

WEEKLY SERMON.

The Rev. Dr. Newell Dwight Hillis on "Christ and the Common People."

The Fascination of Jesus Christ for the Common People was the subject of the sermon by the Rev. Dr. Newell Dwight Hillis in Plymouth church, Brooklyn, on a recent Sunday. His text was the words: "And the common people heard him gladly." Dr. Hillis said:

By common consent Jesus Christ is the most fascinating figure in history. In all other realms named, science or war or song, there are a hundred names equally great, but in His realm Jesus Christ dwells a solitary King. Supreme in the perfection of His teaching, He is supreme also in perfection of His conduct and character. Now and then a man has repudiated the church and neglected the Scriptures, but no enemy has ever risen up to blacken Christ's white name. The more wonderful is the fact that those who have reviled the church have with the same lips proclaimed the majesty and beauty and supremacy of Jesus.

Every sane Christian who earnestly considers Christ is the wisest among the teachers, the noblest of the reformers, the purest among the holy, the saintliest of all the martyrs. Jesus proves all things, sifts the chaff out of the wheat, burns the dross out of the gold, strips away the sheep's clothing from the wolf, exposes every form of weakness, deceit and unbelief. But nineteen centuries have come and gone again and lo, all His foundations stand sure. All things else have been destroyed by time, or else changed beyond recognition. These nineteen centuries have destroyed the old astrology, the old medicine, the old plow and ox-cart, the old houses, the old arts, the old ships, the old laws; lo, all these are new. But after nineteen centuries His charter of Christianity, His Sermon on the Mount, His great similes, the love of God, the sin and need of man, a divine pity that redeems and saves, a hope that is immortal, a Saviour the same yesterday, today and forever—these abide most things that are in ruins, these are unchanged midst innumerable changes.

HIS FASCINATION FOR THE COMMON PEOPLE.

Having confessed the fascination of Jesus Christ for the common people, the noblest of the reformers, the purest among the holy, the saintliest of all the martyrs. Jesus proves all things, sifts the chaff out of the wheat, burns the dross out of the gold, strips away the sheep's clothing from the wolf, exposes every form of weakness, deceit and unbelief. But nineteen centuries have come and gone again and lo, all His foundations stand sure. All things else have been destroyed by time, or else changed beyond recognition. These nineteen centuries have destroyed the old astrology, the old medicine, the old plow and ox-cart, the old houses, the old arts, the old ships, the old laws; lo, all these are new. But after nineteen centuries His charter of Christianity, His Sermon on the Mount, His great similes, the love of God, the sin and need of man, a divine pity that redeems and saves, a hope that is immortal, a Saviour the same yesterday, today and forever—these abide most things that are in ruins, these are unchanged midst innumerable changes.

THE GREAT HAVE FELT HIS FASCINATION.

From the very beginning this universal element in Jesus fascinated the great minds of the world. His friendship with the sons of genius and intellect has been a close friendship. No matter what sentiment the common people have cherished toward Him, it is certain that the greatest intellects of all ages have held the attitude of reverence and worship. No one will deny that through all centuries John, equally great as thinker, as scholar and as poet. It has been beautifully said that Matthew and Mark wrote the details, Luke stood up on the seashore and looked far away into the haze, where the sky met the sea, and saw a shining form standing there like an angel in the light of heaven, making earth and heaven to meet in beautiful unity. Christ's story also fascinated the second greatest intellect of that era—Paul. God had chosen him as the author, the first great exponent of democracy. Then each supreme mind that enters our earth as the years come and go yields obedience and bows in reverence to Jesus as the greatest of men before whom bowed down before Joseph, from Origen, and Athanasius and Augustine, to Milton and Shakespeare, there is not one single mind that has not been drawn by Christ's spell. To these great intellects, in art, or science, or literature, or government, but walks in Christ's triumphal procession. If we represent each century by a great man, then Christ discussed as the great themes, calculated to fascinate the great minds, themes named God, duty, conscience, sin, forgiveness, right, wrong, immortality. These vast themes call for authorship, oratory, high converse. To explain these themes and defend them men instituted lectures and founded schools and universities.

STATESMEN, TOO, CONFESS HIS POWER.

Not less necessary and inevitable was Christ's influence upon law and government. From the moment that Jesus unveiled the human soul as made up of the image of God, proclaimed the brotherhood and essential equality of men, from that moment the absolutism of the throne was doomed, the chasm that separated the patrician from the plebeian began to close up, through went down, the common people went up. For a thousand years, statesmen and legislators have been disciples who have endeavored to translate Christ's idea of the worth of the individual, and the equality of men, into terms of law and government. Inevitable, too, Christ's fascination for the common people, in the realm of the beautiful. Jesus unveiled God as a father, clothed His throne with allurement and beauty, and pointed man to a heaven, glorious beyond all words. Remembering Christ's description of that life immortal in the soul's summerland, John swept together all the greatest beauties and rubies, all his sweet song, to form a vision beautiful enough to interpret that realm gloriously beyond the utmost of man's conceptions. And, from the glorious God and the beautiful heaven came all the fine arts, cathedrals for worship, symphonies of praise, pictures of this glorious and divine babe, and His beautiful mother. His hours of transfiguration, the sorrow of His death, the glory of His resurrection, through the brush of Raphael, of Michael and Titian. For that very reason, if Jesus' teachings have been the springs of the fine arts, the philosophies called aesthetic, and agnosticism, and asceticism, have no fine arts, no paintings, no music, no architecture, no Paradise. In praise of the all-glorious God, great Ambrose writes a Te Deum. But the atheist says: "There is no God. Instead of the sun, glowing yonder in the sky, there is darkness, and an empty socket." Now imagine the atheist rising up and saying, "Let us now pray

of affection flung themselves upon their knees and poured out at the feet of the Carpenter Divine, the full tide of their aspiration, their secret dreams, the concealed effluence and aroma of the heart, all the blossoms of love. As if to use Keats' expression, autumn had come in while the forests offered their golden boughs, and the vines their fruit, and the harvest their sheaves, and shed at their feet, the treasure before the god of summer. For even so the common people emptied the golden urn of the heart, with all its sacred ointment upon Christ's feet.

