

Ever since the revelation of the Son of God in the flesh, earnest Christians have at all times and seasons thanked God in all sincerity and devotion for the great central truths of their holy religion—for those Divine doctrines, which though few in number, and apparently simple in expression, are yet manifold in their application to the needs of mankind, and infinite in their comprehension of the counsel and wisdom of God.

And surely in these latter days, my brethren, surely we may well re-echo their gratitude with even more heartiness and emphasis. Every thoughtful person must have noticed the materialistic tendencies, the unspiritual views of life, which have developed during the past 50 years, and which are still gaining force. But it is not so much against the scientific materialism of the study that we as Christians should utter a vigorous protest, as against that spirit of practical materialism which openly stalks about in the streets, and finds a ready welcome in the homes of the land.

Science has, indeed, made wonderful discoveries in seeking honestly and intelligently to understand more fully the world in which we live. Science has effected marvellous things in extending man's control over the forces of nature. And for all this, we as Christians may be truly thankful.

But, on the other hand, we must deplore the practical effect which the new theories of life set forth, are having upon the everyday life of our people. Must we not regard with deep sadness the mere animal existence which makes up such a huge part of the lives of so many? We see it in the life of mere selfishness and pleasure, of far too many of the well-to-do. We see it also in the monotonous life of working, eating and sleeping of such vast numbers of the lower grades of society. It is against practical materialism like this that the ideal verities of our religion, the spiritual truths of our Faith, are standing protests. Our doctrines, our sacraments, all witness to the fact, that the flesh and the things of the flesh profit nothing—that it is the Spirit alone that giveth life—that to take life as it is, as the saying goes, and only for what it appears, is abject materialism, that is, a denial of the sacramental and spiritual meaning which we must believe constitute the reality and the vitality of everything that enters into our life.

But the doctrine of the Incarnation, which we celebrate and commemorate to day, is not merely an intellectual opinion to be accepted as such by those devoutly disposed to receive it. It is far more. It has, indeed, the inspiring note of a divine truth. For it is an inexhaustible treasure—a perennial source of true knowledge to all those who study it with pure hearts and earnest endeavour. Ever since the revelation of the Incarnate Word in the person of Christ, this great doctrine has inspired and taught Christian men, who with prayer and meditation sought through it to apprehend something more of the mind of God. The lessons learnt from age to age, and from man to man, have been many and various. The principles derived therefrom by the 4th and 5th centuries were different from those appreciated by the 15th and 16th. The message received by an Athanasius was not the same as that proclaimed by a Westcott in our own day. The ideas now entertained of the intimate meaning of that glorious union of our perfect manhood with the God head from on high, are, we trust, fuller than those of earlier ages of Christianity.

Yet we must believe that no mortal being can ever comprehend any single divine truth in its entirety. Such knowledge is reserved only for those thrice blessed ones, who in the purity of their hearts shall see God and shall know even as they are known.

I wish then, my friends, on this Christmas morning, to consider with you for a short time one aspect of the mystery of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. I wish to dwell upon one great lesson alone of the many we are taught thereby, and which seems to me to have an especial application to the urgent needs of the day: I mean the lesson of reverence. Are not the evidences of our sore lack of this quality of reverence only too plain and unmistakable? Look among our school children, and see if the present one-sided system of instruction does not lamentably fail to educate those reverential qualities which go so far to make life worth living.

Go among the young men of the day, whether they be schooled in the merciless competition of business life, or in the sceptical atmosphere of the scientific lecture room, and ask what kind of an ideal of life they accept for energetic pursuit.

And sadder still, look among older people, and mark to what extent they have any capacity left for the pure feeling of wonder.

Alas! my brethren, must we not confess that life is too often regarded as though it were all of one dull drab color, with no relieving background? A mere hum drum existence with little or no variety, except perhaps some momentary flash of pleasure, or some abyss of sorrow or despair, which only serves to deepen the surrounding gloom.

Let us, teach our children, therefore, that there are

endless things for them to love, to honor, and to obey.

Let young men learn that there are ideals of life which deserve their warmest sympathies and their heartiest devotion.

And let the aged be assured that even for them life still retains more than the charm and loveliness of youth, if only they will have eyes to see the glory of God as shown in all His works.

And where can we find nobler inspiration? Where can we look for more powerful ideal, than in the ever blessed Incarnation of the everlasting Son of God. There the loftiest conceptions of mankind, the fondest hopes of our race, find their most perfect consummation. They are there transcended and made divine by union with the eternal God-head. In the light of the Incarnation, the commonplace conditions of our life are completely transformed in meaning. In outward semblance they do, indeed, remain the same, but they now show forth a divine significance which inspires and exalts the soul of the faithful beholder.

Let us, therefore, reverently approach this holy doctrine, and with humble adoration of God, seek to understand the lesson of reverence which it teaches.

We may consider reverence under three forms:

(a) There is reverence for what is above us.

(b) There is reverence for ourselves and what is around us.

(c) And most difficult of all, there is reverence for what is beneath us.

Of these three forms of reverence, the surest and only effectual basis is true faith in the Incarnation of Christ.

Let us begin with the first and simplest form of reverence—reverence for what is superior to us. By calling it the simplest, I mean to say that it is found developed to some extent, at least, even in the most primitive and uncultured peoples.

It seems instinctive in man to honor the objects of his highest conceptions, and if they are divine, to fall down and worship them. Make a man comprehend some grand ideal, and he must, in spirit at least, reverence it with all his heart. In practice, no doubt, through bodily temptations and earth-bound desires, he may act quite contrary to his profession of faith, yet in sober moments he must reverence the ideal, so long as it remains in his mind.

