

VIEWS FROM THE WATCH TOWER. CHURCHES AS SOCIAL CLUBS.

REV. JOHN WATSON, widely known in "orthodox" circles (as "Ian Maclaren," his literary *nom de plume*), wrote for publication recently, that in his judgment the churches of various denominations are rapidly becoming social clubs – ceasing to appreciate or use the place hitherto considered the true position of the church. The text for his criticism was found on a printed postal card sent out by an American Y.M.C.A., which read word for word as follows:

"DO NOT FORGET
"The next Social.
"The next Candy-pull.
"The next Entertainment.
"The next Song Service.
"The next Gospel Meeting.
"The next Meeting of the Debating Club.
"The next Chicken-pie Dinner.
"The next date when you ought to make the
secretary happy with your cash."

Commenting upon this card, he says: –

"This remarkable list of operations, combining evangelistic zeal, creature comforts, and business shrewdness, requires no commentary; the items give us a convincing illustration of an up-to-date religious institution – a veritable hustler of a Y.M.C.A.

"The Christian church and a Y.M.C.A. are of course very different institutions, and the latter is free from any traditions of austere dignity, but one is not surprised to find that the church has also been touched with the social spirit and is also doing her best to make religion entertaining. One enters what is called a place of worship and imagines

that he is in a drawing-room. The floor has a thick carpet, there are rows of theater-chairs, a huge organ fills the eye, a large bouquet of flowers marks the ministers place; people come in with a jaunty air and salute one another cheerily; hardly one bends his head in prayer; there is a hum of gossip through the building.

"A man disentangles himself from a conversation and bustles up to the platform without clerical garb of any kind, as likely as not in layman's dress. A quartet advances, and, facing the audience, sings an anthem to the congregation, which does not rise, and later they sing another anthem, also to the congregation. There is one prayer, and one reading from Holy Scripture, and a sermon which is brief and bright. Among other intimations the minister urges attendance at the oyster supper, when, as is mentioned in a paper in the pews, there will be oysters and meat – turkey, I think – and ice-cream. This meal is to be served in the 'church parlor.'

"No sooner has the benediction been pronounced, which has some original feature introduced, than the congregation hurries to the door, but altho no one can explain how it is managed, the minister is already there shaking hands, introducing people, 'getting off good things,' and generally making things 'hum.' One person congratulates him on his 'talk' – new name for a sermon – and another says it was 'fine.'

"Efforts have been made in England also to make church life really popular, and, in one town known to the writer, with some success of its own kind. One church secured a new set of communion plates by the popular device of a dance; various congregations gave private theatricals, and in one case had stage property of their own. Bible classes celebrated the conclusions of their sessions by a supper; on Good Friday there were excursions into the country accompanied by a military band, and a considerable portion of the congregational income was derived from social treats of various kinds. This particular town is only an illustration of the genial spirit spreading throughout the church in England. One minister uses a magic lantern to give force to his

sermon; another has added a tavern to his church equipment; a third takes up the latest murder or scandal; a fourth has a service of song; a fifth depends on a gypsy or an ex-pugilist.

"If this goes on, the church will soon embrace a theater and other attractions which will draw young people, and prevent old people from wearying in the worship of God.

[Contrasting these modern and irreverent and unscriptural **[R2561 : page 20]** methods with those of the past, Dr. Watson continues: –]

"Perhaps it may be the perversity of human nature which is apt to cavil at new things and hanker after the good old times – which were not always good, by any means – but one is not much enamoured with the new departure, nor at all convinced that what may be called for brief the 'candy-pull' system is any improvement on the past. After a slight experience of smart preachers, and church parlors, and ice-cream suppers, and picnics, one remembers with new respect and keen appreciation the minister of former days, with his seemly dress, his dignified manner, his sense of responsibility, who came from the secret place of divine fellowship, and spoke as one carrying the message of the Eternal. He may not have been so fussy in the aisles as his successor, nor so clever at games, nor able to make so fetching a speech on 'Love, Courtship, and Marriage.'

"There are no doubt many points in which the congregation of the present has advanced on the congregation of the past, but it has not been all gain, for the chief note in the worship of the former generation was *reverence* – people met in the presence of the Eternal, before whom every man is less than nothing. And the chief note of their children, who meet to listen to a choir and a clever platform speaker, is *self-complacency*." – *The Ladies' Home Journal*.

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We have frequently pointed out these same tendencies, but we are glad to be able to quote the words of another – of one who stands so high in Churchianity. But Dr. Watson will ere long find that he must not criticize "Babylon;" and that if he persists he will lose caste with the lords thereof. So conservative a journal as *The Advance* has already intimated that "Candy-Pulls" and other *modern methods* of making Christianity attractive must not be interfered with by "old fogies."

And so say we! Let the innovations proceed – they are essential to the very existence of "Babylon." And besides, the sooner the social Churchianity clubs act out their real sentiments all along the line, the better it will be for *true* Christianity, whose separation from Churchianity is now due to be accomplished in this harvest time – "wheat" from "tares." The more it becomes apparent that, with the vast majority, religion is merely "a form of godliness," the more will those who have the power of it as well realize the width of the gulf which really separates the two classes in divine estimation. The louder grows the revelry and irreverence and the scoffing at God's Word by "higher critics" and the boasts of Evolution, the louder in the ears of the Lord's true saints will sound the Master's command: "Babylon is fallen, is fallen! Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." – Rev. 18:2,4.

