

"ARE CHRISTIANS DESERTING LOWER NEW YORK?"

DEAR BROTHER RUSSELL: – I send you herewith a page taken from the *New York Herald*, Jan. 8th, the principal part of which is devoted to –

"A STUDY OF A REMARKABLE CHURCH SITUATION IN LOWER NEW YORK CITY."

The array of facts showing a steady and uniform surrender of ground by the churches, notwithstanding the increase of population, should indeed prove an astounding revelation to the "Christians" appealed to. And the fact that these matters are promulgated by one of the eminent leaders of the New York pulpit, and are verified and added to by the *Herald's* investigations, makes the statements well nigh indisputable.

It seems to me that the "study" of the conditions here presented lies not so much in the apparent, surface truth presented, namely, that south of 14th street the "church" would appear to be doomed to practical extinction, as it does in an inquiry into the results which may be expected from this moving and movable church in its later surroundings.

The mistake of abandoning this field can and may easily be remedied, if the conscience of the powers that control the situation be sufficiently deeply pricked. But the causes which suggested, and eventually accomplished, such sweeping changes are still at work in their new abode, and are accomplishing still other changes.

It is to be noted that the new *field* of these *old* "churches" is to-day the fashionable quarter of the city; and of course it is to be expected that these *old* "churches" are called upon to cater to the new

requirements. Accordingly we are not surprised to learn that one such requirement is EXCLUSIVENESS.

In the old abode, the idea would not have been tolerated; but conditions are now changed, and the new *environment* is such, that what before seemed to be sinful may now be regarded as an aid to the upholding, if not the upbuilding, of the edifice.

Pursuing this thought, it would be interesting if there could be collected, for purposes of comparison, the subjects discussed, and texts preached from, in these older edifices, in days gone by, and those now made use of in the new fields. I am convinced the relation would be as startling, almost, as the facts here given.

When we reflect upon these things, can we wonder that our friend, Mr. Moody, in his last evangelizing work in New York city, told its ministers and people that if Jesus Christ should appear in person in one of their "churches," he would be driven out, because they would not recognize him!

Since reading the statement of facts alluded to, my attention has been called to another *ministerial* occurrence, which has its bearing on this particular line of "study."

An eminent D.D. of the metropolis, with a big church, fat living, well liked, and ostensibly doing a good work, is offered a professorship in one of our seats of learning. Rumor has it that he wants to accept it. Meeting a friend of the aforesaid D.D., I took occasion to allude to this call and its probable acceptance. "Yes," said this friend, "you know _____ is not patterned after the old style preacher; he is a club man, something of a sportsman, can take his little toddy, and is 'hail, fellow, well met' generally. He is very popular, and is beloved by his congregation, which is fighting hard against this call. But he has literary aspirations, and consequently favors it." Thus we see at work the same underlying evil which succeeded in driving the "church" out of the down-town vineyard. **[R2428 : page 36]**

The student of history, noting such potent and disturbing events as here stated, discovered to-day in New York, sees them to-morrow reflected in London, events, tho peculiar to a locality, having at the same time a universal significance; he hears the alarm sounded, not by the pessimist, but by the brains and conservative judgment of the church as it is understood to-day, and cannot fail to see the inevitable trend of events.

Can these conditions be changed? Reason answers, about as easily as the heathen are to-day being changed or converted. It must be obvious that the powers which now obtain are as impotent to work the desired change (if indeed it be even desired) in the one case as in the other. What a profoundly sad outlook must the array of facts, which give rise to these and cognate thoughts, produce in this, the closing year of the century.

Sad must they be to the student of events, unless indeed he be also a student of God's Word, and can discern his times and seasons, and their peculiar events. Then what a change! As one season alternates another with precise regularity, each doing the work allotted to it, so he sees the conditions now prevailing fulfilling their purpose, only to give way to still other conditions in a later development of God's plan.

He looks ahead to that future great epoch in the history of time, which is to take the place of the present, and by faith he realizes some of the changes then to be established. Among these changes, he is assured that "an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called, The way of holiness;" and "the way-faring men, tho fools, shall not err therein." – Isa. 35:8.

