

SELECTIONS FROM
THE PRESENT MOMENT¹

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

(No. I, 1)

Plato says somewhere in his "Republic" that things will go well only when those men shall govern the state who do not desire to govern. The idea is probably that, assuming the necessary capability, a man's reluctance to govern affords a good guarantee that he will govern well and efficiently; whereas a man desirous of governing may very easily either abuse his power and become a tyrant, or by his desire to govern be brought into an unforeseen situation of dependence on the people he is to rule, so that his government really becomes an illusion.

This observation applies also to other relations where much depends on taking things seriously: assuming there is ability in a man, it is best that he show reluctance to meddle with them. To be sure, as the proverb has it: "where there is a will there is a way"; but true seriousness appears only when a man fully equal to his task is forced, against his will, to undertake it—against his will, but fully equal to the task.

In this sense I may say of myself that I bear a correct relation to the task in hand: to work in the present moment; for God knows that nothing is more distasteful to me.

Authorship—well, I confess that I find it pleasant; and I may as well admit that I have dearly loved to write—in the manner, to be sure, which suits me. And what I have loved to do is precisely the opposite of working in the present moment. What I have loved is precisely remoteness from the present moment—that remoteness in which, like a lover, I may dwell on my thoughts and, like an artist in love with his instrument, entertain myself with language and lure from it the expressions demanded by my thoughts—ah blissful entertainment! In an eternity I should not weary of this occupation.

To contend with men—well, I do like it in a certain sense; for I have by nature a temperament so polemic that I feel in my element only when surrounded by men's mediocrity and meanness. But only on one condition, viz., that I be permitted to scorn them in silence and to satisfy the master passion of my soul: scorn—opportunity for which my career as an author has often enough given me.

I am therefore a man of whom it may be said truthfully that he is not in the least desirous to work in the present moment—very probably I have been called to do so for that very reason.

Now that I am to work in the present moment I must, alas! say farewell to thee, beloved remoteness, where there was no necessity to hurry, but always plenty of time, where I could wait for hours and days and weeks for the proper expression to occur to me; whereas now I must break with all such regards of tender love. ²And now that I am to work in the present moment I find that there will be not a few persons whom I must oblige by paying my respects to all the insignificant things which mediocrity with great self-importance will lecture about; to all the nonsense which mediocre people, by interpreting into my words their own mediocrity, will find in all I shall write; and to all the lies and calumnies to which a man is exposed against whom those two great powers in society: envy and stupidity, must of necessity conspire.

Why, then, do I wish to work in the present moment? Because I should forever repent of not having done so, and forever repent of having been discouraged by the consideration that the generation now living would find a representation of the essential truths of Christianity interesting and curious reading, at most; having accomplished which they will calmly remain where they are; that is, in the illusion that they are Christians and that the clergy's toying with Christianity really is Christianity.

A PANEGYRIC ON THE HUMAN RACE
OR
PROOF THAT THE NEW TESTAMENT IS NO LONGER TRUE
(No. 11, 5)

¹ Selections.

² The following sentence is not clear in the original.

In the New Testament the Savior of the World, our Lord Jesus Christ, represents the matter in this way: "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."³

—now, however, just to confine ourselves to Denmark, the way is as broad as a road can possibly be; in fact, the broadest in Denmark, for it is the road we all travel. At the same time it is in all respects a comfortable way, and the gate as wide as it is possible for a gate to be; for certainly a gate cannot be wider than to let all men pass through *en masse*:

therefore, the New Testament is no longer true¹.

All credit is due to the human race! For thou, oh Savior of the World, thou didst entertain too low an estimate of the human race, so that thou didst not foresee the exalted plan which, in its perfectibility, it may reach by steadily continued endeavor!

To such an extent, then, is the New Testament no longer true: the way is the broadest possible, the gate the widest possible, and we are all Christians. In fact, I may venture still further—I am enthusiastic about it, for you see I am writing a panegyric on the human race—I venture to assert that the average Jew living among us is, to a certain degree, a Christian just as well as we others: to such an extent are we all Christians, and to such an extent is the New Testament no longer true.

And, since the point is to find out all which may be adduced to extol the human race, one ought—while having a care not to mention anything which is not true—one ought to watch that nothing, nothing escape one which in this connection may serve as a proof or even as a suggestion. So I venture still further—without wishing to be too positive, as I lack definite information on this subject and would like, therefore, to refer the matter to specialists in this line to decide—: whether there are not present among our domestic animals, or at any rate the nobler ones, such as the horse, the dog, and the cow, indications of a Christian spirit. It is not improbable. Consider what it means to live in a Christian state, among a Christian people, where everything is Christian and everybody is a Christian and where one, turn where one may, sees nothing but Christians and Christianity, truth and martyrs for the truth—it is not at all unlikely that this exerts an influence on the nobler domestic animals and thereby again—which is ever of the utmost importance, according to the opinion both of veterinarians and of clergymen—an influence on their progeny. We have all read of Jacob's ruse, how in order to obtain spotted lambs he put party-colored twigs into the watering troughs, so that the ewes saw nothing but mottled things and then brought forth spotted lambs. Hence it is not improbable—although I do not wish to be positive, since I do not belong to the profession, but would rather have this passed on by a committee composed of both clergymen and veterinarians—I say, it is not improbable that the result will finally be that the domestic animals living in a Christian nation will produce a Christian progeny. The thought almost takes away my breath. To be sure, in that case the New Testament will to the greatest possible extent have ceased to be true.

