

POPULAR NOTIONS CONCERNING
CHRIST'S EXAMPLE.

Men who fail to walk in the Spirit are ever wont to read into Christ's life their own legalistic practices, and imagine that He illustrated them all. This is seen in nothing more certainly than in their views concerning Christian work. The few incidents in His life which seem to illustrate their ideal life are seized on, and all the rest which speak another language ignored.

It is presumed that that life, which is the most active and conspicuous in organized Church and moral reform work, is the best reproduction of the life which Christ lived when on earth. Paul, as the zealous missionary, and Luther, as the indefatigable itinerant, rather than Paul illustrating the rest of faith in the Mamertine prison, or Luther in enforced exclusion, are the true representatives of Christianity to all such teachers.

But there are some facts in the career of the man, Christ Jesus, which cannot be made to do service, in a legitimate way, in such teaching. For example, How account for the fact that He refrained from all such zealous work until thirty years of age? Just fancy one of these modern, zealous imitators of Christ, the Christian worker, preaching the gospel that no young man should engage in public work of this kind till he arrived at this mature age! How many would be left to run the Young Men's Christian Association, or man the Christian League, Endeavor, and such-like societies, for united Christian work, if all under thirty were eliminated therefrom?

If Christ is our example in His active, public labors, why not preach Him as an example when not so employed?

Again, but three years of His life were spent in public work, and thirty in seclusion. Why not preach the doctrine that, like as with the Master, one-tenth of life occupied in public, Christian work, measures up to Divine example?

Now the creed of all such teachers requires the belief that Christ, long before His baptism, was prepared to teach both by precept and example. For did He not exhibit, at twelve, a very high state

of preparedness for teaching, and is it not taught that His life was as pure and holy then as when He reached more mature years? How, then, could He refrain from zealous work for humanity so long, and not set the world a bad example, if the modern idea of Christian work is the correct thing?

Ah, it is replied, the Father restrained Him until the right time should come. Precisely, but then He must be our example in this also, and we, too, if we follow His example, must permit ourselves to be ever and anon restrained for the same reason. If it is argued that He is not an example in the one thing, but is in the other, we ask by whose authority is the discrimination made? Such discrimination is nowhere made in the Scriptures, and therefore can only have human authority. From all which we infer that Christ, as an example of Christian effort, after the modern idea of such work, is of very questionable value.

And even if His life, lived during the three years of His active ministry, be closely scanned, there will be found in it passages which will confound all such enthusiastic teachers.

Consider, for example, the incident of His visit to the pool of Bethesda. In it lay a multitude of impotent folk, but this example of modern, laborious effort to rush to everybody's help both in temporal and spiritual things, coolly went up to one of these sons and daughters of affliction, and cured him of his sickness, and then, deliberately turning His back on all the rest, walked away from such an inviting field for active sympathy and positive helpfulness.

By what device, we ask, can this example of Christ be made to do service in stimulating zeal for Christian work, after the modern pattern? Imagine a delegate, to a modern convention for the consideration of the best methods of Christian work, utilizing this incident. Should he speak on this wise, saying, that as Christ only took the trouble to put a question or two to one of many in distress, and then simply exerted Himself in his behalf to the extent of telling him to take up his bed and walk, utterly neglecting the rest, so, my hearers, I