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ARTICLE VII.

THE INFLUENCE OF JESUS CHRIST IN
CIVILIZATION.

BY THE REV. NEWELL DWIGHT HILLIS, D.D.

THE soul, like the body, thrives through nourishment. Mind and heart hunger for food, and find it in the best qualities of the best men who have gone before. History stores up the bravest deeds and noblest thoughts of the heroes of yesterday as soul food for the youth of to-day. The Greek general bade his parents bring their children up—not upon milk, but upon the memories of soldierly ancestors. Always it has been the necessity of life that children and youth should look upward toward illustrious masters and models. Each Pitt and Burke stimulates himself by tales of eloquence and oratory. Each young Correggio lingers long before his master's easel. Each Keats or Shelley turns eager feet toward the great bard's home. History is not a mausoleum of dead men, but a granary storing up for future generations the choicest spirits of past ages.

When a nation has no heroes to nourish greatness in its youth, God raises up some poet to create them. Thus the blind bard hung Achilles in the sky above the race of Grecian savages. Straightway thousands felt the drawing of that great heart; just as the ocean, without knowing the cause, is lifted forward, following the planets. Soon the ideal Achilles repeated himself in the real orators and artists, statesmen and philosophers of Athens. Plutarch thought the iron and granite in the hills of Sparta repeated

themselves in the Spartan warriors. We know that the single root brought from Africa by the Spanish traveler repeated its unexampled size and color in all the vineyards of Spain. Thus one great man like Pericles or Cato, like John Huss or William Tell, like Vane or Hampden, like Brown or Lincoln, repeats himself in the new and larger manhood of his nation. When God wants to create a revolution or secure a sudden forward movement in society, he sets some great man into the midst of the people, and, looking upward, the generations are lifted to his level. The measure of civilization for a nation is found in the number and quality of its heroes and leaders.

SOCIAL PROGRESS.

Social progress through lifting up a master and model has always been the divine method. Here nature lends us a thousand interpretations. Ours is a world in which rain and snow, falling to the ground, must be lifted up and passed through bough and branch before water reddens in the wine's purple flood, or drips in the golden juices of the orange. In the forests the carbon and iron of the soil must be lifted up, to be hardened into masts for ships or timbers for temples. In the fields the wheat stalk lifts up the phosphates and condenses them into the rich, brown berry. By ropes and pulleys Phidias lifted the most perfect statue of his time, the "Pallas Athene," to its place upon the Acropolis, where its crown of gold and ivory, reflecting the sun's rays, first welcomed the Athenian mariner home again. Lifted from the quarries, stone and marble become temples and cathedrals. Lifted up by the author, meaningless words become poems and dramas. Standing upon the horizon, the sun lifts from the sea its whitest mists, lifts from the land the golden harvest, lifts from space the heavy planets.

Naturally, therefore, we expect social progress to be

achieved through the lifting up of good men and strong. In accordance with this method, the martyred Cranmer was made heroic, and, thrusting his arm into the fire, he lifted up an example that made the multitudes strong for achieving religious liberty. This multitude of brave women, going into the Crimea with the Red Cross movement and mercy; those nurses kindling their fires upon the edge of battle-fields; those who make their homes among the poor of tenement-house districts, remind us that long ago God caused Mary Ware, serving in the fever-stricken homes of Durham, and Florence Nightingale, nursing the English soldiers in the hospitals of the East, to be lifted up in the presence of the world's women. And, having by this method achieved great results for liberty, culture, and human happiness, God caused to be lifted up before man's mind and heart the soul's Saviour and Master. It need not surprise us, that straightway everything deepest in man's faculties and finest in his feelings responded to the inspiring influences and the stimulating example. When the sun stands upon the horizon, all the birds waken, and rise to sweet song and lofty flight; all the seeds bestir themselves, and push upward toward the light; all the buds unroll their crimson secrets; then the very sands blossom, and all rifts in the mountains respond with blooms beautiful and brilliant. Passing backward o'er the pathway of the ages, we see Christ's mighty, majestic heart, glowing and all-glorious, standing forth, to sow the world with light and joy, even as o'er the planets the sun scatters warmth and atmosphere.

WAXING FAME OF CHRIST.

