



The
CHRISTIAN TREASURY

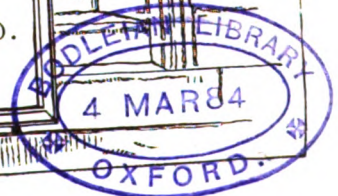
CONTAINING

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM MINISTERS AND MEMBERS
OF
VARIOUS EVANGELICAL DENOMINATIONS



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CHRISTIAN TREASURY.

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FOOLISHNESS AND POWER.*

BY EUGENE BERSIER, PASTOR OF THE REFORMED CHURCH OF PARIS.

‘For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us
which are saved it is the power of God.’—1 Cor. i. 18.



FOOLISHNESS—power! These are the two names that Paul here gives to the preaching of the cross. I propose, my brethren, to study in succession these two ideas, in order afterwards to show you the tie that closely unites them together. This will be the plan

of our reflections.

The preaching of the cross is **FOOLISHNESS**. I pray you to remark, my brethren, that it is not an enemy of the gospel, but an Apostle, who says this to us. Christianity has not waited until the world cast this reproach at it; it has not left it this satisfaction. This insult it has itself seized, and been the first to claim as its lawful property. And let not men say to us that it is here a figure of speech, a bold apostrophe, that has escaped from the Apostle. The gospel is sparing in its use of these exaggerated epithets, of these figures of rhetoric; and, moreover, the same thought is found underlying the entire teaching of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ presented His doctrine as a thing that the world would charge with folly. He clearly speaks of the incompatibility that there is between man's view of things and that which He preached; He foretold

His disciples that they would meet with opposition, hatred, and contempt.

This is, indeed, a strange method of seeking to gain men; so strange that it would be foolishness if it did not show a divine inspiration. Usually, when a man wishes to succeed, he promises to himself and to his disciples success. Every general well knows that in order to succeed he must announce victory to his soldiers. It is the same in the order of intelligence; a philosopher, a chief of a school, is forced to prove that his doctrine answers to all the needs of the age, and will satisfy all its aspirations; he points out intelligences already prepared to embrace it, and proselytes who are about to range themselves under his standard. We ourselves, sometimes yielding to this attraction, have we not announced the near triumph of our beliefs! Jesus Christ alone said to His disciples, ‘You will be judged, calumniated, hated because of My name;’ and it is this thought that Paul takes up when he speaks with so much assurance of the foolishness of the cross.

The cross specially merited this distinction and this reproach, for it is it which epitomises our entire Christianity. It is its centre; it is in it, above all, that there appeared what was strange and opposed to human wisdom. The preaching of the cross was designed to be foolishness; it has been so, my brethren, and Paul has said not a word too much.

And, first of all, considering it only from an

* Translated from the French for the *Christian Treasury*, by permission of the author, from the seventh edition of the second volume of his sermons. Paris: M. Fischbacher.

they are God's servants sent to inflict punishment upon the wicked.

It is to draw your attention to this that I have taken 'locusts' as the subject of this little sermon this morning. I want you to notice how easy it is for God to find instruments to execute His will. Anything and everything He can turn into an instrument of punishment when He wishes to. In Pharaoh's time, *e.g.*, the water of the Nile was turned into blood, and the fish died and filled all the land with a horrible stench. The dust became lice, and covered man and beast. The air they breathed being made poisonous, covered the Egyptians with boils and blains. Hail fell in such quantity as to destroy their crops. Then locusts ate up what the hail left. And to crown all, death smote the first-born in every Egyptian home, from the king downward, and filled the land with mourning.

True, locusts may never come to Canada, and are never likely to come to you in Great Britain and Ireland; but if God is angry with us, He can very easily afflict us in some other way. He may send upon our wheat

rust, smut, or the fly; upon our potatoes the beetle or the rot; dry weather and burn up our fields, or wet weather in harvest and prevent the crops being gathered in. Last week when on the train I heard a gentleman describe his visit to Manitoba and the Western States. He was greatly praising the soil out there, and telling how easily crops could be raised; but he mentioned two things which might any time come and destroy all—viz, frost and grasshoppers (the locusts' cousins), and so bring ruin upon thousands.

Now, how can we best protect ourselves against those terrible scourges of locusts and other things?

To fight against God successfully is hopeless, flight is impossible. Fleeing to God in prayer and penitence when He is displeased is what the Bible commands, and it is right. 'If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, *locust*; . . . what prayer or supplication soever be made by any man: . . . then hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and do' (1 Kings viii. 37-39).

HEAD WINDS.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER, D.D.



COMING up on deck one morning, when crossing the ocean on a Cunarder, and encountering a stiff north-easter, the officer said to me—'There has been a change of administration during the night; the Opposition have come into power. It requires all our steam to make any head-way.' I am reminded of that occurrence on the steamer, when I look at some of the adverse influences which the preachers of the gospel have to encounter in these days. 'It is amazing hard work to keep piety alive in this world,' said humorous old Dr John Todd. 'In the country, they sleep it to death; in the cities, they kill it by silks and ice-creams.'

If Dr Todd were living yet, he would probably see other difficulties besides the somnolence of farmers wearied with a week's work, and the absorptions of city folk in social entertainments. Never has it required more faith, more industry, and more zeal to preach the gospel successfully than now; never has the Church of Christ in America had stiffer head winds to encounter. No gales of persecution smite us, as in the days of the martyrs. But the obstacles that hinder the progress of Christ's cause are more subtle, and yet more powerful than the threats of a persecuting hierarchy. Those fanned the flames of godly devotion, but these tend to extinguish it.

