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MISCELLANEOUS  
PAMPHLETS.



*BY CHARLES WATTS.*

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# CHRISTIANITY :

*Its Nature and Influence on Civilisation.*

BY CHARLES WATTS.

It requires no profound knowledge of the human mind, to enable us to recognise the fact that some persons indulge in certain delusions, until such delusions become to the persons who indulge them, apparent realities. A striking illustration of the truth of this statement is furnished in the two great assumptions, which are entertained extensively throughout Christendom at the present time. First, it is supposed that what is termed Christianity, is sufficiently efficacious to remove all the evils of life ; and in the second place, it is stated that England enjoys a high state of civilisation in consequence of the adoption of Christian principles. Hitherto, it has been the habit of Christian advocates, not only to ignore all in society that is evil and defective as belonging to their system, but also to credit Christianity with all improvements which have taken place in modern times. It matters not whether it be a steam engine, an electric telegraph, a printing press, the repeal of the stamp and paper duties, the establishment of working men's clubs, an industrial exhibition, or the co-operative companies ; all are attributed by Christians to the influence of their faith. All such steps of progress are regarded by them as the gift of God to his creature man. While inquiring into these pretensions, and ascertaining how far such allegations are correct, the investigation shall be two-fold. We will endeavour to discover, if possible, to what extent the blots and blemishes which remain upon our civilisation are to be attributed to Christianity, and also, whether the progress that has been made, is the result of Christian influence ; or whether, on the contrary, it is not the natural con-

sequence of the adoption of principles antagonistic to New Testament principles.

As a rule, man is supposed to know himself better than anyone else knows him. But there are many important instances, where other people can estimate a person more correctly than he can estimate himself. They will take a more dispassionate view of his character. They will be in a better position to compare him with others, and thus judge more accurately of his relations and comparative place in the scale of humanity. As with individuals, so it is with systems, and with generations. An age is incapable in many respects of properly knowing itself. It has only one test by which to estimate its merits and demerits. It cannot compare itself with future ages, which lie in the womb of the unknown. It can only judge of itself by times gone by. And as every age, even the darkest and most lethargic, is, in some instances, more advanced than its predecessor, a survey of itself is extremely apt to assume the form of self-gratulation.

Various designations have been given to the different phases of Christianity. We have had descriptions of "Hetical Christianity," "Muscular Christianity," "Objectionable Christianity," "Secular Christianity," and "Supernatural Christianity." Now it may be necessary here to intimate that I do not coincide with those who consider that what is termed "Secular Christianity" is identical with Freethought principles. Christianity appears to me to be objectionable under whatever name it may be presented to us. Of course there are many things taught in the New Testament which are admirable and worthy of acceptance, but then such beauties do not belong exclusively to Christianity. The practical portion of the Sermon on the Mount was in existence long before the time when Christ is supposed to have taught in Galilee. The phrase "Christianity" cannot be consistently used without conveying in some degree the idea of supernaturalism. The inspiration that induced Christ to say and do what is ascribed to him in the Four Gospels, was considered to have emanated from above. The power that moves and regulates the whole system of Christianity is designated by its believers as supernatural. The term "Secular Christianity" is therefore a misnomer. Christ never uttered one word, or performed one action purely from Secular motives, but thinking he was doing the will of his

“Father in Heaven,” he did it all for the “Glory of God.” It is important that this fact should be remembered, because we live in an age perhaps unsurpassed in the history of the world for the promulgation of systems, having for their professed object the advancement of mankind. It becomes therefore a duty that we should be judicious as to the terms we use, as well as the mode we adopt to secure the triumph of principles which we believe are essential to the permanent welfare of society. Many valuable systems are frequently deprived of much of their vitality, and some of the best efforts of men rendered comparatively useless through the lack of the observance of this very necessary precaution. The temporary success of bad and erroneous principles is often to be attributed to the fact that the manner in which they are presented to the world is the result of careful study, and well-matured thought.

In studying the nature of Christianity, we recognise one or two features which are identical in all its different phases. Reliance on a supernatural power, faith in Christ, belief in the efficacy of prayer, and the immortality of the soul, are tenets professed, more or less, by most Christian sects. In addition to this, the New Testament distinctly teaches that poverty is a virtue, that submission is a duty, and that love to man should be subordinate to love to God. Now these principles, however consoling they may be to some, from their nature have checked and must check the progress of civilisation. The extent of their retarding influence depends upon the degree of veneration in which they are held by their professors. With Theists and Unitarians these theological notions are less dangerous, because such Christians are less dogmatic and less orthodox. But with a Wesleyan or a Baptist the profession of such notions frequently leads to conduct antagonistic to general improvement. With these latter Christians, Christ is “all in all.” In vain do we look to their teachings for those principles that are necessary to a progressive civilisation. On the contrary, experience has proved that as a rule, they have been injurious, and in proportion to their adoption has the Secular welfare of mankind been retarded. And we cannot expect aught else. The object of Christ was to teach his followers how to die, rather than to instruct them how to live. If therefore we press the question, “What is Christianity?” the answers given by the Christian world will be as varied as they will be numerous. The reply from a mem-

ber of the Church of England, would differ widely from the answer given by a Latter-day Saint. The fact is, according to the education of the individual, and the intelligence of the nation, so are the notions entertained as to what constitutes Christianity. For instance, religion with Mazzini is very different to the religion of Archbishop Manning. The faith cherished by Garibaldi, is not precisely the same article of belief as that indulged in by the present ruler of France. The Christianity of Professor Huxley is as different to the doctrines taught by Richard Weaver, as is the religion of a Maurice to that of C. H. Spurgeon. The same diversity exists in reference to nations. In Spain religion is cruel oppression, in Scotland it is a gloomy nightmare, in Rome it is priestly dominion, while in England it is simply emotional pastime. All these different phases of Christianity indicate that theological opinions depend on surrounding circumstances, and cannot therefore be the cause of the civilisation of the world.

To test the power of Christianity in organising a civilised state of society, it is only necessary to suppose a company of men and women going to some uninhabited island, and there attempting to form a constitution to meet the requirements of modern society based upon the teachings of the New Testament. First they must seek the kingdom of Heaven, and love not the world or the things of the world. This would at once put an end to all human effort, because if a person is not to love the world, his interest will be at once gone from things below, and directed to things above. It is impossible to get persons long to work for anything which they hate. Under a system of despotism, a certain amount of labour may be ground out of serfs or slaves, but once give a nation its freedom, and the inhabitants will only strive in a cause which they love. Secondly, they must take no thought for their bodies nor even their lives. This would prevent them studying the laws of health. Sanitary reform or physiological science would be deemed unnecessary. Hospitals would be superseded by a rapid increase of "God's Peculiar People." The recent unfortunate case of the two persons who were committed for manslaughter because they practically carried out New Testament teaching, is a potent answer to the alleged efficacy of Christianity for civilising purposes. The "Peculiar People" relied upon faith and prayer, instead of science and medicine, and, as a reward for