As one of those who are quite ready and willing to note the signs of the times, tho more especially because he is assured by the Word of truth that "*weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning;*" and confident in the comforting assurance that in *that day* (Millennial morning) pauper "churches" will be unknown and unnecessary, because *the way of holiness* shall be open to all, and all

shall then know the Lord from the least unto the greatest (Jer. 31:34), I remain, in the common faith,

Faithfully yours,

JOHN W. ALEXANDER.

Extracts from the *Herald* are as follows: –

"ARE CHRISTIANS DESERTING LOWER NEW YORK?"

"Dr. Peters says so in a sermon, and the *Herald* here shows that twenty-three churches have been abandoned or moved from below Forty-eighth street in the last ten years.

"'The church, instead of adjusting herself practically to the changed conditions in civilization in New York, moves up town and puts on style....A church is located with reference to clientele. So much money must be paid to support it, and it must locate where the rich live, and, as a result, those needing the saving influence of the Church most are neglected;' – says the Rev. Dr. Madison C. Peters.

"This is a startling arraignment of the church in New York; yet the Rev. Dr. Peters quotes statistics which bear out what he says. The church in the Borough of Manhattan is moving up town, and the lower part of the island is every year becoming more churchless. An investigation made by the *Herald* shows that within the last ten years seventeen houses of worship have moved up to the less thickly populated parts of the city, where the wealthy live, and six churches below Fourteenth street have gone out of existence. In the region from the Battery to Forty-eighth street twenty-three churches have in ten years either moved up town or have become extinct, and little has been left in their place.

"'The Christian forces at work below Fourteenth street,' to again quote the words of the Rev. Dr. Peters, 'with a population of 700,000, are not as much as they were twenty-five years ago. Altho during that

time over 200,000 persons have moved in below Fourteenth street, twenty churches have moved out. One Jewish synagogue and two Catholic churches have been added, so that if we count the churches of every kind there are seventeen fewer than twenty-five years ago.'

"It will be seen by consulting the table of churches which have moved up town that all of them belong to Protestant denominations, with the exception of one Catholic organization. There have been from time to time utterances from various pulpits denouncing the lack of fervor shown by the Protestant churches. It is not an optimistic view of the work of the church among the masses who live in the lower part of the city which is drawn from an analysis of the uptown movement of the churches.

"There are many who maintain that the churches are doing missionary work in the fields which they have left. With the exception of the efficient work of Trinity Parish, of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and the work of the Catholics, this field in the lower part of the city is practically left to the sower of tares. ...There is no escape from statistics. The majority of those who dwell in the lower part of the island are churchless. South of Fourteenth street there is one church to every 4,732 persons. In that section there are districts where there is one saloon to every 111 persons.

"In discussing the causes of the movement of the churches, Dr. Peters, the pastor of the Bloomington Reformed Church, told me that the fashionable churches were becoming fashionable clubs.

"Let me give you two examples of what I mean,' said he. 'A man who belonged to one of the uptown churches told me recently that in his church there was only one poor man, and "he a Scotchman who could not be snubbed into leaving." Another man, a member of a church of the exclusive uptown kind, told me that in his church the pew rents were made so high that only a "certain class" could come.'...

"Statistics show that in comparison with the growth of population here the Presbyterian Church in this city has lost eighty per cent. in the last twenty-five years. The Methodist Church, supposed to be [R2428 : page 37] the most aggressive force in Protestantism, has in the last twenty years increased only twenty-five per cent., whereas in proportion to the increase of population in the borough it should have increased eighty-five per cent. The Dutch Reformed Church has in the same proportion lost ten per cent. The only Protestant church doing anything like holding its own here is the Episcopal Church. That is largely owing to the fact that much of the enormous wealth of Trinity Corporation is used in work among the poor. The census of 1890 gave the Catholic population of the then city of New York as 380,000. If the Catholic Church had held her own she should have had 900,000."

*

*

*

Some one failing to grasp the situation will perhaps say or think – "Well, you criticize others, but what are you doing in the line of mission-work?"

We reply that it is not the *actions* of these "churches" that we find fault with, but the inconsistency of their *actions* and *professions*. These denominations, one and all, profess in their published creeds that they exist for the very purpose of *converting the world*; and that all not converted by them will suffer a horrible eternity: and straightway they leave the world to what they say is its fate, to meet for essays, lectures, music and social pleasures – as "social clubs," – called "churches."

