

THE PULPIT

A Magazine of Sermons.

Volume xix.

January to June

1900.

“And how can they hear without a preacher?”—ST. PAUL.

**PUBLISHER:
G. HOLZAPFEL,
• CLEONA, PA.**

DOES RELIGION PAY IN THIS LIFE?

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TEXT.—“Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold we have forsaken all and followed thee: what shall we have therefore?”—Matthew xix: 27.

WE have forsaken everything and are following you; now what is there in it for us? A natural question, even if it does startle a little when worded as we have just worded it. It is presumable that the other eleven were glad to have the question put, and that Peter simply asked what the others would have liked to ask but did not quite venture to. The husbandman puts his seed in the ground because confident that more will come up than goes down. That is agriculture; and it is business. When Peter fished with the hook and line, the bait he threw away was not so much as the fish he caught. His experience with material interests put him upon supposing that the new life he was now entering, in becoming a follower of Christ, was an investment that ought somehow to pay, and to pay him.

No doubt there is a certain impressiveness and moral charm about a deed done without regard to reimbursement, that there is not in a deed calculated with reference to dividend; but unfortunately we are not as exalted in our lives as we are in our admirations. If Christ had died hoping for something again, history would hardly have celebrated His crucifixion, nor would the sacrifice have contained an element that deserved to be called redemptive. Still human nature is rather a frail affair and requires a deal of encouragement. If we were perfect, the mere fact that a thing is right would be all the motive that would occur to us to be necessary in order to our doing it. But if we are at present so constituted as to be unable to

mount with wings, we must do the next best thing and climb up on a trestle. We are not ideal people and therefore ideal motives are not always quite available.

It is, therefore, gratifying to see that some of even the noblest characters of Bible history were helped and encouraged by considerations of compensation that would reimburse for present losses. Great Moses, who seems to have taken more comfort than most in doing what was right, however expensive that might be to his pleasure and prospects, nevertheless—so we are told—was encouraged to endure out of “respect to the recompense of reward.” Even Paul strengthened his old heart, when it was a little tired, by feeding on the prospect of the “crown” that was to be awarded him when his course was exactly finished. Perhaps neither Moses nor Paul finally lived the glorious lives of wearisome warfare they did because of any reimbursement that was to be made to them farther on, but clearly it helped to keep them in good spirits to know that Christian living meant income as well as outgo, and that the kernels put under ground were issuing in still more kernels above ground.

There is a great deal said about the things that have to be given up as a condition of entering the kingdom of heaven, but not as much said about the way a man is reimbursed for his expenditure. We are ready to exchange citizenship in the kingdom of this world for citizenship in the kingdom of God, if the latter kingdom will do more for us and be a greater joy to

us than the other, and if it will commence to be a greater joy without our being obliged to wait too long for it. The world is going to estimate this commodity in the same way precisely that it estimates any other commodity offered to public tenure, on the basis, namely, of the tangible product it yields and the congenial outcome which issues from it.

People who are outside of the kingdom come into the sanctuary and hear the truth presented and their intelligences respond to it; they hear duty presented and their consciences respond to it; and then go away making a quiet and thoughtful inventory of the things they will have to give up in becoming Christians! Of course they have had no experience of the profit there is in being a Christian; seed does not come up till it is planted; so that all they know for a certainty is what they are going to lose by the process; and they will lose considerable; but all they want just then to be sure of, is not simply how much they are going to lose, but whether the loss is going to be greater or less than the profit. Nobody cares how much he loses, if he loses it in a way to bring back more than he expends. And it is at the moment when certain loss is being balanced over against possible gain, that he needs nothing so much as to know that others, who have taken the step and made the investment, have thrived and grown rich upon it. We are not saying this in the way of a criticism. A man runs a risk in becoming a Christian; that is to say, there is nothing in his own experience yet that makes it perfectly certain to him that he will not regret having become such after the step has been taken. It is at that critical moment that he needs most of all, not more preaching, not more thinking, not more of the Spirit of God even, but more reinforcement and encouragement from those who have made the venture, run the risk of the investment, and found that celestial stocks yield larger and steadier dividends than worldly and fleshly ones, and that it pays, pays handsomely and pays now, to be a citizen in God's kingdom.