The waxing fame of Christ is the most striking fact of our era. His star is causing all others to pale. Indeed, the time seems rapidly approaching when society will have but one hero and king, at whose feet humanity will empty

all its songs and flowers, its prayers and tears. In the triumphal procession of the Roman conqueror, kings and princes walked as captives in the emperor's train. Thus all the greatest men of the past generation seem to have joined Christ's triumphal procession. Let us call the roll of the great. Among Carlyle's last words were these: "The tidings of the most important event ever transacted in this world is the life and death of the Divine Man in Judæa, at once the symptom and cause of innumerable changes to all people in the world." By acclamation John Ruskin will be voted the first place among the English prose writers of the last two centuries. But Ruskin says his life has been dedicated, not to "the study of the beautiful in face and flower, in landscape and gallery, but to an interpretation of the truth and beauty of Jesus Christ." Another modern humanist is Matthew Arnold. But, dying, Matthew Arnold said: "Christ came to reveal what righteousness really is. For nothing will do except righteousness, and no other conception of righteousness will do except Christ's conception of it—his method and secret." All will confess that James Martineau is the successor of Theodore Parker in influence. But Martineau asserts that Christ must be called "the regenerator of the human race." "The world has changed," he says, "and that change is historically traceable to Christ." We all know that Shakespeare, perhaps the greatest intellect ever known in its wide and many-sided splendor, paid the lowliest reverence to Christ in passage after passage. But all the great poets of our age—Lowell and Longfellow, Browning and Tennyson—unite in saying:—

"Thou seemest human and divine;
The highest, holiest manhood thou;
Our wills are ours, we know not why;
Our wills are ours to make them thine."

Recently, in announcing his purpose to write a story of Christ's life, the distinguished author, Hall Caine, said that

he had spent all his life accumulating material for this proposed book, and that he had no higher ambition than to be associated in some humble way with the name and fame of Jesus Christ. By common consent Mr. Gladstone is the most sublime figure among the statesmen of our century. There is something deeply pathetic in the fact, that this statesman dedicated his closing years to the study of the teachings of Christ. The great premier seemed to feel that his laurel leaves won in the forum would soon fade, and with wistful pathos he said he desired to "weave a wreath for Him whose name is secure" and shines like a star.

MEETING AT THE CROSS.

At last the time seems to be coming when Unitarian and Trinitarian meeting will find common ground and, meeting at the cross, clasp hands of brotherhood. How striking these words, which William H. Channing, after long wandering in the arid desert of speculation, sent recently to Mr. Frothingham, the Unitarian writer: "Once again I sought comfort with the blessed company of sages and saints of the Orient and Hellas—with *Loa-Tszee* and *Kung-Fu-Tszee*; with the writers of the *Bhagava-Geeta* and the *Dhamma-Bada*; of the hymns of ancient *Avesta* and the modern sayings and songs of the *Sufis*, with radiant *Plato* and heroic *Epictetus*. Once more they refreshed and re-inspired me as of old. But they did something better. Hand in hand they brought me up to the white marble steps, to the crystal baptismal font, and the bread and wine crowned communion table—aye, to the cross in the chancel of the Christian temple—and as they laid their hands in benediction on my head they whispered, 'Here is your real home. We have been but your guides in the desert to lead you to fellowship with the Father and the Son in the spirit of holy humanity. Peace be with you.' And so, my brother, once again, and with purer, profounder,

and tenderer love than ever, like a little child, I kissed the blood-stained feet and hands and sides of the hero of Calvary and laid my head on the knees of the gentlest of martyrs, and was uplifted by the embracing arms of the gracious elder-brother, and in the kiss of mingled pity and pardon found the peace I sought, and became a Christian in experience, as through a long life I had hoped and prayed to be. Depend upon it, dear Frothingham, there is on this small earth ball no reality more real than this central communion with God in Christ, of which the saints of all ages in the church bear witness."

And these words are typical of the spirit of the age. All political economy is being rewritten in the light of the Sermon on the Mount, says the greatest of economic writers. He is increasingly the inspiration of our charities and philanthropies. All the great social movements of our era are centering about Him. Already his teachings are the watchwords of coming revolutions. Reform, duty, art, music, statesmanship, philosophy—all are captives marching in Christ's triumphal procession up the hill of time.

MAN'S VICES WILL DECLINE.