Ah, Thou Savior of the World, when Thou saidst with great concern: "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find Faith on the earth?"⁴—and when Thou didst bow Thy head in death, then didst Thou least of all think that Thy expectations were to be exceeded to such a degree, and that the human race would in such a pretty and touching way render the New Testament no longer true, and Thy significance almost doubtful; for such nice creatures certainly also needed a Savior!⁵

IF WE ARE REALLY CHRISTIANS—THEN WHAT IS GOD?

(No. 11, 8)

If it is not so—that all we mean by being "Christians" is a delusion—that all this machinery, with a State Church and thousands of spiritual-worldly councillors of chancery, etc., is a stupendous delusion which will not be of the least help to us in the life everlasting but, on the contrary, will be turned into an accusation against us—if this is not so; for if it is, then let us, for the sake of life everlasting, get rid of it, the sooner the better—

³ Matthew 7, 14.

⁴ Luke 18, 8.

⁵ The last line of this piece of bloody irony is not clear in the original (S. V. XIII, 128). It will make better sense if one substitutes "da" for the first "de."

if it is not so, and if what we understand by being a Christian really is to be a Christian: then what is God in Heaven?

He is the most ridiculous being that ever existed, His Word is the most ridiculous book which has ever appeared; for to move heaven and earth, as He does in his Word, and to threaten with hell and everlasting damnation—in order to obtain as His result what we understand by being Christians (and our assumption was that we are true Christians)—well, now, has anything so ridiculous ever been seen before? Imagine that a fellow with a loaded pistol in his hand held up a person and said to him, "I shall shoot you"; or imagine, what is still more terrible, that he said, "I shall seize you and torture you to death in the most horrible manner, if"—now watch, here's the point—"if you do not render your life here on earth as profitable and as enjoyable as you can": would not that be utterly ridiculous? For to obtain that effect it certainly is not necessary to threaten one with a loaded pistol and the most painful torture; in fact, it is possible that neither the loaded pistol nor the most painful torture would be able to deter him from making his life as comfortable as he can. And the same is true when, by fear of eternal punishment (terrible threat!), and by hope of eternal salvation, He wishes to bring about—well, to make us what we are (for what we call Christian is, as we have seen, really being Christian), to make us—well, to make us what we are; that is, make men live as they please; for to abstain from committing crimes is nothing but common prudence!

The most terrible blasphemy is the one of which "Christianity" is guilty, which is, to transform the God of the Spirit into—a ridiculous piece of nonsense. And the stupidest kind of worship, more stupid than any idolatry ever was among the heathen, and more stupid than to worship as a god some stone, or an ox, or an insect—more stupid than anything, is to adore as god—a fool!

DIAGNOSIS (No. IV, 1)

1.

Every physician will admit that by the correct diagnosis of a malady more than half the fight against it is won; also, that if a correct diagnosis has not been made, all skill and all care and attention will be of little avail.

The same is true with regard to religion.

We are agreed to let stand the claim that in "Christendom" we are Christians, every one of us; and then we have laid and, perhaps, will lay, emphasis now on this, now on that, side of the teachings of the Scriptures.

But the truth is: we are not only not Christians—no, we are not even the heathen to whom Christianity may be taught without misgivings, and what is worse, we are prevented through a delusion, an enormous delusion (viz. "Christendom," the Christian state, a Christian country, a Christian world) from becoming Christians.

And then the suggestion is made to one to continue untouched and unchanged this delusion and, rather, to furnish a new presentation of the teachings of Christ.⁶

This has been suggested; and, in a certain sense, it is altogether fitting. Just because one lives in a delusion (not to speak even of being interested in keeping up the delusion), one is bound to desire that which will feed the malady—a common enough observation this—the sick man desiring precisely those things which feed his malady.

2.

Imagine a hospital. The patients are dying off like so many flies. The methods are changed, now this way, now that: of no avail! What may be the cause? The cause lies in the building—the whole building is tainted. The patients are put down as having died, the one of this, the other of that, disease, but strictly speaking this is not true; for they all died from the taint which is in the building.

⁶ This suggestion had actually been made to Kierkegaard in the course of his attacks on Martensen.

The same is true in religion. That religious conditions are wretched, and that people in respect of their religion are in a wretched condition, nothing is more certain. So one ventures the opinion that if we could but have a new hymn-book; and another, if we could but have a new service-book; and a third, if we could but have a musical service, etc., etc.—that then matters would mend.

In vain; for the fault lies in the edifice. The whole ramshackle pile of a State Church which has not been aired, spiritually speaking, in times out of mind—the air in it has developed a taint. And therefore religious life has become diseased or has died out; alas, for precisely that which the worldly mind regards as health is, in a Christian sense, disease—just as, vice versa, that which is healthy in a Christian sense, is regarded as diseased from a worldly point of view.

