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THE SOCIETY OF MISSIONARY INQUIRY.

1818—Centennial Celebration—1918.

The celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Society of Missionary Inquiry is one of the notable events in the history of Union Theological Seminary. It is impossible to convey to the printed page all of the information and inspiration which was brought to us during the four days through which the program extended. But we feel that we owe to the future to preserve in printed form as many of the addresses delivered on that occasion as we can. It has been possible for us to secure in written form all of the addresses but three, and we are taxing our space to the utmost limit in order to include all the manuscripts which have come into our hands. With the exception of the book department this whole issue is given over to the Centennial Addresses.

Below will be found an exact copy of the program which was planned for the Centennial. This program was carried out as printed with the exception that the last speaker, President Charles W. Dabney, LL. D., of the University of Cincinnati, found it impossible at the last moment to be present. This was a matter of great regret to us, as there are so many ties that bind Dr. Dabney to Union Seminary. All of the sermons and addresses were of an unusually high order and produced an impression upon the hearers which will not be soon forgotten.

*THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

BY THE REV. PROF. CHARLES R. ERDMAN, D. D.,
Of Princeton Theological Seminary.

Text: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith: as it is written, but the righteous shall live by faith."—Rom. 1:16-17. (R. V.)

It is a great privilege to have any part in a centennial celebration of such rare and radiant interest; and, in view of the impress made upon the student body of Union Seminary by the Society, the anniversary of which we are celebrating, and, in view of the moulding influence on the life of the Church made by the graduates of this institution during the century which is past, it is a distinguishing honor to be allowed to express, in the name of a sister seminary, most cordial congratulations upon the achievement of the years which are past and best wishes for the years which are to come.

As the purpose of this society concerns missionary enterprise, and as we are centering our thoughts at this time upon the great work of world-wide evangelization, it may be profitable for us to consider the passage which embodies the substance of the chief letter of the world's greatest missionary, the passage which Paul introduces by the ringing affirmation: "*I am not ashamed of the gospel.*" Surely no one is who knows the gospel, or has felt its saving power; least of all would Paul be suspected of such fear, timidity or shame. He gloried in the gospel, it was his boast and joy, and it might seem that he is speaking with studied reserve, desiring to emphasize the opposite of his negative statement, and more emphatically to declare his pride and confidence in the message of the cross. However, we must remember that Paul is now, in thought and in anticipation, facing Rome; already he has suffered the loss of all things for the sake of the gospel; he has endured contempt and ignominy and hardship

*Outline of the sermon delivered on Sunday Evening, January 13, 1918.

and pain; and now he has in mind the possibility of preaching this gospel at the very heart and centre of heathenism; he is thinking of the imperial city with its pomp and power, its false faiths and philosophies, its human wisdom and its ignorance of God. It is in such a situation that he is heard to declare: "I am not ashamed of the gospel."

Such confidence we all have felt; and such has been the conviction of those students whose work we are celebrating; and yet are we not now facing conditions which force upon us a new appraisal of the gospel, a new determination of its essential or relative value?

There are many who tell us that the gospel has been discredited by the fact that the nations which were most completely evangelized and were leading in the evangelization of the world are the very nations which are most tragically involved in deadly hatred and cruel slaughter. As Arnold Bennett has written: "The war has finally demonstrated the authenticity of an event which, in importance, far transcends the war itself, namely, the fall of the Christian religion."

Or, if there is still faith in the power of the gospel, shall we not heed those who are saying that in this time of supreme national need we should suspend, for the time, our efforts at world-wide evangelization? Is not war our present sole business, our exclusive duty? Shall we not, as Donald Hankey suggests, so "mobilize the church" that all our theological students and ministers shall enlist as soldiers? Shall we not make it evident to all that our present interest centres on the battle-field, not on the mission field? Shall we not secure, by force of arms, those blessings for the world which the gospel has been unable to give? These are searching and difficult questions; yet this centennial anniversary is sounding forth a reply which, whatever its several notes may involve, re-echoes the great affirmation of the apostle: "*I am not ashamed of the gospel.*"

It is not difficult to conjecture some reasons for your answer. The very standards by which war is condemned are gospel standards; the very principles for which we feel compelled to fight are gospel principles. The forces and agencies which are making for conservation and for reconstruction are inspired by

the gospel message. In vast stretches of ravished and desolated lands, among millions of helpless sufferers, the representatives of the foreign missionary societies have been and are the sole agents for the administration of relief.

What, however, is the reason assigned by Paul for his continued confidence in the gospel? "For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." It is a "*power*," not an indulgence, an ornament or a luxury; it can do something. "It is the power of God," it can do anything. It is "the power of God unto salvation," it can do everything. It is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," it can do everything for every believer. There exist in every human heart certain elemental desires and conscious needs, which only the gospel can supply. For instance, there is the longing to have peace with God, or with "the gods," or with the "spirits" which are supposed to surround us and to control us. Then there is the conscious lack of moral power, and the desire to do the right, united with the sense of continual failure and hopeless weakness. There is further the yearning for immortality and for a paradise regained. It is in the province of the gospel to satisfy all these needs, and to secure for men salvation from the guilt and the power and the eternal consequences of sin.

