"WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?"

A Sermon delivered by Rev. J. E. Donkin in the Methodist Church, Acadia Mines, Sunday, Dec. 4th, 1886.

TEXT.—"What think ye of Christ?" Matt. 22 chap., 42.

The human mind is of such a quality that it will not accept a fact or statement without examination. To enquire is at once its function and duty. Truth must be proved, character must be scrutinized, and both, if pure and genuine, will be brighter when the test is over, while the mind and heart being satisfied will fasten themselves upon a rock-rooted certainty.

The great beauty and force of the Christian dispensation lie in the fact that every principle advanced by its founder was illustrated in his life. He gave to the world a system of theology, not only surpassingly rich in its doctrines, and sublime in its unfoldings of eternal life; but associated with a character eminent for purity, holiness, and every divine perfection. He lived the truth as well as taught it. His words, "I am the way, the truth and the life," have a depth of meaning never before claimed by any other teacher. What do you think of such teachings, such a character, such a Saviour?

The question is personal, practical, pressing—a burning, momentous question. You must answer it, though in that answer you may read your destiny. For whether you are to sink or soar, be crowned or doomed, depends upon what you think of, and do with Christ. But before we ask for your answer, let us turn our attention for a little at what the world has thought of Christ. Ever since the words of our text dropped from the lips of the Saviour, foes and friends alike have studied his life, examined his doctrines, and recorded their opinion. What has been that opinion. I cry across the ages to the mighty spirits of the Christian centuries, "What think ye of Christ?"

I ask the poets, led by the mighty Florentine, with spirit sad, with face so beautiful and full of wondrous thought; with Chaucer and Shakespeare, and Milton, and Cowper, and Coleridge, and Wordsworth, and Byron, and Burns, and many other bright spirits following in their train, "What think ye of Christ?" Listen while they answer, "He was the soul of our poetry, our inspiration, and our joy."

"What think ye of Christ?" We question the men of thought, and out of the middle ages rise the school men, the founders of modern philosophy, men whose mighty intellects made light in its darkness. Descartes, and Bacon, and Locke; the foremost minds of the eighteenth century, the century of unbelief. Leibnitz and Newton, and Berkley, and Kant, men who in intellectual force, and philosophic acumen, transcend all the other men of the age, an age of boasted wisdom. Listen, for with one voice they answer, "The Christ stands alone, spotless, peerless, pre-eminent, the son of God among men.

"What think ye of Christ?" We ask the good and great of this and of other times. Those who lived not for self, but for others, the foremost in doing good, who lived on earth as the brethren of Jesus, as the friends of God, who lived immortal. With hearts all aglow with joy they reply, "He is the realized ideal of humanity."

"What think ye of Christ?" We call to the great masters of music and of song, who have woven for us a divine speech, and filled the ear and stirred the soul with harmonies of sweetest cadence.. O ye mighty bards of the Christian ages, "What think ye of Christ?" I bid you listen, for in answer they chant:

"Oh could I speak the matchless worth,
O could I set the glories forth
That in my Saviour shine,
I'd soar and touch the heavenly strings,
And vie with Gabriel while he sings
In notes almost divine."

"What think ye of Christ?" I would ask the painters, who have almost made the canvas live with their ideals of plenty and of poverty, of beauty and of love. I ask and they respond, "He has been the soul of our art, and to paint him worthily was the highest, though alas, the hopeless feat of man."

I do not wish to multiply such testimonies as these, but before I pass from them, permit me to add another, that of the mighty Napoleon. One day at St. Helena he was conversing, as was his custom, about the great men of antiquity, and comparing himself with them; he paused, and turning to one of his officers, asked, "Can you tell me who Jesus Christ was?" The officer said he had not thought much about such things. "Well then," said Napoleon, "I will tell you." He then compared himself with Christ and with the heroes of antiquity, and showed how far Christ surpassed them all. "Alexander, Caesar and myself have founded great empires, but upon what did we depend? Force was our power. Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for him."

And now having listened to the world's estimate, we ask, "What do you think of Christ?"

First. What do you think of his character? There was one character perfect, infinitely perfect in purity and goodness. The scrutiny of centuries has failed to find in it a flaw. The best men who ever lived are not great enough to be compared with Him. His name is "above every name," and His life is the truest and noblest of all lives. Yes, all other lives are good and great, only as they reflect His life. His character has not a parallel for purity, nobleness and elevation in all the history of humanity. You can study and love it without disappointment, and worship it without idolatry. The love that links you to Him is more precious than the gold of earth.

What grand distinguishing features would you expect to find in such a character? Of course it would have to be free from sin, and we claim this for Christ. He knew no sin, in his mouth was no guile, in his heart was no deceit. He was tempted, but he passed through it without a stain. His enemies have searched for faults, but have failed. Many of them were men of the brightest genius, but they have all failed—failed because there was no fault that could be found. There was nothing in that life which ought not to be there, and everything in it which ought to be there.

