

the abandoned, for whom no emergency is too great, no real need too trivial, no sorrow too hopeless, no injustice too overwhelming. This then is the reply to the searching question with which we started, "What can you do to help human life?"

When the Church, when Quakerism has bound itself thus to answer it, it will have given its message to the world to-day.

To not a few of the called, chosen, and faithful before me may it be given to

"Strengthen the wavering line,
Stablish, continue our march,
On to the bound of the waste,
On to the City of God."

JOHN WILHELM ROWNTREE then read the following paper:—

HAS QUAKERISM A MESSAGE TO THE WORLD TO-DAY?

PAPER BY
JOHN WILHELM
ROWNTREE.

This question has been answered in the affirmative by those who have preceded me. But the possession of a message is one thing, and its delivery to the age another. I therefore propose to consider three great prevailing elements which we must take into account:—

Indifference to the Higher Life.

The change in Religious Thought.

The expansion of Social Ideals.

Sadly must we admit that, in the cities of modern civilization, the tide of paganism still runs high. The growing magnificence of our public-houses and music-halls, and the large and flourishing fraternity of sporting papers, are but an index to the power of low ideals over the minds of men. The greed for wealth, the tyranny of drink, the passion for gambling, the fascinations of vice, these have too often in the past baffled the endeavours of reforming zeal.

But it is not only with an *active* hostility that we have to cope. The Church, in her appeal to the conscience of men, meets with no more frequent or obstinate difficulty than that

of indifference to the higher life. Who has not seen the spectacle, so pathetic and so common, of the man with the muck-rake, absorbed body and soul in scraping together his little heap of gold? Who has not observed the vulgar and selfish display of the "nouveau riche," or the less vulgar but no less selfish uselessness of the mere dilettante, who dabbles in art and indulges in travel, not that he may brighten the lives of others, but only to gratify himself. Who does not know the large class, indolently benevolent, and negatively virtuous, who, wanting in depth of conviction, offer a passive obstruction to the progress of the Church?

Alas, for the army of the Lord, when men desert the rough life of the soldier and the rude ways of the camp, for the pleasant and sheltered streets of Laodicea!

The opposition of indifference is, however, no new thing. It is when we pass from indifference to the mental atmosphere of our day, that we meet with conditions which, save for the striking period of the Renaissance, find no parallel in history. Great was then the expansion of human knowledge, but to us it has been given to apply the invisible forces of nature, and almost to annihilate time and space. And as the Middle Ages learnt the place of the earth in the universe, so we are learning the truth about man, his slow development, his physical affinities with all other forms of life.

We, too, have to reconstruct our cosmogony. And in this reconstruction, the timidity of the Church, the irreconcilable attitude of certain among our scientists, and the revulsion from the iron hardness of terrible and fatalistic creeds, have led to some present confusion.

There are, it is true, many whom nothing has yet troubled, and over whom, no doubt, the Church maintains her hold. But, nevertheless, where in any place the Church has failed to grasp the changed conditions, she suffers continued defections, and ceases to appeal to an ever increasing number outside her borders. Many Churches are enfeebled, many individuals find themselves forced to exchange wholesome centres of activity for the misery of spiritual loneliness, and must drift to extremes of negation or seek relief in isolated service.

God's secrets are often swiftly unveiled. But though the revelation may be sudden, our re-adjustment is slow. Confusion,

nevertheless, is not for ever. One moment the Bible seems taken from us, the next it is restored, more living than before and with a new light upon its page.

The clouds of controversy gather at each great discovery of science, and seem to hide the Christ; but, lo! the clouds disperse, and the Divine figure stands out in renewed splendour.

Even as now so at the Renaissance came perplexity and scepticism. But it was of the new learning, with its larger views of God and the universe, that the reformation was born. So do I unfalteringly believe will there spring out of the present seeming chaos, a renewed and more powerful faith, deeper in its basis, clearer in its vision, broader in its charity, than ever was the old; *and as warm in its love.*

We have now briefly dwelt on two of our three conditions:—*Indifference to the Higher Life* and *The change in Religious Thought.*

Closely allied to this last—which is after all only an inevitable development of the Reformation, accelerated and illumined by scientific discovery—we find a great expansion of social ideals.

No one could fail to note how swift and momentous has been the industrial revolution of the past hundred years. The creation of our great industrial classes, the massing together of men in huge centres, such as London, Birmingham and Manchester, has altered the whole fabric of society, and forces of unknown power are coming into play. The progress of political enfranchisement has almost completely transferred the governing power to the hands of the people, and the increasing efficiency of education must inevitably tend to bring the humblest citizen and the humblest peasant to political consciousness.

Already there are signs of movement in the deep. The supposed immutability of the existing social system is questioned. Men even doubt if it be the best. They refuse to believe *that* to be an ideal life, which compels the labourer “to hold desperately to the small niche into which he has been fitted, if he would not be of the helpless flotsam and jetsam tossed to and fro on the tides of poverty.” They refuse the comfortable belief that the present extreme inequalities of wealth are the ordering of Divine providence, or that the strong

caste feeling that mars English social life, reflects the teaching of the Nazarene Joiner.

