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THE RELIGION OF NATURE AND OF CULTURE.

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*The way of Cain.*—JUDE II.

GOD created Adam in His own image, crowned him with glory and honor, and constituted him the vicegerent of heaven, in this then fair world so lately launched.

By his own transgression Adam fell—fell from his allegiance to God—fell from his high throne of power. He broke away from God, and nature broke away from him. He lost his self-control, and lost control of that magnificent domain, of which the Almighty had made him lord.

Not only so, but he lost God's image, and his whole being, henceforth, was marred and mutilated, and wrecked and ruined. And Adam was the head of the human race, so that the stream of life was poisoned at its very source, and all its waters became tainted and turbid, and so they will ever continue to be until at last they empty themselves into the wide, deep sea, unless grace interpose to make the waters pure and sweet.

Adam begat a son in his own likeness—not God's—that was gone—but his own—and his own bore the imprint of the evil one, to whose subtle agency he had sinfully succumbed. Thus the first man born into the world was not only the child of Adam, but also, in some sense, the child of the devil, and demonstrably our brother, though it be not either politic or pleasant flatly to affirm it. It has been the custom to cast stones upon his grave, as did the

## ENERGY IN RELIGION.

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*From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.—MATT. xi., 12.*

THIS well of truth is deep, for it is one of the profound sayings of our Lord. Yet if we draw water out of this well of salvation, we shall have one of the most spiritual lessons on *Energy in Religion*. The kingdom of heaven is divine religion, personal and organic, in all its true modes of manifestation.

It may not seem strange that this kingdom suffers violence, or is like a city besieged by strong forces, but we may wonder that our Lord should say, "the violent take it by force"—the seekers for religion are violent in their efforts to seize it, as soldiers determined to capture a city, storming the walls and breaking through the gates. Does He commend such violence after saying, "Blessed are the meek; blessed are the poor in spirit, for of such is the kingdom of heaven"? Must we have such heroism, although He tells us to be contrite, lowly in heart, humble, childlike? Let us not tone down His words into a lulling song, for they come to us as the blast of a trumpet to rouse us into activity. How, then, shall we explain them? Notice two interpretations of the text.

I. The kingdom of heaven has always been opposed, and often violently assailed, and yet it has so forced itself on thoughtful minds as to stimulate and win resolute souls. In the time of John and of Jesus there was intense enmity against the spiritual religion which they preached, or the one would not have been imprisoned and beheaded, nor the other "despised and rejected of men." Christ's kingdom was then at hand, forcing itself on public attention, and who took it then? Who had the meekness and poverty of soul to receive the truth and the religion of Christ? Who had the manly and holy boldness to be His disciples and followers? Those who were as earnest as were His opposers. They noticed the violence against Him and His teachings, and they had a moral courage for Him and for His truth. In one case it was the violence of unjust rage, for His foes hated Him without a cause or a willingness to hear His words of authority and love. In the other, it was the boldness of necessity—the holy violence of want, of duty and of privilege, like that of a starving peasant who rushes desperately to seize the bread in a store-house guarded by his oppressors. These willing hearers, in their spiritual poverty, felt the need of salvation. They must have it. They were resolute, full of spiritual energy. They courageously gave up their sins, their evil associations, their wrong opinions, their pride of heart, their delusive hopes, their self-righteousness. They repented, and in their confessions they were meek and child-like, willing to be taught and led by Christ.

Thus they showed both heroism and humility, moral courage and meek-

ness. The two traits are consistent, and, indeed, quite necessary to each other. Some of you have known meek men, naturally timid, never boastful, who had the courage to enlist in the army in order to recover a great national principle from its assailants, and when led to a fortress which had been captured by the enemy, they took it with the sacred violence of patriotism.

So with spiritual soldiers. They are so contrite as to enlist under Christ with trembling, and yet courageous enough to say, "Here, Lord; send me": so conscious of weakness that they pray for divine power: so distrustful of self that they rely on God with a mighty faith, and still so determined to be in Christ's kingdom, that they direct their force against all opposition, and lay hold of His religion as if they captured it by storm.

Must we now take this kingdom by such spiritual and holy violence? Take it by such force of will, and energy of soul? Tell us who take it in any other way? Who *accept*—take to themselves—Christ's salvation, unless they feel their poverty of spirit, confess their needs, and then, in the boldness of want, resist all opposition, and strive to gain what they seek? Who *receive* His religion, unless they take it again as something which has been lost and must be recaptured? Tell us who enter Christ's Church, in these days, and live faithfully in His service, unless they boldly confront the social world and overcome its opposing forces? Who persistently follow Him, unless they heed His words, "He that is not with Me is against Me"—"Take up thy cross"?

True, there may not be killing persecutions, but there are temptations and allurements which may be more ruinous. There may not be just such enmity as Jesus and His disciples met, but there are still the aversions of one's own heart to the heavenly religion, for "The carnal mind is enmity against God." There may not be open scorn, nor loud derision, from the society around you, but there are the many social enticements whose force is not easily broken. Hence there must be a moral energy, a holy violence, in one who says, "I need Christianity: I must have it: I lay hold of the hope set before me: I seize eternal life."

Thus the text has one interpretation with its practical truth and duty. There is another with a deeper truth and a larger lesson on spiritual energy, for it brings a duty to God's people who are already in His kingdom. We do well to ask, what will make our religion more powerful, more eminent, more persuasive? Or what will make the Christian Church more efficient in attracting people into it? Your answer may be, "Put more energy into it." Did not our Lord teach that very thing? Let us see.