Then let the ramshackle pile collapse, get it out of the way, close all these shops and booths which are the only ones which are excepted from the strict Sunday regulations, forbid this official double-dealing, put them out of commission, and provide for them, for all these quacks: even though it is true that the royally attested physician is the acceptable one, and he who is not so attested is a quack: in Christianity it is just the reverse; that is, the royally attested teacher is the quack, is a quack by the very fact that he is royally attested—and let us worship God again in simplicity, instead of making a fool of him in splendid edifices; let us be in earnest again and stop playing; for a Christianity preached by royal officials who are payed and insured by the state and who use the police against the others, such a Christianity bears about the same relation to the Christianity of the New Testament as swimming with the help of a cork-belt or a bladder does to swimming alone—it is mere play.

Yes, let that come about. What Christianity needs is not the stifling protection of the state—ah no, it needs fresh air, it needs persecution and—the protection of God. The state does only mischief in averting persecution and surely is not the medium through which God's protection can be conducted. Whatever you do, save Christianity from the state, for with its protection it overlies Christianity like a fat woman overlying her child with her carcass, beside teaching Christianity the most abominable bad habits—as, e.g., to use the police force and to call that Christianity.

3.

A person is growing thinner every day and is wasting away. What may the trouble be? For surely he is not suffering want! "No, sure enough," says the doctor, "that is not the trouble. The trouble is precisely with his eating, with his eating in season and out of season, with his eating without being hungry, with his using stimulants to produce an appetite, and in this manner ruining his digestion, so that he is wasting away as if he suffered want." The same is true in religion. The worst of all is to satisfy a craving which has not as yet made its appearance, to anticipate it, or—worse still—by the help of stimulants to produce something which looks like a craving, which then is promptly satisfied. Ah, the shame of it! And yet this is exactly what is being done in religion where people are in very truth fooled out of the real meaning of life and helped to waste their lives. That is in very truth, the effect of this whole machinery of a state church and a thousand royal officials who, under the pretense of being spiritual guides for the people, trick them out of the highest thing in life, which is, the solicitude about one's self, and the need which would surely of itself find a teacher or minister after its own mind; whereas now the need—and it is just the growth of this sense of a need which gives life its highest significance—whereas now this need does not arise at all, but on the contrary is forestalled by being satisfied long before it can arise. And this is the way, they claim, this is the way to continue the work which the Savior of Mankind did begin—stunting the human race as they do. And why is this so? Because there happen to be a thousand and one royal officials who have to support their families by furnishing what is called—spiritual guidance for men's souls!

THE CHRISTIANITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT; THE CHRISTIANITY OF "CHRISTENDOM" (No. V, 4)

The intention of Christianity was: to change everything.

The result, the Christianity of "Christendom" is: everything, literally everything, remained as it had been, with just the difference that to everything was affixed the attribute "Christian"—and for the rest (strike up, fiddlers!) we live in Heathendom—so merrily, so merrily the dance goes around; or, rather, we live in a Heathendom made more refined by the help of Life Everlasting and by help of the thought that, after all, it is all Christian!

Try it, point to what you will, and you shall see that I am right in my assertion.

If what Christianity demanded was chastity, then away with brothels! But the change is that the brothels have remained just as they did in Heathendom, and the proportion of prostitutes remained the same, too; to be sure, they became "Christian" brothels! A brothel-keeper is a "Christian" brothel-keeper, he is a Christian as well as we others. Exclude him from church membership? "Why, for goodness sake," the clergyman will say, "what would things come to if we excluded a single paying member?" The brothel-keeper dies and gets a funeral oration with a panegyric in proportion to the amount he pays. And after having earned his money in a manner which, from a Christian point of view, is as filthy and base as can be (for, from a Christian point of view it would be more honorable if he had stolen it) the clergyman returns home. He is in a hurry, for he is to go to church in order to deliver an oration or, as Bishop Martensen would say, "bear witness."

But if Christianity demanded honesty and uprightness, and doing away with this swindle, the change which really came about was this: the swindling has remained just as in Heathendom, "every one (every Christian) is a thief in his own line"; only, the swindling has taken on the predicate "Christian." So we now have "Christian" swindling—and the "clergyman" bestows his blessing on this Christian community, this Christian state, in which one cheats just as one did in Heathendom, at the same time that one pays the "clergyman," that is, the biggest swindler of hem all, and thus cheats one's self into Christianity.

And if Christianity demanded seriousness in life and doing away with the praise and approbation of vanity—why, everything has remained as before, with just this difference that it has assumed the predicate "Christian." Thus the trumpety business with decorations, titles, and rank, etc. has become Christian—and the clergyman (that most decent of all indecencies, that most ridiculous of all ridiculous hodge-podges), he is as pleased as Punch to be decorated himself—with the "cross." The cross? Why, certainly; for in the Christianity of "Christendom" has not the cross become something like a child's hobby-horse and tin-trumpet?

And so with everything. There is implanted in man no stronger instinct, after that of self-preservation, than the instinct of reproduction; for which reason Christianity seeks to reduce its strength, teaching that it is better not to marry; "but if they cannot contain, let them marry; for it better to marry than to burn." But in Christendom the propagation of the race has become the serious business of life and of Christianity; and the clergyman—that quintessence of nonsense done up in long clothes—the clergyman, the teacher of Christianity, of the Christianity of the New Testament, has his income adjusted to the fact that the human race is active in propagating the race, and gets a little something for each child!

