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THE SABBATH AND MODERN CIVILIZATION.

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RECENTLY the writer was requested to answer the following question: "Has modern civilization modified the works of necessity and mercy mentioned in the Westminster Standards in connection with the Sabbath?"

It will be seen at once that this is a difficult question, and one about which intelligent and conscientious Christians are not at all agreed. Many seem to think a great modification of such works has been brought about, in the providence of God, by the changed circumstances in which men now find themselves. They plead the necessities of modern civilization: the necessities of commerce, now carried on on so vast a scale, and constantly involving so great interests, and demanding in its exchanges so much promptness and dispatch; the necessities of labor in ministering adequately and seasonably to the numerous and pressing wants of millions of our people crowded together in our great cities; the necessities of the railway, postal and telegraphic service in preserving communication, often admitting no delay, between the different parts of our widely extended country; the necessities of refreshment and recreation, after toil during the week more exacting and exhausting than any to which men were ever before subjected. These alleged necessities seem to have made the impression on them that the Sabbath law of the Scriptures has become unsuitable for this age; that it is impossible to observe it with the strictness there enjoined; that it is unreasonable to suppose we are expected to do it; that the strict observance there required and these necessities, which often can-

THE CHURCH IN THE FIELD.

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THE most superficial student of the New Testament must be impressed with the fact that the Christian church is an institution built for action and not for repose, for assault rather than for defence. The commands of Christ send the church to the field rather than to the fort or barracks. So long as one is non-Christian, Christ's word is "Come!" The instant he becomes Christian, Christ's word is "Go!"

The church is to live outside its entrenchments. It is no well-kept mutual admiration society, comfortably housed in a cathedral home and solicitous chiefly for the maintenance and recognition of its respectability, but an army for war in a world campaign.

The risen Christ consecrated himself to the church in the field. He said, "Go," and "Lo, I am with you alway," and "All power is given unto me." He shares the campaign with his people. He took the field at Calvary, and has never sounded retreat.

The apostolic church lived outside the entrenchments. When it rested, it rested on its arms. It did not wait for the world to attack it; it attacked the world. It was aggressive, evangelistic. When, in those first days at Jerusalem, it stopped to contemplate itself, supposing it was performing its duties by enjoying its privileges, Christ suffered it to be blessed with a persecution which broke up the camp, and the disciples went everywhere preaching the gospel.

The church that is to win the spiritual battles of any land or age must be a church that is not afraid of war. It must get beyond ribbons and altar cloths, beyond concern for millinery and a passion for ritualistic gaits, away and beyond the scare of criticism and the fear of the one-cent press to courage and arms and deathless enthusiasm in the shock of battle.

No war was ever won by an army that staid inside the entrenchments and spent itself on its fortifications. Perhaps the greatest military genius the race has produced had as the cardinal

maxim of war, "The army that remains within its entrenchments is defeated."

It is as true of the church of Jesus Christ. It will never win by keeping on the defensive and protecting itself against attack. It must assume the offensive and take the field.

The church must be an advancing army. Christ never told his disciples to take care of themselves, to enjoy themselves, to keep out of danger, and seek heaven in the most comfortable way and by the route of least resistance. They were to march into the storm centre and grapple with the adversary.

The church is not to stay where it seems to be safe and exhaust its spiritual activities in measures of protection. It is not to keep its little household gods under lock and key. In this era of war, in this world of strife, in this year of conflict, in this hour of desperate encounter, the church is to occupy the field. It is to heed its marching orders, unfurl its flag, unsheath its weapon for the King and his holy cross. It is to go where the danger is, where there are devils to cast out and new tongues to be spoken, where serpents hiss and sting and deadly things do their hurt, into the thick of carnage, counting no cost too great, no fire too hot, no march too long, no night too dark, no rations too short, no death too utter. When it does, Christ and all his promises become living assets.

The church has nothing to fear on the field. Its real perils are not in the hour of battle, but in seasons of repose and recreation, in times of relaxation, satisfaction, contemplation, enjoyment; when it builds stronger its doors, makes stouter its bolts and bars, and locking itself behind the impregnable defences of its divine organization, says, "Nothing can get me here."

Who wants to get it there? It is doing no damage. Who cares to disturb a sleeping church? Not the devil; not he. Full well he knows that it will starve itself to death inside the fort on its rations of dogma and ritual.

The church must get into the fight to save itself. It is safest where peril is greatest, for there it is closest to Christ. There it is finding expression for all its ransomed powers. The church was built for battle, not for retreat. It was not meant to dwell in a cave or a holy hole in the ground. Let it get to the open and fill its lungs with the living oxygen of aggressive service. Then it becomes a conquering church.

THE CHURCH OF TO-DAY.

How is it with the Christian church to-day? Is it inside or outside the fortifications? Is it on the defensive or offensive? Is it conciliatory or aggressive? No one needs to be a pessimist in order to become dissatisfied with existing conditions. Judged by last year's statistical reports, the church is holding its own, and this is the standard frequently employed. Is it the right standard? Is the Christian standard of obligation the work done or the work to do?

It is undoubtedly true that there is a church in the field to-day. There is a part of the church intensely missionary and evangelistic, thoroughly awake and aggressive. But it is a part of the church. Is it not a comparatively small part of the church?