In going on to speak of what a man

gains by being a Christian we must however be understood as using the word "Christian" in a sense that is quite close and careful. The word is used with such a variety of meanings as to leave it quite indefinite as to what in particular is intended by it, or whether anything in particular is intended by it. For instance: a man may be said to be a Christian in his beliefs without anything very decisive being thereby predicted of his own personal spirit and quality. I ask a man is he is a Christian, and he says he thinks he is, for he accepts the Apostle's Creed or the Thirty-nine Articles, or the Westminster Confession of Faith—as it may be. His answer does not satisfy me, for while it tells me what he thinks, it tells me almost nothing about him. A man can think one thing and be another; we all do that. Nor does it come very much closer to the point for him to express the belief that he is a Christian, grounding such belief on the general fair quality of his behavior. Telling me how he acts does not tell me much about him. A man can do one thing and be another. We all are that. The Pharisee was that: "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers: I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess." Which was rather flattering considered as an inventory of behavior, and yet did not at all cover the ground that it was our Lord's first idea to have covered.

In the make-up of each man's nature there is a stratum deeper than where he does his acting, his thinking or even his believing, and it is that underlying ground that comes in question in any attempt to deal seriously with matters just now in hand. It is that underlying ground that Christ always puts His finger upon in dealing with His disciples. He stood for nothing less with them than the adoption into their hearts of so much of Him as they understood to be the supreme motive of their life, so that not their acts only, nor their thoughts and opinions merely, but themselves, in the innermost fibre of their tendencies and affections, became Christ-dominated. In connecting themselves

with Him they disconnected themselves from other things so far as other things being allowed to dictate to them was concerned. They distinctly appreciated the kingdom of this world, and, before they were through, at least, just as distinctly appreciated the kingdom of God and of His Son Jesus Christ, and let themselves stand under the latter kingdom with an unqualified commitment of themselves to its behests and to the will of Him who is its supreme head. So that there was to them no overlapping of kingdoms, no division of loyalty, no taint of compromise, but a devotion that was simple, unique and comprehensive. This particular feature of the matter we have traversed before and recently, and have no purpose of reviewing it now; only when it is a question of the compensations that a Christian is going to receive in return for being a Christian, we wanted it understood in what sense exactly the term Christian is being used by us. We mean by it the sort of a man that Paul was when, declining the dictation of this world, he said, "For me to live is Christ;" the sort of men that the disciples were when they could say, through Peter, "We have forsaken all and followed Thee." It means so complete a surrender to God and His will that nothing is left unsurrendered. Now we are on sure ground and can go and speak confidently of the compensations.

The first compensation (the only one that time will admit of now), that comes to a man if he is a Christian of the type just named, is, that it silences the quarrel inside his own heart. A man does not need to know a great deal about himself, or about other people, to be aware that outward circumstances go but a very small way in deciding the question of the inward quietness and comfort of his own mind. There is to me nothing more impressive or suggestive than the unruffled and irrepressible serenity of certain men and women whom I have personally known, whose physical condition and natural surroundings were so empty of luxury and so barren indeed of the "necessities," as to make anything like content seem al-

most ridiculous. It takes a man a great while to get over imagining that joy is a flower that is to be plucked from a stalk of exterior conditions. Probably ninety-nine one hundredths of the efforts that are being made to secure happiness are made along the line of effecting a pleasant adjustment between ourselves and our surroundings. I am not arguing that a man ought to make his surroundings uncomfortable. But it is the quiet joy that is in a man's heart that does a great deal more to beautify his circumstances, than the beauty that is in his circumstances can do to create a quiet joy in his heart. It means a great deal more for a man to be at peace with himself, than it does for him to be at peace with his surroundings. A discord that a man carries in his own soul will convert into in-harmony the sweetest music that could be rendered by any earthly orchestra or even by the choirs of heaven.