How is this salvation secured? Why does the gospel have this saving power? "For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith to faith." What is meant by this "righteousness of God?" Not the justice of God, nor His holiness, nor His love; but rather a righteousness which He requires and Himself supplies to the believer through Jesus Christ His Son. The life which begins at the cross, issues in an experience of holiness and is consummated in a blessed immortality.

Men are longing to-day for such a salvation; the desire is not always clearly defined, the cry is not articulate; but never in the history of the world has there been greater need for the message which the gospel brings. It is the message which is strengthening multitudes of men to face the stern duty of the hour. An incident was recently reported from France which illustrates this familiar thought. Two thousand men had paraded at one of the great base camps previous to going "up the line." The

inspection was complete, and in a few minutes the order, "Quick march," to the railway station would be given. Just at that moment while all stood at "attention," fully equipped, a voice began to sing:

"Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast."

Like a wave of melody the song passed from rank to rank, until every man seemed to be singing. They had learned to sing the hymn in the Association "hut," and now it was their song of cheer as they faced the hour of trial and death.

Nor is it only on the field of battle and in the military camps that the gospel message is needed. Quite as much is its inspiration required to give patience and support to the countless hearts in saddened homes, to support women and men in the sacrifices and struggles of these unprecedented days.

Nor is the need less acute than before in lands which are still unevangelized. There the moral peril is greater, the burden of sin no less conscious, the dread of death as great. It is glorious to enlist as a soldier under the national flag, but even greater is the privilege of bearing the banner of the cross to the centres of heathen darkness, to the strongholds of heathen power.

The following letter was written by a gallant soldier of Kitchener's Army, just a month before he died: "Lying here in the hospital helpless from shrapnel wounds which refuse to heal, and just waiting, I have been thinking. You know I have been all over the world. It would seem that I should have plenty to think about. Strange, isn't it, that my thoughts always go back to the one theme of Foreign Missions—especially as I never thought of them before but in derision; yes, and that notwithstanding help cheerfully given me at Mission hospitals in Amritsar, Jaffa and Uganda when I was sick.

When the call to arms came, as you will remember I told you in an earlier letter, I was in London, home on furlough. I joined Lord Kitchener's men. You sent me a New Testament. I have it now.

Reading at random for want of something better to do one night, I was struck by the words of John 17:3: 'And this is life

eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.' I could not forget those words. They have been with me every waking hour these twelve months. They are with me now. And how precious I find them, who can tell? They cause me to care not a jot for this poor maimed body, soon to be set aside.

'I've found a Friend, oh, such a Friend,
 He loved me e're I knew him;
 He drew me with the cords of love
 And thus he bound me to him,
 And round my heart still closely twine
 Those ties which none can sever,
 For I am his and he is mine
 For ever and for ever.'

I realize now that this Friend cares for every savage of our race, even as he cares for me, and why should he not?

Ah, there is the secret of my contempt for Foreign Missions. I had not then that life eternal. Would God I had earlier known the new birth. I envy you fellows who have done so much for the cause. I would gladly die for it now when it is too late.

It is sweet to die for England—I do not regret it—sweet to see the devotion of tender nurses about our beds—a few vagrant thoughts flutter for a moment over these consolations, to die in the flood of glory bursting in contemplation of what it is to minister and to die for the sake and in the service of the King of kings. That will never be my part. I do not complain. I am not worthy the high honor involved. But perhaps I might have been, had somebody taken me in hand early enough. Why does our Church keep Foreign Missions so much in the background? How is it that I was left so long a scoffer?

I do not blame any mortal. I am saying that something is wrong with a scheme of things which fails to put the whole world for Christ right in the forefront as the battle-cry of the Christian Church. I do not know your own inmost feelings. I do not know how keen you are. It is because you gave me the Testament wherein I found the words of life that I tell you something of my rambling thoughts and of the great central regret that fills my whole soul. My little money will presently be found devoted to the cause. But what of that? We can carry nothing out

whither I go. My message is that all who are wise should work in the great service while it is day, remembering the coming night."

In all lands, on the battle fields, in the camps, in the homes, the gospel must be proclaimed with new power and devotion. The cross of Christ is the one hope of the world. In his book entitled "The Cross at the Front," Thomas Tiplady has a charming chapter entitled "The Untouched Cross," in which he describes the ruined church, amidst the desolation of which there stood, against the broken wall, a large wooden cross bearing a life-sized figure of the Saviour. All else was a picture of destruction and death, but the cross had escaped in the rain of shot and shell and stood as a symbol of eternal hope. So over the scene of universal carnage and despair, even amid the smoke of battle we can now discern the majestic figure, not of a dead but of a living Christ. He is the hope of the world. Let us go forth to proclaim his gospel in all the world, until the bells of a new year shall

"Ring out the thousand years of war
Ring in the thousand years of peace
Ring in the Christ that is to be."