The profound dissatisfaction with existing conditions, and the desire for a fuller and happier life, are well nigh universal. But still it is true, that "there is an almost complete absence of any clear indication from those who speak in the name of science and authority as to the direction in which the path of future progress lies."

There are those who think the outlook is already brightening with the light of a better day.

That may well be true, but it would be idle to maintain that the situation is not fraught with danger. "We see not our signs. There is no more any prophet."

Let us listen to the warning voice of perhaps the greatest of our Nonconformist leaders:—"We are face to face with what we may truly call the supreme moment of our history. It is the people that now rule, and unless *God* live in and through the people, the end of all our struggles, the goal of all our boasted progress will be chaos, and chaos is death."

These three elements: *Indifference* to the Higher Life, the Change in *Religious Thought*, and the expansion of *Social Ideals* must be vividly realised if we would make our appeal a message to the world to day. And I am thankful that Friends, having caught something of the spirit that was in their greatest leaders, have met at this Conference boldly to face facts, and frankly review their position.

Never, it has been said, in spite of all that is discouraging, was an age more earnest in spirit, an age so moved and so possessed with the consciousness of evil. And though this earnestness may be largely outside the initiative of the Church, it is an element of the highest promise of good. This is no place for pessimism. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged till he hath set judgment in the earth."

Yet we cannot look unmoved at the extent to which the Churches generally, not least our own, fail to inspire and lead the people. Can we really say that they hold men as they did?

We cannot believe it. It needs but the briefest acquaintance with our large cities to reveal the existence among the people of widespread mistrust of Church and Chapel. And in considering the number of their adherents we are bound to

remember that the census of a Church is but a deceptive index of its spiritual power. We must deduct those who from the force of habit, rather than from strength of conviction, or from the love of respectability, rather than that of truth, cumber the pews with a soulless occupancy. The large activity which spends itself in Bazaar Committees, or the proud charity that loves the high places of subscription lists, is no criterion of deep religious feeling.

If there be failure, the cause must be sought, not without the Church, but *within*.

The empty benches and deserted galleries of our meeting-houses are signs of a high-water mark from which the tide has ebbed away. We may recognize local or particular reasons, more or less pertinent, but the real causes, which cannot be minimised, are the poverty of our spiritual life or the want of aggressive power.

Were the simple worship of those who profess to go beneath form and convention, and strike the deep springs of actual communion with the Father, to become only another of the empty forms of religion, then grant us another George Fox to denounce us as "professors"! Our meetings for worship must be the glowing centres of our spiritual life if we would keep and attract men or satisfy their spiritual hunger.

I believe it is sadly too true that spiritual pride, false respectability, and unmanly deference to mere wealth or title, have crept into our Church; and wherever they are still to be found we see the melancholy spectacle of an invertebrate Christianity, which in its sluggish self-complacency is even ignorant of its weakness.

A lady recently told me, "I had thought of becoming a Friend, but I found you were a pearl of such great price that I had not the spiritual pride to join you."

Such is not the attitude for an appeal to the world. As labourers seeking help to carry on a great work, for which our strength is inadequate, it is both our right and our duty to call men to us, and in the plea that "we are not a proselytizing body," there lies the poison of stagnation. Rather let us break down our barriers, and offer our fellow-workers a social and spiritual home.

To the true Christian the world is a commonwealth of all

men, knowing neither rank nor class. Nevertheless certain sections of the Christian Church tend to represent certain grades of society and to perpetuate class distinctions rather than destroy them. The equality of position nominally possessed by our members should remind us that we are bound, more than other Churches, to overcome this difficulty. There is, however, grave danger of one-sidedness. We shall never know our full power if we appeal to the working classes alone.

Why do we fail almost entirely to reach cultured and thoughtful people?

Why is it that even many of our own more educated members are leaving us?

By all means let us encourage the Adult School movement, and let us warmly welcome every working man who comes into membership with us, but we must remember that our message is for the world. True thought clearly and simply expressed reaches all men. It is a great mistake to imagine that what satisfies the simplest may not also be food for the most completely furnished minds.

Surely it is impossible to view without concern the spiritual starvation of our professional and literary classes. Great is the talent committed to their charge, and small the use they make of it. Would they but contribute to religion something nobler than fastidious criticism of other men's methods, they could render the Church a powerful service of trained intelligence, which she greatly needs.

How to set free their dormant spiritual energy is a problem demanding from us all the self sacrifice and patient thought that have characterised our devotion to our Adult Schools. And though, hitherto, it has been strangely neglected, it is a work which if more difficult is no less urgent.

I do not suggest the method, but though there are many Adult Schools in London, I know of none in Fleet Street for lawyers and journalists, and none in Piccadilly for baronets and dukes. But, because these men are difficult to reach, we have no right to shrink from our duty. Difficulties exist to be overcome. And were there more of that close dependence on God and fearless independence of men which marked John Woolman and Stephen Grellet, we should not stand under the condemnation of this failure.

