

# THE GOSPEL CONFRONTS THE NATION

## II.—THE COMMUNITY.

### “NONE OF US LIVETH TO HIMSELF.”

By the REV. J. W. AUGUR, M.A.

*Vicar of St. Giles, Northampton.*

MY task is to relate the general subject of the Conference to the material and spiritual prosperity of the community in which we live. In this connection we can learn some important lessons from the present-day utterances of our leaders in literature and art, and in politics and industry as compared with those of the past. In 1611 (the date of the Authorized Version of the Bible) Francis Bacon wrote to King James I as follows: “Your people are military and obedient, fit for war and used to peace. Your Church is enlightened with good preachers—a heaven with stars.<sup>1</sup> Your nobility at a right distance between Crown and people . . . your servants in awe of your wisdom, in hope of your goodness. The fields growing from desert to garden . . . your merchants embracing the whole compass of the earth.” With this example of fulsome flattery before them, we are not surprised that the translators of the Authorized Version of the Bible struck the same note and began their eulogy, “to the most high and mighty Prince, James . . .” with the words, “Great and manifold were the blessings, most dread Sovereign, which Almighty God bestowed upon us the people of England, when first He sent Your Majesty’s Royal Person to rule and reign over us . . . the appearance of Your Majesty, as the sun in his strength, instantly dispelled supposed and surmised mists and gave unto all that were well affected exceeding cause of comfort; especially when we beheld the Government established in Your Highness and Your hopeful seed, by an undoubted title, and this also accomplished with peace and tranquillity, at home and abroad.” The only comment to be made is that within forty years the whole country was seething with rebellion, and the then king was swept from the Throne and beheaded.

Let us now make use of two modern illustrations. My first is taken from one of the last addresses delivered by Lord Baldwin before his resignation of the office of Prime Minister. It was on the Strain of Modern Industry, and in the course of his remarks he said, “I see a danger ahead that our people may become mechanized, not only in

<sup>1</sup> I think he must have had in mind the mysterious stars known as Nova, that appear for a time in the heavens and after rapidly attaining exceptional brilliance, gradually fade away and disappear.—J. W. A.

body, but mechanized in mind. I dread the loss of that independent individualist character which has made this nation what it is. I dread the growth of that materialistic view of life which, to my mind, is a danger both to body and soul. We must see to it that in some way we can preserve the character of our people to meet the changed conditions of the age, and see that our character triumphs over our environment."

My second illustration is found in the appeal recently issued by eighteen influential laymen to the men of good will in every part of the world. It makes two practical suggestions towards spiritual re-armament. In the first place it recognizes that no nation can find a lasting solution of its problems save in a spirit of co-operation with others. Secondly, though the word itself is not used, an appeal is made for the consecration of the entire nation to God in full submission to His Will. Dr. Grensted in his recent book on *This Business of Living*, has summed it up: "The Way of Life is also the Way of the Cross." There can be no doubt that if these illustrations represent generally the modern mind we can be thankful that our leaders to-day give much better and wiser advice than was customary in the seventeenth century.

The problem with which we are faced is an old one—How can character triumph over environment? We know that history is strewn with the wreckage of civilizations that have failed to adapt themselves to their environment and consequently gone under. The triumph does not come suddenly with the waving of a magic wand as is done by the fairy in a Pantomime. When environment changes too rapidly or too abruptly for adaptation to keep pace with it, there is extinction.

Those of us who have worked in industrial parishes have noticed the rapid changes in industry which have taken place during the past twenty years. Generally speaking the conditions of work are better but the rate of the mechanized production is tremendously increased. In the great factories of the Midlands with which I am familiar, there are thousands of girls whose work consists solely in watching noisy automatic machines producing at immense speed millions of nuts and bolts every day of the week. I am now living in Northampton. In 1830 a worker took two days to make a pair of shoes; in 1934 they could be made in an hour, and it is reported that there is now in existence a machine which can make shoes without any human intervention at all! In 1914, fifteen hundred hours of work went into the making of a motor car. Only two hundred and thirty hours are required to-day. Workmen now have all the stress and strain of hard labour without the satisfaction which comes to the craftsman who sees the complete article which his labour has helped to produce.

We are not surprised that there is no more common ailment to-day than "a nervous breakdown."

The editor of an American magazine with a huge circulation and a big letter-box, recently summed up his opinion of the people who wrote to him, in these words, "They all carry the same burden as the man who was led to cry out, 'What must I do to be saved?' They

don't word it in that way but in this. What is the matter with life—it doesn't taste good. What is to be done about it?"

Mr. H. G. Wells has also had something to say about the same problem for he has told his public that "Mr. Polly was not so much a human being as a civil war." The streets are full of "civil wars" of this kind—"fightings within, fears without." A well-known psychologist took his stand at a street corner and closely examined the looks on the faces of those who passed by. Not one in twenty seemed to be happy—most of them revealed worry, fear, hurry, illness, weariness, boredom or suspicion. Humility and repentance are conspicuously absent from modern life and our novels and plays give remarkably plain pictures of "life without God," and it is a life which is desperately miserable. The romantic view of the innate goodness of all men is not borne out by the hard facts which are revealed. It is, of course, no new discovery.

