

What think Ye of Christ?

BY CHARLES H. PARKHURST, D. D.

Christ means to you something; what is it? Christ himself asks this of His disciples. It is the first Christian catechism. Brief, but nevertheless it is catechism and is God's warrant for our asking doctrinal questions, and his warrant too for our being prepared to frame some sort of an answer to them.

Christ's inquiry here means that he expects his disciples to have convictions—convictions in regard to Himself at any rate—and definite enough for them to be able to state them. Such convictions may be more correct, may be less so, but an imperfect opinion is better than none, and no opinion ends in being perfect that does not begin by being imperfect; and sound conviction is blunder convicted and converted. Everything human begins in a mistake. Error is the loamy soil out of which truth vegetates and blossoms. The history of philosophy, science and theology illustrates this principle with a distinct cogency that is unanswerable. So that we need not be too much afraid of being in error provided only we cling to our error with a tenacity that is not simply tenacious, but that is also honest and intelligent.

What think you of Christ? His appeal here is to man considered as an animal, who thinks, who has ideas, ideas of his own, takes impressions from what is shown him, told to him, acted out before him and impressions that so groove themselves into his substance as to take defined shape and shape that is fairly permanent. Just as objects make an image of themselves in the eye, so facts, events, truths, make an image of themselves in the mind—that is they do if the mind is an alert mind, sensitive, responsive. A man can of course, look without seeing anything; so he can hear without learning anything; live in the presence of great realities and come away from them without carrying upon his soul any of their imprint. An ox can look toward the west at 6 o'clock in the afternoon without observing any sunset; there is a good deal of the bovine still in most of us that call ourselves human and that is why we behold so little of what is really visible and why we garner so little of the fruit that falls into our laps. A duck can go through the water and still come out dry. A boy can go through college without any of the college going through him. Judas walked three years with Jesus and finished by being a devil.

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION.

What think ye of Christ? He wants to find out from His disciples, then, what impression of himself he has left with them, what stamp he has put upon them. What they think of Him will be only another name for the record of himself that his teachings and demeanor have left printed upon their intelligences. Their opinion of him that he was trying to get hold of was something definitely traceable to the working influence upon them of his own presence and activity. He is not interested to know what they imagine him to be, nor what they logically infer he may be, nor what some one has told them that he is. He has been for some time demonstrating Himself to them by word, act and spirit, and if they are not altogether like the duck in the water or the ox before sunset, as presumably they are not, this demonstration of Himself to them has in some way told upon them, it has lodged something within them, and He wants them to give a name to it. Their opinion of Him was something that he had himself been the means of making to grow up in them without their consciously having any part in the matter themselves. It was not something they had borrowed from somewhere nor something that they had personally striven to acquire.

And any opinion, if it is to have moral or religious value must center in that way. Some of our convictions—though not many—we deliberately construct, make them up, put them together, as a tailor makes a coat, or a cabinet worker a bureau. Most of our convictions we take over bodily from other people, from our parents, from books or the schoolmaster. They cost nothing, and like everything that costs nothing, are worth nothing, that is to say worth nothing so far as relates to any direct hold they may have upon us personally, any possession of us; any splendid governance over us. They are ours; so our baggage is ours, and most opinion is baggage—packed, locked and labelled. Compare a boy getting Christianity out of a book in a confirmation class with Peter growing up into an apostle under the benediction of Jesus, or Paul gathering in religion from the mystic indwelling of the Holy Ghost. You appreciate the difference at the mere mention without having to have it detailedly pointed out to you. The only religion the boy gains by the process is one that he can wear in his vest pocket, or which amounts to the same thing, which he has copied into his memory.

BE MORE THAN A PHONOGRAPH.

Paul, you remember, takes particular pains in the Galatian letter to tell us that he was not an echo, a quotation. He spoke with the authority that came from his own personal realization of the truth of what he was saying, and such speaking always carries; it is authoritative, is marked with its own credentials. Phonographs never carry conviction, for they only tell out what has first been told in, and a human phonograph is no better than a mechanical one for purposes of personal effect, and he was a very poor psychologist and little versed in the intricacies of human

nature who said that Edison's phonograph, when perfected, would replace the platform and the pulpit; and yet a man who can only repeat what has been told him, is no better as a moral force than an Edison machine or a cuckoo clock, and not so good, for the phonograph never forgets and the human cuckoo does.

