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THE *SPECTATOR* A SINCERE CHRISTIAN.

[*We are glad to have had placed at our disposal two articles on "The 'Spectator' a Sincere Christian," written before his lamented death by the* REV. G. S. STREATFEILD, *the first of which we print as follows.*]

IN an age conspicuous for its scepticism (to use no stronger term), an age of which Bishop Butler could write, "It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted, by many persons, that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry." [1] Joseph Addison stood forth as a champion of the Christian faith; his faith as a Christian, if we may judge from his writings, growing firmer and more confident with years,[2] and sealed on his death-bed by the well-known words spoken to his stepson, the young Earl of Warwick, "See in what peace a Christian can die."

It was a frequent, though not invariable, practice with the editors of the *Spectator* to choose a serious subject for their Saturday issue. All the essays on Milton's "Paradise Lost" appeared on Saturday, and there are many papers in the first seven volumes of a still more definitely religious type. The eighth volume, begun two years after the completion of the seventh, contains a remarkable proportion of essays that the devoutest and most scholarly divines of the day might have written—essays of which Lord Macaulay, not perhaps without a grain of exaggeration, could say that they bear comparison with the finest passages in *Marsillon*.[3]

Next to Addison, and not so very far behind him, Steele was the principal writer for the *Spectator*, and Steele, while less consistent and devout than his co-editor, was also a sincere Christian, lending all his weight both as a writer and a politician to the task of stemming

[1] Bishop Butler is but one of many witnesses to the religious condition of England in the first half of the eighteenth century. Addison himself, writing in *The Freeholder*, No. 37, declared that there was "less appearance of religion in England than in any neighbouring state or kingdom." Bishop Berkeley complains that "a cold indifference for the national religion, indeed for all matters of faith and divine worship, is thought good sense." *Works*, vol. iii, p. 63. It was a stock joke of the early years of the Walpole administration (1723) that "certain statesmen were engaged in cooking up a Bill at a hunting-seat in Norfolk (the county in which Walpole lived) for the purpose of excising the word 'not' from the decalogue, and inserting it in every clause of the creed." Sydney, *England and the English in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 322 ff.

[2] Addison left unpublished at his death a treatise on the *Evidences of Christianity*, begun in 1713, which was published among his posthumous works.

[3] There is good ground for believing that Addison, in early life, seriously contemplated entering holy orders. See *Addisoniana*, vol. i, p. 33.

the tide of infidelity and vice. His papers in the *Spectator* leave no doubt on this point.[1]

By far the more important part of the definitely religious element in the *Spectator* is from the pen of Addison, and, in the pages that follow, this feature of the essays will be illustrated chiefly from his contributions.

It almost goes without saying that Addison was no bigot. His moderation is as conspicuous in matters of faith as in those of politics. He was no party man in any sense of the term. Indeed, it may be admitted that, by his lack of zeal, he was a typical representative of the age he adorned. On no subject does he write with more candour and conviction:

No. 201. An enthusiast in religion is like an obstinate clown, a superstitious man like an insipid courtier. Enthusiasm has something in it of madness, superstition or folly. Most of the sects that fall short of the Church of England have in them a strong tincture of enthusiasm, as the Roman Catholic religion is one huge body of childish and idle superstitions.

No. 185. There is nothing in which men more deceive themselves than in what the world calls zeal. There are so many passions which hide themselves under it, and so many mischiefs arising from it, that some have gone so far as to say, it would have been for the benefit of mankind, if it had never been reckoned in the catalogue of virtues.[2] It is certain, where it is once laudable and prudential,

[1] No essay, so far as is known, was written by Steele for the eighth volume. See above.

It is recorded that during the last three or four years of his life, after the paralytic seizure which enfeebled both mind and body, Steele would have nothing read to him but from the Bible or Prayer Book. See *Addisoniana*, vol. i, p. 57.

[2] It was later in the century than Addison's time that a well-known and gifted clergyman wrote, "Mankind in general, if left to themselves, have little or no propensity to that most horrible of all vices called zeal."—*A Country Clergyman of the Eighteenth Century, Thomas Twining*, p. 85. It is only fair to add that the words quoted had reference to the Gordon Riots of 1780. In one respect the Roman Catholic religion, in the opinion of Addison, had an advantage over Protestant Churches. In his *Remarks on Italy* he represents conventual life as a safety-valve for the zeal and fanaticism which tend to schism. "I take one great cause why there are so few sects in the Church of Rome, to be the multitude of convents, with which they everywhere abound, that serve as receptacles for all those fiery zealots who would set the church in a flame, were they not got together in these houses of devotion. All men of dark tempers, according to their degree of melancholy or enthusiasm, may find convents fitted to their humours, and meet with companions as gloomy as themselves."—*Works* (Hurd), vol. ii, p. 198. No. 220 of the Tatler in the *Church Thermometer* (supposed to have been invented in the reign of Henry the Eighth) should be read as illustrating Addison's thoughts on religious enthusiasm. The following words of Swift might almost have been written by Addison: "Violent zeal for truth has a hundred to one odds to be either petulancy, ambition, or pride."