As I said, look about you and you will find that everything is as I told you: the change from Heathendom consists in everything remaining unchanged but having assumed the predicate "Christian."

MODERN RELIGIOUS GUARANTEES

(No. V, 8)

In times long, long past people looked at matters in this fashion: it was demanded of him who would be a teacher of Christianity that his life should be a guarantee for the teachings he proclaimed.

This idea was abandoned long ago, the world having become wiser and more serious. It has learned to set little store by these illiberal and sickly notions of personal responsibility, having learned to look for purely objective ends. The demand is made now of the teacher that his life should guarantee that what he has to say is entertaining and dramatic stuff, amusing, and purely objective.

Some examples. Suppose you wanted to speak about Christianity, that is, the Christianity of the New Testament which expresses preference for the single state—and suppose you yourself are unmarried: why, my dear man! you ought not to speak on this subject, because your congregation might think that you meant what you said and become disquieted, or it might feel insulted that you thus, very improperly, mixed in your own affairs. No, dear sir, it will take a little longer before you are entitled to speak seriously on this

matter so as really to satisfy the congregation. Wait till you have buried your first wife and are well along with your second wife: then it will be time for you to stand before your congregation to preach and "bear witness" that Christianity prefers the single state—then you will satisfy them altogether; for your life will furnish the guarantee that it is all tomfoolery and great fun, or that what you say is—interesting. Indeed, how interesting! For just as, to make it interesting, the husband must be unfaithful to his wife and the wife to her husband, likewise truth becomes interesting, intensely interesting, only when one lets one's self be carried away by one's feelings, be fascinated by them—but of course does the precise opposite and thus in an underhand manner is re-assured in persisting in one's ways.

Do you wish to speak about Christianity's teaching contempt for titles and decorations and all the follies of fame—and should you happen to be neither a person of rank nor anything of the kind: Why, my dear sir! You ought not to undertake to speak on this subject. Why, your congregation might think you were in earnest, or feel insulted by such a lack of tact in forcing your personality on their notice. No, indeed, you ought to wait till you have a lot of decorations, the more the merrier; you ought to wait till you drag along with a rigmarole of titles, so many that you hardly know yourself what you are called: then is your time come to stand before your congregation to preach and "bear witness"—and you will undoubtedly satisfy them; for your life will then furnish the guarantee that it is but a dramatic divertisement, an interesting forenoon entertainment.

Is it your intention to preach Christianity in poverty, and insist that only thus it is taught in truth—and you happen to be very literally a poor devil: Why, my dear sir! You ought not to venture to speak on this subject. Why, your congregation might think you were in earnest, they might become afraid and lose their good humor, and they might be very unpleasantly affected by thus having poverty thrust in on them. No indeed, first get yourself some fat living, and when you have had it so long that your promotion to one still fatter is to be expected: then is your time come to stand before your congregation and to preach and "bear witness"—and you will satisfy them; for your life then furnishes the guarantee that it is just a joke, such as serious men like to indulge in, now and then, in theatre or in church, as a sort of recreation to gather new strength for making money.

And that is the way they honor God in the churches! And then these silk and velvet orators weep, they sob, their voice is drowned in tears! Ah, if it be true (and it is, since God Himself has said so), if it be true that He counts the tears of the afflicted and puts them into His bottle,⁷ then woe to these orators, if God has counted also their Sunday tears and put them into His bottle! And woe to us all if God really heeds these Sunday tears—especially those of the speakers, but also those of the listeners! For a Sunday preacher would indeed be right if he said—and, oratorically, this would have a splendid effect, especially if accompanied by his own tears and suppressed sobs—he would be right if he said to his audience: I shall count all the futile tears you have shed in church, and with them I shall step accusingly before you on the Day of Judgment—indeed, he is right; only please not to forget that, after all, the speaker's own dramatic tears are by far more dreadful than the thoughtless tears of his listeners.

WHAT SAYS THE FIRE-MARSHAL (No. VI, 5)

That a man who in some fashion or other has what one calls a "cause," something he seriously purposes to accomplish—and there are other persons who make it their business to counteract, and antagonize, and hurt him—that he must take measures against these his enemies, this will be evident to every one. But that there is a well-intentioned kindness by far more dangerous, perhaps, and one that seems calculated to prevent the serious accomplishment of his mission, this will not at once be clear to every one.

When a person suddenly falls ill, kindly-intentioned folk will straightway rush to his help, and one will suggest this, another that—and if all those about him had a chance to have their way it would certainly result in the sick man's death; seeing that even one person's well-meaning advice may be dangerous enough. And even if nothing is done, and the advice of neither the assembled and well-meaning crowd nor of any one person is taken, yet their busy and flurried presence may be harmful, nevertheless, inasmuch as they are in the way of the physician.

⁷ Allusion to Psalm 56, 9; also to a passage in one of Bishop Mynster's sermons (S. V.).

Likewise at a fire. Scarcely has the alarm of fire been sounded but a great crowd of people will rush to the spot, good and kindly and sympathetic, helpful people, the one with a bucket, the other with a basin, still another with a hand-squirt—all of them goodly, kindly, sympathetic, helpful persons who want to do all they can to extinguish the fire.

