

The True Church and the True Christian.

BY THE REV. HUGH PRICE HUGHES, M. A.

"I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."—Matt. xvi, 18.

Recently, in the great utterance of which this text forms a fragment, I reminded you that it was then and there that Jesus Christ both founded and defined His church. The thing and the name came into existence together. Then, for the first time in human history, was the word "church" used in its Christian sense. There is no word more misunderstood, more controverted, or more abused, than the word "church." There is no word, probably, that has caused more innocent bloodshed and more diabolical wars in nearly every age since Christ. There is no word that is a greater source of division in family and in civil life than the word "church." We have many human definitions of it, and we have many man-invented churches; but there is only one true Church founded by Jesus Christ. That Church, He declared, consists of those men and women who can make St. Peter's confession. St. Peter was the first human being who, by the inspiration of God, recognized the divinity of the Mechanic of Nazareth, and saluted Him as his own personal Saviour. When one man had attained to that, the Christian Church began. And, having founded the Christian Church in the person of the first real believer who confessed a person, conscious faith in the divine Saviour, Christ proceeds to make some great statements respecting this Church and the Kingdom of God which it should serve. I am increasingly convinced that for the purpose of giving a deadly blow to sectarianism and bigotry, for the purpose of removing endless difficulties that obstruct Christians, and for the purpose of bringing home to the Christian Church her essential and practical duty, nothing is so vitally important today as that we should succeed in disentangling two things that have been confounded together—the Christian Church and the Kingdom of God. The church exists for the sake of the kingdom. The kingdom is the end of which the church is only the means. Now, what is the kingdom?

THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

It is, as I have often tried to teach, human society reconstructed on a Christian basis. But what do we mean precisely by that? In the first place, we mean the Christian family. Christ came into this world first of all to create the Christian family—that is to say, the true home. I have often noticed, with great delight, that there is no song that is so popular as "Home, Sweet Home." When, at our concerts, any favorite singer is encored, and the band begins to play that tune, the audience begins to cheer at once. There is nothing that we English people love so much as home. Has it ever occurred to you that there is no such thing as a true home anywhere except in a Christian land? The word home is the distinct creation of Jesus Christ. It is the foundation of the Kingdom of God which is to be established on earth. There is nothing more vital to Christianity, nothing for which the soldiers of Christ should fight more resolutely, than for the Christian home. The ideal relation of husband and wife, of parent and child, have absolutely no existence outside Christianity. The Christian home is the primary factor, and unit of the Kingdom of God, the family built upon unselfishness, tenderness, spotless purity, and mutual helpfulness. As Tennyson has well said, "Thrice blessed are those whose lives in a higher love endure. There is no peace like theirs." Till this product of Christianity—the home—is destroyed, you can never destroy Christianity.

THE CHRISTIAN CITY.

The second thing that Christ came to create in this world was the Christian City, where law is administered in the name of justice and humanity; where the poor, the sick, the solitary, are wisely and tenderly benefited; where the young are trained in beautiful thoughts and lofty ideals; where art, literature, and science flourish; where the welfare of all is the solicitude and the delight of each; that fair city of God, in fact, of which St. John had so bewitching a vision, where disease ravages no more, where the voice of complaining is not heard in the streets, where pauperism, and crime, and drunkenness, and gambling, and debauchery, are forgotten insanities of a dismal and buried past. And the day will come when, in spite of the devil and all his servants, even great, wicked, miserable London will be such a city as that.

THE CHRISTIAN STATE AND RACE.

The third feature in the programme of Christ is the Christian State, where all legislation and all policy are wise and beneficent, where law and order are transmuted into liberty and love. And then, to crown the edifice and to complete the programme, Christ will ultimately organize the Christian race.

"When the war drum throbs no longer, and the battle-flag is furled, In the parliament of man, the federation of the world."

