

THE
CHURCHMAN

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“DO WE BELIEVE?”¹

THE proprietors of the *Daily Telegraph* have done well to publish in book shape a selection from the extraordinary correspondence that deluged the Editor's box day by day for the last three months of 1904. In a note to this suggestive volume they inform us that at least nine thousand letters were received on this great question, and that if these had all been printed, together with the sermons to which they gave occasion, the total would have occupied two thousand five hundred columns of their journal!

The fact is unique; not only in English journalism, but in all literature. A great secular London “daily” suddenly became a confessional box; the world at large was invested for the nonce with the functions of the Confessor, and into its listening ear was poured this stream of heartfelt utterance—the cry of faith, of doubt, of despair. The most intimate perplexities and doubts were unfolded without reserve, and without shame or shyness. In no country in the world save one that is convincingly and honestly Protestant would this correspondence have been possible. Is it imaginable in Spain or Italy or France? We doubt very much whether even in the United States the *New York Herald* would have anticipated the wants of the mass of its readers by opening its columns after this fashion. Here, and here alone, such a correspondence is possible; and, much as there is to pain in this letter or that, the great outstanding fact is the correspondence itself, with all that it implies. Spiritual independence is the Briton's birthright; we have handed it

¹ A record of a great correspondence in the *Daily Telegraph*, with an introduction by W. L. Courtney, M.A., LL.D. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905.

over to our kinsfolk across the Atlantic, but we won it for ourselves. The result, of course, as this correspondence shows, is the utmost variety of religious belief or unbelief: in this volume there is nothing of sameness or uniformity; but if that fact may be deplored by the sincere Christian, it is far more than balanced by the gain to the national conscience. It is this spiritual independence, this right of private judgment, which is the correlative, and indeed the foundation, of that individualism which underlies our imperial prosperity. Two other facts are worth notice. One is that the bulk of these letters are written by men, not by women; the other is the vast preponderance of faith over unbelief.

This remarkable series was initiated by a letter from "Oxoniensis," complaining that the proceedings of the Church Congress, then just about to meet in Liverpool, were vitiated and rendered practically useless by its tacit assumption that we are all Christians. But, "Do we believe?" What is the good of discussing conclusions if the premises are rotten? The Church Congress says: "We believe." Well, the test is simple: Religion necessarily issues in Morality, and the particular morality inculcated by Christianity is summed up in the Sermon on the Mount. Measure, then, the morality of the nation against the morality of the Sermon, and it will be found not merely unlike, but antithetical. Its ideals are the very opposite of Christ's. What possible right have we, then, to the name of Christian? *Do we believe? What do we believe?*

I am not concerned to decide between the Bishop of London's view that this letter was "an attempt to make us practically ashamed of the Gospel of Christ," and the Dean of Westminster's, who is "grateful to the writer" for the personal form of his inquiry, and not less for his reserve in limiting its range. The really important question is whether "Oxoniensis," whatever his motive, is entitled to contrast the morality of those whom he defines as "the men and women of the world" with that of the Sermon, and then to ask: "Do we believe?" The truth is that the same Sermon makes it perfectly clear that discipleship to Christ, with its obligations of obedience to the laws of the kingdom, constitutes a real severance from "the men and women of the world." We are free to confess that these persons may to-day constitute the bulk of what is termed Christendom, but we much doubt whether they themselves would assert that they represented the Christianity inculcated by Christ. The real question at issue is not whether Christianity is a fraud, but whether the "men and women of the world" who bear the name first given at Antioch to men and women who emphatically were "not of the world" are

not frauds? And to this question, we take it, there can be but one answer.