The 'silks and ice-creams' of the witty doctor point to one of these hindrances. Social entertainments have their place, and none but an ascetic would forbid them in any form. But increase of wealth, and a corresponding increase of social ambition for display, have brought an increase of fashionable amusements. Their drafts on time and purse become more exacting. When Church members embark on this tide of fashion and self-indulgence they commonly abandon their prayer-meetings and other religious services during the week. 'Forty years ago,' said a veteran New York pastor, 'the most of my Church members lived over their stores, and they packed the weekly lecture and prayer-meeting. Now they live in brown stone mansions, and our week night meeting is a handful. A flood of evening engagements carry most of my members away; the whole style of life is changed.' In those former times, glorious revivals were frequent and powerful; now they are as rare in these same churches.

The head-wind of worldliness increases in strength, and there is a corresponding decrease of conversions and church growth. The annual report of one of the leading denominations for 1881-82 gives the alarming fact of a positive *falling off* to the number of two thousand! It enrolls fewer communicants than the year before! In no one of the Evangelical denomi-

nations is there any advance which corresponds at all with the advance of population. This whole spirit of money-making, fashion, and secularity smites against the bows of the Church, as the north-easter smote the bows of the ocean steamer.

Other influences work against us. The tone of reverence for God's-day is lowered. Secular daily papers constitute the Sabbath morning reading in thousands of Christian families; religious journals are less read. It is increasingly difficult to gather large audiences twice on the Lord's-day; many churches have abandoned the attempt in despair. The same style of thorough doctrinal preaching of the Word which once attracted and satisfied is less welcome and less frequent. A strong miasmatic blast of unbelief—unbelief of the plenary inspiration of God's Word, unbelief in the endless retribution of sin, unbelief in the efficacy of spiritual efforts—is blowing from every quarter. And against all these combined influences the ministry of Christ has to make head.

Some young men get frightened from attempting the sacred ministry at all; and so the number of candidates is diminishing. Others, who are in the ministry, grow distrustful of older and solidier methods, and betake themselves to a semi-secular or a sensational style in order to attract an audience. A brilliant preacher who employs a great deal of pulpit pyrotechny lately said, 'People crowd to hear me because they are hungry for the gospel.' But if the good brother extinguished his fireworks, is he quite sure that his crowds would continue? Does every faithful minister who preaches the gospel of salvation instructively and fervently find his house thronged with 'hungry' auditors?

We know well the temptations which beset our brethren to attempt all manner of novelties and devices to stem the head-winds. We know well the discouragement that steals over the heart of one brother after another as he says—'Well, *my* field is a peculiarly hard one, and I have peculiar difficulties to encounter.' Brethren, *everybody's* field is a hard one, and *every* minister has the same head-winds to face. It never required more study, more tact, more faith, and more honest, untiring industry to be a successful minister than it does to-day. But what then? It is Christ's everlasting gospel, and Christ's indispensable and priceless kingdom of righteousness, that is committed to us. No such word as 'fail,' or 'retreat,' must enter our thoughts; there must be no putting the Lord's vessel about or on a new 'tack.'

More steam must be our motto and our godly endeavour. More fidelity to our holy work, more faithfulness in uttering God's mighty message, more prayer, more invocation of the omnipotent Spirit! We need the baptism of fire. Let us heave overboard some of the worthless 'lading of the ship.' Let us call 'all hands' to duty, and set the example. If God permits head-winds to blow.

He will not permit His blood-bought Church to founder. The very winds obey God's voice. As we go into a fresh year's work, let us make a fresh self-consecration, and implore the Lord Jesus to take full command of the vessel.

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STRONG CONSOLATION.—Even on these bright summer days, and while we seek exemption from the noise and hurry and care and work of life, disappointments, trials, anxieties, bereavements, and sorrows come upon us. Let us not forget the words: 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee;' 'Come unto Me, all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;' 'Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.' The good Lord presents Himself to us as our 'burden-bearer.' It is our privilege to roll our cares upon Him, and be at rest.

Shadows.

The sun sinks low in the western sky,
 The shadows grow long of the pine trees high,
 And the brook goes murmuring softly by.

There's a quiet brown path by the shady trees,
 Where I sit and rejoice in my sweet release,
 For the day is over, and I am at peace.

A storm-cloud came from the north to-day,
 And the happy sunbeams were hidden away,
 While the tempest ruled with awful sway.

This morning a storm-cloud came to my life,
 And I groaned and writhed in the bitter strife,
 And my lot seemed dark and sorrow was rife.

At noon-tide the storm-cloud passed away,
 And the sunbeams chased each other at play,
 While the leaves all shone in the gold day.

So at even my weary heart can rest,
 For I know that my lot must be the best—
 Who trusts in God is most surely blest.

The shadows are swaying upon the ground,
 The trees are rocked as the wind breathes round,
 And their leaves make a gentle, whispering sound.

And a voice seems to say as I sit and gaze,
 'You watch while the great tree-shadow sways;
 Could the shadow be, were there no sun's rays?'

The shadow came to my heart to-day,
 And all seemed so dark and cold and grey,
 But the sun was shining with steadfast sway.

I forgot that no shadow could ever be
 Except when the sun was shining for me:
 God's shadows are good, they come lovingly.
Alison.