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I.

JONATHAN EDWARDS.

THE 5th of October marked the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of this great and good man. In many parts of the country notice has been taken of this fact. Especially in New England, the region of his birth, and to which the labors of his life belonged, have fresh laurels been wreathed for his brow. But it is doubtful if any part of the country, or any section of the church, can pay him as sincere a tribute as the Southern Presbyterian Church. He thought as we still think on the great doctrines of grace, being a zealous Calvinist, and was in accord with the Presbyterian Church in his views of government, though he lived and wrought and died in the Congregational Church. If, therefore, any class of persons should honor the name and cherish the memory of Edwards, those should do so who hold Calvinistic views of doctrine, and Presbyterian principles of polity.

Moreover, while Edwards commands our admiration on many grounds, yet his chief title to our esteem is the almost unparalleled excellence of his Christian character. His life was radiant with the beauty of Christ, sweet and fragrant with all the tender and winsome graces of the Holy Spirit. To pass his life in review, and reflect on those qualities that marked him as the eminent Christian, must be a wholesome spiritual exercise.

The story of his life, quiet and uneventful for the most part, is quickly told. He did not figure as the hero in any great and thrilling conflict; there were few dramatic episodes to give variety to the usually smooth tenor of his career; but his days

## HOMILETIC NOTES.

## "IF HE FOUND ANY OF THIS WAY."

"And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."—ACTS ix. 2.

SAUL the zealot: Paul the apostle! If we had separate biographies of the two, would we dream they were the same? Saul, cursing the Nazarene and his followers with every breath, not content with the murder of Stephen and harassment of home disciples, but "persecuting them to strange cities," going an hundred miles to drag the fugitives to punishment, and Paul, "in journeyings often" facing every peril and privation from love to Jesus and his people, present an amazing contradiction. This chapter furnishes the key to the enigma, in the story of the supernatural transformation, by which Saul the persecutor became Paul the preacher, he was never weary of telling it, as it filled the early church with adoring wonder.

The text, "If he should find any of this way, whether men or women, he should bring them bound unto Jerusalem," belongs to his former life.

How was he to find them? By inquiring of the heads of the synagogues, to whom he had letters, what Jewish families had ceased to attend the Saturday service; of informers, who of the Hebrew colony were known to be holding separate meetings; and as the leaders and most of the members were bold and zealous propagandists, he would have no difficulty in locating them. If his plans had not happily miscarried, and he had chosen to go deeper, he would have found them marked by what were not Jewish characteristics: faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah, submission to him, and patient waiting for his return.

Some of this way, men and women, have existed ever since. How shall we go about to find them in our day, not with deadly, but friendly intent?

Diogenes the Cynic, walking in broad daylight the streets of Athens with lighted lantern, when questioned, replied, "I am hunting for a man," a caustic criticism upon Athenian citizenship! Let us equip ourselves with the searchlight of Holy Scripture, and go seeking among our race "men and women of this way."

1. Shall we turn its broad sheen of light through the transiently opened door of the gambling den? Of all vices, gambling is perhaps the most mastering; the passion becomes uncontrollable. Ordinarily it hides behind shut doors; but sometimes, under the protection of society, it flaunts itself brazenly in drawing-rooms and marts of trade. Happily, in our city legal lottery gambling no longer, as it did formerly, spreads its net for the young and unwary at every street corner; its nefarious traffic has been driven into corners. Now, as the chief inducement of gambling, whatever its protean form may be, is gain—money, and what money will bring—it surely cannot be the pursuit of such as have laid up their treasures in heaven; and that which loves darkness cannot be the practice of “children of light.”

2. Shall we, some balmy summer’s Sabbath morning, turn our searchlight upon the multitude filling the many coaches of the excursion train? Here and there will sometimes be found a church member, strangely out of place in the crowd composed of godless people and nominal Christians, who feel no impropriety, for they have been taught that, after mass, Sunday is a holiday. Such, on the contrary, feel the need of excuse, such as scantiness of purse, lack of time, need of recreation. A dollar or two has been saved, a few hours for business, at the cost of a wounded conscience and offended Lord. Suppose there is a wreck, and many are wounded, some laid by the side of the track dying, and our professor saved. Imagine him kneeling and whispering in the dulling ear, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!”

3. Shall we turn our searchlight into the drinking saloon? Time was when, in this city, the lunch table and the liquor bar were inseparable, and the habit of treating customers or closing a bargain with a dram was universal. Happily, times have changed, and the Christian has now no excuse for visiting such places. If consistent, he will avoid the appearance of evil; if temperate himself, he will not lure the weak into danger by his example. A man is shot fatally on the street; will any one send to the nearest saloon for a Christian to instruct and comfort him?

4. Will we be more successful if we turn our light next upon the race-track—upon the excited betters, or hardly less excited spectators? Possibly we might find some cold professor or young Christian caught in the meshes of fashionable society, but ill at ease in her surroundings, and glad when it is all over. As this is but another

form of gambling, we shall not expect to find believers in such a crowd. We will not find there many men and women of this way.