As soon as one commences earnestly to think about this, it begins to seem very strange that men make such prodigious efforts to build up an outside heaven and devote so little attention to the heaven that is interior especially when our Great Teacher has told us so distinctly that the kingdom of heaven is within us, and especially, too, when we have known personal instances that illustrate the fact with such beautiful persuasiveness.

The story of Mr. Hyde and Dr. Jekyll, given to the world a few years ago, produced the impression it did because it told people, in a manner so masterly, that which they had already known or at least felt. Nothing is so interesting to us as that which we already know! The story was a sort of biographic sketch of the people that read the story. It showed that in general each man is conscious of being divided into two men, and showed the alternating experience of the two in us, and the cross purposes at which those two work, and the interior jumble in which they succeed in keeping things because of the differing ends they pursue, and the divergent loyalties they are yielded to. The art of

serenity is the art of getting rid either of Jekyll or of Hyde. Viewed from one standpoint, it makes very little difference which. Whichever of two discordant notes is silenced, it means an end of the discord. I can envy the serenity of a brute that is nothing but a brute and that is surrendered to only one set of impulses. Those impulses may be brutal, fleshly, material, but there is no other note sounding in him that jars on that tone and makes a discord with it. If there is such a thing as a personal Satan, as there seems good ground for supposing there is, then he is a being that is so unmodifiedly and untaintedly bad that there is nothing in him that is not bad. There is nothing left in him that makes it uncomfortable for him to be bad! He can enjoy his depravity as a brute can enjoy his brutality. He is at peace with himself, and that is the secret of all serenity.

It was in this line precisely, although with reference to the world at large, that Christ was speaking when He said, "I am not come to bring peace but a sword." The first effect of His coming was, as He foretold, to set men at variance with each other. Alongside of the note of selfishness and lust that was ringing through the world, He sounded a tone that was distinctly at another key. And the clearer and sharper that note was sounded, the harsher and the more disquieting the discord. The tumultuousness of the world is due not to the fact that it is so wicked, but that wickedness and righteousness are struggling in it alongside of each other, and that the dynasty of the children of God, and the dynasty of the children of Satan, are both striving for the supremacy and the monopoly; and there will be no peace till one or the other of the competitors is completely and definitely defeated. Now that is the same duel, only on a broad historic scale, that is being maintained in the hearts of a very large proportion of men and women. They are not restless and unhappy because they are so bad, nor restless and unhappy because they are so good. Their disquiet is due to the fact that they are just enough of both to be kept in a

condition of unstable equilibrium—bad enough so that their goodness gives them no comfort, and good enough so that their badness gives them no comfort. That is why direct preaching makes men uneasy—it makes more sharp the controversy between their two inner tendencies by making more distinct one of the two tones whose discord is the real occasion of the controversy.

The more wicked a man is, the more uncomfortable the first beginnings of Christianity in him will be certain to make him, for the remorse which he experiences at the crisis, is simply another name for the pain that is caused him by the discord there is between what he is in his life and what he is in his aroused moral perception. What he is, and what he ought to be and might be, lie so near together in his feeling, and yet are so distinct from one another and so contradictory to one another, that he becomes consciously torn in two in his sensitiveness to both. He may not think it all out in so many words, but it is the fact in his case and is easily enough recognized by those of us who have experienced it.

In all such cases the bitterness of self condemnation does not proceed from the fact that the kingdom of Satan has supreme and exclusive sway over us. If it did, we should be beyond remorse; it takes more than one tone to make a discord; it proceeds from the fact that the kingdom of God has never quite let go of us either, and that we have never allowed it quite to let go. Now when this crisis of remorse is reached there are two ways of dealing with it. The cheapest and least exhausting way is to withdraw from the dominion of Satan a certain amount of the territory of one's affection, interests and loyalty, and to sign over that much territory to the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, and to divide the area with a bisecting line that is so impartial, that neither can Satan be jealous of Christ, nor Christ be jealous of Satan.

