because they have discovered, as they are persuaded, mistakes in some or all of its documents, are leading lives of singular beauty and are saying to themselves and to others that the reward which accompanies well-doing here is all the reward they look for or

wish. To a future life, they give no thought. For it they have no care. Should there be a future life, it is a life which concerns them as little as that which their souls may have had in the ages which preceded its beginning here. They live for the day with no expectation or care for a to-morrow. They shut out of their lives whatever comfort or help might be brought into them by a belief in the actual presence of God in the world.

To reject Christianity for the reason that its books were not written, as scholarship now asserts, by men as the amanuenses of Deity, that they contain statements which are inconsistent with facts which science and history carefully studied, the progress of thought and morals contradict and condemn, is no sufficient reason for overlooking the good which they contain. Read in the light of human experience it will be discovered that these books are on a level with the most advanced thought of the time of their composition. Read as marking the progress of religious men from low and primitive ideas of religion, up to the time of Christ, the books are of great value. They encourage us to believe that even Christian ideas oftentimes may reveal themselves more clearly by and by than now. The Bible is a book of progress. Its later standards of duty condemn many that were current in early times. The Bible is to be judged by its aims, by its later standards, not

by those which were held in the twilight of religious history. It is to be judged by what its heroes sought to be and do rather than by what they actually were as compared with men of character living to-day.

If we are not far better than the best Old Testament saint or prophet, it is our fault. We have no right to live below the requirements of the Sermon on the Mount, or to imitate the example of any other man who ever has lived, save that of Christ. Can a really thoughtful person, one who means to be consistent in his thinking, logical in his conduct, find any intellectual reason for not being a follower of the Lord Jesus? No matter what he thinks about his person, his pre-existence, the two natures, or one nature, the virgin birth or a natural birth, relation to God or to men, he lived such a life on earth as no one before him had lived, taught principles, which, where followed, produce the purest and noblest characters of which we have any knowledge. . . . Is not a religion which connects itself with such a person, worthy the most conscientious examination, and if one is really anxious to obtain for himself and others the best this life contains, should not an effort be made to meet the conditions upon which its promises and its results depend?

For most people who reject the Christian religion, an intellectual difficulty has little weight.

They do not want to submit themselves to the standards of Christianity. They are unwilling to deny themselves the pleasures they desire. They want to live and act as if whatever they do, or think, or wish is right; as if living for others, for the good of the whole, for the building up of a moral system or an economic system of righteousness which shall be operative in the future, were no concern of theirs. Their life is a life of complete religious indifference. Of the contents of the biblical books they have neither knowledge nor care. Even the gospels remain unread. The present alone interests them. For what others have done, or for what others may do, they have no care. The multitudes are indifferent, thoughtlessly indifferent. They are hostile to religious restraints. Reason cannot reach them. They care only for the spectacular, the unusual, the horrible, and for this for no long time. They do not think. We must not overlook the needs of persons like these.

Is it asked what do we mean by religion, more especially by the religion of Christ as presented in the gospels and in the letters of Paul? It is the recognition on the part of man of his relation to his Creator. It is a willing, grateful, trustful, loving recognition of God. It is a recognition of the place each of us occupies in the world, the cherishing of a purpose to fill that place to the best

of our ability. We are permitted to scan with utmost care the history of the human race, of that portion of the universe and its relation to every other part of it where we find ourselves, to follow through countless ages the gradual preparation of our world for the support of life, and its slow development from that period on, till man came and grew to be conscious of duty and of a power to think of other worlds than this, of other beings than those like himself, of causes and effects, and of the cause of what we ourselves are, and to ask why we are here, from whom we have come, and to whom we are to return.

These questions and others like them, religion and more especially the religion of Christ answers. . . . It tells us of God, of His love for us, of our need of Him, of the revelation He has made to us of His nature and His wishes for us in His Son. We are asked to hear this Son as He speaks to us, to weigh His words, to heed His warnings, to accept His promises, to follow His guidance. We are not asked to place confidence in a Book, to cherish any particular opinion as to the way into which it came into being, to hold any special theory as to the person of Christ, any belief in a particular church or in any particular body of men, only to believe in Christ, to believe that He came from His Father and our Father, and came with words of good will.