it is an hundred times criminal and erroneous; nor can it be otherwise, if we consider that it operates with equal violence in all religions, however opposite they may be to one another, and in all the subdivisions of each religion in particular. . . . I would have every zealous man examine his heart thoroughly, and I believe, he will often find, that what he calls a zeal for his religion is either pride's interest, or ill-nature. . . . It is certain if our zeal were true and genuine, we should be much more angry with a sinner than a heretic; since there are several cases which may excuse the latter before his great Judge, but none which can excuse the former.

No. 186 may be read as a confession of faith on the part of Addison before the world. It purports to be a letter written by Sir Roger de Coverley's chaplain, who is always presented to us in the most favourable light. The letter, it is clear, expresses Addison's own religious convictions, and is, for that reason, a valuable portion of the *Spectator*. It does not humour or stir the religious sentiments of to-day. There is more egoism than altruism in the confession, and there is a commercial tone of profit and loss, which, however natural and prevalent in Addison's time, jars upon the ear of the twentieth century; but no one can deny the sincerity and piety of the utterance:

A believer may be excused by the most hardened atheist for endeavouring to make him a convert, because he does it with an eye to both their interests. The atheist is inexcusable who tries to gain over a believer, because he does not propose the doing himself or the believer any good by such a conversion.

The prospect of a future state is the secret comfort and refreshment of my soul; it is that which makes nature look gay about me; it doubles all my pleasures, and supports me under all my afflictions. I can look at disappointments and misfortunes, pain and sickness, death itself, and what is worse than death, the loss of those who are dearest to me, with indifference, so long as I keep in view the pleasures of eternity, and the state of being in which there will be no fears nor apprehensions, pains nor sorrows, sickness nor separation. Why will any man be so impertinently officious as to tell me all this is only fancy and delusion? Is there any merit in being the messenger of ill news? If it is a dream, let me enjoy it, since it makes me both the happier and better man.

I must confess I do not know how to trust a man who believes neither heaven nor hell, or, in other words, a future state of rewards and punishments.[1] Not only natural self-love, but reason directs us to promote our own interests above all things. . . .

[1] One is reminded here of Voltaire's aphorism: "Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer."

Infidelity has been attacked with so good success of late years, that it is driven out of all its outworks. The atheist has not found his post tenable, and is therefore retired into deism, and a disbelief of revealed religion only. But the truth of it is, the greatest number of this set of men are those who, for want of a virtuous education, or examining the grounds of religion, know so very little of the matter in question, that their infidelity is but another term for their ignorance.[1] . . .

The great received articles of the Christian religion have been so clearly proved from the authority of that divine revelation in which they are delivered, that it is impossible for those who have ears to hear, and eyes to see, not to be convinced of them. But were it possible for anything in the Christian faith to be erroneous, I can find no ill consequences in adhering to it. The great points of the incarnation and sufferings of our Saviour produce naturally such habits of virtue in the mind of man, that I say, supposing it were possible for us to be mistaken in them, the infidel himself must at least allow that no other system of religion could so effectually contribute to the heightening of morality. They give us great ideas of the dignity of human nature, and of the love which the Supreme Being bears in His creatures, and consequently engage us in the highest acts of duty towards our Creator, our neighbour, and ourselves. How many noble arguments has Saint Paul raised from the chief articles of our religion, for the advancing of morality in its three great branches! To give a single example in each kind. What can be a stronger motive to a firm trust and reliance on the mercies of our Maker, than the giving us His Son to suffer for us? What can make us love and esteem even the most inconsiderable of mankind more than the thought that Christ died for him? Or what dispose us to set a stricter guard upon the purity of our own hearts, than our being members of Christ, and a part of the society of which that immaculate person is the head? But these are only a specimen of those admirable inforcements of morality, which the apostle has drawn from the history of our blessed Saviour.

