

Federation.

THE
REUNION OF CHRISTENDOM.

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AN EASTER SERMON.

PREACHED IN THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO,
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COLOSSIANS 3:1.—“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.”

The resurrection of Christ lifts His people into a life filled with diviner hopes and heavenlier affections. Of all the days of the year this is a day for great thoughts of God and man. It is not a day for littleness, for contention, for narrow-mindedness, for despair. It is a day when our hearts are drawn upward to the exalted Christ and outward to each other. It is a day when our loved ones, who have passed from sight and have entered into Paradise, seem nearer to us and dearer, because transfigured. It was the habit of Paul, in his magnificent exhortations, to draw our thoughts to the greatest truth. His glorious hopefulness, and his sublime faith came from the risen and living Christ. He entreated the Ephesian disciples to lift their minds on high, to set their affections on celestial things. In other words, Paul made the resurrection of Jesus an argument for diviner living. Lifting our hearts to Him who is the Head of the Church, and who, in His heavenly glory, beholds the Church as His own body, through which his life-blood pulses and thrills, we become great-minded.

I think we are disposed on such days as these, to take broader and brighter views of our own individual life and of the Kingdom of Christ on earth. Except at Christmas time the Church is never so exalted in feeling and so one in spirit as on Easter Sunday.

Though even to-day there are some elements of discord apparent, since the Greek Church is divided from western Christendom and following her ancient custom celebrates on the coming Sunday the rising of the Lord, still so large a part of the Christian world is commemorating the greatest of historical events that we realize in ample measure the unity of Christian faith and love. This is the great Lord's day in which the glories of other Lord's days appear to be concentrated and intensified. When I read the arguments of men who would keep the seventh day rather than the first as the Christian's holy day, it always seems to me that they mistake and under-rate the significance of the resurrection of Christ. It seems to me that the creation of the world from which God rested on the seventh day is almost meaningless beside the resurrection of Jesus which the Lord accomplished on the first day. The Christian Sunday is grander and brighter than any Jewish Sabbath. There was no need of any positive instruction to lead the early Church to celebrate the first day of the week. Guided by the Holy Ghost in their own hearts, following the impulses of their own gratitude, I do not see how they could have done otherwise. Many a time they sang in spirit, though not in the modern words, our inspiring hymn:

"O day of rest and gladness,
 O day of joy and light,
 O balm of care and sadness,
 Most beautiful, most bright.
 On thee the high and lowly
 Bending before the throne,
 Sing, Holy, Holy, Holy,
 To the great Three in One."

I shall utilize this day on which the Church so largely realizes its unity, to speak to you on the reunion

of Christendom, which is the next greatest event that lies before the people of God. The prayer and the purpose of Christ are not to be defeated. The Church, which was one during the forty days when the risen Savior walked with His few humble disciples in Judea and Galilee, is yet to be one—one in spirit, one in effort, one in purpose and one in its essential outward manifestations. I do not mean that men are to be robbed of their peculiarities, that men are to be alike in their intellectual habits and preferences, and in all their convictions, or that they are to adopt the same ecclesiastical usages, but I am certain that the present painful divisions of Christendom are transitory; that there is to be a large unity in essentials, great liberty in non-essentials and true Christian charity in all things.

I have no confidence that any central hierarchy, with a world-wide organization, is to dominate the nations. There is a better and grander and truer unity than that. The indications are, however, that bodies of Christians who are naturally affiliated, whose differences are trivial, will come together, and that, then, churches which, though bearing different names, are substantially one, will come into co-operation and ultimately into union, and that in the evolution which is rapidly going on, in the training of bigger brains and bigger hearts, those who have been long sundered by the memory of past alienations and misunderstandings will come into substantial accord. We may not prophesy the details of the future, but it is apparent that the centrifugal forces are lessening and the centripetal forces are gaining, and that this change is being rapidly accelerated.

I shall not be surprised if there come into existence great brotherhoods of Christian unity, whose numbers will ultimately be so large as to comprise almost the entire membership of the churches, and that, gradually,

possibly speedily, ecclesiastical organizations will be remoulded, adapted to new necessities and readjusted to the broader spirit of the more enlightened coming age. Spiritual unity will fashion some forms of outward unity, and the outward unity will not be built up so much on theological, as on fraternal foundations. It will be the heart rather than the head that will bring men together.

