

The Covenanter Witness



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A Thought for Each Day

SABBATH, FEBRUARY 2. *As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith! Colossians 2:6, 7.*

Is our piety rhapsody or service? Is our restoration a dream or a discipline? Do we know in our heart of hearts that He who made the rainbow a covenant made the cross the only way to heaven? These are the questions which shock the complacency of self-satisfaction and bring men to penitence, confession, and prayer.—Joseph Parker.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3. *And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless? Genesis 15:2.*

Whilst the patriarch was pouring out the bitterness of his soul the stars came out. "Look now toward heaven and tell the stars if thou be able to number them," said his almighty Friend. And he believed. For the first time that mighty word occurs in Scripture. Henceforth the patriarch reckoned on God's faithfulness.—F. B. Meyer.

THE PATCH-QUILT'S STORY

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Life's Crises

By CLARENCE EDWARD MACARTNEY,

(Dr. Macartney is pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh.)

Aristotle opens one of his works with this sentence: "This book is written, not for knowledge, but for action." This is preeminently true of the Bible. Its truths were given, not for knowledge, in the ordinary sense of the word, but for belief and action. We hear much of the Bible as literature; and indeed, as mere literature it stands by itself. Nowhere are there such historical narratives, such odes and dirges, such orations, such apostrophes, and such sublime poetry. But it must never be forgotten that the Bible has lived through the ages, not because of the beauty and superiority of its literature, but because men received it as the Word of God and practised its precepts in their daily life.

The Bible says of itself, "The Word of God is tried." This is true as to its history and biography and its comments upon human nature. But it is true, above all else, in the sense that men and women in the midst of the struggles and battles and sorrows and temptations of this life have found the Bible to be a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path. Should the Bible ever cease to be so read and so received; should it ever come to be looked upon as merely an interesting assortment of ancient religious books—then the Bible will have passed out of the life of man. But this will never come to pass, because from age to age men discover that the Bible is what it declared itself to be—"a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path."

In recent years the thrilling story of Pitcairn Island and the mutiny of the *Bounty* has been retold and popularized in moving pictures, newspaper articles, and in books. There is one incident in that story which, indeed, is worth retelling. The mutineers sank their ship and landed with their native women on the lonely island named Pitcairn. There were nine white sailors, six natives, ten women, and a girl of fifteen. One of the sailors discovered a method of distilling alcohol, and the island colony was debauched with drunkenness and vice. After a time, only one of the white sailors who had landed on the island survived, surrounded by native women and half-breed children. This sailor, Alexander Smith, found in one of the chests that had been taken out of the *Bounty* a copy of the Bible. He began to teach his fellow exiles its principles, with the result that his own life was changed and the life of that island colony. In 1803 the United States ship *Topaz* visited the island and found a thriving and prosperous community, without whiskey, without a jail, without crime, and without an insane asylum. The Bible had changed the life of that island community. So it has been from age to age. "The entrance of thy words giveth light."

There is no doubt that the world is dark. Were it not dark, we would need no lamp unto our feet and no light for our path. The world has been made dark by sin, and man has lost the way. The Bible is the revelation of the way through life. Is there any doubt that we all need that revelation?

On a dark night, and on a treacherous path, a

lantern in a man's hand makes a great difference. It may be the difference between life and death. Man's path here is beset by a thousand dangers. The Bible shows these dangers. It utters the commandments of God, which are sure, "making wise the simple." Every day death, sin, and temptation add to the number of their ghastly trophies. But of those who have perished, how many were using faithfully the lantern which God has given man? How many had been reading its pages regularly and prayerfully?

Life is encompassed with sorrow and trial. The Bible does not take away our trials, or deliver us from sorrows; but it does tell us that they have a purpose, and that they are working out for us and in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

By and by, all come to the end of life. Before we ourselves reach that end, we have seen many others arrive at that place of departure, covered with mist and fog. If you close the Bible, if you put out this one light, what have you left? Who speaks for the after-here? What voice is uplifted by the grave of sorrow? A few dreamers and thinkers, a few tamperers with the lock to the gate of the hidden city of death, utter their arguments and come back with their weird tales which neither convince nor enlighten. But when we turn to the Bible there is light and there is hope; for the Bible leads us to Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. The path of life is not only dangerous, but it is a path which, without the light of the Bible, leads we know not where. The Bible is the book of destiny and shows us the way to heaven.

Oscar Wilde, one of the most gifted writers of the last half century, fell into deep and unmentionable sin. Writing of his experiences when a prisoner in Reading Gaol, where, as he says in his powerful "Ballad of Reading Gaol," the prisoners only now and then had a chance to look with wistful eye

"Upon that little tent of blue
Which prisoners call the sky,"

tells how, in his deep distress and woe, the only literature which now meant anything to him was the New Testament. A striking tribute to the fact that the Bible speaks to the deeps that are in the human heart, and that in the crises of life it has a message when all other books are meaningless and all other voices are silent.

Some say the Bible as a book is obscure. It does not, indeed, pretend to answer every question; and what the Bible does not say, the silence of the Bible, is sometimes as striking and impressive as its speech. Of all the figures and metaphors employed in the Bible to describe what it does for the soul of man, I think this of the lantern and the light is the best. We do not carry lanterns by daylight. The Bible is not the sunlight; but it is what the Psalmist called it, "a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path" amid the shadows of this world. It is what Peter called it in his beautiful metaphor, "a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day-star arise in our hearts." When we enter into the fullness of the life to come, and behold the living Word Himself, we

shall not need the written Bible; for we shall see no longer through the glass darkly, but face to face.

