

## The Church as a Social Institution.

Text. - Matthew VIII 16.

"By their fruits ye shall know them"

Under the soothing influence of a summer vacation, after a year of hard work, <sup>How easily</sup> do we change from an atmosphere of work to one of leisure. Almost unconsciously do we relax from the strenuous life of activity, to one of quietness, rest and ease. Like a boat becalmed, we remain idly floating, now and then roused into lazy action by a swell coming from some distant storm. We are in a state relaxation. We think little of the past. The story of our own life is of little interest to us. Now and then we turn to it for an idle story which offers to suit our mood. We have a vague indistinct idea that there



has been a fast, but its details we do not care to recall. We are fully satisfied in the dim consciousness of our existence. We have relaxed, and from our relaxation even the future with all its delightful uncertainties of aspirations, hopes, and ambitious fails to rouse us. As the haze, which gathers on an inland lake in the quiet of noon-day, hides the detail of the shores, so does the quiet and rest of summer make dull to our vision, the fast with all its precious moments, and the outline of days, chances that are a part of our very lives. I thus do me rest, thinking but little of the fast, and looking but instinctively into the future. I thus do me rest, conscious only of our present surroundings, and fully satisfied with our existence.

In this mental condition, in which



neither the wonderful past quickens our mind to action, nor the alluring future inspires us to work, we are best able to stand aside from the world of activity, and examine some detached fragment of art from the past which made it and the future towards which it is tending. It is in this frame of mind that we can take one little quiet work apart from the world, and live contented and satisfied. We are content to say "It is" without asking "How?" "When" or "Why?"

One ought to be in just such a condition of mind when attempting to estimate the value of the church as a social institution. In such a frame of mind one is able to overlook the struggle of 1900 years of Christianity, which has resulted in the various branches of the Christian Church. In this frame of mind one can refrain from looking



into the future and speculating upon the great possibilities there outlined. In other words one can take the church as "it is", without asking the "How?" "When?" and "Why?"

Without considering its beginning, its history, and its struggles, which have made it the living an expression of the vitalizing religion of the world; without considering Christianity which is behind the Church, we simply stand aside to look upon the Church as a social institution in a social civilization, and to think of its value as a social factor in a social world.

We are as social people first and above all else. We may be religious; we may be intellectual; we may be moral; but we are social. We are social physiologically, we are social psychologically. We began the history of man as social beings



The first social ties we make  
 and easily broken, but the key note  
 to our development <sup>was</sup> that first  
 and most sacred of social groups  
 of people, the family. From the  
 single fragile family organization  
 of early man, we have developed  
 into a most complex social system,  
 whose members are bound one to  
 another by countless powerful  
 social ties. We have grown ~~by~~  
 beyond that period in which we  
 are bound by natural relations.  
 Now innumerable ties which have  
 developed artificially in our form  
 of civilization, bind us all into  
 one great family. We no longer can  
 one man say of another, "I have  
 no need of thee". As a result of our  
 economic conditions you and  
 I are dependent upon people in  
 every country upon this globe.  
 No longer are we independent indi-  
 viduals, but we are interdependent



members of a great social organization, ~~whose~~ the complexity of which defies analysis. We are a great social humanity, social by nature, and by training.

In the midst of all this complex organism, do we find the church. The very fact that it has lived and grown through 19 centuries proves that it serves a purpose and meets a demand, as a social organization. In as much as it has survived the ages, we are justified in asserting that it stands for some great principles, which are required by a great social organism. What are they? This is the question that we want to answer.



"Thou shalt not" is really one of the characteristic ideas associated with people of the Church, & those who know but little of the meaning of Church life, association with the Church means a deliberate narrowing of ones life, of deliberately cutting out from ones life a vast part of it that is pleasing and beneficial. Their ideas makes the church a moral prison, in which one is clearly told what he can do and what he cannot do. So then the church is an enclosure bounded by the fence "thou shalt not." While this conception is wrong, yet it is interesting because it tells us something of ourselves. It tells us plainly that we stand for a high type of morality.

After we have been told that the church stands for a high type of morality, we begin to look at some of the church workmen to see if it is true. Do we not everywhere meet



the demand for high character &  
more connected with the church  
with the phrase "Salvation by character"?  
Is not that idea either an expressed  
or an implied characteristic of every  
church? Not only does the church  
say but it is. Beyond all this look  
at the representative organizations  
in churches in large cities. What does  
it mean to a section of a city for a  
college settlement to take up its work  
there? What does the floating Hospital  
mean? Children's Day Nursery? Sailor's  
Home? Open Air Societies? What do  
all these mean to the poor of Boston.  
It means simply a higher type of  
morality. Every movement of the  
Church in this direction among the  
poor, every movement of the church  
in any community, is a movement  
step towards a higher plane of  
morality. For this the church stands.  
Wherever there is church influence  
we expect to find and do find an  
atmosphere of morality.



