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SOME LATTER-DAY HERESIES.

III. CHRISTADELPHIANISM.

BY THE REV. F. MELLOWS, M.A., Vicar of Sparkhill,
Birmingham.

DURING the war this sect came into some prominence through the efforts of all its male members to escape military duty. Every Christadelphian is essentially a conscientious objector. No liberty of thought or action in this matter is allowed. Any "brother" joining the Army, Navy, or Police Force, is at once, *ipso facto*, disfellowshipped, or "withdrawn from" as an evildoer. There are no exceptions, and no extenuating circumstances are allowed. The few patriots who did respond to their country's call are only being received back into fellowship if they publicly confess their grievous sin, and solemnly promise that under no conditions will they ever again re-enlist, but will rather suffer even unto death.

Men who are willing to endure ridicule, imprisonment and punishment for conscientious reasons, are an asset to a nation. We may denounce their action as absurd, unpatriotic, narrow-minded, pharisaic or suicidal, but it is impossible not to admire the true martyr spirit. Unfortunately, there are hypocrites and cowards who make use of "conscience" in order to shirk danger, or unpleasant duties, but such are despised by all true men. The evil in the Christadelphian attitude is that the body legislates for and exercises lordship over its members' consciences, giving them no choice, and even forbidding them to do anything to alleviate the sufferings and agonies of war by joining the R.A.M.C., Red Cross, or A.S.C., though permitting them to increase those agonies and horrors by working on munitions.

Before dealing with this apparent inconsistency, and explaining their strange and unique views on war and other subjects, it might be well to mention briefly a few noteworthy characteristics of this cult. The Christadelphian is well-known as a lover of the Word of God. Every year he is expected to read through the whole Bible. Scripture is the only authority they profess to recognize. No one can read their books or pamphlets without being impressed by the number of texts which are quoted; neither can any one

converse with any members without realizing how well acquainted they are with, at least, parts of the Word of God. They study and know the verses that support, or seem to support, or can be made to support, their peculiar theories. Would that all Church-people were as diligent in the reading of the Word!

They are strong Sacramentarians. Baptism by immersion is regarded as essential to salvation. Every Sunday, usually in the morning, they meet for the "Breaking of Bread." Regular attendance at this service is a condition of fellowship. No "alien" is allowed to take part. The public service is at night, when efforts are made to capture the "stranger." They have no paid ministry, nor any "laying on of hands."

They are strict disciplinarians. Rigid control is exercised over the actions and faith of all members. There is neither liberty of thought nor freedom of conscience permitted concerning what they have judged to be the essentials of the Christian Faith and practice. Their founder, Dr. Thomas, was continually changing his opinions. When accused of this he rightly replied, "Must a man never progress? If he discovers an error in his premises, must he ever hold to it for the sake of consistency? May such a calamity never befall me! Rather let me change every day, till I get right at last."¹ But no such liberty or change is allowed to any member without sacrificing fellowship, and thereby endangering his hope of eternal life. The Birmingham Ecclesia's Constitution contains thirty-eight articles dealing with the working of the Ecclesia, to which all must agree who wish to join. This is followed by thirty-one articles of Faith which must be believed by all members; after this, there are thirty-five doctrines which must be rejected, and then come fifty-three "Commandments of Christ" which must be implicitly obeyed. Altogether, there are 157 separate articles. Surely this is binding men with burdens grievous to be borne, and putting their necks into a galling yoke. Many of the people who subscribe to this extensive and exclusive creed are unquestionably sincere, and are endeavouring to walk in what they firmly believe to be the truth. They try to live consistent Christian lives. For whatever is good and Christlike we are devoutly thankful, but the tendency of this limitation is to make the members narrow, exclusive, suspicious and even deceitful. The best Christadelphians feel this keenly and

¹ *Life and Work of Dr. Thomas*, p. 245.

chafe under it. One such said to the writer a few weeks ago: "This exclusiveness is a constant grief to me." There are few Englishmen, however, who will so sacrifice their God-given liberty and variety of thought, as to allow their intelligence to be stunted by such bondage, and to be "cabined, cribbed and confined" for the rest of their lives.

