

HEATHEN ENGLAND.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT THE PEOPLE THINK ABOUT RELIGION.

“Not for me!” said a strongly-built artizan one evening, when asked to come to a religious service. And in these three words he expressed as concisely as possible the attitude of the millions in his state of life, with reference to God, and godliness, and Heaven.

“But you know what we say is true, and you would not like to be lost!”

“Oh, that’s right enough”—then taking a glance at the remainder of the crowd of men and women round about, he bade us “good evening!”

Poor man! Living, working, walking, talking exclusively almost with men and women who would as soon think of flying as of going to a place of worship, and who watch and ridicule, from morning to night, anybody else who dares to do so.

It’s all right enough. They ought to be religious; they hope somehow they shall get to Heaven at last; but

6 *What the People Think about Religion.*

nobody whom they know has anything to do with it, and they cannot face the whole world in arms against them and be separated from all their kinsfolk and acquaintance by this impassable gulf.

Those who mingle continually with people who regard it as almost an essential of their position in society to pay some regard to the Lord's Day and to the claims of religion, cannot easily realize the mountain difficulties that stand in the way of a working man's approach to God. The following description from his own lips of the inner conflict which a poor man endured before he found Christ may to some be the unveiling of a heathen life in their own land which they had little dreamt of:—

“When I first heard you people out in the open air you were singing—

‘The gate is open wide for me,’

and I made fun of it, the same as many does. But after the singing I heard you speak and it went to my heart, and I thought, ‘Shall I go inside ‘with them?’ But the Devil said ‘No; you mustn't be seen with *them!*’

“‘Well,’ I said to myself, ‘if they come and ask me, I think I will.’

“Then when you had done speaking, one of you came and asked me if I would come in, and I said ‘No; not to-night. I'll come some other time, perhaps!’

“I stood for some time after you had gone, and there seemed to be two voices in me. One said, ‘Go in,’ and the other, ‘No; don't be such a fool!’

“After awhile I thought, ‘Well, I will go,’ and I came to the hall door nearly. But then the Devil said, ‘Don't go inside there,’ and I stood on the pavement opposite till the man at the door said, ‘Come along inside;’ and then I went in.”

He was the only one of a large crowd which had listened to the Gospel with rapt attention outside who dared to follow the holy promptings which multitudes undoubtedly

“A Beautiful Corpse.”

7

felt quite as powerfully as himself to leave the life of godlessness and start for Heaven that night.

The testimony of one after another of those with whom we meet who are Christ's is that “there is nobody in our works,” “there is nobody in our house,” “there is nobody in our family, that cares about religion but me.” “They are all on top of me about it.”

“Oh, sir!” said a woman, when urged to give her heart to God, “what's the use of me trying? I could not keep to it. I should go back and swear and curse to-morrow again, like all the other women where I work.”

“But does not the death of one and another make some impression?”

One Sunday morning I stood on the door step of a house where a poor woman lay dying. She had many a time ridiculed the speakers at the open-air services; but now that the doctor had given her up, she was very anxious that some of these people should come and pray with her. As I stood there the newspaper boy came along with *Lloyd's*, and delivered one at this very house, for the lodger's Sunday entertainment while his landlady was passing into eternity!

It was no easy matter, while standing over the poor sinner's dying bed, making a last desperate effort to snatch her from ruin, to still the gossip of her neighbours, in the very chamber of death. They left the room and stood about the passage and the door till my visit was over, and then returned to gossip and drink with the poor creature till the end. This was not in some filthy court or alley. The house was as thoroughly respectable in position, construction and appearance, as any working man could wish. When the poor soul has fled they will tell you “she went off like a lamb;” “she was quite resigned, poor dear;” “she made a beautiful corpse,” and so forth, and as they speak you will find the key to all this peace and repose and resignation in their own gin-reeking breath.

I turned from the door to a street not a minute's walk

8 *What the People Think about Religion.*

away, where the Sunday market was in full course. Hundreds of just such women as I had come from, were making their purchases and chatting merrily, while a string of worshippers, marked out as distinctly by dress and appearance as by the direction they took, passed through to their churches and chapels.

Standing one Sunday morning in the middle of three streets of working men's houses, I saw a newspaper—often two or three—delivered at almost every door.

A good man, employed in some large guano works, was suddenly called home to his reward. Eight of his mates, out of respect for his character, bore his body to the grave, and decency required them also to accompany his widow to her mission hall for once. They came, primed to a man with intoxicating liquor, just sufficiently to make them impervious to any shaft of truth. They sat quietly until preaching was over, but the moment prayer began, rose and hurried away, lest they should be prevented from living as they had lived hitherto. Not one of them has been seen, to our knowledge, near any place of worship since, and they have one or two mates who would be only too glad to record the fact should it occur.