There is the church in the fort, the church that is chiefly concerned with saving its own neck. There is the church in the play-house, the church that is chiefly concerned in making itself entertaining. There is the tailor-made church, the church whose chief concern is for its vestments and forms of worship. There is the church in the watch-tower of criticism, and the church in the social settlement, and the church in the drawing-room, and the church in the charity bazaar, and the church in the sacred stereopticon, and the church in various other postures; but is it not true that the church in the field for the single and stupendous work of preaching Christ and him crucified and of saving the lost is comparatively a small part of the church? Must it not be confessed that a great number of professing Christians and church members are keeping out of the fight as far as possible. They are not on the battle-field. They have no anxiety to get into trouble. They have a deep solicitude to have no disturbance. The fort is good enough for them.

Many a modern soldier of the cross says, with a sigh of deep satisfaction, "We are holding our own? We are as in former times. Let us strengthen the things that remain."

Diplomacy has been substituted for war. It is that kind of diplomacy by which the world gets everything and the church nothing. The church is cautioned not to antagonize the world. If money be made dishonestly, say nothing about it. If the weak are wronged, say nothing about it. If vice flourishes and iniquity reigns in high places, say nothing about it. Treat the

world's sicknesses with sugar pellets and anesthetics, but never let it see a knife nor hear a battle-cry. Many a church keeps only blank cartridges in its arsenal. They make a noise, but no one is hit.

When there is any fighting, let it be inside the fort. What a spectacle Christendom frequently presents of the sacramental host divided and waging war on itself. Much of our Christian warfare is had among ourselves. There are the conflicts over creeds and the skirmishes concerning forms. There is the war of the critics as to whether we should search the Scriptures or search for the Scriptures. There is the battle for sectarian supremacy and the campaign about orders. There are saints so hotly engaged in contending earnestly for the things once delivered that they forget there is anything else to be delivered.

Some think war is an undignified procedure for a church, anyway. It gets dishevelled locks and tarnished uniform in battle, so they stay out. They keep their fighting clothes on the shelf, and reserve the battle-flag for memorial occasions. They insist that the church should not leave the divinely-ordained sphere to do anything that might interfere with anybody. One cannot help wondering what Elijah or John the Baptist or Paul would say of this modern ecclesiastical non-committalism. They were men who were careful for nothing, but this timid church-fortificationist is "careful to antagonize nothing."

When the martial mood does strike him, what does he do but have a dress parade. He counts the buttons on his uniform, plays on all his wind instruments, and recites himself. Such a Christian has become a mock soldier. He has ceased to be heroic, and his cause has lost its importance.

What shall be said of the martial qualities of a church that, having established itself within the ecclesiastical fort, barricades every entrance, blocks every exit, stacks arms, and sings, "Onward, Christian Soldier"? What shall be said of the saints whose method of bombarding the world is to give amateur theatricals, and who, as they march and countermarch across their playground, sing:

"The Son of God goes forth to war;
Who follows in his train?"

THE RESULT.

What is the result of all this? Is it not a church which the world may compliment, but does not fear; may tolerate, but does not respect? In the heroic days of Christianity bad men trembled when the church proclaimed its message. Who trembles nowadays?

The church is respected as a social organization, but it is not sought for its spiritual power. It is regarded as decent and well-bred. It has amiable motives and harmless ways. Was it to secure this that Christ gave his life? There was not much of it at his cross. There was mighty little of it in his life. Christ did not die to gain the world's respect. Calvary was a challenge, not a compromise. The church has increased in size and diminished in power. It has grown from a dozen men who feared nothing to half a billion souls who are afraid of themselves. The church has grown in the ambulance and commissary and pension departments. The architecture of the barracks has improved and the quarters are more comfortably furnished, but is the church a more skillful wielder of spiritual weapons?

Is it not a fact that a Christian who goes to the firing line, and taking his Bible seriously, lives as though the book were true, is regarded as rather fanatical?

There is not much fiery enthusiasm to-day. People to whom are preached the great tragedies and truths of the gospel stay unstirred. They are not there to be stirred. They do not even change color. The preacher may thank his stars if he keeps them awake. They may saunter forward at the close of the service and remark in a perfectly proper tone of voice that "the subject was ably handled"; but the church is full of little people to-day who are afraid to have any opinions. They want religion peptonized and duly administered in homœopathic doses. We dwell in the days of the kindergarten and predigested food.

How can Almighty God do much with such a crowd? How can Christ lead to victory an army that refuses to budge from the barracks? How is Calvary to be fused into the heart of the world with a block of ice? How is Christ to evangelize the race through followers who, while capable of leonine passion and heroic achievements, persist in remaining as expressionless as dough and as unsympathetic as a day in November?

THE REMEDY.

Is there any remedy for this state of indifference which characterizes, not all, but too much of the Christian church of to-day? We talk over the situation, admit our leanness, and say, "We must have a revival." The revival is gone about in a business-like way. The methods are strictly up-to-date. The result is usually the warming over of cold bread. Some sapless saints are made a little less juicy.

I have referred to an occasion in the history of the apostolic church when Christ drove the church to the field with a persecution. Perhaps it may be necessary for him to do the same with the modern church.

Is a persecution the worst thing that could befall the church to-day? It would certainly reduce its ranks to a Gideon's band; but God has never regarded that sort of decimation a disaster. Doubtless there are many who do not take kindly to such sentiments as have been expressed in this article. They would far rather go into hysterics over paradise. But what is the good of hysterics? The world will never be saved by hysterics. It will never be saved, except by a cross. When Jesus said, "Follow me," his face was toward the front. Christ's call is still a call to arms.