If there was any especial trait which gave to the character of Christ a unique charm, I think it was his perfect unselfishness. Declining all earthly honor and flattery, He became a man among men, a helper to all who needed help; His daily life evinced the enthusiasm of a divine love, in the pure light of which no selfish thought could live. It was Christ who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." And of Him it was said, "Even Christ pleased not Himself." There never appeared in any age such a man, such a life, such a character. God-like in His love, matchless in His lowliness, boundless in charity, patient under almost every form of violence and suffering, homeless and often friendless, taunted by enemies, betrayed by friends with shame and sneer, and a crown of thorns in death. Yet He prays for His enemies, and love and pity are in the prayer. O, my people, you cannot follow Christ, and be narrow, and selfish, and mean. You cannot, you cannot.

The character of Christ, what a theme for study. What an object to be admired. How it claims my love and asks my imitation. I do not wonder that infidels stand amazed and abashed before it, though they look upon its splendor with loveless hearts and blinded eyes.

But further, what do you think of His teachings. How do they compare with Socrates or Cicero, or any of the great disciples of learning. Truth, like character, must be tested, and the teaching that disappears in the furnace is worthless, but that which shines brighter when the fire cools down, proves its right to be, and to be immortal. Such we claim for the teachings of Christ. They have defied the heat, and the centuries have not dimmed their splendor or power. They are all pure gold, and infinitely more precious. They have never deceived the hope of a trusting child, or lost one battlefield. They are grander than human philosophy, with clearer light, richer beauty, and greater variety. As a teacher He stands alone and unique. Seldom systematic, His discourses were pointed utterances of some special truth, each containing some heavenly lesson. While their fervency, grandeur and originality captivate even the heart of his enemies. Simple, as a rule, He sometimes rises to heights where no human mind can climb. No compositions in human language as forcibly trace the analogies of nature and grace, or so plainly point out human duty and destiny. No authority has been so often quoted, or as much loved and studied.

"The greatness of the ancient world culminated in Socrates and Plato," and their greatness culminated in their ability to ask questions: not to answer them. But the full-orbed greatness of Christ as a teacher is seen in his ability to answer questions and pour light upon what had perplexed the brightest minds for centuries. He is the only philosopher who has been able to answer his own queries, and his revelations have become the guide of the world. It is a singular fact that while He was rejected and denied Himself, His teachings and principles have been wrought into all the highest forms of civilization, and men admire them, love and die for them. While the present governments, the happiest communities, and the most successful lives are guided by His precepts. Men in doubt and difficulty and death turn to His words for comfort and guidance and light. When they want something more authoritative than the brilliant guesses of science, so often revised, so always uncertain, they turn to Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

What do you think of Him as a teacher? Those to whom he spoke confessed, "Never man spake like this," while the purest and best minds from that day until this have willingly and lovingly sat disciples at his feet. But a detailed examination of His teachings would require a lifetime, rather than an hour, and although fascinated with their beauty, we are drawn to another equally pleasing and profitable aspect of Christ.

What think you of Christ as a Saviour? O, my brethren, my brethren, I freely confess my inability to unfold the mystery of redemption, it transcends all thought, it surpasses all description. If I could, I would tell you in all its fullness and freeness and beauty, the Saviour's wondrous love.

"I'd sing the precious blood he spilt,
My ransom from the dreadful guilt
Of sin and wrath divine.
I'd sing his glorious righteousness,
And magnify the wondrous grace
That made salvation mine."

But I cannot, I cannot. I can only ask you to accept by simple faith the Christ, then shall you know by experience, what you cannot learn in any other way. You may make this very hour memorable forever as the birth hour of your immortal soul into the blessed life—of love and obedience to God. Even now, if you will, you may part every chain that binds you to a life of sin and shame, and sail out into the boundless bottomless sea of God's infinite love. The door of mercy is open and the Master calls, "Whosoever will, let him come." While I look and listen, I catch glimpses of His redeeming love and power—yea, I am commissioned to tell you to-night "He is mighty to save." O how this poor world needs such a Saviour, let human history abundantly testify. I look at the world in all its sinfulness and helplessness and moral destitution, and the dark picture cannot be overdrawn. But from this I turn to Christ the Saviour, Christ the Redeemer of the world, as represented in the Gospel, and as a soul in need of pardon I rejoice, and as a minister of the Gospel of peace, I shout for joy, because I can publish the most blessed intelligence that can affect the human heart. Christ died for me, and not for me only, but for the world. If I am not saved it is my own fault. For this very purpose the Saviour came and taught and died. To this end he instituted the Christian ministry. To accomplish this Jesus intercedes, the Spirit strives, the Church exists, and running through it all we read these wonderful words, "He is able to save unto the uttermost all who come." Casting myself a poor pleading penitent at His feet, I find peace and sing—

"Now rest my long divided heart,
Fixed on this blissful centre rest."