“I am sent for,” wrote an Evangelist, in October, 1877, “late at night to go and see a poor woman who is dying. We make our way with some little difficulty through mud and slush into a dark corner on the very outskirts of the town ; but, dark and dirty as it was outside, it was worse inside. There lay a poor dear woman in the last stage of disease, with a family of seven children, and as I talked to her about her soul, I found that she was in complete ignorance of spiritual things. After praying with her she thanked me for my trouble, but wished me to be gone, as she could not bear talking to any more then, but would be glad to see me in the morning, when she hoped to be better able to attend to those things. The morning came, but before I got there her spirit had passed away.”

The Great Gulf.

9

Do they tell us of anything more dark and hopelessly heathenish than this in China or in Africa ?

There is a certain amount of infidelity spreading its deadly contagion amongst the unthinking. There is a considerable amount of prejudice against religion, arising in part from the inconsistency of its professors ; in part from a widely-spread notion that those who labour for the salvation of others are either " well paid for it," or are " gone mad with their religion." But the great obstacle to the progress of the work of God lies not in the incorrect views, but in the sinful hearts of the people. They " love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil ;" and when any of them are so far aroused from the sleep of sin as to desire to seek a better life, there comes in at once the dread of the rest to hedge them in. Amongst the working classes generally, it is an appalling fact that the separation between the people of Heaven and the people of Hell is already almost as complete as it will be when the Great Shepherd divides the sheep from the goats.

The continual sight of the half-ruined and perishing multitudes cannot but stir up every truly awakened soul to increased devotion every day. To stand in an open-air service and see a crowd of poor people, many a face clouded and twisted and marred by sin and sorrow, many a head turned aside to drop a tear as the word of God makes the poor heart quake, many a look of longing for salvation, or of despair as to its attainment—a solid mass of sinners, who know and feel bitterly enough that they *are* sinners, and listen for half-an-hour or an hour, as attentively as if they were in the walls of some sanctuary, to the preachers, and then to see all this crowd—to a man and to a woman—when the invitation is given to come inside, lingering, longing, wavering, listening with attention to the last sound of the procession as it marches singing away, or hastening off at the moment of conclusion, as if to escape arrest ; to a man and to a woman turning away to re-commence, as

10 *What the People Think about Religion.*

by a deliberate choice, once more the life which they know will end in everlasting death. Oh, that sight!—that awful sight! It does not need that the fiends of Hell, that play so large a part in it, should visibly appear; it does not need that any of that dying crowd should drop down before our eyes for that sight to be terrible enough to make anyone who believes in God, in Heaven, in Hell, determined to spend their latest breath, their last penny, their every available moment, in publishing the sinners' Friend.

But to live, and walk, and talk, and work amongst these people every day; to know little children in petticoats who have learned to curse, swear, and fight—not street arabs—the children of well-paid artizans; to see the little ones going to the public-house for father's beer, and, sipping it on the way home, so to acquire the taste for death to all that is good and true; to know young men who are fast becoming drunkards and gamblers, and young women who laugh at the sound of shameless songs, and joke in language that would be shocking even from men; to know men and women who constantly visit the public-house together or apart, who scarcely ever pass a Saturday and Sunday over without at least partial intoxication, who lavish money in tawdry fineries, and never have a pound in hand when out of work or sick; to know old men and women, tottering on the brink of the grave, who pour forth their feeble indignation in the foulest language, who laugh and joke at the drunkenness and vice of their sons and daughters, and lodgers and neighbours, if they do not actively promote it, who have drink and tobacco brought to them down to their latest hour by dutiful children, as a tender tribute to their paternal worth and valuable training; to know thousands of people who, though they may not be remarkable in any of these particulars, are joined to these people by the common fraternity of utter separation from everything connected with God, and by the common practice of ridiculing anyone who is not so separated; to live and move all the day long

Are there English Heathen ?

11

amongst these children of Hell—is it not enough to make anybody who wishes to get to Heaven anxious to do anything and everything that can be done to snatch them from ruin ?