To return to their strange attitude to war. How do they justify their conduct? As conscientious objectors, they lay stress on the same texts which have led the Society of Friends to take up a similar position. But they affirm that these words only apply to God's own people, and have no reference to the nations of the world, or even to Christendom. Christadelphians believe it is God's will that the world-powers shall fight and destroy one another. They assert that "peace is to be deprecated as a calamity by the faithful . . . War is not displeasing to God. It is a divine institution for the punishment of the transgressors of His law; and a most beneficent one too."¹ War will "thin down (the world's) overstocked and corrupt population; it will relieve the atmosphere of foetid and oppressive elements."² The Christadelphian is opposed to all "Peace Societies" or "League of Nations." "These peace-criers are the enemies of God." Such organizations are of the world, and "eternal war" is to be preferred to them. What a contrast this is to our Lord's attitude: "Blessed are the peace-makers for they shall be called sons of God." The founder of Christadelphianism (Dr. Thomas) went to a meeting in London (in 1849) called for the purpose of adopting a petition to Parliament in favour of Mr. Cobden's motion for special treaties of arbitration, instead of the brutalities of war in the settlement of national disputes. A crowd of about 2,000 men had assembled to support the petition. Dr. Thomas moved a long amendment praising war as "a divine institution," but it was hopelessly lost. The audience became turbulent, and the doctor described them as "a mere mob of swine."³

The Christadelphian, therefore, heartily supports war, and by making munitions he not only earns big wages, but helps to fulfil the purposes of God. As a Bible Christian, he argues, he must not "take the sword," because that is forbidden, but he is at perfect

¹ *Elpis Israel* (Dr. Thomas), p. 111 f.

² *Christendom Astray* (R. Roberts), p. 359.

³ *Life and Work of Dr. Thomas*, p. 277.

liberty to make swords, as that is nowhere forbidden in Scripture. When our Lord returns, the embargo will be removed, and the Christadelphian expects to take a prominent part in the terrific slaughter and bloodshed which he believes will follow the second Advent. Those of his faith who are dead will be resurrected, or rather re-created, and given bloodless immortal bodies of flesh and bones. Those who are alive will be immortalized after the same fashion. Christ and His saints (i.e., Christadelphians) will then begin a terrible work of vengeance and destruction. "The saints will be associated with the Lord Jesus in destroying the political, ecclesiastical and social systems, which aggregately constitute 'this present evil world.' This is a work of devastation for which the mere religious sentimentalists of the age would be unfit. (It needs conscientious objectors.) It will involve much destruction of life, after the wholesome example of the flood. . . . Widespread will be the desolation produced; bloody and scathing the judgments ministered at the hands of Jesus and the saints."¹ For forty years this "great slaughter over all the earth" will continue. When it is finished the existing order of things will have been completely abolished, and those left alive will have learnt righteousness, and will have been subdued to the sceptre of Shiloh. Then the Prince of Peace and His saints will reign for 1,000 years, and "rule the earth with a rod of iron." At the end of the millennium there is to be a great revolt of the nations which will only "be suppressed by a summary outburst of judgment; after which will occur a resurrection and judgment of those who had died during the thousand years, and a judging of those who are alive at the end of the period; resulting in the immortalization of the approved, and the consignment of the rejected to destruction. None will then remain but a generation of righteous, redeemed, immortal persons, who shall *inhabit the earth for ever*. Christ's work will be finished, and the Father will reveal Himself without mediation."² "This is the Hope of Israel which is set before men in the Gospel, and for which Paul was bound in a chain. It is a very different one to that exhibited in pulpit-theology: yet it is that which must be embraced as the soul's anchorage, if a man would be saved, and inherit the Kingdom of God."³ What a travesty all this is of the true Gospel!

¹ *Christendom Astray*, p. 314 f.

² *A Declaration*, etc., § xviii:

³ *Elpis Israel*, p. 454.

How repellent to any noble-souled, tender-hearted man or woman ! If the world is only to be won at the point of the sword (or the muzzle of a gun) then Might is Right ; Christianity, as revealed in the Gospels, is a hopeless failure, and the devil and his principles have triumphed, for it is only by adopting his methods that the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them are to become the kingdom of the Son of man. (See Matt. iv. 8.)

To enter upon a detailed examination of the scriptural passages, mainly from Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah and the Apocalypse, from which they construct their theories, is impossible in this article. A study of their writings, however, reveals that they take verses from their context, distort others, ignore others, often literalize what is evidently metaphorical, allegorical or spiritual, and evolve from their imagination whatever is lacking to complete the structure. In this way they have misled many earnest but semi-educated Christian people.