But morality is apt to be a sort of ~~negative~~ goodness, that type which simply says "Thou shalt not." Some how a purely moral person thinks that he is doing his duty by simply refusing to do certain things that society has declared immoral. Such morality is really fitiable. We are gratified to see that the church stands for more than a mere negative morality. Not only does it say "Thou shalt not!" but also it says "Thou shalt," but ~~not~~ <sup>never</sup> refrain from evil, but do good is the command of the church. This spirit of doing good manifests itself in many directions, but most conspicuously is it shown in the attitude towards the community, in Good Citizenship. While the church has passed beyond that <sup>condition</sup> state in which it was identified with the state, yet to day its influence is even greater than of old. As a class men who are connected with



the church are superior as citizens  
 to those who are not connected  
 with it. But whatever may be the  
 attitude and the <sup>interest of men</sup> activity towards the  
 question, it is evident that there is yet work  
 to be done. Before the church there lies  
 a field for work extending the length  
 and breadth of this country and every  
 country in the world. Everywhere  
 comes the cry for purity in Politics.  
 With greater energy should the church  
 respond to this call! Next to man's duty  
 to his family comes his duty to the  
 government. Whoever shuns his  
 duty as a citizen, like Peter of old,  
 denies his master. ~~But still~~  
~~for~~ But still for good citizenship does  
 the church stand, and to morality  
 may be added good citizenship  
 as an influence of the church as a  
 social institution. ~~in a~~



There is yet another great social factor which the church has developed. Historically our educational systems belong to the church. The beginning of education in almost every country has been associated with the church. Especially has this been true in this country. In the early days it was the church which met demands of learning in the youths. As a memorial of the spirit of education in the church recall to your mind the large number of secondary schools which are still under the control of churches. Supplement this by the American college system, and you <sup>have</sup> the memorial to that spirit of education which has characterized the church. For the purposes of economy the educational system has passed into the hands of the state, but still the church stands behind it and influences it. In short education is one of the factors which the church as a social insti-



tution stands for, so our morality and good citizenship, we now add education.

All these characteristics may be selfish virtues. A high standard of morality is necessary for selfish purposes, good citizenship gives us the pleasanter community in which to live, and is therefore selfish, education reacts in favor of those who promote it. So these influences ~~will~~ may exist for selfish purposes. But there is a spirit in the church that is not selfish, it is that which says "I am my brother's keeper"; of the spirit of fraternity; of brotherly love. How changed is the <sup>present</sup> spirit of fraternity from the early ~~historical~~ days of historical knowledge in which the watch word seems to have been, "I am my brother's robber". Even now we see some of that early savage spirit manifested, but it is for the most part outside of the church circles.



We began with but the germ of this spirit of fraternity in us. We have developed it through sorrow <sup>and</sup> suffering of which we can have no conception until today it stands out as the most characteristic <sup>of our</sup> ~~function~~ of the church. It has taken centuries to develop that whole ~~whole~~ <sup>whole</sup> ~~souled~~ attitude towards life, which says, "I am my brother's keeper." It is taken ages to produce such characters as Clara Barton, Jacob Riis, and Helen Gould. These but represent a large class of people who are devoting their lives to the uplifting of their less fortunate fellow men.

The whole world is filled with this spirit of doing for others. Have any of you been sick or been in trouble? The little acts of kindness simply reveal to you the extent to which this spirit permeates society. The church cannot claim ~~to~~ all the honors for the good done unto others. In fact a great proportion of this social



richness is out <sup>side</sup> of the church. Yet ~~I~~  
~~think~~ that the church is foster  
 mother of it all. At least the church  
 stands for this spirit of fraternity.  
 Now the list is completed, morality,  
 good citizenship, education, and  
 fraternity. These are the influences  
 which the church as a social  
 institution exerts on society.  
 For these the church as a social insti-  
 tution stands. They are the outward  
 expressions of a great inner power.  
 This is what we have found the  
 Church to be, as we have stood  
 aside and examined it as  
 a social institution. What lies  
 back of this outward phenomena  
 we are not in beyond the scope  
 of this topic. We have found  
 out "what is" without asking  
 "how?", "when?", or "why?" Our  
 answer to "what is?" is that  
 the church is a social institu-  
 tion, which is doing a powerful



work in up lifting the standard of morality, good citizenship, education and fraternal aid in this great social ~~and~~ humanity.

Now that we have found the value of the church as a social institution, what does it profit us? It seems to me simply this, - We men and women, who say to ourselves or our friends, "I do not believe in the church I do not attend church, because I think that I can be just as good a Christian outside of the Church. There are just as good people out of the church as there are in it." It is true, too true, that there are just as good people out of the Church as there are in it. But there some people would be better if they associated their efforts with the church. They would be



better stronger and nobler by  
 associating themselves with that  
 institution which is ~~of~~ the  
 highest most powerful of all  
 associations of men. No longer  
 is the church regarded as a necessary  
 step in the process of salvation,  
 it is an association of individuals  
 who are working for a great purpose  
 and who find union gives them  
 power, and strength to accomplish  
 their end. The man who refuses  
 to associate himself with the  
 church on the ground that he can  
 be just as much of a Christian  
 outside as in side, is like the  
 man who would prefer  
 swimming to being carried  
 in a steamer. He is simply  
 refusing to accept a whole hearted  
 aid that is being offered  
 him as help in his struggles.  
 On the other hand the man who  
 does not associate with the



Church is deliberately refusing to assist in the work of the associations which stand for the highest type of social life. He is in a cold blooded manner refusing to do his part towards the realization of that which future generations of right demand. He is refusing to do his share in making the world better. The man who refuses to unite in Church movement, is injuring himself, his fellow men and his God.

Almighty may we always be eager to do those things which work for the comfort, purity and happiness of those into whose lives we enter. May all our deeds of love and kindness be done in the name and spirit of Him who went about doing good.  
Amen.