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The Editor of the Washington City *Times* gives his opinion of some of the methods of Churchianity, thus: –

"A sensational Brooklyn preacher lately discoursed on subjects like these: 'Would Christ Belong to a Labor Union?' 'Would Christ Go to a Brooklyn Theater?' and so on. It is rather difficult to conceive the moral status of people who actually approve of sermons of this sort. Undoubtedly a large part of the audiences which they attract come from mere curiosity, as they might come to any other sort of show; and they might as well be at the theater for all the good that it is likely to do them. One of the most deplorable features of modern American life is

the tendency toward sensationalism in the pulpit. It is bad from every point of view. It excites emotions which are in no way religious, and are all the worse for passing under that name. It is in execrable taste, it misleads people to a sort of contempt for religion, and it makes the churches which indulge in it odious.

"It has grown out of another bad feature of our modern life – the plutocratic ideal. Any sensible person may easily understand that when the attraction of a church for its members depends on this sort of thing, and on the ability of the people of the church to dress well and pay for a handsome building and a showy choir, there is no more real religion in the whole business than there is in a circus...."

"It would be much more to the point for the sensational preacher above quoted to ask himself, in private, whether his church is the kind which Christ would be likely to approve, or if it is full of money-changers and the sellers of doves.

"It is time that sensible and thoughtful religious people in this country understood what a church is really intended to be. It should not be a bad imitation of fashionable society, with all the meannesses, caste distinctions, pettiness, and jealousy of that society, veneered over with a coating of formal religion...."

CHRISTIANITY IN JAPAN.

Not long since Japan was considered the brightest example of progress in Christian missions, and with good reason. Everything coming from Europe or the United States was looked upon with favor – the Christian religion included. In a few years the number of converts to various shades of nominal "Christianity" ran up to 40,578 in 1878. However, a great change has occurred there: and within the past two years the total converts claimed by all denominations is only 403.

The beginning of this change of sentiment seems to have dated from the time that the different denominations began more or less

to *compete*. It would seem that at first denominational and creed differences were considerably hidden from the Japanese, and they seem to have embraced Christianity in something of its simplicity of spirit if not of doctrine. However, when they began to send some of their young men to American and English colleges, the fact of the great varieties of contradictory doctrines, all claiming to represent [R2562 : page 21] Christ's teachings, became known, and was naturally followed by denominational reapings, chiefly, we believe, Presbyterian.

The Japanese are a *practical* people, and concluded that, if Christians of the West were so confused and divided respecting the teachings of the Bible, the Japanese could properly exercise their own judgments on the subjects also. In doing so they are rapidly tending toward agnosticism, doubt, uncertainty, unbelief, just as thinking people everywhere are doing, except as they get the truth and with it the spirit of a sound mind. How we would like to put into the hands of these Japanese and all truth-seekers the light of present truth showing forth the divine plan of the ages. We are on the lookout for the Lord to bring forward to the light some earnest, fully consecrated Japanese capable of presenting the plan by translating DAWN, VOL. I., presenting it to his Christian countrymen. We thought we had found the one two years ago, but it proved otherwise; – Christianity was unpopular, but the truth much more so – too unpopular for him.

Rev. Dr. Christlieb, for years the representative of the "Evangelical Protestant Mission Society" of Germany, discussed the set-back in Japan in a volume just published, entitled, "The Tendencies of Japanese Civilization and Christianity," in which he explains: –

"The opposition now generally entertained by the Japanese against the Christian church is due to the changed attitude which they have in recent years developed in so marked a degree to all influences from abroad – a conservative reaction of a pronounced type. This return to nativism is largely due to the easy success in the war with the Chinese.

This reaction from the former enthusiasm for innovation has assumed a particularly determined character. The Japanese have reached the conclusion that they had been too hasty in discarding the old in favor of the new, and this spirit has found its way even into the Christian elements of Japan, which aspired to the establishment of a church independent of the churches in countries that have been Christian for centuries. Altho the Japanese have known Christianity only for thirty years and there is scarcely a single adult native who has been a Christian since his childhood, yet they began to regard themselves more capable to develop a Christian culture and life than those who brought them the new faith.

"These ideas and ambitions are largely due to the fact that attempts were made to build up a Christianity wholly divorced from the national character of the people. The reaction is, to a certain extent, the result also of the radical anti-Japanese type of life that representatives of Western Christianity aimed to develop, completely ignoring the many excellent traits that make up the national character of the people.

"Still another element that has entered into this reaction is the fact that the Japanese, who is naturally not too deep intellectually and who is but half civilized, has been made acquainted with Western agnosticism and atheism as found in the writings of Schopenhauer and Herbert Spencer. Through these a certain dangerous contempt for the supernatural has been developed, especially among the younger generation. All these factors and others have united to produce the modern opposition to Christianity in the Japanese empire."

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A LITTLE WHILE.

A little while with weary feet to tread the narrow way,
A little while, the time will not be long,
A little while the sinless One to follow day by day,
A little while to suffer and be strong.

A little while with faltering tongue to testify for God,
A little while to suffer scorn and shame,
A little while with voice and pen to spread the truth abroad,
A little while to glorify his name.

A little while with humble faith to wage the goodly fight,
A little while, grasp firm the two-edged sword,
A little while, Satanic hosts shall all be put to flight,
A little while, then, trust thou in the Lord.

A little while, a little while, Oh, let this be our song,
A little while, lay not the armor down;
A little while, a little while, the strife will not be long,
A little while, and we shall wear the crown!

– GERTRUDE W. SEIBERT.
