

Bills from the Fountains of Israel.

POPULAR CHRISTIANITY: WHOM DOES IT SAVE?

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How comes it that Christianity is not popular, there should be a popular Christianity? We all, by nature, as sinners, hate Christianity in its integrity, or we should not want it. Yet the most of us, from various reasons, have convictions which nothing is adequate to overcome, and which, in not a few, assume a terrible, though unacknowledged power, that Christianity is essential to us; and that, beyond all doubt, woe is he who hath nothing to do with it. Therefore we popularise it. Of course, Christianity so popularised is *not* Christianity; but this no man who is not "born again" inquires into. He had rather not inquire into it. It has been good enough (he supposes) for other men, some of whom have been better judges in theology, and others worse livers in the world, than he; and why not then, for him? It sounds like Christianity, tastes like it, looks like it (or what he presumes Christianity should sound, taste, and look like): indeed, for Christianity it is surprisingly agreeable; and he is almost disposed (at quite spare moments) to become a "defender of the faith" against those cross-grained people, of whatever religious distinction—especially those thorough Christians—who would represent it as *not* agreeable until it has become painful; as *not* a freedom until something they call bondage has been discovered within; as *not* accommodating and yielding, *except in what they would perhaps describe as long-suffering* and compassion towards the infirmities of sincere purpose and desire, and the sorrows of a contrite heart. But this triumph finds its completeness in this, that he has got Christianity without anything of that DREADED and HATED REVOLUTION WITHIN wherewith so many sickening preachers scare people away from being "religious." Poor man! little does he think, as he laughs, who *laughs with him!*

Ill as it is constituted, this popular Christianity has its constitution; the elements of which do not sound so badly to ears that have their hearing appointed them in a time like our own: they may be collectively named as "Notions" and "Heroes." This *must* be agreeable to unrenewed men, who cannot, from whatsoever cause, do without a "religiousness." For "notions" *may* be *right*, and may be wrong; are so capable of being added to, subtracted, multiplied, and divided, as almost to show that you *can* apply arithmetical calculation to moral subjects (which everybody knows you cannot); and then "heroes" whether writers, speakers, workers, or preachers, can be changed, dismissed, recalled, applauded, condemned; they may become everything, nothing, wonderful, common-place; and, better still, all this at pleasure,—not the pleasure of the hero, that is, any more than of the notions; but of the owner of this popular Christianity.

Let us look at this "religionism of the million" a little more closely. While "notions" and "heroes" are its comprehending elements, the chief features therein contained may be denominated—Religiousness, or Religiosity; Symbolism; Evangelical Doctrine superficially stated; Sentimentality; Earnest Men; and Fusion.

RELIGIOUSNESS, OR RELIGIOSITY.—This is the mother of the rest. Free from the discomfort of definition, proportionably secure against being "brought to book," and reserving, in every case, to its possessor the right of final appeal, it is fatally adapted alike to secure and hasten destruction, by at once gratifying the prejudice, feeding the self-satisfaction, and lulling the conscience. Righteousness saves no man, any more than politics. How should it? Is it not jointly from without and within, and *not* from above? Is it not inventive, carnal, grudging, self-satisfied? Is it not a compromise between a man's self, with all that it really values or prefers, and a dreadful alternative? Is it not a substitution? Is it not "WRITTEN" thus in God's word, "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God?" (Rom. x. 3.)

"But," it may be said, "If you thus distinguish between 'religiousness' and