But what says the fire-marshal? The fire-marshal, he says—well, at other times the fire-marshal is a very pleasant and refined man; but at a fire he does use coarse language—he says or, rather, he roars out: "Oh, go to hell with your buckets and hand-squirts!" And then, when these well-meaning people feel insulted, perhaps, and think it highly improper to be treated in this fashion, and would like at least to be treated respectfully—what says the fire-marshal then? Well, at other times the fire-marshal is a very pleasant and refined gentleman who will show every one the respect due him; but at a fire he is somewhat different—he says: "Where the devil is the police?" And when the policemen arrive he says to them: "Rid me of these damn people with their buckets and hand-squirts; and if they won't clear out, then club them on their heads, so that we get rid of them and—can get at the fire!"

That is to say, in the case of a fire the whole way of looking at things is a very different one from that of quiet every-day life. The qualities which in quiet every-day life render one well-liked, viz., good-nature and kindly well meaning, all this is repaid, in the case of a fire, with abusive language and finally with a crack on the head.

And this is just as it should be. For a conflagration is a serious business; and wherever we have to deal with a serious business this well-intentioned kindness won't do at all. Indeed, any serious business enforces a very different mode of behavior which is: either-or. Either you are able really to do something, and really have something to do here; or else, if that be not the case, then the serious business demands precisely that you take yourself away. And if you will not comprehend that, the fire-marshal proposes to have the police hammer it into your head; which may do you a great deal of good, as it may help to render you a little serious, as is befitting so serious a business as a fire.

But what is true in the case of a fire holds true also in matters of the spirit. Wherever a cause is to be promoted, or an enterprise to be seen through, or an idea to be served—you may be sure that when he who really is the man to do it, the right man, he who, in a higher sense has and ought to have command, he who is in earnest and can make the matter the serious business it really is—you may be sure that when he arrives at the spot, so to say, he will find there a nice company of easy-going, addle-pated twaddlers who, pretending to be engaged in serious business, dabble in wishing to serve this cause, to further that enterprise, to promote that idea—a company of addle-pated fools who will of course consider one's unwillingness to make common cause with them (which unwillingness precisely proves one's seriousness)—will of course consider that a sure proof of the man's lack of seriousness. I say, when the right man arrives he will find this; but I might also look at it in this fashion: the very question as to whether he is the right man is most properly decided by his attitude to that crowd of fools. If he thinks they may help him, and that he will add to his strength by joining them, then he is *eo ipso* not the right man. The right man will understand at once, as did the fire-marshal, that the crowd must be got out of the way; in fact, that their presence and pattering around is the most dangerous ally the fire could have. Only, that in matters of the spirit it is not as in the case of the conflagration, where the fire-marshal needs but to say to the police: rid me of these people!

Thus in matters of the spirit, and likewise in matters of religion. History has frequently been compared to what the chemists call a "process." The figure is quite suggestive, providing it is correctly understood. For instance, in the "process of filtration" water is run through a filter and by this process loses its impurities. In a totally different sense history is a process. The idea is given utterance—and then enters into the process of history. But unfortunately this process (how ridiculous a supposition!) consists not in purifying the idea, which never is purer than at its inception; oh no, it consists in gradually and increasingly botching, bungling, and making a mess of, the idea, in using up the idea, in—indeed, is not this the opposite of filtering?—adding the impurer elements which it originally lacked: until at last, by the enthusiastic and mutually appreciative efforts of successive generations, the idea has absolutely disappeared and the very opposite of the original idea is now called the idea, which is then asserted to have arisen through a historic process by which the idea is purified and elevated.

When finally the right man arrives, he who in the highest sense is called to the task—for all we know, chosen early and slowly educated for this business—which is, to throw light on the matter, to set fire to this jungle which is a refuge for all kinds of foolish talk and delusions and rascally tricks—when he comes he will always find a nice company of addle-pated fools and twaddlers who, surely enough, do think that,

perhaps, things are wrong and that "something must be done about it"; or who have taken the position, and talk a good deal about it, that it is preposterous to be self-important and talk about it. Now if he, the right man, is deceived but a single instant and thinks that it is this company who are to aid him, then it is clear he is not the right man. If he is deceived and has dealings with that company, then providence will at once take its hand off him, as not fit. But the right man will see at a glance, as the fire-marshal does, that the crowd who in the kindness of their hearts mean to help in extinguishing a conflagration by buckets and hand-squirts—the right man will see that the same crowd who here, when there is a question, not of extinguishing a fire, but rather of setting something on fire, will in the kindness of their hearts wish to help with a sulphur match *sans* fire or a wet spill—he will see that this crowd must be got rid of, that he must not have the least thing in common with this crowd, that he will be obliged to use the coarsest possible language against them—he who perhaps at other times is anything but coarse. But the thing of supreme importance is to be rid of the crowd; for the effect of the crowd is to hamstring the whole cause by robbing it of its seriousness while heartfelt sympathy is pretended. Of course the crowd will then rage against him, against his incredible arrogance and so forth. This ought not to count with him, whether for or against, in all truly serious business the law of : either—or, prevails. Either, I am the man whose serious business this is, I am called to it, and am willing to take a decisive risk; or, if this be not the case, then the seriousness of the business demands that I do not meddle with it at all. Nothing is more detestable and mean, and nothing discloses and effects a deeper demoralization, than this lackadaisical wishing to enter "somewhat" into matters which demand an *aut—aut, aut Caesar aut nihil*,⁸ this taking just a little part in something, to be so wretchedly lukewarm, to twaddle about the business, and then by twaddling to usurp through a lie the attitude of being better than they who wish not to have anything whatever to do with the whole business—to usurp through a lie the attitude of being better, and thus to render doubly difficult the task of him whose business it really is.