The foolish, superstitious, superficial, ignorant and cynical may laugh at this as a mere visionary forecast. Many of our politicians and journalists spend their time in sneering and jeering at these lofty ideals and anticipations of peace and brotherly love. They think that the dream of Isaiah will never be fulfilled, and that the day will never dawn when nations will not only never go to war, but when they will not even prepare for war. And yet that day is coming, and the song with which the angels saluted the cradle of our Redeemer will be no longer a prophecy and a hope, but an accomplished fact—there will be peace on earth and good-will among men. Some may say, if this is the programme of Christ, who is to fulfil it on a world-wide scale? Who is to be the agent to realize this divine ideal? I answer, on the authority of Christ, the church—the church which is the army of the Kingdom of God, which stands in relation to that great kingdom in precisely the same relation that human armies stand to human kingdoms, regimented and federated companies of men and women, whose sins are forgiven, whose hearts are changed, and who will strike down everything that is wrong, and establish the kingdom of righteousness and peace in every country under heaven. We remember how at that critical moment in the history of our fatherland, when the fortunes of those on the side of freedom, justice, and truth seemed to be very dark, indeed, one of the greatest of Englishmen that ever lived—Oliver Cromwell—came to the conclusion that if the cause of God was to triumph, it was necessary to create some regiments of

IRONSIDES,

who put some conscience into their work, and prayed before they fought, and whose reliance was upon God. So he organized a Christian army, comparatively small, but resolute, devout, and fearless, who scattered the Stuarts, and England was saved. Christ also in another way, and with other weapons that inflict no wound upon the human body, organizes His Ironsides. They have never been very numerous, but they have already done mighty deeds. Those who realize the policy of Jesus Christ never trouble themselves about numbers. John Wesley, who was one of the mightiest captains of Christ in the last century, said that it did not matter how few you are, if you are thorough-going. Surely he was right. The essential work of the Church of God in all ages must be done by thorough-going, consecrated Christians. God never complains that His soldiers are too few, but often that they are too many. Lukewarm Christians and critics and half-hearted people are in the way. Due honor must be given to all who help the Christian army. Agnostics have rendered excellent service, but this has been exceptional. The hard, resolute, determined work has always been done by Christians whose hearts are changed and whose sins are forgiven. Who destroyed the terrors of the old Roman world and abolished slavery? Who made modern England? Search and see. Christians, real Christians, are at the bottom of every true reform and of every genuine and permanent advance. Many tell us what they are going to do, but Christians can give you a report of what they have done. Speaking generally, only Christians have the persistency, the enthusiasm, the inexhaustible patience, and the absolute disinterestedness necessary to regenerate the world. A great American divine says that the soul of all improvement is the improvement of the soul. The first necessity is to get a few real Christians, Christ-like Christians, men and women regenerated and given up to God. They are the persons to storm the breach, to capture the fortress. Certainly the warfare in which we are engaged is the greatest and most difficult the world has ever seen. What a task it is to abolish slavery, drunkenness, gambling, debauchery, pauperism, ignorance, disease, crime, and war, and all other abominations, and to establish freedom, temperance, purity, wisdom, health, innocence and peace! Who is sufficient for these things? I unhesitatingly answer the church, the real church, the chosen instrument of God. The one question which

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Will ask will be: What have you done to realize the programme of Jesus Christ? Have you created Christian homes? Have you cleansed your cities of all that is vile? Have you purified the legislature and the legislation, and the policy of your State? Have you established international justice and peace? If not, you must clear out. We will not have you. The human race is getting too serious. It is an awful thing to claim to be a part, much more the whole, of the church of the living God. Very few people are wholly given up to Christ. As you look at this little army, and see the vast forces of the enemy, and the wealth, and power, and glory that belong to the foe, do you not rather tremble at the prospect? Surely you say, this handful of men and women are not going to fight the whole world? Ask politicians the chances of the Veto Bill. What are the chances of anything? The world shouts loudly, and those who have not the secret of God, and do not understand the real source of moral strength, are terrified. Last week I saw a picture of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. There was Napoleon,

with his arms folded and his head bowed. He was riding down some of the French soldiers, and was fleeing for his life. A few months before that he had advanced with all the armies of Europe, except the English, at his back. He seemed irresistible. Where was his imperial army now? Buried in the snows of Russia. The gates of Hades had prevailed against it. Death has spread its wings upon the blast, and now they were retreating. Shall the gates of Hades prevail against this little Christian army? Will the army of the devil make an end of the saints? Christ anticipated the question at the moment when He recruited His first soldier; He said the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

AN INVINCIBLE CHURCH.