In nature, as the summer waxes the winter wanes, and the lengthening of the days means the shortening of the nights. This fact encourages within us the belief, that, as Christ's principles advance, man's vices will decline. In our world, causes are invariably followed by their appropriate results, and this law asks us to expect that so prodigious a cause as the life and teaching of Jesus Christ will be followed, of necessity, by strange effects upon man's happiness and character. In times of storm rivers often overflow their banks, and, spreading over the rich valleys, sweep away the houses, drown the cattle, and, when the waves have retreated, leave behind pastures buried in mud, and fields all covered with wrecks and desolation. Thus

the pages of Juvenal and Pliny and Lucian tell us of days when the floods of vice poured their dark and turbulent streams through the streets of all the ancient cities. Pliny tells us that the clouds of ashes falling from Vesuvius buried Pompeii and Herculaneum under thirty feet of ashes. This burial seems to have embalmed for our age that ancient civilization. The excavations in the streets where Pliny used to walk exhibit to us ancient art and ancient vice, rich homes and defiled inmates, beauteous statues and vicious sculptors, the cultivated intellect, but the darkened conscience.

Journeying up the Nile to Thebes and Memphis, our travelers are amazed to find that hideous vices were once worshiped as gods in those cities, where splendor and sin were united, like gold and mud, in the same image. We remember also that Cicero, who argues so eloquently for the rights of the poet Archias, also used his eloquence to defend a gladiatorial fight in which a thousand slaves were slain to satisfy the bloodthirsty instincts of eighty thousand of the leading ladies and gentlemen of that so-called "golden age." Lecky speaks of ten vices in Cicero's day, only two of which remain—intemperance and the social evil. It seems hard to realize that a few hundred years ago the sale of an estate in England carried with it the people on the land, and that a little earlier the Saxon hero used his enemy's skull for a drinking-cup. When Charlemagne marched through France, he found multitudes whose religion it was to eat dirt and roll their persons daily in the black mud. But a few Sunday evenings ago a young Sioux Indian stood in one of our great pulpits, and told of his ambitions for the homes and schools and churches of his people in words of such simple and majestic eloquence that he held spellbound an audience of nearly two thousand people. Yet, from the days when Ponce de Leon first landed in Florida to these modern times,

when the frontier line of civilization has advanced into the Dakotas, each newly discovered tribe of Indians has appeared offering innocent children as sacrifices and by strange incantations trying to appease the world devil. The Odyssey tells us that when Ulysses was pursuing the monster to slay it, the warrior traced the serpent by a black mark left upon the grass and flowers. Thus these monsters called vices have crawled like serpents down the aisles of time. Upon all the ages and nations vices have made as deep, black marks. But some hand has slain nearly all of these defiling monsters. With Guizot, let us gladly confess that the advance of Christ's teachings has been so closely followed by the decline of vice as to compel the logical mind to associate them in the relation of cause and effect.

NEW ERA FOR HUMANITY.

Doubtless Christ's emphasis of individual worth has done much to usher in the new era for humanity. When Queen Victoria celebrated her golden anniversary, the gifts sent her were such as were thought to become a queen and empress. Each book was bound in gold, each texture held shining threads, and the very boxes were inlaid with pearls and jewels; and to Christ belonged such majesty of mingled beauty and strength and gentleness that society felt that the human soul could scarcely be painted in colors too rich for which such a one as Christ had lived and died. His enthusiasm for humanity immediately began to make itself felt. A glorious sense of human brotherhood moved outward over the earth like an advancing summer. If the emperors and the kings did not at once descend from their thrones, the slaves and the serfs did begin to rise to the level of those who held the scepter. It was not so much a crumbling of thrones or a falling of crowned heads as it was an upbuilding of the common people. In analyzing

Burns' song, "A man's a man for a' that," the scholars trace it back to Christ's parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Before Christ's searching vision the purple and the fine linen fell away from Dives, and his rags fell away from the beggared Lazarus. Christ placed his finger upon the soul, capitalized manhood, and made the name of man a title superior to that of ruler and lord. Soon, because men were equals and brothers, the church adopted the same ritual for high and low, bond and free. Emperor Constantine and his rude soldiers knelt together before the same minister, and in baptism received alike the cleansing flood. The marriage ceremony that bound with golden chains prince and princess was used also for servant and maid. In the solemn hour of death the words, "I am the resurrection and the life," were read over the bier of kings and paupers alike. Thus Christianity assaulted the vanity of the heart through its outer trappings, even as the sun assaults an armor of ice. The old proverb was, "Call a man a thief, and he will rob you." The new proverb becomes, "Trust a man, and he will not disappoint you." Christ unfurled the flag of equality above palace and slave market. He waved the golden rule above each law and statute-book. He caused the state to set guardian angels beside each sleeping babe. Above each doorway for vice and crime he wrote the words, "Blessed are the pure in heart." Soon society began to forsake the paths of vice and crime, and turned glad feet into the way that led unto happiness and virtue.