And so, too, with professing Christians. Is it not a small thing, my brethren, is it not a small thing that we should humbly adore and reverence God Almighty, who so loved us that He gave His only-begotten Son to take our nature upon Him? Must we not see well to it that our reverence toward God—which we cannot help feeling, if we do rightly believe the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ—must we not see well to it, that our reverence does not become valueless and inoperative by our neglecting to act consistently with that great truth?

"If ye love me," said our Lord, "keep my commandments."

And secondly, we should reverence ourselves and all around us. By ourselves I mean not those degraded selves which from time to time by God's grace we cast away. I mean not those "dead selves" we may use as "stepping stones" to higher things. But I mean rather those ideal selves, which so far forth as the grace of God constraineth us, are made and fashioned after the perfect pattern and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every man has an ideal of what he ought to be, and to attain which he directs his efforts according to the measure of the love of Christ that is in him. Moreover, no man ever has reached, or ever will reach on earth, even to his own ideal, however low and degraded it may be.

Oh! if men would be truer to their own true selves, the life of the world would, indeed, assume a much more Christian aspect than at present exists.

And why, it may well be asked, why are not men truer to themselves? Ah! my friends, is not the answer quite plain? Simply because men have not yet fully realised a righteous belief in the Incarnate Word of God.

We are too prone to take life as a matter of course. We too often allow external circumstances to mould our characters, and to fashion our actions as they will. We fail to use the light of the Incarnation to illumine the path of life before us, to make clear our duties and responsibilities, and to enforce their observance with Almighty authority. Our ideals, therefore, instead of being strong, vivid pictures, ever present to our minds, are more often only blurred and indistinct images, from time to time fading away into insignificance.

There is, as you are aware, a system of human philosophy, which endeavours to induce men to lead a moral, and in some sense, a religious life, by deifying humanity, by exalting the natural man into a god. This philosophy of Positivism is, indeed, a noble abstraction. It offers a beautiful, and in many respects a Christian picture for our adoration and imitation. But there is no personal Christ there. And what do we find in consequence?

Not long since I heard one of the learned professors of Positivism in Oxford confess that as a religion of life, Positivism could not, and did not appeal to the vast majority of mankind.

It has no inherent power to draw men. It is intended merely for the intellectual and cultured few. But Christianity certainly has this drawing power. By the Incarnation of Jesus Christ a divine seal was stamped upon our humanity, and endless possibilities of ultimate perfection were assured unto men. It was the first act of restoration of that divine Being, who also said, "I if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

Finally we come to that form of reverence which is most difficult of all to realize—reverence for what is, or seems to be, on a lower grade than ourselves. Here the Incarnation of Christ stands supreme as offering the only adequate and all-sufficient motive for the exercise of this kind of reverence.

Why should we recognize our duties and responsibilities to all those who are yet living in misery, degradation and sin, unless it be that the love and example of Christ constraineth us? If God in heaven condescended to assume our humanity, shall we dare to neglect our fallen brethren and to pass by on the other side? Nay, my brethren, but we must go forth to them and succor them. If we do, indeed, believe in the Fatherhood of God, as revealed in the Incarnation of His only Son Jesus Christ, then the brotherhood of mankind can be no empty cant word for us.

Fraternity must be for us a word which both excites our noblest thoughts, and which also awakens a sense of terrible responsibility.

And this mutual bond of brotherhood depends not upon accidents of birth or descent. It is not restricted to family or national ties. It does not even depend on our descent from a common ancestor. For it rests solely and surely upon the Incarnation of Christ by which God the Almighty Father, who created all things, is revealed unto us His children. And surely, my brethren, at this glad some Christmas season, when for us all things are smiling and cheerful, it will become us well to think of our brethren, made in the image of God, and yet living in ignorance and sin. Those of us who have commenced our Christmas morning by drawing near with faith and reverence to God's Holy Altar, and those who yet mean to fulfil their obligation to partake of Christ's body and blood on this high festival of the Church Catholic. There in that holy mystery we have ratified, or shall ratify by our outward act, our spiritual union with Christ.

There we lift up our hearts in communion with the saints of God.

And there, too, if we obey the voice of our divine Master, we shall, at least, give a thought to that other communion of saint with sinner in the all-embracing body of Christ. "A new commandment give I unto you," said our gracious Lord, "that ye love one another, even"—and this is most important—"even as I have loved you," i.e., not only love for friends and relations, not merely love for those who have pleased or benefited us; but love, self-sacrificing love for those beneath us—the degraded, the outcast; yes, even love for our enemies, and for those who have de spitefully used us.

We may learn, therefore, from the revelation of the Incarnate Word to worship and reverence God, the Giver of all good.

We learn, also, to be true to our higher selves, and to find something to reverence in all that enters into our lives. Above all, we are taught to strive ever with prayer and active effort to realize the Christian brotherhood, the true fraternity of mankind.

Let us, then, uplift our hearts in humble adoration of God. Let us praise and magnify Him this day for the ever-blessed Incarnation of His only Son. And let us pray that we may attain, day by day, and year by year, to a fuller and more real conception of this divine truth, in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

And if by God's grace our eyes should be opened, as we see, so let us believe: as we believe, so let us act: as we act, so let us be.

## Home & Foreign Church News.

From our own Correspondents.

### DOMINION.

#### MONTREAL.

MONTREAL.—Christ Church Cathedral.—Rev. J. G. Norton, D.D., rector of Montreal, is preaching every day in Lent to large congregations in Christ Church Cathedral, on the "Early History of the Christian Church."

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