The real church of Jesus Christ shall never be destroyed. Men-made churches have been destroyed a thousand times; the real church, the spiritual and living church, has never been destroyed. We are often told that the churches are about to perish. Carlyle replied to that question in his own day, when people were wondering and talking about Christianity being on its last legs. Yes, he said, the church has always been in great danger ever since we heard of her. We intend to make an end of everything that is vile and degraded, and every form of pleasure that is wrung out of the damnation of others. The end is coming, for God has spoken the word. The church can never perish. That is the one army that is never disbanded. Fifteen years ago there was a clever man of science who used to write the name of God with a small "g," who said that in a decade no sensible person would believe in God. Fifteen years later Prof. Sanderson, in the Chair of the British Association, without a dissentient voice, knocked the bottom out of that nonsense. The Christian tide is rising every day. The moral force, the power that makes for righteousness, is waxing mightier and mightier. There is a glorious future before us if we Christians are faithful. May God forgive us if we have small ideals of the future, or grovel before the boasting of the ignorant and the wicked. Our prospects were never brighter than they are today. Even in this hall God saves men and women so let us rejoice. There are good times coming, and the twentieth century will be the best since the Resurrection of Christ. Who will join this army tonight? What a glorious thing it is to live for a purpose of this sort; to hasten the coming of the day when God will wipe every tear away, and when the Kingdom of God will be established in every heart and in every land! It ought to make the blood of young men and women leap within them when they realize what honor God has given them. God would have you enlist now—not for your own sake, but that you may cooperate, that you may fight bravely, that you may do something noble. My brothers, my sisters, in the name of Christ, I pray you enlist in the army of Christ tonight, just as you are. He will do everything that is necessary in order to make you a brave and victorious soldier. Let us have done with everything that is mean and contemptible, and base and selfish, and unworthy and untrue, and, by the help of God, let us say: "Lord Jesus, take me as I am; qualify me to do something, however small; help me to hasten the coming of the day when sin and misery will be abolished forever."

Thankfulness as a means of Grace.

BY MRS. MARGARET E. SANSTON.

Lips say God be pitiful. That ne'er said God be praised, sang Mrs. Browning, crystallizing in a couplet of truth which every day's lack of gratitude to the generous Giver of all our good bears sorrowful witness. Our impulse in trial and pain is to call for help; in extremity we clamor for relief; in peril and darkness we lift up our hands to the heavens. Not always do we render the tribute of thanks to him who so bountifully spreads our tables, so wonderfully guides our way and so instantly aids us in our time of need. When have we ever gone to him in penitence and faith and been denied? When shall we ever get to the end of the mercies which make the outgoings of the morning and the evening to rejoice? Yet in our private devotions we sometimes forget to acknowledge our obligation to God, and as a people we have occasion to be reminded, as we are by the feast the fathers set, that our national life and institutions are tokens of his watchful care and ceaseless wisdom.

In considering thanksgiving as a means of grace, ought we not to make a special note of all from which we have been saved in the things that have not happened? How safe has been our journey! How free from accident the tenor of our lives! How protected have been our homes! How long an immunity have we had from sickness, and how seldom has the angel of death spread his wings of darkness over our threshold! Yes, thanks be unto God for the sorrows we have not had to bear, for the calamities that have not fallen upon us and ours.

Thus on the negative side. But on the positive, what pleasure we have had with our dear ones as the years have sped! How the children have grown and flourished, doing well at school, showing nobleness and developing fine characters, how the business has prospered to which we have set our hands, how our lines have gone, if not to the ends of the earth, yet to such ends as we most desired, so that life has been blithe and full of song and sweetness and beauty! What rare and interesting people we have met, and how delightfully we have widened our circle of acquaintances, so that our lives are so much enriched by the new faces and new voices and new

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