

CHRISTIANITY THE CONSERVATOR OF AMERICAN CIVILIZATION.



CIVILIZATION has from the earliest times developed a centripetal force that has tended to the aggregation of the mass of the population in cities. That force did its work in ancient times in Egypt, in Greece, and in Rome. It is doing its work now in modern Europe and in this country.

At the end of the war of the Revolution the population of the United States numbered nearly four millions. There were then but 6 cities, and in those 6 cities there dwelt 130,000 people; so that of the total population of the country at that time $3\frac{1}{3}$ per cent. was to be found in the cities. In the century that has passed since then the national development has been so directed that there are now 286 cities, and of the total population in the United States, which now amounts to more than 50,000,000, 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ millions are dwellers in cities; that is to say, 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., or more than one-fifth of the entire population of the United States to-day, is to be found in the cities. Of that urban population very nearly one-half is in ten cities, and nearly one-third is in the cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, including as a part of New York its tributary cities of Brooklyn and Jersey City.

American citizenship has its duties as well as its rights, its responsibilities as well as its privileges. The proper exercise of the right of suffrage requires in him who exercises it a high degree of intelligence; yet, of the more than two million voters in our cities, a majority are not sufficiently educated to exercise intelligently the right of suffrage, and a formidable minority are ignorant and vicious. As Lord Sherbrooke said in England with reference to the new voters upon whom the Reform Act of 1867 conferred the suffrage, "We must educate our *masters*," so we can well say with reference to the masses in our large cities, "We must educate *our* masters."

Education is in this connection a word of large import. It means something more than the perfunctory acquisition of facts, and something more than the development of the mind

as an intellectual machine. It means the bringing to bear upon every individual in the mass every influence that can tend to make him better as a man and better as a citizen.

The common-school system will not do the work of the education that we need, for that system, even if it were practically efficient, deals only with children, and it fails in that the tendency of its method of instruction is to direct the pupils, not to trades, not to mechanical work of any description, but exclusively to clerical labor; and the consequence is that the supply of that kind of labor is so greatly in excess of the demand for it that but a small proportion of the applicants can possibly obtain employment, and the unemployed applicants drift into vice and crime, not from any predisposition thereto, but because their compulsory idleness exposes them to temptation. We therefore cannot rely for the education of the masses upon the public-school system.*

Nor can we rely upon any system of merely philosophical training. That experiment has been tried again and again in the world's history. The philosophic systems of Greece and Rome culminated in the barbarism of the Middle Ages. The abstract philosophy of reason in France was crowned by the Reign of Terror.

If history has proved to demonstration any one fact it has proved this, that without Christianity there is now no possibility of an enduring civilization. If this be true of countries whose forms of government are monarchical or aristocratic, much more is it true here, where every citizen is entitled to an equal voice in the selection of the makers and administrators of the laws. Therefore we must find the solution of our problem in bringing the principles of Christianity to bear upon the population of our cities, for just so far as those principles leaven the mass will the individuals become better citizens, and will politics be purified.

There are certain inevitable results which follow upon the crowding of masses of people in cities. These are, first, an excess of demand over supply in the necessaries of life,

* Of 2127 convicts who have been received in the Pennsylvania Eastern State Penitentiary from 1875 to 1884, inclusive, 1547 had been pupils of the common schools; 65 had been pupils of private schools; 452 had never attended school; 1939 had never been apprenticed to any trade; 75 had been apprenticed, but

had left their trade before serving out their time; and 113 had been apprenticed and served out their time. These figures do not mean that the 1547 pupils of the public schools had received in those schools any instruction which in any way tended to incite them to crime, but they fortify the conclusion stated in the text.

and a consequently increased cost of living; secondly, an excess of supply over demand in all departments of labor, professional, clerical, and mechanical, and for the many a constantly increasing difficulty in obtaining the means of living; thirdly, for the few, wealth and luxury, and for the many, poverty and suffering; and, fourthly, a development of crime, intemperance, and other vices.

There is, therefore, poverty to be relieved, suffering to be alleviated, and sorrow to be comforted. Means of prevention must also be used. The sale of intoxicating liquors must be restrained. The reformatory agencies that clothe and educate the homeless youth and those other reformatory agencies that work upon the vicious and criminal classes must be fostered, stimulated, and strengthened.

Of course, much of this charitable work of all sorts is done and will continue to be done by the voluntary and unsectarian action of individuals and organizations; but all such work, by whomsoever done, is really animated, whether ostensibly or not, by that truly charitable spirit which is inspired by Christianity, and it is the office of every church to encourage that work, and to furnish volunteers for its performance.

It is another result of the growth of cities that in periods of business depression there are gathered together large bodies of unemployed and possibly starving men and women, who, under the pressure of their unfortunate circumstances, fall an easy prey to demagogues, and may be incited to acts of violence. Under any system of government this result of the centralization of population has been and always will be of grave importance.

Now, too, modern civilization is threatened from within by a foe who preaches the false gospel of a Godless humanity based upon the logic of dynamite and assassination, and that false gospel finds ready acceptance when it is preached to men who are both ignorant and starving.

We have heretofore flattered ourselves, with somewhat of national complacency, and in the exercise of a very practical materialism, that, whatever might befall the governments of Europe, here at least our free institutions and our boundless expanse of territory would protect us from the dangers which threaten European society; but we are beginning to realize that like causes will always produce like results, and that the congregation of the masses in cities, the aggrandizement of the few, and the depression of the many have combined to develop antagonistic forces the possible collision of which is full of danger.

Pagan Rome dealt with the difficulty in a spirit of conciliation that was epigrammatically expressed in the phrase *Panem et circenses*; that is to say, the government freely distributed food to the masses and provided for their entertainment the shows of the arena. Continental Europe deals with the difficulty in a spirit of stern repression, and endeavors by standing armies and police to hold the masses in subjection. Yet both systems failed. The armed mob accomplished in Rome the work which communism and nihilism are doing in Europe in our day.

We cannot have a standing army of adequate size, and if we undertake to maintain large bodies of men in idleness and to amuse them at the public expense we shall invite the very danger against which we would guard.

Christianity must be used as our conservative force, for it deals with man as an individual in his personal responsibility to his God, and it deals with him also as a citizen in his relation to organized society. It preaches, by example rather than by precept, the power of Christian charity, which is limited only by human need for human help. It teaches the rich that wealth is a trust, not a gift. It neutralizes class antagonisms by bringing home to men the great doctrine of the brotherhood of man.

The Christianity that is to do this great work must be a living Christianity; it must be aggressive; it must be liberal; it must be united; it must not confine itself to a merely defensive warfare. It must hold the outworks of civilization, not only by keeping watch and ward, but also by leading sorties against the besieging forces of unreason.

This work cannot be done only by throwing wide the doors of churches, holding service, and preaching sermons. It must also be done in the highways and the byways, among the rich and the poor, the virtuous and the vicious, the innocent and the guilty. It must be done by the laity as well as by the clergy; and its most persuasive sermons will find their expression not in words but in deeds, and not in exposition or argument or entreaty, but in the silent yet eloquent lessons of lives of self-sacrifice.

With the necessity for this great work staring us in the face, let us, agreeing about the essentials of the Christian faith, agree to disagree as to minor matters; and recognizing our points of agreement, and dwelling upon them to the exclusion of our points of disagreement, let us, as soldiers in one army and under one banner, move forward shoulder to shoulder.

Christopher Stuart Patterson.