

## ARTICLE IV.

## THE CHRISTIAN LEAVEN.

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IN the familiar parable of the leaven (Matt. xiii. 33) Jesus Christ seems to teach that in the course of time the whole world will become in some degree Christian. The phrase "kingdom of heaven" is used by Him often to denote His own and God's moral and religious power in the world, or to include those persons, whether organized into a church or not, who acknowledge His supremacy. For in the "kingdom of heaven" it is He who is to be King. But not a king of the ordinary sort with crown and scepter, government and army. "My kingdom," He told Pilate, "is not of this world." Nevertheless, though His kingdom is not "*of* this world," it is *in* this world, like the good seed that is sown, and grows up mixed with tares. Again, it begins as a small thing, a grain of mustard seed, and grows into a great plant. And in the parable of the leaven the promise is indicated, that the small amount of the leaven of the kingdom, though hidden in a large quantity of meal, will leaven it all.

Now this may not be the exact meaning of the parable. Many interpretations have been given to some of the sayings of Jesus. Do the facts of Christian history and experience, for nearly nineteen centuries, give good evidence that the Christian leaven will cause the whole world to rise?

It is rather the fashion now, even among church people, to

take the negative side of this question. Many books and other writings of late years have discussed defects in our civilization, weaknesses in the churches, and vices in humanity, to a previously unheard-of extent, while the outbreak of the Great War has led to some expressions of utter pessimism. Many individuals have suffered disillusionment in passing from youth to mature life, in regard to the general conditions of our time and country. They have perhaps thought at one time that in America political ideals and practice had reached their ultimate perfection, that decency, honesty, and truth had forever driven away their opposites, that pure religion and undefiled was the belief and practice of all people of any worth, high or low; and they have perhaps read pityingly of the evils and injustices of days long past, or lands far away — of Assyrian cruelty and Roman venality, of Chinese corruption and African lawlessness; and then perhaps they have learned gradually that the supposedly old and far-away evils appear one by one in our own land, that among our hundred millions of people are some who practice any vice, some who are capable of any crime, some who shrink not from inflicting any wrong, that ever stained humanity from the beginning of time: and it may be hard to say that this age and this land are a part of the kingdom of heaven, that in them is working the leaven of Christ's teachings, and that one day they will be all leavened.

Nevertheless, it is possible to find abundant evidence of the working of the uplifting leaven. Of course the previous parables show that Christ did not predict a time when all should be righteous upon this earth, and when human society in all its aspects should be ideally perfect. But He does seem in this parable and elsewhere to predict that the kingdom of heaven will ultimately touch every human being and modify

for the better every phase of human activity. Let us survey the field, externally and internally, for general evidence that this is taking place.

In former times, when Christian scholars were fond of looking for hidden allegories, it seemed clear to some that the "three measures of meal" of the parable were Asia, Africa, and Europe, nor would such scholars feel that the Americas and Australia spoil the analogy, for were they not peopled from the three regions mentioned? Certain it is that from early times the Christian leaven began working in each of the three. The leading Christian cities of the three continents, Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome, were early exalted to the high position of patriarchates. In the fourth century the Christian leaven had worked mightily in the Roman Empire, and had gone to the Germans on the north, the Abyssinians on the south, and the Syrians scattering far to the east in Parthia and Persia and beyond. The protection of a great government has often helped much in the spread of a great religion, and while Rome remained strong, Christianity gained adherents with rapidity. But there was a loss of spirituality which was hastened by the barbarian invasions, even though most of the invaders were also Christians. Mohammed taught at Mecca and Medina what he thought to be a third stage in the same religion, reforming and completing Judaism and Christianity. In some respects his teaching was a Christian heresy, but actually it became a great obstacle to the spread of the Christian leaven, and stretched a barrier across the entire north of Africa and the southwest of Asia, which was to stand with hardly a break until less than one hundred years ago. But in Europe the Christian leaven spread slowly northward, conquering one land after another, until by the end of the fourteenth cen-

tury all were accounted Christian. Before this consummation the lands of western Europe had sent in the Crusades successive great armies to Palestine, in the effort to retake the Holy Land and break the Moslem barrier. They failed, but among the consequences of their efforts came the attempts to pass around the Moslems to the north or west and south, and destroy them from behind, and Christianize the rest of the world. At the end of the fifteenth century the effort to pass around the Moslems succeeded. Less than fifty years later the Jesuits began their extensive attempts to convert the whole world to Roman Catholic Christianity. As long as Spain, Portugal, and France played a great part in Asia and the Americas, the Jesuits made progress. But these Catholic nations were in time humbled by the Protestant Dutch and English, while the Russian Greek orthodox power pushed across the north of Asia. A little more than a century ago began the great organized work of Protestant missions, which has carried the Christian leaven into every untouched land, and which is perhaps hardly past the beginning of its successes. European powers, whose peoples profess the Christian religion, now control four fifths of the earth's surface. Moslem political rule has been reduced to a small fraction of its former area. All nations are more or less widely open to Christian influence. Truly, if we look only at geography and population, the three measures of meal would seem to be already almost all leavened. Christianity is now accounted far in the lead among the religions of the world, with about 570 million adherents, approximately one third of the total population. In Europe there are 380 million Christians, in North America 115 million, in South America 40 million, in Asia 30 million, in Africa