Our views of the divine plan for human salvation are very different from theirs: and hence the question is not, are we following their theories more consistently than they follow them? but, are we following our own conception of the divine plan consistently? – are we practicing what we preach and profess to believe, faithfully? We trust that every regular WATCH TOWER reader can answer promptly, – I am doing with my might what my hand finds to do, in harmony with my understanding of the divine will concerning me. And if any cannot

so answer, promptly, we trust he will begin at once such "reasonable service."

We hold that *none* are in danger of eternal torment – that the very thought of such an unjust punishment for sin is in antagonism to God's revealed plan, rightly interpreted, utterly repugnant to "the spirit of the truth," "the spirit of Christ," "the holy spirit."

We hold that *ignorance* neither justifies nor condemns – either in New York or Africa or elsewhere; but that knowledge alone brings blessings and corresponding responsibilities. Nor do we understand that all knowledges bring grave responsibilities and are savors of life unto life or of death unto death; for but one knowledge, one science, is thus made a test in the Scriptures – the knowledge of the way, the truth and the life; the knowledge of the *true* God, the God of Justice, Wisdom, Love and Power.

We hold that the masses in down town New York, not possessing this knowledge, but being *blinded* in their minds by the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), are not on trial *now*, as are we who have this knowledge, but will have their trial by and by, during the Millennial age, at the same time with the "heathen" millions of Asia and Africa; – after Satan has been "bound" and deceives the peoples no more (Rev. 20:1-4), after the Lord and his elect Church have begun the reign of righteousness. And we hold the same to be true of their polished and wealthy and better educated [R2429 : page 37] neighbors who have moved up-town; and who, "blinded," mistakenly call themselves "churches."

We hold that the Lord's Church, the only one to which the name *ecclesia*, body or church, is properly applicable, is so insignificant, so unostentatious, and comparatively so poor in this world's riches, that it is not recognized nor recognizable from the worldly standpoint. It is neither man-made nor man-ruled; nor are its members enrolled on earth, but in heaven. (Heb. 12:23.) Its head and bishop is the Lord, its law is his Word: it has but one Lord, one Faith,

one Baptism; and it is built upon the testimonies of the holy apostles and prophets – Jesus Christ himself being its chief corner-stone.

We hold that, while neither the *masses* of lower New York nor the *classes* of upper New York constitute this Church, some in both may be eligible to its membership and blessings – "even as many as the Lord our God shall *call*," and no more. And we hold that in New York, as elsewhere, many more have been called than will be chosen; – because the call being to a very high post of service and honor, God has made the way to it *narrow* – so narrow that few find it, and fewer still care to walk therein after they have found it; a way of self-sacrifice, self-denial.

In harmony with this our faith and knowledge respecting the divine plan, we are neither sitting in the seat of the scorers, drawing nigh to God with our lips, while our hearts are far from him (rebellious against him as monstrously unjust and unloving – as blasphemously misrepresented in the creeds of Christendom), nor are we excitedly and frantically with drums and tambourines and "War Crys" striving to save from eternal torment fellow creatures – under a theory that God would horribly and unjustly misuse them, but for our efforts.

On the contrary, we are endeavoring to do as Jesus and the apostles and the early Church did, before the errors ("tares") of false doctrine were planted by the great Adversary. We are striving to find those who are not wholly blinded by the god of this world; – the "called," those who have "ears to hear," among the "masses" and among the "classes;" we are seeking to find, and to explain to them the way of the Lord more perfectly. And whether they hear and obey, or **[R2429 : page 38]** whether they forbear, we doubt not for a moment that all the gracious purposes of our all-wise God will be accomplished, – that the foreordained number of the "copies of his Son" will be completed, and that then these as the body of Christ, "the Seed of Abraham," as God's glorious Kingdom, shall rule and relieve from

blindness all mankind and bless and uplift all willing to obediently return to God's favor through the great Redeemer.

Above all we are seeking now, because it is the "harvest" time, the time of preparation for the marriage of the Lamb, to prepare ourselves, and each the other, for that great event which shall complete our joy and usher in the world's blessings; – that we may be in heart (and as nearly as attainable in the flesh also) "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing." – Eph. 5:23; Rev. 19:7.

Additionally, we are sympathetic toward all secondary influences of our Light – moral reforms.