If our modern infidels considered these matters with that candour and seriousness which they deserve, we should not see them act with such a spirit of bitterness, arrogance and malice. They would not be raising such insignificant cavils, doubts and scruples, as may be started against everything that is not capable of mathematical demonstration; in order to unsettle the minds of the ignorant, disturb the public peace, subvert morality and throw all things into confusion and disorder. (*Addison.*)

In No. 201 the duty of those entrusted with the upbringing of children to implant early devotion in their hearts is urged:

[1] Addison is hardly altogether consistent in his treatment of the infidelity of his age. Rationalism, teste Bishop Butler and others (see above), was gaining, rather than losing, ground when the *Spectator* papers were written. See also, e.g., Swift's *Argument Against Abolishing Christianity.*

It is of the last importance to season the passions of a child with devotion, which seldom dies in a mind that has received an early tincture of it. Though it may seem extinguished for a while by the cares of the world, the heats of youth, or the allurements of vice, it generally breaks out and discovers itself again as soon as discretion, consideration, age, or misfortunes have brought the man to himself. The fire may be covered and overlaid, but cannot be entirely quenched and smothered.

A state of temperance, sobriety, and justice, without devotion, is a cold, lifeless, insipid condition of virtue, and is rather to be styled philosophy than religion. Devotion opens the mind to great conceptions, and fills it with more sublime ideas than any that are to be met with in the most exalted science; and at the same time warms and agitates the soul more than sensual pleasure. (*Addison.*)

In the following words (No. 293) Addison inculcates belief in Divine Providence and a sense of humble dependence upon the Supreme Being:

It is a great presumption to ascribe our successes to our own management, and not to esteem ourselves upon any blessing, rather as it is the bounty of heaven, than the acquisition of our own prudence. I am very well pleased with a medal which was struck by Queen Elizabeth, a little after the defeat of the invincible armada, to perpetuate the memory of that extraordinary event. It is well known how the King of Spain, and others who were the enemies of that great princess, to derogate from her glory, ascribed the ruin of their fleet to the violence of storms and tempests, rather than to the bravery of the English. Queen Elizabeth, instead of looking upon this as a diminution of her honour, valued herself upon such a signal favour of Providence, and, accordingly, in the reverse of the medal above-mentioned, has represented a fleet beaten by a tempest, and falling foul upon one another, with that religious description, "*Afflavit Deus et dissipantar*" ("He blew with His wind, and they were scattered").

In No. 381 Addison pursues the subject in his beautiful essay on cheerfulness, which the author must have written from his own experience, and in which he describes (perhaps unconsciously) one of the most conspicuous features in his own character. Drawing, surely, from his knowledge of the world and of human nature, he states his belief that guilt and atheism are the most fatal foes to cheerfulness:

There are but two things which, in my opinion, can reasonably deprive us of this cheerfulness of heart. The first of these is the sense of guilt. A man who lives in a state of vice and impenitence, can have no title to that evenness and tranquillity of mind which is the health of the soul, and the natural effect of virtue and

innocence. Cheerfulness in an ill man deserves a harder name than language can furnish us with, and is many degrees beyond what we commonly call folly or madness.

Atheism, by which I mean a disbelief of a Supreme Being, and consequently of a future state, under whatsoever titles it shelters itself, may likewise very reasonably deprive a man of this cheerfulness of temper. There is something so particularly gloomy and offensive in human nature in the prospect of non-existence, that I cannot but wonder, with many excellent writers, how it is possible for a man to outlive the expectation of it. For my own part, I think the being of a God is so little to be doubted, that it is almost the only truth we are sure of, and such a truth as we may meet with in every object, in every occurrence, and in every thought. If we look into the characters of this tribe of infidels, we generally find they are made up of pride, spleen and cavil.[1] It is indeed no wonder, that men who are uneasy to themselves should be so to the rest of the world; and how is it possible for a man to be otherwise than uneasy in himself, who is in danger every moment of losing his entire existence, and dropping into nothing?

The vicious man and atheist have therefore no pretence to cheerfulness and would act very unreasonably should they endeavour after it. It is impossible for anyone to live in good humour, and enjoy his present existence, who is apprehensive either of turmoil or of annihilation; of being miserable, or of not being at all. (*Addison.*)

In No. 458, *Spectator* seriously and forcibly rebukes the moral cowardice of those who fear to confess their faith:

We have in England a particular bashfulness in everything that regards religion. A well-bred man is obliged to conceal any serious sentiment of this nature, and very often to appear a greater libertine than he is, that he may keep himself in countenance among the men of mode. Our excess of modesty makes us shamefaced in all the exercises of piety and devotion. This humour prevails upon us daily; insomuch that at many well-bred tables, the master of the house is so very modest a man, that he has not the confidence to say grace at his own table: a custom which is not only practised by all the nations about us, but was never omitted by the heathens themselves. English gentlemen who travel into Roman-Catholic countries, are not a little surprised to meet with people of the best quality kneeling in their churches, and engaged in their private devotions, though it be not at the hours of public worship. An officer of the army, or a man of wit and pleasure, in those countries, would be afraid of passing not only for an irreligious, but an ill-bred man, should he be seen to go to bed, or sit down at table, without offering up his devotions on such occasions. The same show of religion appears in all the foreign reformed churches, and enters so

[1] Had Addison lived to-day he would have doubtless more than modified this statement.

much into their ordinary conversation, that an Englishman is apt to term them hypocritical and precise.