It is being forced upon us by the necessities of our times, by the scandal and weakness of schism, that the churches shall get closer to each other. Men who are pronounced in their denominational preferences are pleading for the co-operation of denominations. A common effort to accomplish moral and spiritual ends is becoming a necessity. At the meetings of the Evangelical Alliance, Congregationalists like Dr. R. S. Storrs on the one hand, and Episcopalians like the late Bishop Harris of Michigan on the other, have advocated the plan which puts combination in the place of division, and co-operation in the place of competition among our American churches. We must build on larger plans; we are too slow in carrying our convictions into execution. There is no reason why the present Christian generation should let most men go to the bad in other lands as well as in this. We are seeing how ridiculous it is to limit our efforts to any one people. I doubt if there is a soul here this morning who would re-write the Lord's Prayer after the fashion which I saw suggested the other day, and say: "Our Father which art in America, Thy Kingdom come in America, Thy will be done in America. Give us this day in America our daily bread and forgive us our debts in America," and so on to the end. We are trying to catch Christ's thought and that is as great as the world. We are trying to see Christ's plan, and in the light of it

Presbyterianism seems much smaller than Christianity; denominationalism appears only the stepping-stone to something higher and more Christian. No one fragment of the Church is to be compared with the Church, and no one fragment of humanity with humanity.

Two of the greatest needs of our time are; first, the simplification of the theology, its reduction, so far as co-operation is concerned, to the common denominator of all Christians; and secondly, the getting together, the practical union, of believers in Jesus Christ. I know that it is very delightful to associate and to work with those who think almost entirely as we do in all things; it does not need much grace or much wisdom or much large-mindedness for those entirely agreed to co-operate. And doubtless the Church is not as yet educated to that point where men are ready to come together by those great things which they have in common. But, thank God! the tendency is in that way.

The higher up you go on a Swiss mountain the smaller relatively appear the foot-hills which you once saw from below. We could not get the Presbyterian Church to-day to quarrel as our fathers did over the questions which divided them in the days of Albert Barnes and Lyman Beecher. The questions which agitate us now concern things more fundamental than theories about natural and moral inability and our connections with Adam's transgression. They relate to the Bible, the groundwork of all our special knowledge, and even here the differences are not so wide as some imagine, and the bitterness will be very mild compared with that which was injected into the controversies of fifty years ago.

There are certain great things which all Christians more and more aim at. We test doctrine by character and life, we are trying to rescue men from sin and to

construct in them a noble Christian manhood. We are judging doctrines by their effects, and the tendency in a growing measure is toward union rather than division. What stands in the way of a more perfect co-operation? I reply in part, selfishness, denominational selfishness, a willingness to postpone reunion and even co-operation, in the hope that our own Church may be the final Church, the rallying-point around which others will gather, or may come in for a greater share of the spiritual riches gained in the conquest of the world. Think for a moment of the two greatest churches in Christendom, the Greek and the Latin, numbering more than two hundred and fifty millions of communicants, or of people nominally connected with them. We almost forget one of the chief causes of their separation many hundred years ago, that one held that the procession of the Holy Ghost was from the Father, and the other from the Father and the Son, or as in the Latin, Filioque. Now, we all know that such a difference of doctrine as that, and some of us know that the Filioque controversy, which exasperated and tore apart great churches, is of no practical amount. As one has said "it has absolutely no perceptible influence upon the ordinary daily life of the average citizen." But after churches get apart, animosities are deepened oftentimes, or the memory of past separations and new and growing ecclesiastical interests and ambitions *keep* them separate. Both of these great Churches have truth enough to save all souls. The truth may be largely mixed with error, and they may rely far less upon truth and love than upon organizations and sacraments. But in spite of separation, the noblest Christians, those nearest to Christ, in these two immense churches, must realize their unity. Their priests may quarrel over the holy places of Palestine, and their scholars may dispute

over the procession of the Holy Ghost. But men living near to God, whether they look to the supreme Pontiff at Rome or to the Patriarch in Constantinople, or to the Procurator of the Holy Synod in St. Petersburg, must realize in some measure that, since Christ is their Lord and Savior, they belong to each other as well as to Him. It is in His Name they are baptized, it is His Cross, whatever the different forms of the crucifixes in the Greek and Latin churches, that brings them salvation. It is in His resurrection that they have hope and His will be the blessed and prevailing Name whispered in their dying breath.