But assuming for the moment that “Oxoniensis” is correct in his identification of Christendom and Christianity, he makes a not unusual mistake as to the character of the precepts in our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. He points to such words as, “Whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him twain” (Matt. v. 39-41). Now, I have often wondered what the results would by this time have been had the men and women “not of the world” literally and invariably translated such precepts into practice. I am disposed to think that the world, which has always bowed to the might of meekness, would long ago have admitted the reality, and have bent to the supremacy, of the kingdom of God. Such speculations, however, are needless. It is clear, as more than one correspondent urges, and as Archbishop Magee admitted, that foreign politics could not be conducted on these lines. “Homo” calls them “sweet, impossible counsels”; “Wheat and Tares” is bold enough to say that the ideals of the Sermon are for us to love, but not for us to follow: as if it were possible to love without attempting to follow.¹

But simply to say what might have been, and there to stop, is to “make us practically ashamed of the Gospel of Christ,” and to relegate the kingdom of God to the region of mere ideas. The mistake of all these writers, and of that large number of persons whom they represent, is to consider the precepts of the Sermon so many universal absolutes, and as literally binding as the precepts of the Decalogue. Of course, they are nothing of the kind. They are paradoxical in form, and purposely so, with a view to arresting attention. The command, “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” has for its object the setting up as an ideal the love which never fails. Its absolute realization in every, or indeed any,

¹ Some years ago one of my congregation was preaching in the open air. On the outskirts of the crowd stood a shady-looking individual, much dilapidated and without a coat. Like “Oxoniensis,” this man presently challenged the speaker’s honesty, telling him that he was a fraud: “Jesus Christ said, Give yer coat to ‘im as ‘asn’t one. Now, I ain’t got a coat, so give me yourn.” My friend at once responded by taking off his coat, which was as promptly put on by the other, who said as he went off: “Well, I’m a Catholic, but I ain’t got no prejudice.” My friend came home in his shirt-sleeves, not quite at his ease in mind or body, conscious that he had done a stupid thing, and presently asked my opinion about it. With such a questioner I felt it sufficient to point him to the maxim, “He that hath *two* coats, let him impart to him that hath none!”

disciple is impossible; but, nevertheless, every act prompted by love is the act of a son of God, a following in his Father's steps, an approximation, however faint, to God Himself. And this is the key to Christ's teaching. It may please some of the writers to the *Daily Telegraph* to represent our Lord as a Socialist, bidding the general renunciation of property; but that is a mere caricature of His teaching. In the Sermon on the Mount the kingdom of God is seen as a great social order; its supreme law is the law of love, for love is the solution of all social difficulties. The special cases drawn by Christ are simply so many ideal illustrations of how that law operates in the most homely situations. Had "Oxonienensis" understood this he would not have scolded "the men and women of the world," or have mistaken Christendom for Christianity.

Turning to the second part of the volume, we come to the letters classified under the head of "Unfaith." Of materialism, pure and simple, there is but little. Lady Florence Dixie, challenged to give her "valuable and courageous opinion," writes a letter upon the question which certainly deserves the latter of these epithets. But such writers appear to be as destitute of philosophy as they are of faith. Really thoughtful minds cannot be purely materialistic. It is seen with increasing clearness that matter is always synthetic with spirit, and that each acts and reacts upon the other. This has been well put by Schopenhauer: "Realism" (materialism), he writes, "which commends itself to the crude understanding by the appearance which it assumes of being matter of fact, really starts from an arbitrary assumption, and is therefore an empty castle in the air; for it ignores or denies the first of all facts—that all we know lies within consciousness. For that the *objective existence* of things is conditional through a subject whose ideas they are, and consequently that the objective world exists only as idea, is no hypothesis, and still less a dogma, or even a paradox set up for discussion; but it is the most certain and the simplest truth."¹

It is too much to hope that unbelief will not find new weapons wherewith to assail Christianity, but the old ones are certainly not merely old, but somewhat rusty. Spencer and Haeckel alike are behind the times, and it is comforting to find so strong an authority as Sir Oliver Lodge speaking of them both in the *Hibbert Journal* as "stranded by the tide of opinion, which has begun to flow in another direction." But, we repeat, there is little of this pure materialism in evidence in the "Do we believe?" discussion; on the con-

¹ "World as Will and Idea," Book I.

trary, there is everywhere evidence of a deep longing for something that materialism cannot give. Some of the writing, indeed, is intensely pathetic; as, for instance, that of "Anxious" on p. 257, which we subjoin in its entirety:

SIR,—I shall be very grateful if some one of your correspondents will help me. I am longing to know and find God. I feel as if I am in a dark, dark room, groping for someone I am told is there, and I grope on and on, and always grasp thin air.

