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→*SERMONS*←

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MISSIONS.

BY EDWARD P. GOODWIN, D.D., FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, CHICAGO.

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. — ACTS xiii., 2.

THE door swings here upon a new era in the history of the Church. The day of the Jew was ended, the day of the Gentile begun. Prior to this, Paul had preached in Cilicia and Peter had been sent to the house of Cornelius, where the Spirit sealed the testimony to the Gentiles with great power. Some of those, also, who "were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen" had gone as far as Antioch, preaching unto the Grecians the Lord Jesus, and "a great number had believed and turned to the Lord." But this was exceptional and anticipatory. In the main the Gospel had been preached to "none but unto the Jews only." (Acts ix., 30; x., 44; xi., 19-21.)

The text is the pivotal point of the new departure. Now the work of spreading the Gospel among the Gentiles is taken in hand and formally inaugurated. Henceforth the Church appears as a missionary Church. The map of her future campaigns is no longer bounded by the narrow rim that embraces Palestine, but pushes its border east, west, north, south, to the utmost horizon—a boundary line that takes in the world.

Note how the work is undertaken and carried on. Not Barnabas, nor Peter, nor John, nor even Paul, advises, projects, shapes the enterprise. It is altogether the purpose, the plan, the work of the Holy Spirit. He originates

the perfect temple of divine truth, and the result of all is a system more complete and harmonious than any human mind could possibly produce, or properly interpret when produced. Thus too we find

Moses and the historians, poets and prophets of the old covenant, co-operating with these leaders in the new covenant in carrying forward the plan of God in redemption, from the fall to the final glory.

CHRISTIAN EDIFICATION

The Advantages of Persecution.

By T. DE WITT TALMAGE, D.D. (PRESBYTERIAN), BROOKLYN.

Some one writes me: "Why did Jesus in the list of blessings promised to those who should exercise self-denial place the word persecutions—'shall receive a hundredfold in this time, houses and brethren and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions'? Why rewards and punishments for the same acts?"

I never before noticed the paradox. It seems like promising a man health and comfort and success and a sound thrashing, or saying to a child for something to be done, "I will reward you with a cake and a ride and a dark closet." Still there is no contradiction. A cup may be so sweet that it is insipid or nauseating. Our cup of life is not all sweets. It is a compounded cup and with the saccharine there mingles the acids and the bitters. All the good and useful shall have the promise of persecutions fulfilled. Cutting out the tongue, putting out the eye or pulling apart the limbs is a past fashion, but still there are weapons of persecution. Sometimes it is a newspaper attack, sometimes it is an anonymous letter, sometimes private caricature and misrepresentation. Tell me of any man eminently useful that has not been eminently cursed. Crossing the sea I used to hang over the side of the ocean steamer and watch the stroke of the wave against the ship's cutwater. I noticed when it was foggy and we were making only seven or eight knots an hour there was but little stir in the water, but when it was fair weather and we went at the rate of four hundred miles a day, the ocean tossed in front of the prow and boiled on either side. So

just in proportion as a Christian makes headway in Christian enterprise, in that ratio will there be a commotion and excited resistance in the waters. If nothing can be said against you, if you have never been assaulted, if everybody seems pleased with you, you are making little or no progress; you are waterlogged. Instead of mastering the waves the waves master you. All of you who will do your duty must take a share of that treatment. Be not oversensitive. If you see two persons talking in a corner and occasionally looking over toward you, you are annoyed and think they are talking against you. Let not your mind sit brooding over one small egg of provocation till it is hatched out into a great obscene vulture of unhappiness.

In answering the letter in my hand I say that persecution may be a blessing by testing our earnestness. A man may think himself in earnest when it is a mere hobby he is riding, and when the hobby balks he gets off and goes home. Let a man start out and find those who promised to help proving tricky and his motives maligned, he will give it up unless he be in earnest. It is easy to be a soldier in time of peace. We had many brave captains and colonels and majors before the war began, but at Big Bethel, when the war opened, how the fellows did run. If men are not in earnest in Christian conflict, they make a big show for a while, but, attacked and pursued, they show the white flag and surrender.

Persecution, if sanctified, makes one humble. Success has a tendency to brag, and so God lets it be jeered at. The man says: "I endowed that college. I started that school. I built that church. Is not this great Babylon that I have built?"

And God turns Nebuchadnezzar out to eat grass like an ox. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!"

Another advantage of persecution is, it lets us know how much of the bad is left in us. What a mild Christian he was when everybody praised him. Now he runs against the sharp edge of sarcasm and opposition and he is in full fight. He feels more like swearing than praying. He runs about in great excitement talking over all the mean things he knows about those who oppose him. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, scorn for scorn, personality for personality; and the demons of malice, revenge and hate, with racket of explosion, keep Fourth of July in his heart. After a while he wakes up and finds he is all wrong, and he cools down and and has a long list of hard speeches and unjust deeds to repent of, and learns as never before his weakness before God.

Persecution brings us into sympathy with Christ. What deed or work of His life has not been misrepresented? They said that He was a sot, a traitor, a disturber of the peace. They got up a sham trial and

kept on until matters culminated in His death. He answered not. Struck, He did not strike back. The reason you don't demolish your enemy is because you can't. Christ had all the power in heaven and on earth, yet was as a sheep before His shearers. O, Thou despised one of the cross, show us how to bear the scoffs and criticism of the world! If Christ will answer that prayer then we will be able to know why, in the tenth chapter of Mark, He announced persecutions as the very climax of all the blessings we can possibly receive on earth for Christian work and self-denial. Though it be a crown of fire, the first breath of heaven will put out the flame and leave nothing but the gold, and that all the brighter for the heat. Pearls are found in the shell in the deep sea, but the shell is opened by the knife of the pearl-diver and the pearl drops out. The richest blessings are hidden and inclosed, and it sometimes takes the sharp knife of persecution to bring out the pearl of great price. Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

— PRAYER MEETING SERVICE —

Reverence Indispensable.

BY REV. J. M. WILLIAMS.

Pendulums swing to the two extremes of an arc. So sometimes do religions. The one extreme may be the corruption or mere formality of the old and "hoary"; the other, the barrenness or thoughtlessness of the "protesting" new. Action and reaction is likely to be the law of the soul as well as of physics. Every student of religious change knows that the danger lies in the new extreme. Who so ardent as the renegade? The country that revolts against the absolutism of Roman Catholic domination is in danger of lapsing into infidelity. The pendulum swings to the other extreme.

So there is danger of passing from the too "ornate" to the too "barren." The

"swing" from the pealing organ, sacred candle, intoning priest, and surpliced choir of the Romish Church in England before the days of Henry VIII., to the barren service, or rather to the no "service," the nasal psalm-singing, the canting tone of the minister, and the chilling plainness of church building of the Scotch Church of the eighteenth century, illustrates the sweep to the extremes of the religious arc. Both these extremes are to be deplored; and neither of them could be maintained by the average British worshipper. If the one extreme had been avoided the protest would not have been called for. If the other extreme had not been followed out, there would have been no need of the reaction that is still fighting its way in Scotland.

These larger extremes illustrate smaller.

