



CHRISTIAN ZEAL.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

THIRD PRESBYTERY OF NEW-YORK,

IN THIRTIETH-ST. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

JULY 5, 1854.

BY

J. W. C. PENNINGTON, D.D.,

MODERATOR.

NEW-YORK.

PRINTED BY ZULLE & LEONARD, 109 CANAL STREET.

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S E R M O N .

"AND his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."—JOHN 2 : 17.

OR, *literally*, "consumed me." Association is one of the most obvious and powerful laws of our mental constitution. Through its operation even the most careless observer not unfrequently finds himself aroused by vivid recollections of facts and events past. And much more true is it, that the thoughtful observer can scarcely see an act or hear a word of an earnest, faithful agent without receiving impressions more or less important. It is consistent with the philosophy of thought that the most singular occurrences should produce the deepest and most powerful reflections. The occurrence may be as singularly out of the usual course as a miracle is aside from the laws of nature, and yet it may be as singularly wise in its adaptation to the end in view, namely, the production of thought and reflection. These observations have been suggested by the connection in which our text stands. The Saviour had been spending some days in Capernaum, (his own city, Matt. 9 : 1,) in company with his mother and his brethren. He had just performed the beginning of his miracles at the marriage in Cana of Galilee. From thence he seems to have went at once into the social circle at Capernaum, where it is said "he continued many days." And these were, doubtless, days of devotion, not only preparatory to the Jewish feast, which was at hand, but also preparatory to his public ministry

upon a theme worthy of exertion. On this theme the mind concentrates itself, here it dwells, here it thinks, here it plans, and here it vows; on this theme the intellect throws the brilliancy of its light; on this theme the heart pours its warmest emotions. Thus viewed and thus prepared, the theme is taken to our embrace. It is loved with Godlike affection; our whole being becomes absorbed in it; the eye sees it, the mind grasps it, the understanding comprehends it, and the heart loves it. This gives us an appropriate view of the nature of Christian zeal. It is intense love for the objects of Christian labor, with an impassioned and ever-burning ardor to magnify, extend, and give prominence to these objects. They thus become a part of the intellectual, moral, and experimental being. *Such is zeal*, biblically. It was the burning fire shut up in the bones of the ancient prophet, and which made it more wearisome to him to forbear than to speak the word of God. It was the tongue in the mouth of the Apostles, when against great opposition they said, We can not but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

II. It will now be viewed in another aspect; I mean *its Practical Power as an Element of Usefulness*. The power of Christian zeal lies,

1st. In its eminent *discretion*. While it may have the bravery of the warrior, the courage of the martyr, and the boldness of a patriot, it is nevertheless preëminent for its discretion; and discretion in Hooker's lucid sense: he says that "Discretion is not only prudence and knowledge to govern one's self, but it is also management." By this he means ability to govern others, or time, place, ways, and means of success. The Saviour's zeal was always discreet in this sense. He did an act on this occasion which he would not have attempted on any occasion in the same form. The Jews' pass-over was at hand—an institution whose recurrence always brought afresh to the Jewish mind God's mercy and wisdom in their deliverance out of Egypt—an institution which was connected with their patriarchs, their prophets, and which embodied many of their promises, shadows, and symbols in regard to the Messiah of whom the Paschal Lamb was a type.

impossibilities, her Christlike discretion will not let her undertake impossibilities at an inauspicious moment; she discriminates between what is *possible* and what is *probable*; she is an invaluable friend, for she never forsakes her allies; she is a wary antagonist, for she never ceases to watch for *the time* to strike for victory; she inspired the ministry of *Noah* one hundred and twenty years, while preaching righteousness and building the ark; she stood with Moses before the haughty oppressor of Israel, in Egypt, while faithful to his trust he delivered his message from God: "Let my son go that he may serve me, and if thou refuse to let him go, behold I will slay thy son, even thy first-born." She travelled with the people around the walls of Jericho once a day for six days, and the seventh day seven times, and so preëminent was her discretion here that she suffered not her people to shout till the long, loud blast of the trump of victory was heard. At this signal she bade them shout, when one united voice rent the air and the walls of Jericho came to the ground. She staid with Mordecai at the court of Ahasuerus while she faced all the frowns and overcame the diabolical schemes of that wicked Haman; and time would not suffice to tell of all her similar victories. In her history this truth is illustrated, that *the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong*.

3d. Christian zeal is eminently *diffusive*, which will further illustrate its *usefulness*. It will travel into distant lands. It will hunger in barren regions. It will face perils among savage and half-civilized tribes. It will go under the torrid zone, into pestilential climes, or amid perpetual frost, and still it is zeal seeking only to spread the glorious gospel of the blessed God through every land and among all nations, and to dispense its benefits to every class of men. The Saviour plainly indicated his contempt of the gold and silver coins which he poured out: so true zeal despises the riches of this world comparatively. Yet, like the Saviour, she would attire herself in the most attractive form, and with words of love and kindness upon her lips, walk about the streets and lanes, through highways and byways, visiting temples, palaces, as well as hovels of the lowest grade; always in search of the precious jewels of the Saviour's crown of glory, using her gold to feed immortal souls. Whether the question