I remember seeing once on the wall of old Canterbury cathedral a tablet with an inscription on it from the second and little read portion of "Pilgrim's Progress." It is as follows:

Prudence: What do you think of the Bible?

Matthew: It is the holy Word of God.

Prudence: Is there nothing written therein but what you understand?

Matthew: Yes, a great deal.

Prudence: What do you do when you meet with such places therein that you do not understand?

Matthew: I think God is wiser than I. I pray also that He will please to let me know all therein that He knows will be for my good.

Here is John Bunyan's common sense at its best. There will be many things in the Bible which we do not understand; but a great deal there which we can understand, and which is for our eternal good.

The Christian church owes much to the heroic and ancient Church of the Waldenses in Italy for the preservation of the Bible and its saving truths. In a day when the Bible was proscribed, Waldensian ministers sometimes supported themselves by selling jewels and precious stones to the families of the great and noble. In the disguise of merchants they were able to speak to those who otherwise would have been inaccessible. When they had disposed of their rings and trinkets, and were asked if they had nothing more to offer for sale, they would reply, "Yes; we have jewels still more precious than any you have seen. We will be glad to show these also to you, if you will promise not to betray us to the clergy. We have here a precious stone so brilliant that by its light a man may see God; and another which radiates such a fire that it enkindles the love of God in the heart of its possessor." Then they unwrapped their treasure, which was, of course, the Bible. A true and beautiful statement about the Word of God. It is a precious stone which sheds a light so brilliant that by its light a man may see God. It is a stone which kindles within the heart of man the love of God.

The Christian Amendment and Disfranchisement

By W. J. COLEMAN

One reason why the Christian Amendment has not been popular is the general belief that, if adopted, it would disfranchise the Jew, infidel and atheist. Is it possible to frame or place an Amendment that will please Jesus Christ and not displease His enemies?

If the United States becomes really Christian and recognizes Jesus Christ as King and His will in the Bible as the standard to decide moral issues in political life, it will enter the kingdom of grace. Is there any place in that kingdom for the unbeliever?

There is no spirit of persecution in Jesus Christ, or in true Christianity. It may be taken for granted, we think, that when Christ's kingdom comes in this country all civil rights will be assured the unbeliever. Civil rights include the protection of life, liberty and

property, free speech and peaceable assembly, marriage, education, travel and redress of grievances. In return for all this the law requires obedience to law and the payment of taxes.

The real question is with regard to political rights, especially the right to vote. In this the citizen exercises the right to rule, to adopt laws and to elect officers. Would the Christian Amendment deprive the unbeliever of the right to rule?

1. *This disfranchisement, if it take place, will be by the decision of the citizen himself.* When the Covenanter does not vote under the present Constitution, he decides that for himself. Being a citizen, he could vote, if he would. So under the Christian Amendment, if adopted, the unbeliever would decide for himself. One reason why the Covenanter gets so little sympathy is that he could vote, if he would. So could the unbeliever. Would he get as little sympathy then, as we do now? Would not the world be more interested in his case than in ours? The world always knows which side it is on.

2. *Christians who object to the Christian Amendment that it would disfranchise the Jew take for granted a principle that would disfranchise themselves.* That principle is that a citizen cannot swear or affirm his support of the Constitution, if it differs seriously from his own belief. A Christian believes that Jesus Christ is his supreme Ruler and that God's will in the Bible is his supreme law. But the Constitution recognizes neither. Therefore according to his own logic the objector cannot vote.

Dr. A. M. Milligan was once asked by a young man going out to plead for the Christian Amendment what he would say if the objection were made that this Amendment, if adopted, would disfranchise the Jew, infidel, and atheist. He said, "Tell them that if a Christian can swear to an infidel Constitution, an infidel can swear to a Christian Constitution, unless the infidel has more conscience than the Christian."

Some of us have hesitated to call the Constitution infidel or atheistic, though it makes no religious acknowledgements, because the terms infidel and atheist have come to mean active hostility to Christianity. While the influence of the present Constitution seems to be against religion in our Government, it is not actively hostile. It has no religion.

3. *Citizens do not readily take the position of dissent and disfranchisement.* This position involves self-denial, seems to forfeit power and invites criticism. Those who stay in do not favor a "come-outer," especially if he comes out for conscience's sake. That reflects somewhat on those who stay in and is resented.

Two striking examples of the unwillingness of people to disfranchise themselves may be cited. The Prohibition Amendment was in the Constitution for about thirteen years. Yet we have never heard of a single citizen, however opposed to prohibition, who refused to swear to support the Constitution, or to vote for a representative who would swear to support the Constitution, during all those years.

The next example is on the other extreme. Many good, noble, intelligent and devout men, outside the Covenanter Church, gave their time and strength to advocate the Christian Amendment, especially in the earlier years of its history. They knew well the character of the Constitution. One of them wrote a strong tract on "The Religious Defect of the Constitution of the United States." Yet, with remarkably few excep-