Churches are kept apart to-day partly by the memory of old divisions, partly by a great mass of ecclesiastical and theological rubbish, partly by selfishness, partly by an unintelligent conservatism and by ill-founded fears and dense ignorance of other denominations, and by lack of brotherliness, and partly, also, by a lack of education in those higher truths, living by which, men care less and less for minor distinctions. In view of the necessities of our time, in view of the great work which God has given us to do, in view of the practical problems which are before us, it seems to me that this tinkering and trimming of the Westminster Confession is not the grandest business in which the great Presbyterian Church of America should be engaged. I have never disguised my conviction that that Confession does not represent fairly what the Church deems the living, important and supreme truths of the Christian Gospel, in this age of Christian missions and growing fraternity. If we would adapt ourselves to the exigencies and opportunities of the times, it has seemed to me that we might most wisely lay aside the old Confession, and give to the world, in compact form and stirring phrase, such a Christian Creed as fairly represents the Church of to-

day. I believe that our Presbyterian brethren in England have pursued the right method, and that we should follow their example. There is no reason that justifies itself to broad common sense, why the Presbyterian churches of this land, of all names, should not come into organic unity, and why the Presbyterian churches of all lands should not come into immediate co-operation on the basis of those supreme things which are assuredly believed among us. And I am of the opinion that while Calvinism may well be taught in our seminaries, there is no reason why Calvinism in any of its distinctive forms, should be embodied in the Church's Creed. By this I do not say that Calvinism is not true, but I mean to say it is not such a truth, or system of truth, as should be set up for an ecclesiastical barrier between us and other denominations. As the Congregationalists have lost nothing vital since they ceased making Calvinism a test in the ministry, so we too, doing the same, would lose nothing vital, and we would be certain to come into more catholic relations with other churches.

There is not one man in a hundred in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches to-day who can define the differences between Calvinists and Arminians, and why should an undefined and unknown quantity, a metaphysical interpretation of divine decrees over which scholars are divided, keep Christians apart who are equally earnest, equally devout and, in different directions, equally successful? So long as all Christians pray to God as though everything depended on Him, and work for God as though everything depended on themselves, we should not let such theological distinctions remain as perpetual barriers to reunion, and they will not remain.

The time is nearly past when there was any truth

in the proverb: "I know they are Christians, for they quarrel so." The noises of discord are being drowned in the notes of concord. The business men, the practical men in our churches, especially those living in great cities, and enlightened by perceiving the needs of our time, are going to teach some lessons to would-be ecclesiastical leaders. Christian evangelization is a very pressing problem, and progress will be slow until we get the common sense of average men on our side. Talk of evangelizing our cities! Why, to many it means the building of a few more Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian or other churches. It means perpetuating present divisions which are not very profitable, or wise or rational. So multitudes of Christian business men think, and a growing number of them, especially in the Presbyterian Church, prefer giving their money to purely Christian work. I would not lessen one particle any man's loyalty to his denomination. I believe heartily in my own, but I am pointing out tendencies which are, on the whole, promising and hopeful. God has us in hand and He is going to give us some lessons that we shall not forget. And I am thankful for all the great interdenominational societies, especially those of young men and women that are showing us how much we have in common.

A few years ago the House of Bishops, meeting in Chicago, proposed a basis of union for evangelical churches. They enumerated four points that were essential. Now three of these points most American Protestants believe to be essential. The fourth point, what is called the historic episcopate, they think is non-essential. But as Bishop Coxe recently said, before we blame the Episcopalians for sticking to what we deem a non-essential point, we ought to ask, why do not the churches, like the Congregationalist, Presbyterian,

Baptist and Methodist, why do not they come together on those three points which they deem essential? I have no doubt that such a union is to be achieved, perhaps in our own time. As Saul found it difficult to kick against the ox-goads, so the churches will find it increasingly hard to kick against those points of theology and of the sacraments which they regard as non-essential, and to fail to unite on the basis of those things which they deem to be fundamental. There is a tendency on the part of many Christians to go back of the fourth century, and to inquire if it be not possible, on the basis of the early Church, to find the ground of present reunion. I see one good reason for approving such a plan. In the fourth century the Christian Church became allied to the Roman Empire, and entered upon a non-Christian evolution. It took upon it excrescences harmful or largely useless. It absorbed much of the secular empire. To use the popular phrase, it bit off more heathenism than it could comfortably chew and successfully digest and assimilate. Therefore it may be well to go back of the Council of Nice, to go back to the Apostolic Church. But, dear friends, God is working to-day as truly as in the first century, and though we may be enlightened and guided by what we observe in the earliest Christian ages, we may also be instructed by what is going on about us. There is a trend discoverable, there is a drawing together, of Christian hearts about the Cross and broken tomb of Christ.

