



THE LATE PROFESSOR WILLIS JUDSON BEECHER, D.D.

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Editorial

THE RELATION BETWEEN RELIGION AND FREEDOM

This theme recalls one of the old great questions and controversies whether we think of what has gone on in the world at large, or in the souls of silent strugglers and sufferers. Throughout the long human story religion has ever warred with freedom, freedom with religion. At times, indeed, it has seemed as if choice must be made between religion without freedom or freedom without religion. Ecclesiastical and clerical domination, trial and execution of heretics, opposition to all progress which the church did not authorize, and the resultant nameless ravages wrought upon consciences of whole peoples—our purpose now does not require us to dwell upon all this, done in the name of religion, or upon their analogues, done in the name of freedom. Other questions clamor for consideration. Are religion and church hereditarily burdened with the evils of unfreedom? Is religious earnestness quite necessarily allied with a certain narrowness, if not stupidity even? Shall irritating encroachments upon free personality drive many of the strongest and best of our fellow-men from religion, Christianity, and church? Is it possible to unify religion and freedom? If so, how?

In the "trial-and-error" plan of history, some methods of unification have proved false already. These may be mentioned and set aside.

One of these false ways is to superpose freedom upon religion from without. Here as everywhere, spiritual reality must be

Work and Workers

WILLIS JUDSON BEECHER

The ranks of our veterans in Old Testament scholarship are once more reduced by the death on May 10, at his home in Auburn, N.Y., of Dr. Willis Judson Beecher. He has been best known to this and the preceding generation as professor of the Hebrew language and literature in Auburn Theological Seminary, where he lived his life and did his work. The remarkable and loving tributes which the citizens of Auburn, the members of the Theological Seminary, the various civic, literary, and mercantile associations of that and adjoining cities paid to his memory at the funeral revealed a character of rare exemplary worth, whose endowments and ideals and methods deserve more than passing notice.

Willis Judson Beecher was born in Hampden, Ohio, April 29, 1838, of sturdy Christian parents. They early moved to New York state, where the lad was trained in Augusta and Vernon academies. He was graduated from Hamilton College at the age of twenty (1858) with the degree of A.B. After teaching three years in Whiteside Seminary, he entered Auburn Theological Seminary in 1861 and was graduated and also ordained to the ministry of the Presbyterian church, in 1864. For the next year he was pastor at Ovid, N.Y.; and from 1865-69 was professor of moral science and belles lettres at Knox College, Galesburg, Ill. In 1869-71 he was pastor of the First Church of Christ at Galesburg. In 1871 he was called to Auburn Theological Seminary, to the chair which he so acceptably filled for thirty-seven years, until his voluntary retirement in 1908, when seventy years of age. Since retirement from the Seminary he has devoted his time to writing and to the service of the several boards and organizations of which he was a member. Physically robust until about a month before his death, he was then stricken with the sudden illness which has removed a rare man and a widely beloved friend.

Dr. Beecher was a man among men. He was one of those persons who never lost his humanness. He was interested in everything that made for the uplift of the life about him. More than this, he willingly, gladly shared his burden of responsibility as a citizen in the city of Auburn. Even his habits as a scholar did not make him a recluse, nor

dehumanize him. Among the educated and uneducated he was equally a man abounding in human sympathy and helpfulness. Modest, retiring, yet firm, he commanded the highest regard of everyone.

As a member of the Presbyterian church he was a pillar of support. He was always an official in the local church at Auburn, a teacher in the Bible school, a genial friend and helper, and one of the most cordial welcomers of those whom others would be likely to overlook. In denominational work in the synod and in the whole country he was naturally a leader, wise adviser, and counselor. Pastors and teachers eagerly consulted him and availed themselves of his sympathy and wisdom in the prosecution of their work. In the community at large he wielded a forceful influence for good. The Y.M.C.A., the city library, the historical society, Wells College at Aurora—all were enriched by his active efforts and counsel.

But the one department to which he gave the bulk of his time and strength since 1871, a period of forty-one years, was that of the Old Testament.

He was known among his students as patient and kind toward the hard-working, earnest, yet mediocre student, and always severe on himself. He had the spirit of the true scholar in the thoroughness which he required; and the humility of the real scholar in his treatment of difficult questions. His students testify that they received some of their best lessons in sincerity in the modest reply he gave to some difficult question: "I do not know; I'll investigate the matter and see if I can give a satisfactory answer." He rarely if ever gave an answer to weighty questions based on his own assumption of knowledge, or the superiority of his methods of investigation. With this modesty was linked an open-mindedness that always seeks the truth and welcomes it from any quarter. He was not merely a student of books, but a thinker, who made his own investigations and reached his own conclusions. Though hospitable to truth from any source, he was by nature conservative, and very tenacious of the conclusions he had once reached. While he recognized the scientific method, he could not always accept the conclusions of his fellow-workers. The old paths were more acceptable to him than the untrodden ways of new theories.

As an Old Testament scholar he devoted much time to lecturing, and wrote extensively for religious journals, especially those denominational, and the *Sunday School Times*. His published books have been mainly of a popular character. In 1874 he issued *Father Tompkins and His Bibles*; in 1905, *The Prophets and the Promise*; in 1906, *The Teaching of*

Jesus Concerning the Future Life; in 1907, *The Dated Events of the Old Testament*; and in 1911, *Reasonable Biblical Criticism*. Though somewhat mediating in character, his last works cling firmly to the principles of the conservative school of thought on Old Testament themes.

Dr. Beecher had another very desirable trait for these times. He had a greater regard for life than for intellectual conclusions. As over against the spiritual life of men, he felt that the biblical scholar often pursued the base of a rainbow. This attitude necessarily made him a mediator, a judge. His chief question was not, "What is truth?" but "What is the truth for men?"

As a kind friend, by the written and printed testimony of the professors of Auburn Seminary, to which credit must be given for our information, Dr. Beecher was unsurpassed. His unselfishness and fidelity toward others had the ring of true friendship. He had a heart that was always thoughtful, warm, and tender. He put himself in the place of others. He was free from envy and any semblance of self-seeking, preferring others before himself. He was the first to rejoice in the successes of his friends and the most sympathetic in their sorrows. Since the death of his wife twenty years ago, his only child, Miss Elizabeth Beecher, has been his constant companion and the sharer of all his joys and sorrows.

Life to Dr. Beecher was something sacred. He made drudgery divine. He moved among even the common things of life with the sense of their divineness. With all his passing years he was always young and fresh in thought. His life broadened and enriched with the years. His love of nature, of the woods, brooks, and mountains, the joys of friendship, the loss of himself for the good of others—all made his years youthfully happy. To those who knew him best, he was a great man and a great Christian.

IRA M. PRICE