5. Shall we turn our searchlight in the direction of the theatre, some Sunday night, or any week night? Let us be fair and just, which some of its opponents are not. To some the very name, playhouse, is a red rag. To enter it once, under any circumstances, is as truly a sin as to lie once, to steal once! Such unreasonableness, put down to ignorant fanaticism, only harms the cause. Now, I admit that I have never attended a play proper; but this does not bar criticism, for there are other reliable sources of information, reports of those who go, bill posters, press dramatic column, and admissions of actors themselves. Further, I am a lover and student of Shakespeare's plays; have in my desk a critique of *Hamlet*, written two vacations since, and would like, did other things not forbid, to see *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, interpreted by some master of the histrionic art. I do not hesitate to quote the poet in this pulpit. Why, our children in the nursery are actors and actresses, rehearsing, in the wide land of make-believe, the comedies and the tragedies of coming life; and Jesus, who saw the street children of Jerusalem at it, illustrates, by their experience, the contradictory attitudes of his generation toward him and his forerunner. I admit, further, that there are worthy actors and pure actresses, clean plays and chaste acting.

But, now, on the other hand: The average character of followers of the stage as a profession is not high, and there are stars, swinging openly, defiantly, away from the orbit of virtue, to whom, if their course is not changed, is reserved the blackness of darkness forever; and while the majority of theatre-goers are what they now are, and managers have an eye to profits, the average play will not be wholesome. I once heard the late Dr. Palmer remark, "Virtue is too humdrum an affair to interest the public, so vice is used to spice the entertainment." We have just seen a similar statement from one who should know, herself an actress in unwholesome plays, Clara Morris. She is reported in the *Literary Digest* as observing, "The drama deals in aberrations; all interesting occurrences are aberrations, many of them aberrations from the straight rule of rectitude."

Some noted actresses have confessed the corrupting influence of the stage on professionals, for example, Charlotte Cushman, and more than one has on this ground dissuaded ambitious young girls from seeking this avocation.

It is idle, while the church is in the minority, to attempt, as has been suggested, by attendance, the elevation of the stage. As for occasional attendance, when a great tragedian or comedian is announced, or only when the play is known to be clean, what of the example? Does the public keep note and observe absence at other times? And the presence of a Christian once will encourage others to attend constantly and indiscriminately. And what of Paul's rule of putting a restraint upon personal liberty where its exercise will cause a brother to offend? As for the average play, we submit a test: tell the whole thing next morning, in the cold light of the breakfast table, to the assembled family, and not blush for shame! Shall we flash our searchlight upon parquette, dress circle or pit, to find "men and women of this way"?

6. Reverse, now, the lens a half-circle, and we turn it, in hope of successful search, toward the house of God, or rather to Sabbath assembly, for God's people have been constrained, for various reasons, to assemble in strange places, in upper room and school of Tyrannus, by river brink, in catacombs of the dead, in snowy mountain tops, and dark caves and hidden glens, as well as in buildings dedicated to him. But in all ages and circumstances they have loved to meet together for worship, and the "How amiable are thy tabernacles" of David finds modern expression in—

"I love thy kingdom, Lord,  
The house of thine abode."

Pliny describes the early Christians as meeting before light on the first day of the week, and singing hymns to one Christ. Happily for them, many attend who are not yet Christians, but in a fair way to be; but when one is never willingly absent, and takes manifest interest in every part of the service, you may know you have found what you have been looking for.

7. Again, turn the light on the Lord's Supper, and we shall be more successful. All communicants are not participants; but where there are correct views of the Supper, and discriminating preaching, the majority are "men and women of this way."

8. Turn, now, the light upon the home. Should you find every sleeping chamber temporarily a closet, the fire alight on the family altar, children being reared in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, you may safely believe parents, sons and daughters are of this way.

9. And, finally, could we make our light an x-ray, but with greater clearness, penetrating the walls where dwells the inner self, and should find repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and communion with the invisible, we could afford to close our lantern slide and cease our search, for we have found "men and women" such as Saul, in the days of his ignorance, was seeking to find, that he might destroy, but in after years loved with all the might of his big heart.

*Application.*—Three distinct impressions have possibly been made upon as many classes:

1. Some of my unconverted hearers, having hitherto only hazy ideas of the second birth, have been thinking that the difference between themselves and the new-born is so slight as easily to be overcome, whenever it is willed. Now, you realize what a tremendous change is involved. May it startle you into immediate attention to the business of your personal salvation.

2. Possibly some unhappy professor has awakened to the fact that this change has never by him been felt. Thank God for the discovery of your mistake while it is correctible. Leave your name on the church roll, stay away from the communion for the present, if you cannot come conscientiously, and give no sleep to your eyes nor slumber to your eyelids until a better foundation is found. The path is still open to the cross.

3. Many of you have discovered a pleasing resemblance to the experience described. Rejoice and give thanks; press on; climb higher; for it is of you, and such like, that the Master was speaking when he said, "Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

R. Q. MALLARD.

*New Orleans, December, 1903.*

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#### THANKSGIVING FOR REVERSES.

"We glory in tribulations also."—ROMANS v. 3.

It is to be deplored that in the thanksgiving proclamations the Christian faith is so scrupulously ignored. The religion of Christ lies at the very foundation of our national and state prosperity,