THE BRITISH EMPIRE.

Part of the "Gospel" includes predictions as to the future of our Empire. Amongst much detail we have the following particulars. The navy is to be destroyed in the Mediterranean by a violent tempest, and England abased. "The British Lion is a proud and lofty beast. . . . Proud persons, proud nations, and proud governments are equally objects of God's detestation."¹ The king and the royal family are to be deposed and ejected from their possessions. "When the saints have made captive of the royal family of Britain, and their nobles and dependants, they will ask no favours, but take all they possess as the spoil of the victors."² "There will be no alternative before the royal family, bishops, nobles, legislators, administrators of the law, official subordinates, ecclesiastics of all sects, and soldiery of the British Empire, but unconditional surrender of place, power, property, and allegiance, or *death*."³ "The clergy of the Gentiles will not retain even a shadow of an existence: they would be only 'cumberers of the ground.'"⁴ "The kingdom of God made known in the Scriptures is a kingdom localized by the promises of God in Palestine, and destined to rule over all the earth. The clergy and their flocks have no part in

¹ *The Destiny of the British Empire* (Dr. Thomas, revised by C.C.W.), p. 24.

² P. 41.

³ P. 42.

⁴ P. 44.

this kingdom.”¹ “The aristocracy of Britain, with all their official retainers in church and state, will be ejected from place and power, and all their glory, honour, and emolument will be taken from them and bestowed upon the personal friends of Jesus”² (viz., Christadelphians). “The saints are to *take* the kingdom by force, and to leave none of the greatness for any but themselves.”² Our king and rulers will be conveyed in fetters and chains by “the saints” to Jerusalem, to receive the judgment there to be pronounced on all the kings of the earth.³ The land having been subdued, all rebels destroyed, and the “saints” given all authority and power, the millennium of peace and prosperity will commence.

THE DOCTRINE CONCERNING MAN.

The Christadelphian asserts that “Man is a creature of dust formation, whose individuality and faculties are the attributes of his bodily *organization*. That man is mortal (that is, subject to death, or *dissolution of being*) in consequence of the disobedience of Adam. . . . That in the death state, a man is as utterly unconscious as if he had never existed. Corruption will destroy his dead body, and he will pass away like a dream.” (Declaration § XXIV.) He goes “into a state of nothingness.” When our Lord returns, some will be resurrected (or rather re-created, since all trace of them will have perished), a few to receive immortality, as stated above, but the others to be judged, punished, and finally annihilated. All children, heathen and the insane, perish for ever at death. None but those who believe the Christadelphian Creed, and have been immersed in that faith, have any hope of “resurrection unto life.” Hence, since they never baptize a child under fourteen years of age, they have no hope of ever seeing again any of their own little ones who have died. What a terrible and cruel belief for bereaved parents to hold! They have no comfort to give to any outside their fold in sorrow. A few months ago one of the teachers in Birmingham lost her husband. She was of a kind, sensitive and gentle nature, and felt the blow keenly. A fellow-teacher said to a Christadelphian, “Why don’t you speak to her, and tell her what you believe?” The answer was a pathetic cry, “Oh, I daren’t! It would be cruel.” What a sad, comfortless religion!

¹ P. 44.

² P. 40.

³ P. 47.

All the vast multitudes of China, India, Africa, Russia, France, Italy, Belgium, etc., are to perish for ever. They are to be "cast as rubbish to the void." The Christadelphians have not a single missionary amongst them, and have no desire to send one. And not being a missionary Church, they are essentially a very small community.¹

In order to maintain their view concerning the nature and future of man, they ignore or explain away the clear teaching of the New Testament and construct their faith mainly upon verses to be found in Job, Ecclesiastes and a few Psalms. Their great texts are "The dead know not anything"; "There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Eccles. ix. 5, 10). "In death there is no remembrance of Thee" (Ps. vi. 5). (Man's) "breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Ps. cxlvi. 4). These passages are regarded as fundamental, and whatever else occurs must be made to harmonize with them. The immortality of the soul is a "damnable doctrine," "sheer paganism," and none who believe it can be saved.