Let us welcome a large conception of our responsibilities. Great hearted men are not nurtured on small ideals, and there is something in our Church of that parochialism which is fatal to vigorous action. Parochialism and exclusiveness bring with them that want of proportion so typical of Friends.

Such a matter as the sitting together of men and women Friends in Meeting, is surely of infinitesimal importance when measured by the larger concerns of life. Yet I have heard that petty question discussed in a usually torpid Preparative Meeting with the heat and passion of a House of Commons debate. If we are to do great things we must lift up our eyes from our microscopic affairs and look out upon the world. And if we look aright we shall see—across the darkness of vice unconquered and problems unsolved—like a vision of the Holy Grail, the city of God that is to be; and into our souls will come a great longing, and to our ears the sound of a voice, “Arise and labour for the need is great.”

Is there development in Social Ideals?

Then let us face the facts, nor lose our faith in the power of true religion to guide and inspire.

Christianity is before all things practical. A presentment of truth merely theological is also inadequate. We shall give more force to the preaching of Christ if we illustrate our theology by our practice, and work with a deep sense of our social responsibility. Let working men feel our sympathy as something more than a kind patronage, let them feel that we believe in brotherhood, not as a mere catch-word, but as an essential teaching of Christ. Let them see that irresponsible and selfish wealth, blind to its potentialities for good, has our scornful and pitying denunciation, and we shall do something to dispel their justifiable distrust.

The message of salvation hereafter is cold comfort to men who are starving here; and it is our place as soldiers of the Cross to bring hope and gladness into barren places, and to carry the glad presence of the living Christ into dark slums and lonely garrets.

The engineer is helpless without *applied mechanics*, and if we Adult School teachers would bridge the gulf between rich and poor, we must study the dark problems of poverty which

cry aloud for solution, and give our teaching the force of
APPLIED CHRISTIANITY.

Is there change and perplexity in Religious Thought ?

Let us face the facts with confidence and courage.

If the age of the faith which comes by tradition and authority is gone, and men can no longer believe without knowing why they believe ; if they are expanding those partial views of the truth that were inevitable in earlier times, then such a change will bring, as its ultimate result, not weakness but new strength.

At the root of this great movement is the longing for reality, for a more real and human touch with God. We must not—we dare not—continue in a spirit of timid conservatism. We must understand sympathetically if we would convince and lead.

Those who, having the ability, refuse to acquaint themselves with the modern development of thought, sadly limit the scope of their service. That faith alone will satisfy which, triumphant and aggressive, fights no longer with "bows and arrows, but arms her with the weapons of the time."

In the early days faith and science were one. What we wait for now is a religion that shall once more appeal to the whole complex nature of man.

Much earnest Christianity to-day fails to command the intellect and establish its own authority beyond all doubt and criticism. Yet a religion merely intellectual will never warm the heart with the fire of self-sacrificing love. Let us in our message offer that which is beyond all creeds—the evidence in our lives of communion with the spirit of God. The need of positive animating faith in the inward presence of His spirit was never greater than now. All who earnestly seek truth could unite with us in fellowship on the broad platform of faith in that indwelling guidance.

The Church exists to create for each succeeding generation the ideal of the Christ in the thought-form of the age, and in the adaptability of Christ's teaching lies one secret of its power.

Friends are not bound by a heritage of creeds, and need not break with their great past to put themselves in touch with the present.

Is there perplexity and change in religious thought?

Then God grant to our Church the spirit of understanding which shall give her the eye of a seer, the voice of a prophet, the place and power of a leader.

Is there Indifference to the Higher Life?

Then, O Christ, convince us by Thy Spirit, thrill us with Thy Divine passion, drown our selfishness in Thy invading love, lay on us the burden of the world's suffering, drive us forth with the apostolic fervour of the early Church! So only can our message be delivered:—"Speak to the Children of Israel, that they go forward."

The CHAIRMAN: The subject is now open for the consideration of the meeting. Friends will remember that there is a limitation of time to five minutes for each speaker. I propose, with the permission of the meeting, to reserve my few remarks until towards the close.

JOSEPH TAYLOR: We have heard of the message of Quakerism, and we are all convinced that it has a message. I am convinced that the message is not to England only, but to the world. I was very much interested when in Calcutta to find how a Hindoo Society, one which included many eminent Hindoos, had been leavened with the doctrines of Quakerism, the result of the message carried during a visit of some Friends. I believe if such visits had only been followed up, we should see a large and active work now among the Hindoos of Bengal. As it is, our Society has not increased there, and our views have not brought forth the full fruit, that might have been expected. In the early days of our Society, the message was carried almost entirely by young men, and the places where it was given were not in chapels or meeting-houses, but in the open air. Whether the circumstances of our time are now so altered as to make this an unfit place for us to do so, I will not venture to give a positive opinion; but I do not believe that it is so myself. I believe that the Society of Friends has lost more than we can calculate, through ceasing from aggressive, open air work. I do not think that I know one place in all England where Friends, as such,