GERMAN PEASANT'S DREAM.

Those who were of royal birth felt they must not live like slaves. The Germans have a poem of the transformation of a cottage. While the peasant slept in his chair he dreamed, and, lo, the thatched roof was lifted up and became the roof of a temple. The little cracked windows

became large, arched, and filled with colored glass. The low walls gave place to glorious paintings. The fireplace became a golden altar, over which bowed the angel forms of his children departed and dead. Oh, beautiful story, picturing for us that strange transformation that passed over society after Christ taught the doctrine of individual worth and divine sonship.

Christianity, while chiefly busying itself with teaching the art of right living and of character building here, as a preparation for the life hereafter, has accomplished many incidental results for man's happiness and welfare. Orchards are planted primarily for one purpose—to secure food and fruit against the long winter. But having met the requirements of hunger, the orchards go on to delight the eye with blossoms, to fill the air with perfume, to provide grateful shade for man and beast, and homes for countless birds. Thus Christianity is a tree that bears indeed the fruit of immortal life, but it bears also a thousand other fruits for the life that now is. By reason of the great themes with which it is concerned—themes called God, law, mind, conscience, truth, beauty—Christianity early developed an affiliation for education and learning. To advance its principles and defend them, to secure wise advocates for its truths, it founded colleges, schools, and literatures. Having educated teachers for the sanctuary, it began to expand its plans, and came to include the training of poets and jurists, of physicians and scientists. From the day when the boy Christ remained in the temple to converse with the wise men, Christianity has been the friend of the mind and an advocate of the increase of knowledge. Nourished in its stimulating atmosphere, such minds as those of Bacon and Milton and Angelo, and thousands of illustrious compeers, have come with genius enriched by the stimulating atmosphere in which they have lived. Where other religions have produced here

and there a single mediocre mind, Christianity has produced during like periods a thousand giants in the realm of philosophy or art or learning.

CHANGES MADE BY CHRISTIANITY.

Single minds do exist in the history of China or India or Africa, but they exist just as occasional palm-trees and springs are found, at intervals of hundreds of miles, in the Sahara desert. But entering moral deserts like England in the year 590, and Germany in 700, Christianity has changed the climate for nations, and made genius and greatness indigenous. To this enriching influence upon learning must be added Christianity's natural affiliation with the fine arts. To describe that eternal summer land beyond the grave, John has swept together all gold for the streets, all gems for its walls, all cool fountains and streams, all sweet song, all noble speech. So beautiful is that realm, said Paul, that eye had not seen or ear heard, nor could mind conceive its splendors. The task, therefore, of portraying that ideal land placed every artist upon his mettle. Architects taxed themselves to build cathedrals worthy of Him whom the heaven of heavens could not contain. Painters vied with each other in creating seraphs and angels beautiful enough to adorn the walls of Christ's sanctuary. Sculptors went everywhither searching out marble white enough for Christ's forehead.

Each Handel taxed himself for music sweet enough for his hymns of praise. Soon the greatness of Christianity's themes lent greatness to the minds studying them. For great thoughts make great thinkers, while petty thoughts make insignificant thinkers. It was the woe, the grief of three million slaves that lent eloquence to Wendell Phillips. It was the sorrows of the poor of England that lent eloquence to John Bright. It was the Madonna that made Titian, and the paradise that made Milton. Take the seed idea and the mother principles of Christian-

ity out of the last thousand years of time, and society's storehouses, called galleries and libraries, would be emptied. An English jurist tells of falling asleep and dreaming that every Christian idea had been stricken out of his law-books. Opening the familiar books, he found one-third of each page blank, and all pages meaningless. Thus, if by divine fiat every Christian idea should be blotted out of the library, the museum, the statute-books, all would become meaningless. The very structure of civilization would crumble into a heap of ruins. Eloquence, songs, laws, reforms, civic virtues, would all fall with the fall of the great ideas that produced them.

