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THE UNION SEMINARY REVIEW

VOL. XXV.

DECEMBER-JANUARY.

No. 2.

THE BUSINESS OF THE CHURCH.

BY THE REV. J. S. LYONS, D. D., LOUISVILLE, KY.

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United States.*

In responding to the invitation to write upon the subject of "The Business of the Church," it is worth while to avail one's self of the limitations of the subject. We assume that we may omit any consideration of the technical definitions of the church; the outstanding characteristics, or "marks" of the church; its spiritual equipment; its past history, and its great mission through the years to come.

The whole question narrows down to the interesting, important, and extremely practical question—"What does Jesus Christ want us who are in His church to do today?"

What is the present task of the church in our country? This inquiry must contemplate the church in the general sense in which that term is used, including all the Protestant Evangelical bodies in our land.

The present task of the church calls upon us to consider how it is related to the people of God themselves. The work of the church in this regard is to gather them out of the world, to nourish and strengthen them, and to inspire them to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world."

As the work of the church relates to what is known as the "world," that is, the unregenerate mass about us, its duty is to evangelize and save as many as possible, and to season and

THE FIRST GOSPEL.

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR THERON H. RICE, D. D.

Genesis 3:15—*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*"

That the first gospel promise should have been addressed to Satan is startling and calls for explanation. Let us see how it came about.

One of the most prominent facts in the creation story is that God made everything good. At each successive step the Creator inspects His handiwork and pronounces it "good." At the end of the process he surveys the whole and declares it to be very good. God made everything else, but He was not the author of evil.

The summit of the achievement was man, marvelous product of the wisdom and the power of God. He is a microcosm—a little universe. The two substances—so far as we know the only two substances—matter and spirit, are united in him. His body is the most highly developed and exquisitely organized of material things, the harp of the senses answering every touch of the encompassing universe with experiences varied, elevated, refined. His soul is a spiritual essence made in God's image and capable of all the profound experiences and lofty ecstasies suggested by such words as prayer, divine communion, "workers together with God." And then these two, this matter and this spirit are blended—and there is man.

Answering to such a constitution and endowment God had for man a destiny of dominion. He was to "subdue" the earth and "have dominion over" its creatures.—Gen. 1:28. As the eighth Psalm puts it, Jehovah crowned man with glory and honor, made him to have dominion over the works of God's hands and put all things under his feet. And this may be as good a place as any to say that God has never surrendered this purpose. The writer of Hebrews, referring to this very passage in the eighth

Psalm, says: "But now we see not yet all things subjected to him," implying that though not yet they are eventually to be put under man's feet, of which fact we see an earnest in Jesus crowned with glory and honor and destined to bring many sons into glory. See Heb. 2:5-10. In short from the very first, from the day he made the world, God has purposed to establish His Kingdom on earth, administered by a man who should be His vicegerent, and the first man to whom He committed the trust was Adam.

Now one thing certainly must be true of any man who would represent God's sovereignty in this world, who would administer the Kingdom of Heaven here—he must himself be in perfect harmony with God's will, ready to take his orders from his divine King, prompt to yield implicit, unquestioning, cheerful, obedience to his Lord's commandments. It will be recalled how clearly this comes out as we trace the history of God's Kingdom in the Scriptures. Saul, for instance, proved an utter failure as a theocratic king because he was heady, self-willed, insubordinate, constantly snatching the reins out of Jehovah's hands and attempting to drive the chariot of State as he pleased. Hence he was set aside and David chosen. David was the very opposite of Saul in this respect. God's description of him was: "A man after my heart who shall do all my will." The history of his reign bears out this description abundantly. With all his personal failings and sins, David as a ruler was loyal to Jehovah, always eager to know God's counsel and to carry out God's plans. In Jesus this qualification is present in absolute perfection. In the volume of the book it is written of Him: "I delight to do thy will, O my God." When He was on earth He could say: "I came down from heaven not to do mine own will but the will of him who sent me." "I do always the things that please Him." In Gethsemane: "Not my will, but thine be done." This is the spirit of him by whom God will establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

On this point of his readiness to obey God Adam was tested. The form of the test seems calculated to raise in the sharpest way the precise issue. The command did not concern some great duty for the doing of which many and weighty reasons

might easily be seen, but involved an act indifferent in itself, for which there was no reason to be seen save God's express command. It was to be seen whether Adam would abstain from the forbidden fruit simply because God told him to abstain.

At this juncture a new being appears. Heretofore God and man are the only actors in the history. Now there breaks abruptly into the circle in the guise of a serpent, one which the Book of Revelation (20:2) unmask as "the Devil and Satan." It is not without significance that this section of Genesis is entitled: "The generations of the heavens and the earth" (Ch. 2:4). The things narrated here of man's probation, temptation by Satan and recovery by grace bring before our vision as on a vast stage beings belonging to both earth and what we call the heavens; God is here as well as man; and Satan, the prince of the powers of the air; the head of those "spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). John Milton is true to the facts when in the magnificent passage of "Paradise Lost" he represents the fall of man as summoning to one spot, involving, enlisting, stirring to sublime energy, the powers of heaven and earth and hell.