Last August, the writer of this article gave an address to over 500 Christadelphians on this subject. This address has been published under the title of *Man and his Destiny*,² and those who desire to see the position examined in more detail are referred to that pamphlet. In it is pointed out that there is no New Testament support for their contentions as to their doctrine concerning man; that *not one* of the passages in the Old Testament, upon which they build their faith, is ever quoted by our Lord or His apostles, and that even the Old Testament does not really teach their doctrines. It is also affirmed that they dare not take the passage from Ecclesiastes literally, because the verse continues, "Neither *have they any more a reward*, for the memory of them is forgotten: as well their love as their hatred and their envy is now perished, neither have they any more a portion FOR EVER in anything that is done under the sun." This cuts at the root of all the Christadelphian holds dear, for his only hope for the future is that he shall

¹ No statistics are published, but they claim to number between 5,000 and 10,000, all in English-speaking countries. Birmingham is their headquarters, from which nearly all their literature is issued.

² C. J. Thynne, Whitefriars Street, E.C.4. Post free, 5d. The pamphlet also contains a short history of the sect.

have a "reward," which shall be a goodly "portion" *on this earth*. One of their leaders has replied: "As to Ecclesiastes ix. 5, 6, it is perfectly true of the majority. The exceptions prove the rule."¹ But if only true of the majority, it is not true of all, and hence, "The dead know not anything" cannot be quoted by them as though it referred to all, unless they are prepared to "handle the word of God deceitfully." They are on the horns of a dilemma.

Some illustrations ought to be given of their treatment of the New Testament evidence for continuity of existence. The great passage, Luke xvi. 19 to end, is regarded as deliberate delusion on our Lord's part. He was blinding the Pharisees by one of their own fables. The words to the penitent thief, "Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise," are altered by placing the comma after "to-day." The passage is then made to refer to the distant future when Christ comes into His kingdom. St. Stephen's prayer, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," is denuded of all its significance. The word "spirit" is said to be synonymous with "breath," which man possesses in common with the animals. This "breath" Stephen hoped to get back at the resurrection. (How comforting to a martyr!) St. Paul's words, "depart and be with Christ" (Phil. i. 23) are wrested by making "depart" mean "return," or a space of about 2,000 years is put between the two clauses. As to the Transfiguration, we are to believe that Moses was specially raised from the dead for that event. In all these and similar passages any interpretation is to be accepted rather than the simple, natural and obvious one. They dare not take these verses as they stand. Yet the Christadelphian boasts that he accepts the word of God as his only guide, and that he believes it to be verbally inspired and "consequently without error in all parts." In fact, it is his copious quotation of Scripture which frequently proves an attraction—and pitfall—to the simple-minded believer. There are practically no really educated men amongst their supporters.

THE DOCTRINE CONCERNING OUR LORD.

As in most of their other articles of faith, so in their Christology do they differ absolutely from all other branches of the Christian Church. They are neither Trinitarians nor Unitarians. They believe in the Virgin birth, but they do not believe in our Lord's pre-existence.

¹ *The Christadelphian*, April, 1920, p. 149.

They assert that He was born with a *sinful* body exactly similar to that of other men. "God made Him to be sin for us" is taken as referring to the Incarnation. Being thus sinful by nature, He was able "to condemn sin in the flesh." "His body was as unclean as the bodies of those for whom He died. The nature of Mary was as unclean as that of other women . . . and not one can bring a clean body out of a defiled body. . . . Upon this principle he that is born of sinful flesh is a sinner; as he that is born of English parents is an English child."¹ Hence, when our Lord died for sinners, even though He Himself had been perfectly obedient (and they believe this), *He died for His own benefit*, as well as for the sake of others. His sacrifice was necessary for Himself and He profited by it. This unorthodox view of our Lord's person and work is a constant source of trouble to the members of this sect. At the present time, some of the small Ecclesias in Australia are being rent in twain by the doctrine, and there is danger of a split, even if one has not already taken place. The words of the angel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin are important in contradicting the above blasphemy. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; wherefore *that which is to be born of THEE* shall be called holy, the Son of God" (St. Luke i. 35). The Christadelphian teaches the abhorrent doctrine that "that which was born of her" was "unclean, sinful, sin." (See also Heb. x. 5, "*A body didst Thou prepare for me.*")

Our Lord's miracles were wrought, not by any inherent power in Himself, but solely by the Father Who made use of Him for His own purposes. It was God who specially kept Him from sinning, whilst possessing a sinful nature. "As to how the Father could be manifest in a man with an independent volition, we need not trouble ourselves."² "We must simply believe . . . (even) if our understanding be baffled."³ In this way is the insuperable difficulty of their position evaded. When our Lord died on the Cross, He was for the time being extinguished, and in "a state of nothingness," until the Father raised Him from the dead. Then He was given an immortal body of flesh and bones similar to the Father's own body, and He now is at the centre of the Universe where the Father dwells corporeally in light unapproachable.

