

## PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

### WHAT HAS CHRISTIANITY DONE FOR US?

A PAPER FOR YOUNG MEN.

It has given us *rest*. Some of us were floundering in the horrible pit and miry clay of sin, perfectly incapable of extricating ourselves, when it came with its strong, beneficent, loving grasp, and drew us out, and gave us a new chance and a fresh start. Others of us were sorely perplexed. We had no fixed principles—at least, none to speak of. Confused by the clash and clatter of opinions that went on around us—turning first to one adviser, and then to another—we knew not what to think; and instead of living a life, we were perpetually asking questions, and receiving no answer; perpetually starting problems and finding no solution. Now, this is all altered. We have come to a settlement, and know where we are—to our unspeakable comfort. A man may be a strong man enough, and active enough, but if you place him on an insecure and slippery footing, of what avail are his broad shoulders and muscular arms? He can do very little. He will be entirely occupied with keeping his balance. Plant him, however, on solid ground, on a sure basis, and what a difference there will be! So with us. "We have our feet on the Rock now, and we can put forth to their utmost stretch, the powers, whatever they may be, that we possess, and we can engage, with safety and with comfort to ourselves, in working the work of the world. Do you say that this persuasion of ours is all a delusion? Well, think as you may, *it is a delusion which has exercised a marvellously transforming influence upon our heart and life.*

Again, this Christianity has given us *certainly*. We find men nowadays walking in a fog; at least, we find that very many of them are not sure whether they are in the right path or not. They ask every one they meet to be so good as to direct them, and they are ready to accept for Gospel the assertions of the last comer till the next comer arrives. Like Pilate, nearly two thousand years ago, they have the question perpetually on their lips, "What is truth?" and at length they begin to doubt whether there is such a thing as truth at all in the matters which concern their duty here and their destiny hereafter, and they give themselves up to drift, like weeds on a tide, over the ever-shifting currents of contemporary speculation. With us it is different. There are some things we are sure about; we have no misgiving, no doubt concerning them whatever. We believe, for instance, with a confidence that nothing can shake, in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. That Resurrection is to us a fact, more certainly a fact than many which we are accustomed to regard as such. We believe with confidence in the Fatherhood of God. In our view it is blankly incredible that there should be laws without a Lawgiver, and that this universe should be formed by the concurrence of atoms mysteriously endowing themselves with the germs of life and intelligence; indeed, we might be unphilosophical enough to amuse ourselves with the idea, were it not for the deadly animus against God which it displays. Nor can we credit that we are cast at the feet of a huge machine, which, when once set a-going, has been left to work out its results with pitiless precision, but without anything like a loving, divinely-sent superintendence. But we look up and see through all complications the hand of a heavenly Father, who loves us and cares for us, and who busies Himself in conducting our frail and bungling lives to a blessed issue. We believe, too, in the practical efficacy of prayer. We hold that prayer is not a mere spiritual *dumb-bell exercise*, intended to promote the soul-warmth and soul-reform of the solitary actor engaged in it, but that it produces, if we may so say, an effect upon God which could not be produced without it; and when clever men—far cleverer than we are—talk about fixed law, and the inflexible progression of events, and tell us in effect that prayer is so much empty breath, we just put their words into one scale, and the words of Jesus Christ into the other, and are quite content. If to be prayerless is to be wise, we are satisfied to be fools—especially in such good company. Do you say that all this—this belief in the Resurrection, in the Fatherhood of God, in the efficacy of prayer, is a delusion? Well, say so if you like, but at least *it is a delusion which*

*we have found to exercise a most strengthening influence upon heart and life.*

Again, our Christianity has given us a power to resist temptation, which, without it, we feel we should never have possessed. We hold that a new life has been imparted to us; that we have been raised into an element in which, if we abide, we are lifted above the atmosphere of low motive, and grovelling desires, in which, alas! too many of our fellow men born to better and nobler things—are contented to live. "A delusion," you say. "Well," we answer, "if it be a delusion, it is *a delusion which has strangely raised us, elevated us, and made us better than we were.*"

And, yet once again, our Christianity has given us definite ideas about a future state. We do not profess to know very much about the subject. Streets of gold, and gates of pearl, and foundations of precious stones, and all the gorgeous images of the Apocalypse, do not convey to us, nor are they, we suppose, intended to convey to us, any thoughts we can really grasp. But we can form a tolerably clear conception of what Jesus Christ is, and of what pleases Him; and this enlightens us, to a certain extent, as to the nature of the place, or region, in which He makes His most distinct self-manifestation. Nor is this all. We believe we have—we say it in all humility—a personal acquaintance with this Great Being. He is no stranger to us. We "know Him," as St. Paul says, and we believe that death, with all its painful and humiliating accompaniments, will be nothing more, if we continue faithful, than the coming of this known Friend—who has walked with us through life—to receive us to Himself, that where He is, there all His friends may be also. You say, "This is the greatest, the grossest delusion of all." Well, say so if you please, but, at any rate, it is *a delusion which imparts to us great comfort, for we feel that when we die we shall not be taking a leap in the dark.*