INFLUENCE ON HOPE OF PROGRESS.

This uplifted name is also exerting a profound influence upon the world's hope of progress. Frederick Schlegel was deeply impressed by the thought that all other religious systems are living upon the prestige of the past. Looking backward, they borrow their light from "a golden age" forever gone. "The gods hate the prosperous," was the ancient proverb. And so with profound melancholy the Greeks and Romans looked longingly backward toward a greatness that was rapidly receding, for they felt that the future held for them only awful and inevitable catastrophe. Each disciple of Buddha or Confucius also speaks wistfully of a departed glory. For Christ alone "the golden age" is in the to-morrow. With buoyant and aspiring spirit, with confident and unyielding expectancy of a general and certain progress of society toward liberty and light, Christianity moves steadily forward into the future. And as a plan turns a pile of bricks into a house, turns a mob into an army, turns scattered sounds into a symphony, turns warring sections into a nation, so this unfolding plan and purpose of God unifies events, constrains opposing nations, gives each century its stint, gives a definite goal to history. That conviction of Christianity's ultimate triumph never

failed the fathers or martyrs. It lent the soldier his unconquerable courage; it lent the hero and reformer his adamant will; it lent the sage his stainless life. Beginning a mere dot on the map, Christianity has now subdued and bannered whole continents. It began at Olivet with the twelve disciples. In forty days there were three thousand. When John died in Ephesus there were five hundred thousand; to-day these have become four hundred million. Napoleon said: "He who does not attack and plunge his standard into the thick of the enemy's ranks must soon pull down his flag." Whatever system, therefore, is sending the thousands of scholars, professors, physicians, editors, into other nations, holds the keynote of progress and will sooner or later mount to the world's throne. To-day our young lawyers study Sir Henry Maine's "Ancient Society," "Ancient Law," "Early Institutions."

FUTURE OF INDIA.

But these are lectures written by a jurist in the law school of Calcutta, founded by Christian teachers only a hundred years ago. There are three million other young men and women in India in Christian colleges, academies, and schools. Soon this will mean a free press, libraries in every village of that tropic land, railways, manual training schools, free institutions—and after that "the flood" of knowledge. And so of Africa and China; the columns of light are marching straight for the heart of each continent. Christianity is a young giant that in three centuries leaped to the throne of the Cæsars. The rate of progress that has prevailed since Shakespeare's day will in three centuries more seat Christianity upon every great throne of our earth. But can it conquer the civilized barbarians at home? Has it power to stay lawlessness in the city, to check the ravages of poverty and intemperance? There is a proverb that "What has been done can be done." Did Christianity find the finest scholars and noblest ladies of

Rome attending gladiatorial shows, and does it now guard the very horses from cruelty? Did it find in the finest temples of Corinth vices worshiped and defiled that now it is shameful to mention? The past at least is secure. And because it has ideals for the city, the forum, and the market, Christianity's future is certain. It is urged that today in Europe there are nations armed to the teeth and soldiers awaiting orders to march.

But what if at one time there were four Christian men on the throne in Berlin and Paris, in Vienna and St. Petersburg? Would not the barracks and citadels be emptied, the soldiers drop their bayonets to turn toward the fields with the pruning-knives and sickles? What if all our institutions and people should seek to incarnate Christ's example? No more war, no more clanking of chains in prisons, no more lazy, thriftless poverty, no crushing monopoly, no cruelty, no harsh judgments, each bearing another's weakness. A beautiful dream! But ideals rule the world. And Christ's ideal is the prophecy of what shall be when men and events have hastened on toward that one far-off event toward which the whole creation moves. True, the ideal may be realized slowly. Nature changes no climate rapidly. Physically man does not sleep midst snow-drifts to waken midst roses. The difference between the icicle and a ripe cherry represents for the planet a journey of many millions of miles. And in morals with God a thousand years are as one day. God has time enough and to spare. Take no counsel, therefore, of crouching fear. It is safer to trust the highest hopes than the lowest fears. The century plant takes a hundred years for root and trunk, but blossoms, as it were, in the night. And nations, also, shall be born into culture and character in a day. Soon every knee shall bow to the name that is above every name, and he whom God has lifted to the world's throne shall in turn lift the world to a place beside him.