CONFIRMATION AND WEDDING CEREMONY;
CHRISTIAN COMEDY—OR WORSE STILL
(No. VII, 6)

Pricks of conscience (insofar as they may be assumed in this connection)—pricks of conscience seem to have convinced "Christendom" that it was, after all, going too far, and that it would not do—this beastly farce of becoming a Christian by the simple method of letting a royal official give the infant a sprinkle of water over his head, which is the occasion for a family gathering with a banquet to celebrate the day.

This won't do, was the opinion of "Christendom," for the opportunity ought to be given the baptized individual to indorse personally his baptismal vows.

For this purpose the rite of confirmation was devised—a splendid invention, providing we take two things for granted: in the first place, that the idea of divine worship is to make God ridiculous; and in the second place, that its purpose is to give occasion for family celebrations, parties, a jolly evening, a banquet which is different from other banquets in that it—ah, exquisite—in that it, "at the same time" has a religious significance.

"The tender child," thus Christendom, "can of course not assume the baptismal vow personally, for this requires a real personality." Consequently there was chosen—is this a stroke of genius or just ingenious?—there was chosen the age of 14 or 15 years, the schoolboy age. This real personality—that is all right, if you please—he is equal to the task of personally assuming responsibility for the baptismal vow taken in behalf of the infant.

A boy of fifteen! Now, if it were a matter of 10 dollars, his father would probably say: "No, my boy, I can't let you have all that money, you are still too green for that." But for a matter touching his eternal salvation where the point is to assume, with all the seriousness one's personality is capable of, and as a personality, responsibility for what certainly could not in any profounder sense be called serious—when a child is bound by a vow: for that the age of fifteen is excellently fitting.

Excellently fitting. Oh yes if, as was remarked above, divine worship serves a double purpose, viz., to render God ridiculous in a very adroit manner—if you may call it so—and to furnish the occasion for graceful family celebrations. In that case it is indeed excellently fitting, as everything is on that occasion;

⁸ Either—or; either Cæsar or nothing (Cæsarè Borgia's slogan).

as is, likewise, the customary biblical lesson for the day which, you will remember, begins: "Then the same day at evening, when the doors were shut"⁹—and this text is particularly suitable to a Confirmation Sunday. One is truly edified when hearing a clergyman read it on a Confirmation Sunday.

As is easily perceived, then, the confirmation ceremony is still worse nonsense than the baptism of infants, just because confirmation pretends to supply what was lacking at the baptism, viz., a real personality capable of making a vow in a matter touching one's eternal salvation. In another sense this nonsense is, to be sure, ingenious enough, as serving the self-interest of the clergy who understand full well that if the decision concerning a man's religion were reserved until he had reached maturity (which were the only Christian, as well as the only sensible, way), many might possess character enough to refuse to become Christians by an act of hypocrisy. For this reason "the clergyman" seeks to gain control of men in their infancy and their youth, so that they would find it difficult, upon reaching a more mature age, to break a "sacred" vow dating, to be sure, from one's boyhood, but which would, perhaps, still be a serious enough matter to many a one. Hence the clergy take hold of the infants, the youths, and receive sacred promises and the like from them. And what that man of God, "the clergyman," does, why, that is, of course, a God-fearing action. Else, analogy might, perhaps, demand that to the ordinance forbidding the sale of spirituous liquors to minors there should be added one forbidding the taking of solemn vows concerning one's eternal salvation from—boys; which ordinance would look toward preventing the clergy, who themselves are perjurers, from working—in order to salve their own consciences—from working toward the greatest conceivable shipwreck which is, to make all society become perjured; for letting boys of fifteen bind themselves in a matter touching their eternal salvation is a measure which is precisely calculated to have that effect.

The ceremony of confirmation is, then, in itself a worse piece of nonsense than the baptism of infants. But in order to miss nothing which might, in any conceivable manner, contribute to render confirmation the exact opposite of what it purports to be, this ceremony has been connected with all manner of worldly and civil affairs, so that the significance of confirmation lies chiefly in the—certificate of character which the minister makes out; without which certificate no boy or girl will be able to get on at all in life.¹⁰

The whole thing is a comedy; and perhaps something might be done to add greater dramatic illusion to the solemnity; as e.g., passing an ordinance forbidding any one to be confirmed in a jacket, as not becoming a real personality; likewise, a regulation ordering male candidates for confirmation to wear a beard during the ceremony, which beard might, of course, be taken off for the family celebration in the evening, or be used in fun and merrymaking.