II. The text has been rendered thus: "The kingdom of heaven is energized, and the energetic seize it by force." And thus: "The kingdom of heaven exerts force—forces itself on the attention of men—and the men of force lay hold on it." In this light, the first thing is to put energy into religion, into Christ's Church, into His kingdom. Was not this the method of John and of Jesus?

The spiritual kingdom was in a dormant state, almost dead, when John

came in the spirit and power of Elijah to rouse it, revive it, give it new force, and make it attractive. With a holy violence, he cried aloud and spared not. He showed people their sins. He preached repentance and the Great Hope, saying that the new kingdom of heaven was at hand, for the King Himself, the Christ, was near. With divine grace upon him, he gave a new power to religion. It drew public attention, and crowds came to hear of it. To his disciples he pointed out "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world." Jesus soon began His work with a zeal and devotedness to be found only in the Son of God. And still, it was no easy thing to energize the kingdom, and compel the attention of men to His religion. What is it now to enlist the people in any great movement, such as education, temperance, moral or political reform, or Church enterprises? What time is required to convince, rouse, organize them, and get them to work! Leaders must keep the facts and proposals before them, argue, plead, entreat, and put their whole force into the cause. People must give time, effort and funds to it. Then it is energized. It has power. It forces itself on the minds of the larger public. It has life, it moves, it wins, it succeeds.

So in this spiritual kingdom. The Divine King put into it the tremendous force of His character, His life, His spirit, His words, His works, His example, His sacrifices, His death, and all His power as the Risen Lord. He gave a new energy to religion, so that its doctrines, duties and privileges were revealed with clearness and force. It compelled attention. It forced itself on the minds of the people, so that they could not escape it; they must hear, think, inquire, choose between life and death, and decide for Christ or against Him. Resolute souls, who wanted the best life, saw that this earnest religion was desirable—the one thing needed. They were energized; they seized it with a spiritual violence. Thus it was especially at the great Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came more personally and powerfully than ever before, into the kingdom of heaven. He gave still greater energy to the religion of Christ. Though it was preached by apostles, it seemed to be under the hand of its enemies. It was assailed with violence. Yet thousands of people saw that there was a divine power in it, and a new life in its advocates. They wanted it. They must have it. They repented in humility; they believed with courage, and with a sublime heroism they renounced and faced the enmity which had sent their Messiah to the cross, and they avowed their faith in the crucified and risen Lord. They saw, too, that there was, in the circle of Christian disciples, the revived, renewed and energized Church of God and that it was the visible kingdom of heaven for them. They wanted to be in it, and into it they carried their best gifts and powers. They helped to energize that kingdom, extend it, and make it attractive to thousands of people who had any force of will, or any resolute spirit to seek what was eternally best for themselves. When it commanded still wider attention, did earnest seekers take on them the name of Christ at the risk of life? They did it because there was a power in His religion, and the resolute seized on the new life with the holy violence of conquerors.

Thus it has ever been when Christianity has shown itself to be alive, vigorous, and full of divine power, and when the Christian Church has manifested its true vitality. It has drawn multitudes to its worship, its truths and its faith. When God's people have been thoroughly revived, the revival has usually extended beyond them, and there have been new converts to Christ.

May it be so now? Assuredly. When Christians put more energy into their religion and Church, put into them more life, more devotion, more enthusiasm, more spiritual vehemence, more love, more labor, more faithfulness in personal duties, more loyalty to Christ in public services, more grace and larger gifts to His cause at home and in foreign lands, they will surely find that Christianity, like its divine founder, cannot be hid, nor kept within the circle of a few believers; for, when energized, it compels the attention of earnest people, wins their respect, and stimulates their convictions of need so that they press into the kingdom of heaven. (Isaiah ii., 2, 3.) People will come to the fire that warms, to the light that shines, and to the city set on a hill when it offers a refuge from the malaria of sin and the floods of iniquity.

Before the Church can have this position and this power, there must be a draft on the source of all spiritual energy. That source is God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Can it ever fail? We may speak of the abundant wealth in mines, the endless fertility of the soil, and the unflinching light of the sun, but these are merely weak symbols of the exhaustless store of energy which God has for His children. Draw on Him for it, and, as the first disciples were, "Ye shall be endued with power from on high." (Is. xl., 27-29.)

We are, to-day and here, divided into two classes—those in the kingdom of heaven and those out of it. To both our Lord's deep saying comes with a stirring appeal. Fellow Christians, there is scarcely a nobler thought for us to-day than one which I quote from an earnest man: "The true and grand idea of a Church is a society for the purpose of making men like Christ, earth like heaven, the kingdoms of this world the kingdom of Christ." We shall fulfil that purpose when we help to energize His Church with all the forces that we may derive from God.

And, my friends who are not yet in His kingdom, would you be in it? He tells you to seek, strive, labor, "take it by force;" and all this effort must be toward Him, for He says, "Come to Me." Has this word "come" been heard so often, as a gentle invitation, that we lose sight of the exertion implied in it? Does it allow us to lie passive, or to merely wait listlessly for Him to come to us with salvation? Indeed, the Christ has already come to us, and the force of His invitation is, "Come now to Me: exert the powers of thy soul; repent, deny thyself, step out from the world, be on My side; believe in Me with all thy mind; trust Me with all confidence; love Me with all thy heart; obey Me with all thy might; enlist in My service; fight the good fight, and I will give thee a crown of righteousness." He, who promises the crown at last, will give all saving power, at the first, to every energetic soul that takes the kingdom by force.