9 million. The gain each year, by natural growth and by conversion, amounts to several millions.

Of course it is possible that increase of area and numbers has led regularly to diminished intensity in the Christian influence. Let us examine this question summarily.

The intensity of Christian influence is not easily measured. What shall be our standard? If a very high one be chosen, the situation will seem needlessly discouraging. But if we look for every result of the Christian influence, there will be much reason for encouragement. Acceptance of the name of Christ, belief in His teachings, and especially an advance toward practice of His summary of the law and the prophets, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself,"—such are the simplest tests of the Christian influence.

Has there been gain or loss in Christian religious life? No doubt there have been marked variations between periods of deep religious experience and times of reliance upon liturgy and formalism, and between emphasis upon particularly worded creeds and upon active benevolence. The whole church declined after Christianity became the Roman state religion. The same thing has been true of extensive portions of the Christian communion, as the entire Greek Orthodox Church in recent centuries, the Roman Catholic Church in the tenth and fifteenth centuries, and the Syrian Church after the thirteenth century. But the Greek Church when it converted the Slavs, the Roman Church in the Counter Reformation and the nineteenth century, and most of the Protestant churches in their early years and in the nineteenth century, have had periods of vigorous spiritual energy. Christianity has thrown out peculiar heresies,—Arianism and Mani-

chæism in the old time, Mormonism and Christian Science lately. At one time the church has been given to prayer, at another to attending services, at another to fasting and flagellation, again to heeding preachers, sometimes to war for religion, now to charity, philanthropy, and other organized activities. Always there have been hypocrites, always time-servers and climbers, and mercenary and cowardly priests and ministers. But always, and more now than ever, there have been faithful devout souls, humble, meek, and self-sacrificing members, fearless and capable officers and clergymen. Church members are constantly as a whole more intelligent, efficient, and devoted, and ministers as a whole more thorough, conscientious, and humanly interested in their people. The present church is not perhaps enough given to religious meditation and prayer. There is often recession in some regards at the same time with gain in other respects. But in all its branches Christianity shows even now great strength and continuing life, whether it be seen in the superstitious devotion of the Russian, the martyrdom of the Armenian, the faith that God is with them in battle of the German, Frenchman and Englishman alike, or the generous giving of the American.

On the political side, the Christian leaven has helped the world, slowly it may be but in many profound ways. The recognition of one God in place of many has been an element of unity and strength in every Christian nation, and it works steadily toward a union of all humanity, children of the same Father and therefore brothers. Jesus taught love toward enemies and non-resistance. The combination of the war-like Old Testament with the peaceful New Testament has, however, given many conscientious Christians justification for fighting. Christ seems to have been distinctly a pacifist

and not in favor of "preparedness." But Christianity has been in practice one of the warlike religions, a close second to Mohammedanism and Shintoism, and far less peaceful than Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. And most of its fiercest wars have been, not against the adherents of other religions, but against other Christians. The ethics of Christ provides a remedy for war, in love, forgiveness, and long-suffering. Until two years ago, great numbers of people in the civilized nations supposed that the last century at least had seen an approach to the abolition of war. Now they do not feel the same assurance. But war as never before is regarded as an unnecessary evil. The facts are similar as regards justice and honesty in political life. Christ's ethics would establish this, but many men who are Christian in most relationships fall far short in their political ideals. Nevertheless the American conscience in political matters has improved greatly of late. The whole world over, governmental theory and practice have been moving rapidly in the direction of mildness of punishments and general care for the welfare of the people. All this is in the Christian direction.

The utterances of Jesus as regards business life are sufficiently radical: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven." "Give to him that asketh thee." As for his example: "the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." The rich young ruler was bidden: "Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, . . . and follow me." In the Middle Ages, great numbers accepted to an extreme the point of view of Jesus in the parable: they gave away all. Hardly any one does so now. But the business world has undergone great changes. In Roman times the merchant was despised: Cicero said that no good thing could come out of a shop.