From what has been said, it is clear that the only satisfactory way to prove the truth of the gospel is to listen to it and then make personal test of its claims. In order to do this, no great amount of learning is necessary. A very ignorant person may be brought to Christ, and recognizing Him may put faith in Him, live as He directs, and enjoy the peace He promises. For most of us Christianity is nothing more than a personal relation with Christ. We read His words, we recall the conditions in which He lived, we dwell upon His deeds of mercy, upon the help He gave to those who sought Him, we think of Him as living still, we do not know where, we do not try to locate Him, only to believe Him and make sure in our experience that He is with us and helping us every day. We have only to look around us to find examples of those who have cast their care upon Him, and (in consequence) are living happy, useful lives, whose peace of mind is not disturbed by burdens of sickness and poverty and failure of their plans, who feel and act as if they knew that all things are working together for their good.

Why is not a practical proof like this as good as any that can be given? Why are not the evidences which are brought before us in the lives of those reached by the Salvation Army, by many of our evangelists, by missionaries in foreign

lands, as satisfactory as any that rest on theory or on conclusions which ought to follow logically from assumed premises? Are not many of that very intelligent class who are turning away from the gospel, failing to see what the gospel is, and what it requires? Are they not setting up standards of thought in reference to it, to which it makes no claims? Did not Christianity exist before any account of it was written? Was there not a time when Christ and His disciples made up the entire Christian church? Was their associating together called a church? Was not the relationship between Master and disciple then as real and close as ever existed between any believer and his Lord.

The accounts of the life in Palestine, full of interest and important as they are, are accounts which have a human origin, even if of divine suggestion. They are to be treated as we treat other accounts written by men, save that they relate to more important matters and are of deeper concern to us. Suppose it were true that in certain minor points, the so-called gospels do not exactly agree, that the epistles of Paul are rather more philosophical than we wish they were, rather more difficult to explain than we could desire? Does this render untrue the evidence of the good that comes to us from the association of the apostles with the Saviour, or that comes to us in the experience of

countless millions who since their time have found comfort and peace through their faith in Christ? Surely what has proved itself to be of value in this life for multitudes of men of all conditions and of all races, is not unworthy the attention of gifted men now living. Their faith is not to be set aside as a fancy, the hopes they cherished as nothing better than a dream.

If the facts of the change produced by the acceptance of the gospel cannot be denied, if the change wrought in character is always for the better, if we see pure characters emerge from among the most vicious, if what is low and degraded is rejected because of love for Christ and the desire to serve Him, if, instead of seeking to injure others, there is a desire to help them, reason demands that the causes of these changes be sought for and when found be carefully considered. This is what the most thoughtful people in our churches are eager that the many outside them should do. . . . They are confident that if this were done, faithfully and conscientiously, nearly all of those who are now taking no part with them in the work of extending the gospel, would join in their efforts and by their suggestions and their personal assistance add to its power and hasten the coming of the kingdom of God.

X. OUR PLACE IS THE ONE WE OCCUPY

Our place in the world. What is it? Not a place which has come to us by chance. The universe is full of thought. All that is material in it is under the control of law. Many of these laws have been discovered. Others are coming to light as research continues. Some that had been taken to be final and universal are superseded or modified, and others of broader application put into their place. We find, indeed, that we can go nowhere in the universe with our investigations, without finding indications of thought. And this thought as its creations show is not so unlike our thought as to render our relation to its author unnatural or impossible. If He by whom it is exercised is not like ourselves, we are like Him, at least in those qualities which constitute personality, in reason, character and purpose. If there are no words which we can employ to describe Him, yet we can see that He is, and observation and experience teach us that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Our place in the universe, then, is the place we are now occupying. Our work in it is to do the best that can be done for ourselves and for others, to make the best possible use of our inheritance

and pass it on to those who come after us. In some way we are very near to a Supreme Being, that He is speaking to us through conscience, and through our longing for a larger and better life than we now lead. We discover that it is the great things in life that interest us most, that as our outlook widens, we feel more keenly our relation to the invisible and the more fully convinced that our destiny is not realized in this world or in the few years that make up our stay in it. Christ seeks to establish such relations between ourselves and Him whom He calls His Father, that we also shall call Him Father, and at all times be conscious of His care and love.

