

**CHRISTIAN SCIENCE, ITS STRENGTH  
AND ITS WEAKNESS.**

Preached at the St. Cloud Presbyterian Church, Orange, N. J., by the Pastor, Rev. Chauncey W. Goodrich.

I Thess. v: 21: Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

The cult of Christian Science has long since developed beyond the point when it could be ignored as a harmless fad. Already it has a history of thirty years; and of late there has been manifested among its adherents the indubitable indication that as a religious movement it has passed its initial stages—namely, the disposition to divide into opposing parties, the conservative and the liberal, the orthodox and the heterodox. Its societies, or churches, in the United States and Canada now number four hundred, its teachers and healers, five thousand, representing an actual membership, it is claimed, of three hundred thousand. Its growth in numbers from year to year has been extraordinary and it is far from giving signs of waning power.

The character of its adherents also is such as demands respect. The new teaching has of course attracted many who were mere "faddists," moved by an Athenian curiosity for something new, and many restless souls always expectant of some easy panacea for the ills of body and spirit. But among avowed Christian Scientists there are many of such intelligence and high purpose and beauty of character that we cannot class them with the light-weights who might easily be carried away with the religious fashion of the moment.

The more one studies the movement, the more he is convinced that nothing which is wholly a delusion or a fraud could exhibit such vitality or attract the men and women that it does. There must be in its teaching some truth—though it be but half a truth—to give it the power which it exerts over intelligent and earnest souls. No consideration, therefore, of Christian Science is just or worthy which concerns itself wholly with the exposure of its errors or the ridicule of some of its palpable absurdities. Our method of treating the matter should be rather to discriminate the good, to stand ready to appropriate whatever is helpful and from that vantage point of sympathy to judge, with less prejudice, its errors. The Scriptural counsel is still applicable, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

In approaching the subject then in this attitude—with the inquiry first of all as to what is true, what is good in the teaching or practice of this new system, the attention is arrested by the most obviously beneficent aspect of it as a system of physical healing, and of this I shall have something to say in a moment. But I would remind you that,

though from the first this has been the most prominent aspect of the matter, theoretically and according to the teaching of the more discerning leaders in the movement, it is not the primary aspect. Christian Science is first of all a religion, teaching of God and of man and of their relation to one another.

Logically, therefore, the first fruitage of the new faith is spiritual—manifesting itself in character. And as a matter of fact Christian Science, like some of the other sects, tends to produce a distinct type of character.

Before passing on to the more mooted question of bodily healing, a word should thus be said of the spiritual graces most characteristic of this new faith. It may be observed in passing that if there are graces, there are also blemishes, and we have many of us doubtless suffered from that spiritual conceit which in some of these religionists manifests itself in an irritating air of superiority and condescension. Nevertheless, the normal product of this teaching is in certain graces of which I would name the two which seem to me most commonly observable.

The first is a certain *quietness and serenity of spirit*. This impresses us, when we meet it, by its contrast with the prevailing temper of our Christian life. Ours is a restless, anxious, fretted age; and even our Christianity has caught something of this corroding spirit. As a generation we are becoming increasingly aware of the defect and are trying to remedy it. And we are under a distinct obligation to Christian Scientists in so far as their quiet and sunny example emphasizes our need. But does the teaching of Christian Science offer the only adequate basis for such serenity of heart? Because the adherents of the system happen to emphasize by their example a grace which is today too generally neglected, shall we forget all the ground that is offered for its cultivation in our historic faith? You will bear me witness that not a few times I have urged upon you from the pulpit, repose of heart—not merely as a privilege, but as a Christian duty—reminding you how impressively, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus associated with the cardinal virtues this grace of the unanxious mind—recalling the great legacy which he left his disciples of peace such as the world could not give, and that benediction which echoes on through the Apostolic writings, "peace, peace"—the "peace of God" which should "guard all hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." And the record of the Christian centuries brings before us thousands of those whose lives, though they knew nothing of this new teaching, were sweet and winsome with the serenity which the old Gospel gives.

Yes, we all need more repose of heart, and we thank those new religionists whose example has reminded us of the

fact; but we believe that the teaching and grace of Christ, as we have of old learned of Him, offer the sufficient promise of attainment to those who really crave the serenity of soul which He urged.

And the other grace which I would mention, as distinguishing certain of the adherents of Christian Science is an *exceptionally vivid consciousness of the divine*. Though they may not think of God as their personal Heavenly Father, yet to them the world is alive with spiritual energy. At every moment they are striving to be consciously in touch with the divine. In many respects they may seem to us sadly mistaken in their conception of God and of their relation to Him; yet this is true, that in an age which is painfully material, they offer refreshing examples of men and women who are in an impressive degree spiritually minded. Not only as a matter of philosophical belief, but as a matter of practical living they strive to make spirit the great reality.

It is possible that to some Christians who under the pressure of material interests have permitted themselves to become unspiritual and earth-bound, the example of such adherents of the new faith has come with helpful suggestion. But I would remind you that Christian Scientists can make no exclusive claim to spiritual-mindedness. If we would have an intenser consciousness of the divine, we are not shut up to their doctrine. Jesus of Nazareth who ever lived in manifest communion with God, and who taught us to discern His presence in the very field-flower at our feet, showed us this way long ago. It was not a Christian Scientist who wrote: "In Him we live and move and have our being," who assured us that to be spiritually minded is life," who urged us to "walk in the spirit." Nor when Brother Lawrence in later years told of the "practice of the presence of God," and led others into that life of sweet communion, was it as the teacher of an essentially different Christianity from that which we to day know. Nor in our own time did it require a Scientist, so-called, to write,

"Closer is He than breathing,  
Nearer than hands and feet."

No! If we are reminded by the serenity of heart or the intense spirituality of some of the worthier adherents of this "new way" of certain defects in the Christian life of our time; we are not—if we would remedy the defects—limited to the peculiar doctrines of the sect. We are only prompted to look with more earnestness to the Gospel as we have received it, to learn there anew those truths which through the centuries have blossomed forth again and again in precisely the same graces of character.

But I realize that for most of you it has been another aspect of this matter