And Satan gets what he came for. His desire was to persuade Adam to refuse to do the thing that God told him to do and to do the thing that God's arch adversary told him to do. The fall was thus not merely a change in man's principles, it was a change of masters, it was a transfer of his allegiance. In this Satan scored a vast triumph. He became what the New Testament calls him, "the god of this world." Adam, to whom God entrusted this fair and spotless creation, and whose sacred duty it was to guard it chivalrously for His holy King, with a baseness and recklessness unspeakable betrayed it to the Devil. Thus "by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin."

Well, what is God going to do about it? It becomes evident at once that He is not going to acquiesce in the situation and quit the field. Far otherwise! While the guilty pair are for fear and shame hiding themselves amongst the trees of the garden "they heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." "And Jehovah God called unto the man and said unto him, Where art thou?" Oh God of all

grace, this is thy work from the beginning. "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which is lost."

Face to face with the three God pushes the investigation back, back till the probe reaches Satan. Recognizing him as the head and front of the offending Jehovah deals first with h's doom. We are concerned at present with only so much of it as is recorded in the fifteenth verse.

This is language which wears a two-fold aspect; it pronounces a curse on the devil on the one hand, it holds out a hope to men on the other. And let it be noticed that the curse and the blessing are not independent and separate things but interwoven. In the execution of the curse on the serpent is to come the deliverance of the redeemed, in the process of saving ruined men the serpent is to be destroyed. Does not this reveal the gospel in an aspect we are apt to overlook? According to the common way of viewing it the plan of salvation contemplates almost exclusively man's redemption. Here we receive the impression that its goal is the Saviour's victory over the Prince of evil. Here two champions meet, one represents the Kingdom of light, the other the kingdom of darkness. The King of glory takes up the guage of battle flung down by Satan. Takes it up, it is true, in the interest of fallen, ruined, helpless man, but takes it up to wage this conflict to an issue which means the complete overthrow and destruction of the Devil and his kingdom. The question to be decided is not only whether sinful men shall be saved, but whether on the field of his universe God shall be the victor or God's defiant foe. In entire accord with this wider scope of the work of redemption are certain passages in the New Testament. "The Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil." I John 3:8. "The Prince of this world shall be cast out." John 12:31. And after the final conflict, which the Revelation represents as very widespread and desperate, Satan is cast into the lake of fire forever. So the devil and his angels and his works are all to be destroyed as the ultimate issue of the Redeemer's conflict, while "to the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places shall be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God." Eph. 3:10.

Let us now notice briefly what this first Gospel announces.

First of all there are the two parties to the conflict: "thee and the woman," "thy seed and her seed." There was Eve and there was the enemy who had led her to her ruin, Satan and Eve. Their respective seeds are seen in the first generation of children. Cain "was of that wicked one and slew his brother." I Jno. 3:12. Abel was the seed of the woman, for when he had been slain by Cain and Seth had been born, Eve said God hath appointed me (the woman) another "seed" in the place of Abel, whom Cain slew. Gen. 4:25. All down the course of Bible history we trace the two "seeds." "The children of God are manifold and the children of the devil." I Jno. 3:10. Finally Christ appears, the perfect fulfilment of the prophetic description, the seed of the woman, born of a virgin. And as the inspired Apostles teach us about Him we come to understand that He and all His redeemed people in every age and nation; He, the head, and His people, the body or members, constitute the woman's seed.

We have here in the second place, an enmity issuing in a conflict between the two seeds. This enmity is of God's making. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed." This does not mean that God put the malevolent hatred into Satan's heart which smokes continually against all the good and holy, but that He does originate an opposition to the Devil and his words in the hearts of His people, the woman's seed and thus makes it impossible that they should live at peace with sin. "You that love the Lord *hate* evil." And so it is. And not only do the godly seed hate evil, they war against it, in their own hearts, in the hearts and lives of other men, in the world around them, so far as in them lies they oppose, resist and endeavor to destroy all wicked works. In the case of Christ, the perfect and preëminent representative of the seed of the woman, how sharp and bitter the antagonism between His good and the world's evil. How the Pharisees persecuted Him and how clearly He discerned the animus of their opposition. "Ye are of your father the Devil and the works of your father ye will do."

Finally, we have the issue of the conflict predicted. That issue is to be twofold. There is to be bruising on both sides,

wounds given and received by both combatants. But there is this difference. The woman's seed is to receive no vital hurt: "Thou, Satan, shalt bruise his *heel*." That cannot destroy him. On the other hand the serpent's seed shall finally get a wound that shall be mortal. "He shall bruise thy head"—as a man sets his heel on a viper's head and grinds it in the dust. The contrast has been repeatedly illustrated. Babylon seemed to have wounded Judah unto death when Nebuchadnezzar burned Jerusalem and carried away her captives. But Babylon has long since perished and God's Church is still living and growing. But in Christ the thing meant was perfectly accomplished. Satan seemed to have compassed his ruin when he had Him nailed to a Roman Cross, dying there. Yet only the heel was bruised. He rose from the dead and reigns. And the wonderful fact is that through the very death which the Devil planned, Jesus destroyed him that hath the power of death, that is the Devil. Heb. 2:14. In dying He gave Satan His death wound.

What does it mean to us who read this ancient Gospel in our modern world? It means much—not one line is antiquated. It means two sides—and a choice to make. It means a fight—and blows to give and take. It means a victory for Christ's men, for the enemy is already beaten, and the voice of our Prince is calling back to us: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."