How can I find Him, and be quite, quite sure that I have found Him?

I hear of people who say they receive great comfort from the Holy Communion, so I stay this service, but I am confident I receive no benefit.

I pray (because I read that if we do His will we shall know it) against fierce temptation, but the temptation remains; so what can I conclude but either there is no God or, if there be, He will have nothing to do with me? "Etoniensis" seems to have first believed because he found his prayers were answered. Mine are not, so that road is cut off. I feel if I do not soon find help I shall give up, and, as it appears a fact that we never stand still, I suppose I must drift to the bad.

ANXIOUS.

We remember being struck at the time by the way this letter was answered. Its deep human note struck a responsive chord; the replies were many, but they did not appear likely to be of much use to "Anxious." There was no appeal to Scripture, no pointing to the Atonement, no statement of God's way of salvation; but "Anxious" was bidden to "cheer up," or "grin and bear it," or "look at the bright side of life"—all of which poor Anxious had doubtless tried before he wrote his letter.

On the whole, this volume is stimulating and full of encouragement, though I lay it down with a feeling of disappointment that there were so few letters from the abler pens of those who have found God in His Son. Possibly, however, they did write and their letters were not inserted. In any case, it is clear that "Unfaith," so called, is far less prevalent than is generally supposed; and that, while there is plenty of "Doubt," there is far more "Faith." The following lines, culled from an American college magazine, appear to set forth the mental attitude of multitudes towards the things unseen and eternal—men who are "feeling after God if haply they may find Him," men who are on the way to faith, though not yet sure of its foothold—and they may fitly conclude this article:

A fire-mist, and a planet,
A crystal, and a cell,
A jelly-fish and a saurian
And caves where the cave-men dwell:
Then a sense of law and beauty
And a face turned from the clod;
Some call it "evolution,"
And others call it "God."

A haze on the fair horizon,
 The infinite tender sky,
 The ripe rich tracts of the cornfields,
 And the wild birds sailing high;
 And all over upland and lowland
 The charm of the golden rod:
 Some of us call it "autumn,"
 And others call it "God."

Like tides on a crescent sea-beach,
 When the moon is new and thin,
 Into our hearts high yearnings
 Come welling and surging in:
 Come from the mystic ocean,
 Whose rim no foot hath trod:
 Some of us call it "longing,"
 And others call it "God."

A picket frozen on duty,
 A mother starved for her brood,
 Socrates drinking his hemlock,
 And Jesus on the Rood;
 And millions who, humble and nameless,
 The straight hard pathway plod:
 Some call it "consecration,"
 And others call it "God."

A. E. BARNES-LAWRENCE.



HORT'S "CHRISTIAN ECCLESIA."

IN 1897 there was published the "Christian Ecclesia," a course of lectures on the early history and the early conception of the Ecclesia by the late Professor Hort, a book remarkable alike on account of the man, the method, and the conclusions. It is difficult to explain why this book should have apparently made so little impression, and that Evangelical Churchmen have seemingly been so slow to appreciate the magnificent support which it gives to their position in regard to the essential nature and character of the Church and the ministry. It is in the hope of drawing attention again to its claims and its timeliness, in view of the great controversy with sacerdotalism in our Communion, that I venture to point out briefly some of the salient points in Dr. Hort's position.

With Hort the love of truth was the master passion. He was dominated by a consuming desire to be perfectly fair and accurate in all that he wrote. This led him to write and rewrite; and after all his revision, still dissatisfied, he shrank from publication. Hence it has been that most of his books have only appeared since his death; but they have been found