Rousseau and Wesley were contemporaries for sixty-six years, and their differing views on life have a bearing on our subject. The former believed that man is a noble savage spoiled by his environment. He was concerned mainly with the appalling conditions in which the masses lived. We go a step further and ask, What was the character of the environment in which the leaders of Society lived? They certainly had an infinitely easier and more comfortable existence—did it result in happier moral conditions and produce ideal characters? Some of the best pictures of this society are found in a book recently published called *The Young Melbourne*, by Lord David Cecil. It deals with the earlier years of the Prime Minister who had such a dominating influence over Queen Victoria before her marriage to Prince Albert. I will quote from it to illustrate the results of their environment. First in regard to religion, p. 83: "There was a little uncertainty at first as to what profession William should adopt. He had been destined for the Bar; but now Lady Melbourne, his mother, suddenly suggested that he should become a clergyman. It was a curious idea, considering that he doubted Christian doctrines and disapproved of Christian morals. But the Whig aristocracy did not regard faith as an essential qualification for Holy Orders . . . William's scholarly tastes and relatively discreet private character seemed to make him especially fitted for it; with any reasonable luck he should be a bishop before he died. However, he did not show any enthusiasm for the proposal" and nothing came of it. In regard to Morals, one must say it quite bluntly, they had none. There were six children in the Melbourne family, and to quote from the book (p. 33): "William was universally supposed to be Lord Egremont's son, George, the Prince of Wales, while Emily's birth was shrouded in mystery."

Rousseau's philosophy of life whether applied to the masses or to the leaders of Society has long since proved to be false and fatuous. Blindness of the understanding is as much to be pitied as blindness of the eyes.

It is not necessary for me in this gathering to take time to show the way in which Wesley's message stood every test which was applied to it. Christianity always comes with a "to-day" as well as a

to-morrow. Samuel Butler's aphorism is proved true : " Repentant tears are the waters upon which the Spirit of God moves."

We turn from the past to the present. Have we any assurance that it is really better than the past? Is there something based on eternal values in the present world situation which justifies a confident hope for the future? You will remember that in More's " Utopia," private property is abolished and gold is worthless. The priests are few *and good* and there are no lawyers! But More realized that it was not possible for all to be well unless all men were good, " Which," said he, " I think will not be yet for many years."

In this Conference we have no doubt about the reality of the panacea for all the ills of mankind. " We are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

The Dean of St. Paul's has rightly said that " one of the effects of the Madras Conference should be to disabuse people's minds of the illusion that the Christian Church was in full retreat. When men pointed to signs of decay in the older Churches, they could point in turn to the new life in the younger Churches overseas and ask : ' Who has begotten these ? ' "

I began this paper with a quotation from one of Lord Baldwin's speeches. I will conclude with two further quotations from prominent Christian laymen. The first one is from an address given in St. Mary Woolnoth Church by Mr. A. P. Young, the Manager of the great electrical works at Rugby. It is included in a book recently published entitled *Plan and Serve*.

" Henry Drummond in a wonderful essay, tells us that the greatest thing in the world is love. His spectrum of love has nine ingredients—patience, kindness, generosity, humility, courtesy, unselfishness, good temper, guilelessness and sincerity. These attributes make up the supreme endowment of the perfect man . . . Christ spent a great proportion of His time simply in making people happy, in doing good turns to people.

" Christianity is something not confined to Churches, prayer books, or even the Bible—it is a living spiritual force which can activate and actuate every one of us every moment of every day. Christianity manifests itself and can only manifest itself, in a living human being. It is expressed in his mode of life ; in his human relationships ; in his thinking and actions ; in his attitude of mind and above all, in the spirit of his endeavour . . . The future of our civilization depends not on the scientific mind but on the spiritual evolution of man. In the bending of his spiritual nature so that it may truly align itself with the spirit of Christ. . . . In these days of stress and strain by far the greatest thing a man can do for his city and country, is to be a good man."

The second quotation is from an article by Sir Walter Moberley in one of the Crisis Booklets published by the Student Christian Movement. He is talking about Moral Rearmament :

" Well, you may say, what is it you suggest we should *do*? Two things are necessary. We have got to broaden our religion and we have got to deepen it. First we must broaden it. . . . The test question was asked in my hearing only the other day. It is this : ' If I were not a Christian what would I do that I am not doing now, and what would I cease to do that I am doing.' It was added that for most laymen, at least, the difference does not at present amount to very much. . . . We have

got to wake up to our personal share in responsibility for the social and international order in which we play our part. We have got to bring that order under a Christian judgment as the prophets in the Bible did.

"Secondly, we need immensely to deepen our religion through prayer, through Bible reading and through Church going. . . . If we are to do anything practical we must get together with our fellow-Christians. In their company we may be led to revise our ideas of how the Church should worship and what it should do ; we may even find that we have a contribution to make to its work and worship which we can't make from outside."

I have used these quotations not because they are utterances which have never been made before (most of the clergy are making them every Sunday) but because they are made by eminent laymen. That is the really significant feature of our national life compared with the normal life of the people in other countries. To a much greater extent here than in any other country the great mass of the laity are really swayed and influenced by Christian idealism. Our Labour Movement is not anti-Christian ; our political parties, in any great moral issue, are on the side of the Church ; our leaders in industry are frequently office bearers in the Church and supporters of all philanthropic work. The amount of money raised by the B.B.C. charitable appeals and its religious services and addresses, amaze the inhabitants of other countries.

I would therefore urge that the rallying cries which come to us from the Christian laity on the lines of the quotations which I have used in this paper, bring to us both confidence and hope in regard to the future of the community in which we live. "None of us liveth to himself." Neither our life nor our death is due to and concerns only ourselves. Our lives are always necessarily related to others, but St. Paul in the passage quoted reaches out to a greater and more profound truth of universal joint relationship "in Christ." That is the ideal set before us and that is the ground of our hope for ultimate world peace.

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