Good men are not contented with praising themselves; they are finding and eulogizing the good seen in other denominations. Baptist piety, and Methodist piety, and Presbyterian piety, and Lutheran piety, and Catholic piety, are all praiseworthy and divine. Those who have passed from one denomination to another have had their eyes and their hearts opened. It is a good

thing for some men to have belonged to two denominations. I asked the Rev. Dr. Noble the other day if he knew of any good reason why the Congregationalists and Presbyterians should not unite. I know that the late Professor Phelps had argued for that union of Christians so closely affiliated. Dr. Noble said "There is no good reason in the world why they should not come together." When the late Professor Calvin E. Stowe, of Hartford, was dying, he asked a friend to find out if his name was still on the roll of the Presbytery. He was then a Congregationalist. He learned that it was, and was glad, and then he said: "If I had my life to live over again I would belong to all of the denominations." Personally, I am determined that nothing shall keep me from entering into the heartiest sympathy with all. I prefer to see the good things rather than the evil in all bodies of Christians. No Pope can excommunicate me from being a good Catholic. I shall never cease to cherish grateful thoughts of the English Church so long as the books of her scholars occupy so large a place in my library. Spurgeon has helped me to be a good Baptist, and Robert Hall and Judson and John Foster and John Bunyan have helped to do the same. So long as I hold a modern hymn book in my hand I shall be a good Methodist. Friends, I believe it is a mistake, it hurts our own souls, to fix our thoughts chiefly on what we deem the defects of other Christian bodies. The result is narrow Presbyterians and poor Christians. What our age wants is bigger-minded men. Men are not great on account of their denominational connection, not on account of their ecclesiasticism, but on account of service and character. The late Cardinal Manning, mourned by millions of the poor, belonged to the Church universal. His Christianity was greater than his Cardinal's hat, and more divine than his

princely office. We have all heard of the woman who said, "I am not sure that I am a Christian, but I know that I am a Baptist." And I have met several men who made no pretensions to being religious, who were very pronounced and bigoted Presbyterians.

In pleading for a broader outlook and a larger fellowship and a closer union of the followers of Christ, I cannot forget the waste and inefficiency which belong to our present methods of Christian work. You may know that in the town of Wichita, Kansas, there are eight denominational Christian colleges, and in hundreds of communities throughout this great West, communities of from three hundred to two thousand people, there are from four to twelve rival and diminutive churches, each striving for a hold and draining from our Christian work an immense amount of money which ought to be utilized in our imperiled cities. It is said there are seventeen different forms of Christianity which are struggling for a foothold in Japan. How much nobler and deeper the enthusiasm which will be kindled when our churches are brought into closer fellowship, when such anomalies are removed, when Christian disciples unite on a broad, true and simple working-platform, and when the pledge which men take in entering our churches is not in effect a promise to aid in the building up of one denomination, oftentimes at the expense of others, and still oftener to the loss of that Kingdom which was founded by our Lord. Church membership ought to mean a pledge to actively co-operate with all Christians in certain definite and self-sacrificing Christian work. A better test of true discipleship than those usually applied would be a declared willingness to enter into an army that means conquest, like General Booth's; to enter a school where discipline and obedience are demanded, to undertake a work where self-denial is re-

quired. I know that this Christian age demands more freedom of thought. It will never take less. It requires that large liberty should be allowed as to questions of belief. There are some yokes which it will not bear and ought not to bear; but the more Christian it becomes, the more willing it will be to take on the military form, to promise obedience to the Christian law of self-sacrifice, to subordinate self to the needs of the world. Thus men will come together in the service of man, and reunion will not be based so much on ritual or on intellectual belief as on a common purpose to make this world less like hell. The Church of God will be fired with the love of man. A reunited Christendom will be the great peacemaker among the jarring interests that disturb our industrial life. Christians cooperating will take hold vigorously of the crime question, the saloon question, the child question, the Sunday question, the poverty question, the great issues of war and peace among nations. Whereas they are now weak because acting separately, they will become powerful when acting together. There are Christian forces in English-speaking lands to-day which, if united, could prevent the opium trade in China and the destructive liquor traffic in Africa; and I thank God on this Easter Sunday that the tendencies which are bringing in a better day grow stronger year by year. There is an inspiration in the fact that we are getting more into accord with the Universal Church, and that we are getting back to Christ's original conception of a Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

It will not do with such wide-spread misery and degradation prevailing all about us, it will not do for great and prosperous churches to locate the Kingdom of Heaven in that world which lies across the River of Death. It is our business to make the conditions of

human life more tolerable here below, to bridge over the chasms which separate the rich and poor, to push back the tyrannical and deadly forces which have grown strong through our disunion, and to help usher in that day of peace which the angels heralded at Bethlehem, and that day of joy prophesied by the resurrection morning when Jesus issued from the tomb. And in the risen and ever-living Christ we shall find that inspiration which we need for service, that assurance that the militant Church shall cease its conflicts with itself, and that hope, which was never stronger than to-day, that all things on earth and beyond are yet to be made one in Christ, the Prince of Peace, the Lord of life, the Victor over death and discord, the King of saints and the joy of Heaven.