Perhaps characteristically (for Addison was a loyal Churchman) this reserve is traced to the sanctimonious speech and practices which had been encouraged by Puritans of the more pronounced type:

This little appearance of religious deportment in our nation, may proceed in some measure from that modesty which is natural to us; but the great occasion of it is certainly this: Those swarms of sectaries[1] that overran the nation in the time of the great rebellion, carried their hypocrisy so high, that they converted our whole language into a jargon of enthusiasm; insomuch that, upon the Restoration, men thought they could not recede too far from the behaviour and practice of those persons who had made religion a cloak for so many villainies. This led them into the other extreme; every appearance of devotion was looked upon as puritanical; and, falling into the hands of the "ridiculers" who flourished in that reign, and attacked everything that was serious, it has ever since been out of countenance among us. By this means we are gradually fallen into that vicious modesty, which has in some measure worn out from among us the appearance of Christianity in ordinary life and conversation, and which distinguishes us from all our neighbours.

Hypocrisy cannot indeed be too much detested, but at the same time is to be preferred to open impiety. They are both equally destructive to the person who is possessed with them; but, in regard to others, hypocrisy is not so pernicious as barefaced irreligion. The due mean to be observed is to be sincerely virtuous, and at the same time to let the world see we are so. I do not know a more dreadful menace in the holy writings, than that which is pronounced against those who have this perverted modesty, to be ashamed before men in a particular of such unspeakable importance. (*Addison.*)

What Addison thought of Puritanism we may judge from No. 494:

About an age ago it was the fashion in England, for every one that would be thought religious, to throw as much sanctity as possible into his face, and, in particular to abstain from all appearances of mirth and pleasantry, which were looked upon as the masks of a carnal mind. The saint was of a sorrowful countenance, and generally eaten up with spleen and melancholy. . . . Notwithstanding this general form and outside of religion is pretty well worn out among us, there are many persons who, by a natural uncheerfulness of heart, mistaken notions of piety, or weakness of understanding, love to indulge this uncomfortable way of life, and

[1] Cp. *Freeholder*, No. 37.

give up themselves a prey to grief and melancholy. Superstitious fears and groundless scruples cut them off from the pleasures of conversation, and all those social entertainments, which are not only innocent but laudable: as if mirth were made for reprobates, and cheerfulness of heart denied those who are the only persons that have a proper title to it.

Sombrius is one of these sons of sorrow. He thinks himself obliged in duty to be sad and disconsolate. He looks on a sudden fit of laughter as a breach of his baptismal vow. An innocent jest startles him like blasphemy. Tell him of one who is advanced to a title of honour, he lifts up his hands and eyes; describe a public ceremony, he shakes his head; shew him a gay equipage, he blesses himself. All the little ornaments of life are pomps and vanities. Mirth is wanton, and wit profane. He is scandalized at youth for being lively, and at childhood for being playful. He sits at a christening, or a marriage feast, as at a funeral; sighs at the conclusion of a merry story, and grows devout when the rest of the company grow pleasant. After all, Sombrius is a religious man, and would have behaved himself very properly, had he lived when Christianity was under a general persecution.

I would by no means presume to tax such characters with hypocrisy, as is done too frequently; that being a vice, which I think none but He, Who knows the secrets of men's hearts, should pretend to discover in another, where the proofs of it do not amount to a demonstration. On the contrary, as there are many excellent persons, who are weighed down by this habitual sorrow of heart, they rather deserve our compassion than our reproaches. I think, however, they would do well to consider whether such behaviour does not deter men from a religious life, by representing it as an unsociable state, that extinguishes all joy and gladness, darkens the face of nature, and destroys the relish of being itself.

I have in former papers, shewn how great a tendency there is to cheerfulness in religion, and how such a frame of mind is not only the most lovely, but the most commendable in a virtuous person. In short, those who represent religion in so unamiable a light, are like the spies sent by Moses to make a discovery of the land of promise, when by their reports they discouraged the people from entering upon it. Those who shew us the joy, the cheerfulness, the good-humour, that naturally spring up in this happy state, are like the spies bringing along with them the clusters of grapes, and delicious fruits, that might invite their companions into the pleasant country which produced them. . . .