Opinion, then, if it is anything more than mere quotation, copy of what some one else has thought, is one of the things that grows. The influence that starts the conviction will, if it continues to operate, go on adding to that conviction's strength and intensity. As illustrative of this compare the feebleness and timorousness of the convictions of the disciples when they began to believe in Jesus with what these convictions were when at the end of their course they laid down their lives in martyrdom. That is the natural course of things. It is natural for a flower to continue to grow if it stands in the same sunshine and rain as that which first made it begin to grow. If a flower comes up out of the ground, grows for a day and then suddenly stops growing and remains as it is, you know something is the matter—either there is a worm at the root or the air too cold or the soil too dry. It is not natural for it not to go on improving upon itself, adding to itself.

It is a sorry condition, then, that a man is in, that a Christian believer is in, when he says that he has the same opinion of Christ that he had a year ago. It tells a sad story of the way the year has been passing with him. If the vine that is twining itself around your trellis itself in no more leaves and puts forth no more leaves and blossoms this summer than it did last summer, the season must have been an infelicitous one for plant life or there is something serious the matter with the vine.—Commonwealth.

Clear Shining After Rain.

BY THEODORE L. CUYLER, D. D.

One of the numberless touches of exquisite poetry in the Old Testament is that which describes the "tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." The verdant grass plot which gladdens the eye is the result of a double process: shower and sunshine. Both are indispensable. We find in this beautiful expression a type of our deepest and richest spiritual experiences. It is a type of the most thorough work of conversion by the Holy Spirit. Over every impenitent soul hangs the dark cloud of God's righteous displeasure; His holy word thunders against sin, and His threatenings beat like a storm of hail. Repentance and faith in Christ sweep away the cloud; the thunders cease; the face of the atoning, pardoning Saviour looks forth like a clear blue sky after a storm; for there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ. No two cases of conversion are exactly similar, yet in every thorough work of grace the darkness and dread which belong to a state of guilt give place to the smile and peace of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

What is true in the beginnings of the most thorough Christian life is often realized in the subsequent experiences of the believer. Rain and sunshine both play their part in developing godly character. It ought to be a comfort to such of my readers as are under the heavy downpour of trials to open their Bibles and read how it fared with some of God's most faithful children. Abraham toiled on his sorrowful way to Mount Moriah under a dark cloud of apprehension, but the clear shining came when God approved his faith and spared the beloved Isaac to the fathers' heart. The successive strokes of trial that burst on the head of Joseph only made his exaltation the more signal when he became prime minister of Egypt. There are forty-one chapters of the Book of Job through which beats the tempest which smote the four corners of his house, but in the forty-second chapter comes the clear shining after rain and a blaze of restored prosperity. The biographies of Elijah and of Daniel prove how light is sown for the righteous; and the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews is a meteorological record to show how faith paints rainbows on thunder clouds.

In our day God often employs stormy providences for the discipline and perfecting of his own people. He knows when we need the drenchings. Every raindrop has its mission to perform. It goes right down to the roots of the heart, and creeps into every crevice. Not one drop of sorrow, not one tear, but may have some beneficent purpose. The process is not joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness and purity and strength. Christ's countenance never beams with such brightness and beauty as when it breaks forth after a deluge of sorrow; and many a Christian has become a braver, stronger and holier man or woman for terrible afflictions; there has been a clear shining after rain.

This principle has manifold applications. Sometimes a cloud of unjust clammy gathers over a good man's name; lies darken the air and it pours falsehoods forty days and forty nights. But when the shower of slander has spent itself the truth creeps out slowly but surely from behind the clouds of defamation and the slandered character shines with more luster than ever. The same storm that wrecks a rotten tree only roots the more firmly the sound tree, whose leaves glisten in the subsequent sunshine.