Because I have felt in my own heart this saving power, because I have known others whose hearts were changed and whose lives have been given to Christian service, and because under his mighty saving grace the worst men of earth have been changed into the best men who ever lived. I confidently recommend Him tonight as a Saviour. If any of you think this salvation is either difficult or distant, I am commanded to say to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, it is very nigh thee, this very day you may obtain deliverance. Yes, this very hour the blood may be applied, and earth and heaven rejoice over another trophy won for Christ. Parents come and bring your children, brothers and sisters come—come and take what he delights to give. This is a world of fading and wasting and woe. O amidst it all to feel safe, free, happy, to feel sure you are on the road to a far distant and far better home. Then never rest till consciously saved. O, ye wayward, wandering, perishing ones, listen. A living, dying, exalted Christ stoops to-day to ask your love and waits to grant you pardon. "What think you of such a Christ."

I have only touched upon the edges of a great subject to-day. I would have you carefully consider what a wondrous love, what a blessed pardon, what a wise teacher and guide you reject when you turn away from such a Christ. Alas for such there remains a ruin, human lips may not tell. I would have you

"Trust His blood to save your soul,
Trust His grace to make you whole,
Trust His living, dying, too,
Trust Him all the journey through,
Trust Him till your feet shall be
Planted on the crystal sea."

Go and do as the wisest, purest, strongest, noblest, best men the world ever saw, did, give your heart to Christ and fashion your life after his example. Amen.

Correspondenc.

[We do not hold ourselves responsible for the opinions of our correspondents.]

To the Editor of the Week's Doings.

SIR,—I am given to understand that I am the clergyman referred to in a letter in your paper of to-day. If such be the case I must trouble you with a few lines. I never made the statements your correspondent accuses me of making. I have never attacked any man or body of men. I have never attempted to advance the cause of the Church of England by inconclusive arguments, or one-sided statements. What I have done, and what I am in duty bound to do, has been and is to point out *what* the Church of England teaches, and *why* she teaches it. This I have done as far as I know with courtesy and charity towards all, and therefore I repudiate absolutely what "Dennis" has put into print.

I quite agree with "Dennis" in admiring a manly, noble and straightforward Christianity, a Christianity which has the courage of conviction, and therefore I altogether detest a character and spirit which, while it can make a bitter and untruthful statement about another, is yet ashamed to do so over its own name.

JOHN R. S. PARKINSON.

The Rectory,
Acadia Mines, Dec. 11th, '86.

SIR,—As there has been considerable debating in our temperance organizations as to which is the greater evil, dancing, or skating in rinks, and as the rink in our community is about to be re-opened, I will take this opportunity of stating that there has not been a solitary proof that skating in rinks is an evil, but by their narrow minded arguments they are convincing us more and more every day that the rink in our community is a greater blessing than we had anticipated. One reason presented why the rink is an evil, is because some of our ministers attend. Now this, to our minds, is a good reason why our children should be allowed to go. As we know of no place where they would be more benefitted than in company with our learned clergymen, but we know that the person who started this argument and said the rink was the latest patent of the devil, does not want the children to have any recreation at all or he would never have spoken against the Sabbath School, Christmas tree and sleigh drive. Another "heavy card" and would-be professional man says that if dancing is an evil the rink is an abomination, but like the rest, he failed to give any proofs, but because I say it's an abomination, it is. We would now advise this friend to give up debating till he learns what the poetry of motion is. He also says that out of door skating is good healthy exercise, but because we have a roof over our heads to protect us from the weather, it is no exercise whatever, but an evil that is sending hundreds of souls to hell every day. Now if it is unhealthy to skate in a well ventilated rink, what must it be to dance in a close-heated and dusty dance hall. Now, Mr. Editor, what we are looking forward to is the time when the graceful motions on ice will be appreciated by all, and this nefarious, vulgar, disgusting hugging-to-music business will be abolished.

PARENT.

The *Victoria Advocate* rejoices that it is a free trader, but it is perfectly clear that it will receive no recognition at the hands of the distributors of the Cobden club "American campaign fund." Why? Because the Advocate is a free trader only as to the revenue tariff; it "out Herod's Herod" as a protectionist, only it wants protection in its own way. The Advocate's idea might be found a brilliant one if divested of certain obscurities. It advocates the removal of all tariff restrictions to foreign trade, and dwells eloquently upon the blessings to flow to the country by such a course, but then knocks all its former reasoning into "pi" by declaring it would, in lieu of tariff protection, protect American labor and industries by a strict and severe boycott of every article of foreign production that would come in competition with American production. If American manufacturers and producers are actuated by the vast greed generally attributed to them, the Advocate's plan of protection would be more satisfactory to them than the existing one, for it would be absolute and unlimited, where as now they must at least confine themselves to the margin afforded by the tariff. The *Express* is not in favor of any more protection than will reasonably cover the difference in cost of production between this and other countries, so as to place the home and foreign manufacturers and producers on an equality in the market, and therefore could not favor such an absolute embargo upon importations as the Advocate proposes. But it may be claimed that the Advocate does not know what it is talking about. Probably it does not.

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