It is all one, whether you visit colliers, fishermen, mechanics, shopmen, warehousemen, soldiers, sailors, iron-workers, factory hands, brick-makers, navvies, or any other of the labouring classes. From one end of the country to another “there is no difference.” The vast majority of your own fellow-countrymen take no notice whatever of the one God whose existence almost all admit. The “heathen” nations we hear of in other lands have, with scarcely an exception, Gods which are revered and worshipped. But thousands of your fellow-countrymen never voluntarily bowed their knee to any god in their lives. Am I not right in calling them heathen ? And what are you, if knowing all this, you do not do your utmost to turn them to the living and true God that made heaven and earth ?

Ah ! one thinks, if those who dwell in far different circles could but realize the havoc sin is making daily, hourly, amongst the masses, the splendid drawing-room and the comfortable club, and the busy counting-house—aye, and the cushioned pew, if not the lofty pulpit, would lose many a true lover of Jesus who would seek to follow Him, who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through His poverty, might become rich, and who has left us an example that we should walk in his steps.

OUR WAR SONG.

TUNE—*Men of Harlech.*

CHRISTIAN, rouse thee ! War is raging,
 God and fiends are battle waging,
 Every ransomed power engaging,
 Break the tempter's spell.

12 *What the People Think about Religion.*

Dare ye still lie fondly dreaming,
 Wrapt in ease and worldly scheming,
 While the multitudes are streaming,
 Downwards into hell ?

Through the world resounding,
 Let the Gospel sounding,
 Summon all,
 At Jesu's call.
 His glorious cross surrounding,
 Sons of God, earth's trifles leaving,
 Be not faithless, but believing,
 To your conquering Captain cleaving,
 Forward to the fight.

Lord, we come, and from Thee never,
 Self nor earth our hearts shall sever ;
 Thine entirely, Thine for ever,
 We will fight and die.
 To a world of rebels dying,
 Heaven, and hell, and God defying,
 Everywhere we'll still be crying,
 " Will ye perish—why ?"

Hark ! I hear the warriors shouting,
 Now the hosts of hell we're routing ;
 Courage ! onward ! never doubting,
 We shall win the day.
 See the foe before us falling,
 Sinners on the Saviour calling,
 Throwing off the bondage galling,
 Join our glad array.



CHAPTER II.

WHY THE PEOPLE DON'T "TURN RELIGIOUS."

How is it that whilst every religious denomination is increasing its buildings, its offerings, its Sunday Schools, its social meetings, its evangelistic efforts, there is such an utter and unmistakable separation between the church-going and the working-class population ?

In the first place, how few religious people really *care* about the matter. Just watch the dispersion of a large congregation some Sunday evening. Look at the well-dressed, comfortable, gladsome people. Observe their smiles as they say "Good evening" to one another. Their chatting is as merry as the whistling of the birds in the woods. They have had a good time—a charming discourse, a good attendance, exquisite singing, perhaps they have even had an "after-meeting" and seekers of salvation.

You see that row of young men who press through the throng ! A glance tells you *they* have had nothing to do with Jesus to-day. They are as well-dressed as the others ; but they do not mean to have religion, at any rate for a long time to come. Neither does that man with the meerschaum in his mouth, who pilots his wife and child through the knots of ex-worshippers. He prefers to take his wife out somewhere on a Sunday. The big rough men who follow

14 *Why the People Don't "Turn Religious."*

him, annoyed at the momentary obstruction of their pathway, express in oaths and curses their abhorrence of these religious people and their sanctuary.

Now, does the minister, do any of the members, does anyone, in fact, who has been in that place to-night feel any discomfort because of the multitudes who have remained outside? Is it not the simple solemn truth that the matter never so much as occurs to the mind of any one of them?

“ Well, but they *support* missions.”

Just so, and with that they are satisfied. How much does it cost each member of that Church to support the missionary or Bible woman, whose pittance is small enough, in all conscience, for the labour of visiting so many hours a day? And for this outlay the agent must not only undertake the performance of the duty, but also the responsibility at the Judgment-bar.

“ But they have tract-districts.”

Upon which they have the opportunity to assure themselves week by week that the people are still persisting in the neglect of the means of grace, though politely receiving their visits, tracts, and invitations.

“ Well, how can they help it, if the people will not come ? ”

But does anyone put himself at all about to consider whether it can be helped, or how? You see that nice old gentleman and his wife—dear, good people they are, too. On their way home from evening service they will pass by thousands of people who have spent the day in sinful pleasure; but the happy couple are busily engaged in discussing the evening's discourse and kindred themes, so that the very fact of the sin and misery of the multitudes around will never occur to their minds at all. And they represent, fairly and properly, the vast majority of the most devoted of church-going people.

But, then, suppose worshippers really did care to gather