XI. AGNOSTICS AND MATERIALISTS

Are we agnostics? Are we willing to take refuge in ignorance? There have been many theories of man and of the world, and of their relation to each other. There are those who look upon the world as a machine, wonderfully complex, yet running accurately because constructed according to a law which perfectly serves its needs. What mind is behind this law, or who is responsible for its execution, we are not told. We only know that this law is universal in its action, and, so far as we can see, is to be permanent in its application. But so far as knowing what, or whence, or why, this law is, we confess we do not know. We are content to look upon ourselves as agnostics, as beings who have come from the earth itself, in accordance with a well-defined law which at present we do not understand, but which patient study may yet reveal.

But the operation of law in the world, mechanical though it be, is suggestive of life. The world is not a dead world. Though forms of life change and pass away, life itself does not necessarily perish. That of which life made use remains with us. The organic feeds upon the inorganic, each higher form of life in the organic world upon

that which is below it. Man who seems to be the climax of development feeds upon all that is below or around him. Yet for all this no higher cause is sought by many than the mechanical. If this does not quite satisfy or answer our questions about man and his exact relation to this world or to the universe, there are those who shake their heads and say, "We do not know, We never can know, We must be content to remain what we are, agnostics."

Not all believers in this mechanical theory of the world, however, are willing to be known as agnostics. Some go farther than this. They are confident that this world and everything pertaining to it is material and perishable, that man is material also, and will live his life here and cease to be. This life is all. Generations come and go. Although later generations owe something to those which have preceded the one to which they belong, even if there be no end to this movement, there is no other immortality than that which is cherished in memory. Our future life is in what the few who have known us, or heard of us, may think of us. With such theories no real explanation of what man is can be given. Nor is any explanation necessary. We are as a flower of the field. The wind passeth over it, and it is gone.

But notwithstanding our difficulties and the ease with which we drift into agnosticism or strive to

content ourselves with a mechanical and material philosophy of the world and of life, we are not satisfied. The question, "What is man?" constantly rises up and demands an answer. We continue to ask, "What is our relation to this world? Why is life here so brief? Is there nothing more for us than what comes to us between the cradle and the grave? Are we not more than beasts of the field, or the fowls of the air? Does our sense of duty, our feeling that there is in us something besides matter, mean nothing? Is there no such thing as spirit in distinction from matter? Has all the development which has taken place in the world, which is now our home, been without a purpose, without any suggestion or direction from a creative mind? It cannot be. We fall back, therefore, on the thought and the belief in the existence of an intelligent, powerful, first cause, personal because possessing intelligence and will (not necessarily having form and location), but capable of thought, able to bring the universe into being, and put it under law, even if we cannot discover for what purpose that law exists.

We believe there is a purpose. What that purpose is, science does not inform us: history does not inform us: philosophy gives us no certain knowledge. Our own conjectures we do not like to trust. Where, then, shall we go to ascertain? Where but to the gospel, led thither by that re-

religious sense with which every one who comes into the world is endowed. The gospel gives a satisfactory answer, and to a philosophical mind only when it reduces the gospel to its lowest terms as a message which coming through Christ establishes a close and loving relation between the Father and His child.

Is it asking too much of men whom we honor, whose intellectual ability we recognize, with whose moral lives we find no fault, who seem to be in harmony with that moral order which we believe governs the world, but who appear to us to be depriving themselves of the chiefest privilege in living, consciousness of the presence of God, that they test the power of the gospel for themselves and in their daily lives? They that do the will of God, we are told, shall know of the doctrine. We discover truth by experimenting with it, by making trial of it in our own experience. Why not do the same with the gospel of Christ? We are living in times which test manhood. Even so-called Christian nations accept principles and approve conduct which savages might condemn. We are asked to sacrifice that which we deem best and most precious. Our young men and our young women are serving their country on battle fields, as soldiers and as nurses. Our homes are full of sorrow, for youth has been taken and the hopes which confidently rested on it have been dashed to the

ground. The nation is in peril. All that is noblest and most desirable in civilization is threatened with destruction. Wisdom, courage, endurance, confidence, are needed by us all. Where shall we find these great qualities if not by recognizing our relation to God and receiving from Him the strength and comfort which faith in Him and His government of world can give? We need God. Why not seek to find Him and in a way which many witnesses tell us does not fail?



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