Here are two kingdoms within the confined area of one man's little soul, two kingdoms that in their innermost genius have nothing in common, are

in deadly hostility, and neither of the two anxious for anything so much as to compass the reduction and conquest of the other. This is in one sense the cheapest way in which the thing can be arranged, but there are very few cheap things that are worth anything. And so far from that sort of adjustment being likely to contribute to the interior harmony of a man's life, it is the most ingenious contrivance possible for generating discomfort and for converting inward experience into solid and chronic discord; for it takes pains to emphasize each of the two tones that the discord is made out of, and puts so nearly an equal emphasis upon the two that neither stands any chance of being drowned out by the other. Genius, no matter how long it had been to school, or how many times it might have rehearsed, could not have invented a scheme more easily prolific in suspense and personal disquietude.

And that, let me say in all confidence, is the secret of a very large percentage of the unrest of men and women who call themselves Christians. They imagine that they are at peace with God and they are not even at peace with themselves. They come into the church; they go into their closet, and in their conference with the truth, and in their communion with the Holy Spirit, they feel the deep stirring of all those impulses that connect with the higher experiences of life. These make them take a more firm hold upon the finer relations of man with man and upon the great realities that range themselves beyond the frontier of what is only selfish. Then with this divine note sounding within them they go out of the church or retire from their closet, and let themselves down to the key of a note that is sounded in them by instincts and ambitions that are tainted. And the inconvenient circumstance in the case is that while we are singing so much of the music of our lives as is composed in the lower key, the other higher note keeps going right on. A man or woman meets our Lord at His Table and there grows in the heart an experience of the blessedness of that Lord as shown in His gentle holiness,

in the sweetness of His judgments and in the tender readiness with which He gave Himself away for the sins and sorrows of the world. Then such an one goes back perhaps into the world again and slips down into doing as the world does; lets himself be drawn at the chariot-wheel of the world's usages and motives; becomes self-aggrandizing, indifferent to distress, animal, perhaps brutal. And yet all of that does not erase the Communion-table or extinguish the Cross! Both notes keep sounding. All of that is exceedingly inconvenient, and often becomes so inconvenient that after a while one will study to avoid those occasions where the higher cord will be liable to be set vibrating, will draw away from the Sacrament; absent himself from the place of prayer and still the discord by stilling the upper string. All of this permanent unrest and chronic wretchedness of people who pass as Christians is perfectly apparent to the world, and tells against Christianity terribly in the world's esteem. As a means of making Christianity winsome to popular regard, one Christian who has exterminated the world, the flesh and the devil from his heart; who has had power and grace to tear out the under string; left chance for a melody in his soul that is untainted by flatted wires; knows only one Lord; has no poor averages to strike between the empire of God and the empire of Satan; has no orbit to describe that carries him once in so often through the opposite poles of spiritual exaltation and fleshly degradation; but is all over at peace with God and therefore all through at peace with himself—one such Christian, I say, counts more as an argument in the esteem of an observant and appreciative public than a thousand professors whose Christianity consists principally in realizing how uncomfortable it is to try being at one and the same time sufficiently saintly to preserve spiritual appearances and encourage future expectations and sufficiently unsaintly to keep in with a carnal nature that is selfish and animal and whose only concern is with the things that perish with the using.

That then is one reimbursement

that a man gains for what he gives up in becoming a Christian—becoming a Christian I mean in the hearty way in which the disciples did when they could say, "We have forsaken all and followed Thee." He leaves some things behind him that he would like to take, but there is a deep and a steady joy in doing the sincere will of God that no mixing of God's will with the will of this world knows anything about. I not only testify that which

I do know. I know very well what it is to try to satisfy God and the natural heart at one and the same time, and also what it is to have, for a season at least, every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and I know that whatever the latter feeling may cost it yields a great deal more than it costs and that a great many more kernels came away in the harvest than went under ground in the planting.