I am not now attacking the community—they are led astray; they cannot be blamed for liking this kind of divine worship, seeing that they are left to their own devices and deceived by their clergyman who has sworn an oath on the New Testament. But woe to these clergymen, woe to them, these sworn liars! I know there have been mockers at religion, and I know how much they would have given to be able to do what I do; but they were not able to, because God was not with them. It is different with me. Originally as well disposed to the clergy as few have been, and very ready to help them, I have undergone a change of heart in the opposite direction, owing to their attitude. And the Almighty is with me, and He knows how the whip is to be handled so that the blows take effect, and that laughter must be that whip, handled with fear and trembling—therefor am I used.

THE WEDDING CEREMONY

True worship of God consists, very simply, in doing God's will.

But that kind of divine service has never suited man's wishes. That which occupies man's mind at all times, that which gives rise to science¹¹ and makes science spread into many, many sciences, and into interminable detail; that of which, and for which, thousands of clergymen and professors live, that which forms the contents of the history of Christendom, by the study of which the clergyman or the professor to

⁹ John 20, 19—"Where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you."

¹⁰ This was, until very recently, the universal rule in Protestant Scandinavia and Germany.

¹¹ It is to be borne in mind that Danish *videnskab*, like German *Wissenschaft*, embraces the humanities and theology as well.

be is trained—is to get a different kind of worship arranged, the main point of which would be: to do what one pleases, but in such fashion that the name of God and the invocation of God be brought into connection therewith; by which arrangement man imagines himself safeguarded against ungodliness—whereas, alas! just this procedure is the most unqualified ungodliness.

For example: a man has the intention to make his living by killing people. To be sure, he knows from the Word of God that this is not permissible, that God's will is: thou shalt not kill! "All right," thinks he, "but this way of serving God will not serve my purposes—at the same time I don't care to be among the ungodly ones, either." So what does he do but get hold of some priest who in God's name blesses his dagger. Ah, *c'est bien autre chose!*

In the Scriptures the single state is recommended. "But," says man, "that kind of worship really does not serve my purposes—and surely, you can't say that I am an ungodly person; and such an important step as marriage (which *nota bene* God counsels against, His opinion being, in fact, that the important thing is not to take "this important step")—should I take such an important step without making sure of God's blessing?" Bravo! "That is what we have the priest for, that man of God, he will bestow the blessing on this important step (*nota bene* concerning which the most important thing was not to take it at all) and so it will be acceptable to God"—and so I have my own way; and my own way becomes the way of worshipping God; and the priest has his own way and gets his ten dollars, which are not earned in such a simple way as, for example, by brushing people's clothes, or by serving out beer and brandy—oh no! Was he not active on behalf of God? To earn ten dollars in this fashion is: serving God. Bravissimo!

What depth of nonsense and abomination! If something is not pleasing to God, does it perhaps become pleasing to Him by having—why, that is aggravating the mischief!—by having a clergyman along who—why, that is aggravating the mischief still more!—who gets ten dollars for declaring it pleasant to God?

Let us consider the marriage ceremony still further! In His word God recommends the single state. Now suppose two young people want to be married. To be sure, they ought certainly to know, themselves, what Christianity is, seeing that they call themselves Christians; but never mind that now. The lovers then apply to—the clergyman; and the clergyman is, we remember, pledged by his oath on the New Testament (which *nota bene* recommends the single state). Now, if he is not a liar and a perjurer who makes his money in the very shabbiest fashion, he would be bound to take the following course: at most he could, with human compassion for this human condition of being in love, say to them: "Dear children, I am the one to whom you should turn last of all; to turn to me on this occasion is, indeed, as strange as if one should turn to the chief of police and ask him how best to steal. My duty is to employ all means to restrain you. At most, I can say, with the words of the Apostle (for they are not the words of Our Lord), I can say to you: well, if it must be, and you cannot contain, why, then find some way of getting together; for 'it is better to marry than to burn.'¹² I know very well that you will be likely to shudder when I speak in this manner about what you think is the most beautiful thing in life; but I must do my duty. And it is therefore I said to you that to me you should have applied last of all."

It is different in "Christendom." The priest—oh dear me!—if there are but two to clap together, why certainly! Indeed, if the persons concerned turned to a midwife they would perhaps not be as sure to be confirmed in their conviction that their intention is pleasing to God.

And so they are married; i.e. man has his own way, and this having his own way strategically serves at the same time as divine worship, God's name being connected with it. They are married—by the priest! Ah, for having the clergyman along is just what reassures one—the man who, to be sure, is pledged by his oath to preach the New Testament, but who for a consideration of ten dollars is the pleasantest company one could desire—that man he guarantees that this act is true worship of God.

In a Christian sense one ought to say: precisely the fact that a priest is in it, precisely that is the worst thing about the whole business. If you want to be married you ought, rather, be married by a smith; for then—if it were admissible to speak in this fashion—then it might possibly escape God's attention; whereas, if there is a priest along it can certainly not escape His attention. Precisely the fact of the clergyman's being there makes it as criminal an affair as possible—call to mind what was said to a man who in a storm at sea invoked the gods: "By all means do not let the gods notice that you are aboard!" Thus one might say here also: By all means try to avoid calling in a priest. The others, the smith and the lovers,

¹² I Cor. 7,9.

have not pledged themselves by an oath on the New Testament, so matters are not as bad—if it be admissible to speak in this fashion—as when the priest assists with his—holy presence.