Medieval Christianity forbade the receiving of interest as sinful, and believed that a "just price" should contain only a moderate profit, and not all the profit attainable. Since Adam Smith at least, the principle of freedom, with each man's right to do the best possible for himself, has been the rule. This is very different from Christ's principle of loving our neighbor as ourself. Nevertheless, allowing for all selfishness and trickery in modern business, it is probable that business has never been conducted more fairly and beneficently than now. Good religious people have in their hands a remarkable share of the world's wealth, and they use vast amounts of it for all sorts of useful and benevolent purposes. If there be actually great injustice in the ownership and inheritance of wealth, this is because of the system of things and arrangements made by men in the past, rather than from a general desire of living men to be unjust to their fellows. At least one man of enormous wealth has come near to giving away all that he has, — if not to the poor, at any rate to the public. And whatever one may think of Socialism, and however some Socialists may decry religion or at least the organized Christian church, the whole vast socialistic movement, so strong in many lands, is full of the Christian spirit of the brotherhood of man.

A few words on the vast subject of the intellectual life of mankind. This has grown greatly through the Christian centuries. Philosophy and science have at times tried to go alone, disregarding religion in general or Christianity in particular. But this has always proved to be impossible for long. Many a philosophic system has flourished and passed away safely into the history of philosophy, while Christianity lives on, undiminished and vigorous. Most recent philosophic schemes involve as essential elements the chief ideas



of the Christian influence — the unity of God and the brotherhood of man — with most elements of the Christian ethics.

The artistic life of mankind has been profoundly affected by the Christian influence. In fact for over a thousand years the art of Christian lands was held captive by the church. The great Italian Renaissance was double, with a revival of pagan subjects and ideals, and at the same time an attainment of the grandest heights of Christian art. The great trio, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Michael Angelo, all used their genius in the Christian service. Calvinism, it is true, reacted so strongly against the world of sense and the practices of the Roman Church, that it largely cast art away for a time. But it has abandoned such a position. The truth remains that art in all its forms, expressing as it does the nature of man and the spirit of the time, regularly reveals the Christian influence in proportion as that influence is active in the world.

Considering family and social life, there is sometimes much mourning over numerous divorces and over irregularities and infidelities. Nevertheless all over this country and in all Christian lands, there is probably a constantly increasing proportion of ideal families, composed of a man and a woman who in their youth have kept themselves pure for each other, and who with their children dwell in harmony and the fear and love of God. There is also more general social life than ever, and though much of it is wasted over time-filling amusements that yield no measurable advantage, yet as a whole it reflects the spirit of benevolent feeling and mutually helpful brotherhood.

In this rapid survey of the Christian influence upon many sides of human life, it is clear that in that vast world-wide society which is greater than the sum of all its parts, the

teachings of Jesus have left their imprint everywhere. Sometimes it seems a mockery to speak of European or Western civilization as Christian, and yet the appellation is in a profound sense true. And this Christian European civilization is in our days rapidly becoming a world civilization, which in its turn seems destined to be deeply imbued with the Christian influence.

It would be possible to discuss at length the leavening of the individual Christian. Each child is a new being, and must be Christianized afresh. Herein lies a principal reason for the slowness of Christian progress. The improving environment tends, however, to make the task constantly easier. Especially does the vast and developing scheme of education introduce elements of the Christian influence. It is true that religious and ethical ideas are often given too small a place, a neglect which is more serious since parents tend to transfer all possible educational influence from the home to the schools. Under such conditions an increasing responsibility falls upon the church, to care in Sunday school, young people's societies, and the regular church services for the proper religious and moral training of children. This responsibility tends to be more fully met. Outside the church, children and adults are increasingly reached by home missions and other agencies, while in foreign lands the growing missionary work strives to satisfy an ever-increasing interest in Christian education and the Christian life.

In conclusion, it may be said that one of the strongest evidences of the progress of the heavenly kingdom is in the general Christian attitude toward the world. Christians of the early church felt themselves to be a few faithful in the midst of a very evil and hostile world. Even after the Roman Empire had adopted Christianity as its state religion, truly

believing Christians were often heartsick over conditions. In the confusion of the Middle Ages it was the fashion to despise the world, and long for speedy *release*, as it was called, so as to enter upon the joys of heaven. But the Christian of to-day can feel much more confident of the world. While discerning many and vast evils, he can still feel that it is *his* world, and on the whole friendly to him as a Christian. Even where it does not practice Christian principles, it is apt to look upon them as superior to its own. All the reaction involved in the Great War does not drive the world back to former conditions, except in a few temporary respects.

The Christian leaven is working powerfully in the world. It is the duty of every Christian, in all the relationships of life, to do his part to further the beneficent action. If in both its aspects the great command be heeded: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself": the outcome can safely be entrusted to God.