HIS LOVABLENESS.

Fascinated by His example, and His perfect carriage of His faculties, the common people were also charmed by His lovableness. When it is said that He spoke as never man spoke, the emphasis is partly upon the wisdom of His words, and partly upon the sympathy and lovableness of His heart and life. We do not know exactly about His face or figure. We only know that He carried about with Him a sweet and all-compelling charm. That, to the poor, He stood forth clothed with such beauty and attraction, as an oasis with fountain and garden is attractive for the birds of Paradise, dwelling in the dusty desert. For His was the genius of friendship. His first His last His greatest enthusiasm was His enthusiasm for the soul. Take Him all in all, He is the most companionable man in history. He did not dwell apart in caves, like John. He did not return to solitude and descend on men like an avalanche or a thunder storm, like the reformers of the history. He did not hold himself apart from the new, like the old Greek god and had flung down His blood-stained cross, at sight of which Jupiter had turned pale, and before which Venus had trembled, and both had dissolved into ghosts and shadowy air, and disappeared, like the "baseless fabric of a dream." But the persecution failed—the summer is beautiful and the fruits are harvested of August approve themselves unto the hungry pilgrims. And if one happens to love the winter and hate the summer, with what form of weapon shall the army with banners go up against the south wind and drive back the hosts of the summer? The new view of God and His Fatherhood and His divine love swept over our cold, fearful earth like a genial atmosphere that was rosy and full of form. Therefore, the common people heard Jesus gladly.

HIS VIEW OF MAN.

The people were also fascinated by Christ's view of man. Standing above the prodigious with his rags, Jesus invested the youth with such dignity and personal worth that the boy rose up to meet him on his knees, and wept, and, having cast off his rags and filth, cast off also his passions and sins. The time was when science talked man down, made him a speck in an infinite and unworthy in an infinite God. But suddenly science had become a prophet. For fifty years science has been talking about other worlds that were habitable, but here is a book with all the details of a new world, "Man's Place in the Physical Universe," and the message of the book is the uniqueness of man, his dignity and his nobility. Now the common people makes man's world like a solitary god. For thirty years, reading science, I have felt sometimes that man was a leaf, drifting down the cosmic sea, being blown by the wind of a thousand diamond points and covered with divine tracery in the midst, lying on a cosmic shore, where the poet to develop the motif of an infinite God. But suddenly science seems that our astronomers, through spectroscopic and telescope, have been analyzing the other suns and stars and planets. Parceling out the heavens, and dividing the night sky into these distant worlds, as to their heat, their cold, their gas, the possibility of vegetable and animal life. To their astonishment, the man all the reports were in, they discovered that most of these shining bodies represent fire, in which any form of life is impossible. Disturbed and alarmed, after their vain hope to find habitable worlds, they turned their attention to the planets. And lo, even the two upon which they had built their highest hopes proved disappointing. Mars had a tiny fraction of the heat that our earth has. Her polar snows proved to be deposits of carbonic acid and heavy gases. The equilibrium of atmosphere that makes vegetable and animal life possible was totally lacking, but Venus was found to have only one face toward the sun, the one side knowing the most dreadful cold, the other fierce heat. Conditions that make life possible on our earth, even lo forms of vegetable life impossible—all this, not to mention the other facts precluding life. And slowly the physicist, the astronomer, the astronomer have been retracted from the old position as to the habitable worlds. They tell us that somewhere in space there may be a habitable world, where beings remotely as rapids as to make this world is for the dreamer and not for the scientist who deals with the facts in the case. And what is the result of it all? Only this—that a tiny fraction of the heat that our earth has, and held it so dear, that its dust was counted worthy to be organized into one made in His image. So, at last, physical science has driven us back again into a little world, the Garden of Eden. Again we stand out on the grass in the cool of the evening, and man keeps a trust with Him who walks with His earthly child. Answering with a smile, man bows his head and whispers "My Father" in answer to the divine overture, "My son, oh, Absalom, my son, my son."

HIS DISCOVERY OF GOD.

The common people have also felt the fascination of Christ's view of God. The prophets of the Old Testament, the God as the all-terrible One. To approach His throne was to approach all-consuming fire. The very thought of His righteousness and holiness filled men with terror. But suddenly, the common people realized that this was not Christ's idea of God. This gentle radiant Teacher, this Comrade, Master and Friend, this Jesus, His Father, and lingered upon His name, as if that name filled Him with all sweet delight and roused a thousand willigome associations. Going to school and to work, he carried with him a book that he read over and over. Under the impression of that hard, it was, as our teacher once taught us, "always down hill toward God's heart, for sinful men." But the publican and the Pharisee supposed before that going toward God was going toward ten thousand naked swords, and swords that were tipped with fire. But Jesus said, "The love was love. 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