eye of Dr. Chalmers saw at a glance the working of this, and determined to bring the Gospel to bear upon these masses. The point selected was the West Port, a district in the north-west part of the city, which, at the commencement of his operations, could not be surpassed in degradation by any district of any city in any country. He began by preaching in a school-house in the *West Port*. During the time Dr. Chalmers preached occasionally in the *West Port* school-house, one important fact came out to the observation of every one, namely, that wherever Dr. Chalmers preached, even to the poorest of the poor, or the most wretched of the wretched, the rich and refined would attend him even there: *as it was with his Saviour, so it was with him.* In the little school-house, on a Sabbath afternoon or evening, might be seen the finest ladies sitting side by side with the humblest servant-girls; in the aisles might be seen the epauletted officer standing with the humblest soldiers under his command; at the window outside, might be seen two heads, one the rich lord, the other his coachman. Encouraged by this success in laboring for the salvation of his poor fellow-citizens, Dr. Chalmers resolved to enlarge his operations. For this purpose his *ardent zeal* led him to attempt the erection of a neat substantial church-edifice on the *West Port*, to seat five hundred and twenty souls together with school room for three hundred children, and wash-houses; thirty thousand dollars were needed for this. Dr. Chalmers asked for this sum, and it was given, (I believe partly from this country,) and the *house was reared* and soon filled.

Dr. Chalmers began the *West Port* church by adopting the rule, that each member of the church and congregation must give something for the support of the Gospel and education. This was thought to be wild, but the thing was successful; poor as the majority of the people were, each one gave. We visited that church in 1849, and found it one of the most interesting in Edinburgh; there might be seen a congregation of five hundred persons, some of them once the most wretched in the city, most of them now clothed in their right minds; mingling with them many of the *élite*; a day-school of three hundred children, an evening-school of two hundred, a congregation supporting itself to the amount of seventeen hundred dollars—

Hudson, Grand streets, Broadway, etc., are packed from cellar to garret.

Again, it is an alarming feature of the case, that while church removals from down to up-town are of every-day occurrence, you will not, in a day's walk, see a church-edifice being reared in the lower part of the city.

An appeal in behalf of these lower wards may be rested upon another important point, namely, the immense interest centered there. Our 163 newspapers, 95 magazines, with nearly all our large publishing houses, are there; our ferries, which exert such influence upon the Sabbath habits of our city and suburb population, nearly all arrivals from abroad, are there.

It is here the immense emigration first comes into contact with us, and there receives its first impressions of our institutions; there is no equal portion of the American soil whose population should be pervaded so thoroughly with heaven as that of the lower wards of New-York. This question of church erection in the lower wards will have to be taken up upon its own merits. It should be viewed distinct and separate from the up-town church question. It is evident that the down-town population differs in some respects from that of up-town. Losing sight of this fact, the whole question has been placed in a false position. It is true that the substantial, church-going and church-sustaining population has removed from the old centres up-town; but this very fact has tended rather to increase the church-needing population below. Many of the old church centres are occupied by hotels, warehouses, and dwellings, leaving no traces that churches ever existed there; but still there are many human beings thronging these regions, and spending their Sabbaths, and for that reason need churches. The work of church erection up-town may *go on*; but it *must* also commence down-town. The up-town style of churches is too expensive for down-town; the remaining old churches down-town are too large; the work of demolition *must go on*. Many of the old sites are still good, and should be saved for the purpose; but few of the old edifices will answer. They must be smaller and cheaper; but neat, and substantial, and attracting. The population below will also need a ministry of a different stamp: a ministry not less skilled in learning or sound in theology, than the up-town ministry; but more ner-

so; and those who have not the money, will manage to wait about till the return of the procession. In either case, there is no more church, Sabbath, Sabbath-school, or Bible-class; for any who walk in or follow a funeral procession. Now, do the parties interested in Sabbath funerals dispense with the religious services of clergymen? Or are there clergymen who attend funerals on that day, at that hour, and under these circumstances? Who are they? And on what principle do they act? These are questions of importance.

3d. My position on the *slavery question* is well known. The subject has been brought before us in a new and most important aspect, and we ought to meet it like men of God. The vote of the *seventy-six*, who call upon the Southern Presbyteries for statistics in regard to the number of slaves in their churches, etc., I think, is a *manly vindication* of the principles of *Christian discipline*. The words *seventy-six* will hereafter be as memorable in Presbyterian history as that date is in American history. Common fame says that Presbyterians in this country own eighty thousand slaves; and that of this number, the New-School own at least forty thousand, and that these Presbyterian slaves are liable to all the evils of the system—no church, no Christian ministry, no Bible, no marriage, no parental control over children. This is a question of *fact*, which the Presbyterian *world* has a right to know. Some of *us* who have travelled abroad have been made to smart under the odium of this common-fame report. Now we wish to know whether the thing is true. Our Southern Presbyteries can give light on the subject; this we ask them to do at present. It is *just, kind, and reasonable*. If they have clean hands, let us see them. It does seem as if the zeal of the Lord of hosts had taken hold of this subject. It is to be deeply regretted that some leading Presbyterian theologians among us have, in their zeal, undertaken to justify slavery from the Bible; but even on this point, we only ask a *fair and open discussion*. The fast-day, thanksgiving, and Fourth-of-July sermons that have emanated from the American pulpit, on the Bible sanction of slavery, are not to be taken as standard theology on the question. The intelligent Christian world will review and compare them with other and older standards, and under the weight of impartial opinion they will sink to their level.

name, and to give life and power to his doctrines, what a different world this would be! What a revival of pure and undefiled religion—sinners converted—saints confirmed! Oh! how soon the world would be full of the knowledge of God! Amen!