¹ *Elpis Israel*, p. 128.

² *The Blood of Christ* (Roberts), p. 24 f.

³ P. 25.

THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The Holy Spirit is not a Person, but "the radiant, invisible power or energy of the Father, filling universal space and forming the medium of His omniscient perceptions and the instrument of His omnipotent behests, whether in creation or inspiration."¹ But what exactly does this mean? The "Father is a tangible person," and the spirit is something which can be traced "in the laboratory of the experimental chemist." In fact, it is that "subtle, unanalysable, incomprehensible principle, which, though inscrutable in its essence, is found to be at the basis of all phenomena of nature—ELECTRICITY."² When God works consciously through this agent then it becomes Holy Spirit. This He did in apostolic days, but "there is no manifestation of the Spirit in these days. . . . The present days are barren days, as regards the Spirit's direct operations."³ The electricity is not now being used for the accomplishment of the divine revelation. *What a creed!*

The Christadelphian faith is, therefore, not one to be desired, or which brings joy to the heart. Several of their writers have admitted that it was no pleasure to them to discover the "truth," nor would they ever have accepted it had they not been convinced it was in accordance with the Word of God. Their whole hope is centred upon an eternity of good things on this earth, attained after heart-rending destruction. God is a great autocrat, and at present is an unspeakable number of millions of miles away from them; Jesus Christ is at His right hand; the Holy Spirit is not a person, a friend, but mere power—electricity. There is no fellowship with the departed, because they are for the present blotted out, and as though they had never been. There is no hope for all the noble, God-fearing, unselfish men and women who are now devoting their lives and substance to the service of their fellow-men, unless they believe and are baptized in the Christadelphian faith. All our splendid men who fought and died to save Europe from the horrors that threatened are now so much refuse. All children, of whom Christ said, "It is not the will of your Father that one of these little ones should perish"—all these at death are of no more value than rabbits or vermin. Such is part of the awful creed that the

¹ *A Declaration*, p. 20.

² *Christendom Astray*, p. 123

³ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

advocates of this sect ask men and women to believe. No wonder they are few in numbers, in spite of great efforts for over seventy years ; no wonder they are constantly losing members ; no wonder there are innumerable splits ;¹ no wonder they are narrow, bigotted, assertive, unattractive, soulless, unless they (as some do) rise above the confines of their profession, and breathe the purer and freer air of the breadth and length, and depth and height, of the love of God. From such a "latter day heresy" may our people be delivered !

F. MELLOWS.

¹ In Birmingham, there are three bodies which have no fellowship one with another, in addition to some who now meet alone with their own family for the "Breaking of Bread."



MEMORIES OF CANON CHRISTOPHER.

BY THE REV. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

(Continued from THE CHURCHMAN of May, p. 258.)

III. INDIA, 1844-1848

MR. and Mrs. Christopher sailed from Spithead on August 2, 1844, and after a three months' voyage reached Calcutta. By the same boat, Mr. Christopher's younger brother, Lieutenant Leonard Raisbeck Christopher, returned after sick leave to India, where he subsequently did good service during the war of the Mutiny in 1857. As Colonel Christopher, the Chief Commissariat officer at Cawnpore, he was responsible for the food supply of Lord Clyde's army at the time of the relief of the residency and the occupation of Lucknow. It was a saying at the time that "you could walk from Cawnpore to Lucknow on Christopher's carts." He received the thanks of the Government for his services, and later became a Major-General. Another passenger on this boat was Henry Brougham Loch, a Cavalry Cadet, who was afterwards Lord Loch and Governor of Cape Colony. In after years Lord Loch was Governor of the Isle of Man, and there Mr. Christopher resumed acquaintance with him.

At this point it is necessary to understand something of the Institution to which Mr. Christopher had been appointed. Claude