This being the case with us, we are anxious that others should share in our blessings. In the early days, when Christ was choosing His disciples, one of them, brimful of his own joy, hurried off to tell the news to a friend, and to bring him to Christ. But his eager enthusiasm was checked at once by a difficulty. "The Messiah!" cried the friend, "and out of Nazareth! Who ever knew a good thing issue from that degraded locality? Your story is inconceivable, your facts are wrong. You must be egregiously mistaken." Now, Philip, perhaps, felt himself to be no adept in arguing; at all events, he felt that arguing was not the way to convince his friend of the truth of his statement; and so he adopted a much better plan. He simply said, "Come and see," come and judge for yourself; for he knew that in the sight of that gracious Presence all his friend's objections would vanish, as mists vanish before the rising sun. The result, as you will remember, justified him in the course he took. And so with us. We are no professed disputants. We know that controversy is a match of intellectual skill in which the practised player, familiar with all the turns, and tricks, and rules of the game, gets the better of the unpractised opponent, even if he should happen to have the truth on his side. We doubt, too, if arguing wins hearts. We think it wiser, then, and more likely to be effectual in most cases, to do as Philip did: to waive controversy, to decline the clash and clatter of argument, and simply to say, This is what Christianity, or rather what Christ has done for us. He has changed the current of our lives, has given us rest and peace, and repose of soul; has elevated our conceptions, and our character, has nerved and strengthened us for duty—has been, in fact, a source of blessing such as we are unable to describe. Could *a delusion* have done all this? Come, then, we pray you, and judge for yourselves, whether He be not all that we have told you, and very much more.—*Quiver.*

#### NEIGHBOUR DODSON'S WELL.

I was on my first visit to my neighbour Dodson, who was an old settler, while I had lately come into the neighbourhood. Going with him to look over his fine farm, I was a little surprised to find a pump standing in one of the back fields.

"Have you a well away back here?" I asked.

"I hardly know what to say," said he; "a hole has been dug down here, a wall built, and a pump put in, by a man who formerly settled here; but there is no water. What do you say; is it a well?"

"Why," said I, "your question is about as hard to answer as the one I frequently hear about a certain

class of people. Men will ask, Is he a Christian? or a professor? or church member?—according to the different ways of expression—and I am often puzzled for an answer."

"Just what I have thought many a time. I have seen men who have at some time made some of the outward movements towards a Christian life (and I have no right to say that they have not commenced the inward ones too), but now, for years past, though they may have a few outward forms of religion, and they make them as few as possible, so far as doing anything for accomplishing Christ's work is concerned, why a thirsty ox might as well come to this old pump expiring to find water. You might perhaps find out whether they were church members, by searching the church records; but as to finding any signs of real Christian life, it would baffle any tests that I know how to apply."

"That is too true," said I, "but sad as it is, I suppose we must be careful not to judge them too harshly. The actions of such are a great hindrance to the success of the Gospel, but let us pray the life-giving Spirit may yet rouse to action their seeming dead souls."

"You are right, there," said neighbour Dodson, "and I am one of the last men that ought to forget it. I remember when I first dug the well where I live; it filled with water almost to the top, and I was greatly pleased. Some of my neighbours who had no wells of their own yet, used to come to me, and they were all welcome, for there was enough for all, and just as much always left in the well. But by-and-by, as the season grew hotter and drier, the water got lower in the well, and I had to restrict my neighbours in the amount they might take, and finally to refuse it to them altogether, as I could get from the well no more than I needed for my own daily use. I remember one evening as I was standing by the well after I had told one of my neighbours not to come any more, the thought struck me forcibly that there was a close resemblance between the well and myself. Once I had been so filled with the grace of life, that I was always ready to help and encourage others, remembering who had said, 'Freely ye have received, freely give.' But as I thought of it, I was compelled to acknowledge to myself that I had become so absorbed in worldly things, and so little attentive to anything higher, that there would have been small encouragement for any one to come to me for help in the spiritual life. The thought was bitter to me but did not at once produce any improvement. The supply of water in my well grew more and more scanty, and I was obliged to go away off to the river for much of the water for home use. And I could not but think that it was much the same with the divine life in my soul. I still tasted of the goodness of God, but I was far indeed from the fulness of joy in the Lord. I would not have given up either my well or my religion, but how far was either from satisfying the want it was intended to supply!

"The thought of that time is still grievous to me, but I think I should at least learn from it the lesson of charity for others. When I see professing Christians running after the follies of the world, and am ready to ask, 'How can a person with any portion of the mind of Christ have any desire for those beggarly elements?' my conscience retorts, 'How could you act just as inconsistently, though in a little different way?' About this time it was discovered that there was under our neighbourhood a body of water which could be reached by artesian wells. Tired of a scarcity of water, I got a drilling machine and set it to work in my well. Down through the rock the drill gradually cut its way, till one day it struck an open seam in the rock, and the little water there was in the well ran out and disappeared.

"By this time I had been so accustomed to compare myself with the well that I was almost frightened. A couplet of one of our hymns kept running through my mind,

'My former hopes are fled,  
My terror now begins.'

But the drill kept on cutting, cutting its way through the flinty rock, until one day it struck into the water, and we had to hasten to clear away the machinery and get the pipes in place and the flood gushed forth! and ever since, without a moment's pause, the stream has been flowing with an ample supply. Summer and winter, heat and cold, flood or drought, have no effect upon it, but it is always the same. As I saw the water flow, I felt a gleam of hope in my heart. I said