All ye children of God who are under the peltings of

poverty, or the downpour of disappointments, or the blizzards of adversity, "think it not strange as though some strange thing had happened unto you." Millions have had the same experience before you. No storm ever drowned a true believer, or washed out the foundations of his hope. The trial of your faith will be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Two things ought to give you courage. One is that our Lord loves to honor and reward unwavering faith. He permits the storm to test you, and then sends the smile of His sunshine to reward you. Another thought is that the skies are never so brilliantly blue as when they have been washed by a storm. The countenance of Jesus is never so welcome and lovable as when he breaks forth upon us—a sun of consolation and joy after trials.

Long years ago, on a day of thick fog and pouring rain, I ascended a mountain by an old bridlepath over the slippery rocks. A weary, disappointed company we were when we reached the cabin on the summit. But toward evening a mighty wind swept away the bank of mist, the body of blue heavens stood out in its clearness, and before us was revealed the magnificent landscape stretching away to the sea. The scene was at the time, and has often been since, a sermon to my soul. It taught me that faith's stairways are over steep and slippery rocks, often through blinding storms; but God never loses his hold on us, and if we endure to the end he will bring us out into the clear shining after rain.

"So it's better to hope, though the clouds run low,
And to keep the eye still lifted;
For the clear blue sky will soon peep through
When the thunder cloud is rife."

—Sel.

A Touch at the Regulator.

BY CORNELIUS WOELFKIN, D. D.

When a watch does not accurately indicate the time it is in need of a double adjustment. The hands must be set to the standard time. But let this be all, and in a few days I shall find the same variation. The watch needs to be adjusted at the regulator, which governs the running. Likewise the character and the conduct need a double adjustment. The law of the Old Testament prescribed the form of outward conduct. Obedience to the commandments was a setting of the hands according to the standard of duty. The New Testament tests of character are finer and more delicate. They deal with the heart, the regulator of character and governor of conduct. Under the old regime, if the outer conduct conformed to the law's prohibitions, the character passed judgment. Under the new dispensation, the motives come up for inspection. The same order obtains in the daily discipline of life. We hem the child's life in by commandments of to do and do not. With adults we make our appeal to the motives of the heart. The Lord's "I say unto you," is his touch at the regulator of life, rather than the hands.

"Thou shalt not kill." That commandment does not find us. Our hands are not like Lady Macbeth's, red with a brother's blood. We have been angry with men, we have condemned them with venomous speech; we have condemned them with prejudiced judgment; but we have never smitten them unto death. But for these inner emotions, the reader of the heart has branded, not our foreheads, but our souls, with the mark of Cain. Is there in the secret depths of the soul the passion of envy, jealousy, malice, suspicion and unkind feeling? There we have the constituent elements, that charge us with the primeval crime.

It is not Christianity to be free from certain catalogues of outward crime. Mohammedans, heathens, pagans and infidels may be honest, truthful, virtuous, and law abiding. The unique quality that constitutes Christianity is love in the heart. Love that suffers long and is kind, love that is not easily provoked and thinketh no evil. Character and conduct are never safe, until the heart is regulated with the grace of love. When love is enthroned in the secret chamber of the soul, all the outward life is held in splendid balance and poise.

If the heart is not right, then cease from the forms of religion. The Lord wants reconciliation rather than a ritual. He passes all our singing, praying, giving, working and talking, to have a look at the heart behind it all. If that is not right there can be no acceptable worship. A wrong heart strikes discord into our praises; works havoc in our service, and discredits all our worship. If we could look behind the religious activity that meets with no burning soul of joy, no answer to our prayers, no power in our services, we might read the burning words, "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God." The pure in heart shall see God. From all others the secrets of peace, hope, satisfaction, contentment and joy are hid away. These are sharp and two-edged words from the lips of our Lord. It is no wonder he did not rise to popularity quickly. A religion that feeds the hungry, heals the sick and ministers to bodily needs, springs into rapid favor. But a religion that searches and probes the heart is of slow growth. Here the real greatness of our Lord our manifest. He raised no popular cry. He built for eternity, not time. He rather welcomes the souls that come singly through the straight gate, and the crowd that seeks entrance at the wide door. But if we can