AN ETERNITY TO REPENT IN!
(No. VIII, 3)

Let me relate a story. I did not read it in a book of devotion but in what is generally called light reading. Yet I do not hesitate to make use of it, and indicate its source only lest any one be disturbed if he should happen to be acquainted with it, or find out at some later time where it is from—lest he be disturbed that I had been silent about this.

Once upon a time there lived somewhere in the East a poor old couple. Utterly poor they were, and anxiety about the future naturally grew when they thought of old age approaching. They did not, indeed, constantly assail heaven with their prayers, they were too God-fearing to do that; but still they were ever praying to God for help.

Then one morning it happened that the old woman found an exceeding large jewel on the hearth-stone, which she forthwith showed to her husband, who recognized its value and easily perceived that now their poverty was at an end.

What a bright future for these old people, and what gladness! But frugal and pious as they were they decided not to sell the jewel just yet, since they had enough wherewithal to live still one more day. But on the morrow they would sell it, and then a new life was to begin for them.

In the following night the woman dreamed that she was transported to Paradise. An angel showed her about the splendors which only an Oriental imagination can devise. He showed her a hall in which there stood long rows of arm-chairs gemmed all over with precious stones and pearls. These, so the angel explained, were the seats of the pious. And last of all he pointed out to her the one destined for herself. When regarding it more closely she discovered that a very large jewel was lacking in the back of the chair, and she asked the angel how that might be. He—ah, watch now, for here is the point! The angel answered: "That was the jewel which you found on your hearth-stone. It was given you ahead of time, and it cannot be put in again."

In the morning the woman told her husband this dream. And she was of the opinion that it was better, perhaps, to endure in poverty the few years still left to them to live, rather than to be without that jewel in all eternity. And her pious husband was of the same opinion.

So in the evening they laid the jewel on the hearth-stone and prayed to God to take it away again. And next morning it had disappeared, for certain; and what had become of it the old folks well knew: it was in its right place again.

This man was in truth happily married, and his wife a sensible woman. But even if it were true, as is maintained so often, that it is men's wives who cause them to lose sight of eternal values: even if all men remained unmarried, there would still be in every one of us an impulse, more ingenious and more pressing and more unremitting than a woman, which will cause him to use a wrong measure and to think a couple of years, or ten years, or forty years, so enormous a length of time that even eternity were quite brief in comparison; instead of these years being as nothing when compared with the infinite duration of eternity.

Therefore, heed this well! You may by worldly wisdom escape perhaps what it has pleased God to unite with the condition of one's being a Christian, that is, sufferings and tribulations; you may, and to your own destruction, by cleverly avoiding the difficulties, perhaps, gain what God has forever made incompatible with being a Christian, that is, the enjoyment of pleasures and all earthly goods; you may, fooled by your own worldly wisdom, perhaps, finally perish altogether, in the illusion that you are on the right way because you have gained happiness in this world: and then—you will have an eternity to repent in! An eternity to repent in; to repent that you did not employ your time in doing what might be remembered in all eternity; that is, in truth to love God, with the consequence that you suffer the persecution of men in this life.

Therefore, do not deceive yourself, and of all deceivers fear most yourself! Even if it were possible for one, with regard to eternity, to take something ahead of time, you would still deceive yourself just by having something ahead of time—and then an eternity to repent in!

A DOSE OF DISGUST WITH LIFE
(No. IX, 3)

Just as man—as is natural—desires that which tends to nourish and revive his love of life, likewise he who wishes to live with eternity in mind needs a constant dose of disgust with life lest he become foolishly enamored of this world and, still more, in order that he may learn thoroughly to be disgusted and bored and sickened with the folly and lies of this wretched world. Here is a dose of it:

God Incarnate is betrayed, mocked, deserted by absolutely all men; not a single one, literally not a single one, remains faithful to him—and then, afterwards, afterwards,—oh yes, afterwards, there were millions of men who on their knees made pilgrimage to the places where many hundred years ago His feet, perhaps, trod the ground; afterwards, afterwards—oh yes, afterwards, millions worshipped a splinter of the cross on which He was crucified!

And so it was always when men were contemporary with the great; but afterwards, afterwards—oh yes, afterwards!

Must one then not loathe being human?

And again, must one not loathe being human? For these millions who on their knees made pilgrimage to His grave, this throng of people which no power on earth was able to overcome: but one thing were necessary, Christ's return—and all these millions would quickly regain their feet to run their way, so that the whole throng were as if blown away; or would, in a mass, and erect enough, rush upon Christ in order to kill him.

That which Christ and the Apostles and every martyr desires, and desires as the only thing: that we should follow in His footsteps, just that is the thing which mankind does not like or does not find pleasure in.

No, take away the danger—so that it is but play, and then the batallions of the human race will (ah, disgusting!) will perform astonishing feats in aping Him; and then instead of an imitation of Christ we get (ah, disgusting!), we get that sacred buffoonery—under guidance and command (ah, disgusting!) of sworn clergymen who do service as sergeants, lieutenants, etc.—ordained men who therefore have the Holy Spirit's special assistance in this serious business.