The contemplation of the Divine Being, and the exercise of virtue, are, in their own nature, so far from excluding all gladness of heart, that they are perpetual sources of it. In a word, the true spirit of religion cheers, as well as composes the soul; it banishes indeed all levity of behaviour, all vicious and dissolute mirth, but in exchange fills the mind with a perpetual serenity, uninterrupted cheerfulness, and an habitual inclination to please others, as well as to be pleased in itself.

Addison could look to the pagan as well as the Christian world for his saints. Cato, as we know from his tragedy of that title, claimed his homage. Still deeper was his reverence for the character of Socrates:

No. 213. When I employ myself upon a paper of morality I generally consider how I may recommend the particular virtue which I treat of, by the precepts or examples of the ancient heathens: by that means if possible, to shame those who have greater advantages of knowing their duty, and therefore greater obligations to perform it, into a better course of life: besides that many among us are unreasonably disposed to give a fairer hearing to a pagan philosopher, than to a Christian writer.

I shall therefore produce an instance of this excellent frame of mind in a speech of Socrates, which is quoted by Erasmus. This great philosopher on the day of his execution, a little before the draught of poison was brought to him, entertaining his friends with a discourse on the immortality of the soul, has these words: "Whether or not God will approve my actions, I know not; but this I am sure of, that I have at all times made it my endeavour to please Him, and I have a good hope that this my endeavour will be accepted by Him." We find in these words of that great man the habitual good intention which I would here inculcate, and with which that divine philosopher always acted. I shall only add that Erasmus,[1] who was an unbigoted Roman Catholic, was so much transported with this passage of Socrates, that he could scarce forbear looking upon him as a saint, and desiring him to pray for him; or as the ingenious and learned writer has expressed himself in a much more lively manner, "When I reflect on such a speech pronounced by such a person, I can scarce forbear crying out 'Sancte Socrates, or a pro nobis!'"

In few of his papers is Addison's irony more severe than when he comments on those who interpret misfortunes as judgments:

No. 483. We cannot be guilty of a greater act of uncharitableness than to interpret the afflictions which befall our neighbours as punishments and judgments. . . . The humour of turning every misfortune into a judgment proceeds from wrong notions of religion, which, in its own nature, produces good-will toward men and puts the mildest construction upon every accident that befalls them. In this case, therefore, it is not religion that sours a man's temper, but it is his temper that sours his religion. . . . An old maiden gentlewoman, whom I shall conceal under the name of Nemesis, is the greatest discoverer of judgments that I have ever met with. She can tell you what sin it was that set such a man's house on fire, or blew down his barns. Talk to her of an unfortunate young lady that lost her beauty by the smallpox, she fetches a deep sigh,

[1] *Apophthegm*, Book II.

and tells you, that when she had a fine face, she was always looking on it in her glass. Tell her of a piece of good fortune that has befallen one of her acquaintance, and she wishes it may prosper with her, but her mother used one of her nieces very barbarously. Her usual remarks turn upon people who had great estates, but never enjoyed them by reason of some flaw in their own or their father's behaviour. She can give you the reason why such an one died childless; why such an one was cut off in the flower of his youth; why such an one was unhappy in her marriage; why one broke his leg on such a particular spot of ground; and why another was killed with a back-sword,[1] rather than with any other weapon. She has a crime for every misfortune that can befall any of her acquaintance; and when she hears of a robbery that has been made, or a murder that has been committed, enlarges more on the guilt of the suffering person, than on that of the thief or assassin. In short, she is so good a Christian, that whatever happens to herself is a trial, and whatever happens to her neighbours is a judgment. . . . Indeed, most historians, as well Christian as pagan, have fallen into this idle superstition, and spoken of ill success, unforeseen disasters, and terrible events, as if they had been let into the secrets of Providence, and made acquainted with that private conduct by which the world is governed. One would think several of our own historians in particular had many revelations of this kind made to them. Our old English monks seldom let any of their kings depart in peace, who had endeavoured to diminish the power or wealth of which the ecclesiastics were in those times possessed. William the Conqueror's race generally found their judgments in the New Forest, where their father had pulled down churches and monasteries. In short, read one of the chronicles written by an author of this frame of mind, and you would think you were reading the history of the Kings of Israel or Judah, where the historians were actually inspired, and where by a particular scheme of Providence, the Kings were distinguished by judgments or blessings, according as they promoted idolatry or the worship of the true God. (*Addison.*)

[1] *Back-sword*, a sword with only one cutting edge.