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UNION SEMINARY REVIEW

A PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY

OCTOBER, 1915

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EDITORIALS

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THE UNION SEMINARY REVIEW

VOL. XXVI.

OCTOBER, 1915.

No. 3.

*BROWNING AND THE BIBLE.

BY PROFESSOR MAURICE G. FULTON,

Department of English, Davidson College.

It is safe to say that no other book has had the influence upon the literature of the world that the Bible has, and it is also safe to say that no other literature shows this influence to the same great degree that our English literature does. From Anglo-Saxon times to our day, English writers have been using the Bible as a treasury of material to an extent that is astonishing. My purpose, however, this evening does not allow me to give a roll of these writers, interesting though that would be. To particularize would be well-nigh endless, for the sense of duty toward man and God is the bone and flesh of English books in their age. My object is merely to study the influence of the Bible in the work of one poet.

As time goes on it is becoming evident that Browning has a message for our generation not to be found in the pages of any of his contemporaries, and that he has a special claim on our gratitude and reverence as the most virile and spiritually awakening mind in modern English poetry. But Browning is more than that. He is the great Christian poet of modern times. He has caught the inner spirit of the Christian faith as perhaps no

*An address delivered in the Presbyterian Church at Davidson College at the annual Bible Society meeting, 1915. In preparing the address for publication, no attempt has been made to remove the traces of preparation for oral delivery.

A MISSIONARY SERMON.*

By REV. J. ROSS STEVENSON, D. D.,

President of Princeton Theological Seminary.

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Matthew 24:14.

In these words the great teacher sums up the nations' supreme need, the world's paramount, though unconscious, desire, and the main business of the Church. He stood all alone in this position. For at the time the world despised his message. The nations took no more account of his mission than that of a common criminal, and although his few disciples expected a kingdom, they never dreamed that it could be established, or would be established, by the proclamation of good news. When Jesus laid down this program of world-wide evangelization it was not only in the face of universal indifference, but of growing hostility to all that the gospel means and aims to accomplish. The prospects were indescribably dark, men hated one another and were ready to spring at one another's throats like blood-thirsty wolves. The awful scourge of war was impending, and one catastrophe after another, earthquake, famine, pestilence was to fall upon the race, and it would seem as if the end of the world had come. False prophets would arise to misinterpret the throes of humanity; wickedness would so abound that good people would lose heart and courageous souls give up in despair. How could any one expect that amid such conditions the gospel of the kingdom could survive, much less make any headway? Any yet in spite of every obstacle, though from a human point of view it may seem to be utter madness, the gospel must be preached to all nations. This is the imperialism

*Delivered before the Society of Missionary Inquiry of Union Seminary, May 9, 1915, and printed at the request of students in the Seminary.

which Jesus would project into all national life; the supreme dominance of the truth as it is in him. This is the imperative of the gospel.

We have here the absolutely important thing to do, no matter how untoward or disheartening the conditions. It seems as if the situation to-day is much as Jesus forecast it centuries ago. Not only has nation risen up against nation, but the news of each day has mainly to do with war and rumors of war. We have gloried in our own national peace, and yet we are solemnized by a great dread of what may come to pass, when against our own will we are dragged into international strife, and now as never before we should be holding up the hands of President Wilson and all who are associated with him in united, earnest intercession. In our great mission station, at Elat, where there is the largest and most prosperous Presbyterian church in the world, a Red Cross station has been established. This means that war has been carried into the interior of the Kamerun Province, where the Germans have the support of the Bulu peoples, and the English and the French have secured the Fang tribes as their allies, and thus a most promising mission field is transformed into a battleground to settle the differences of so-called Christian nations. And yet the latest word from that station is to the effect that at a recent communion service eight thousand people participated. In the near East the ground is reeking with martyrs' blood, and we can almost hear the cries of despairing, dying women and children, and we know not when the tidings may come of missionaries having been massacred and the foundations of mission work razed to the ground. Among the warring nations aggressive Christian work has come to a standstill, and amid hard times here at home it has been a question how the furtherance of the gospel might be continued.

In the Orient, where religion is a national affair and the Chinaman is regarded as a Confucian, the East Indian a Hindoo, the Arabian a Mohammedan, the present bloody conflict is regarded as a Christian struggle, and the spectacle of Christians slaughtering one another makes farcical the gospel's message of peace and good will. There are those at home who

tell us that our whole civilization has broken down, that Christianity is a failure and that the Church should close up and go out of business. What are we to think of this amazing spectacle of race hatred, of national thirst for vengeance, of international strife and struggle, of world-wide catastrophe? Christ says to us as he did to his disciples, See that ye be not troubled. These things must needs come to pass, but the end is not yet. This gospel of the kingdom must be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all nations.

A moment's reflection would convince us that this imperative of the gospel is in line with the nation's paramount need. In times like these the most pertinent question is, what must a nation do to be saved? According to the wisdom of the world each nation must save herself by thinking only of herself and by caring only for herself. She must have that illumination and shrewdness which will enable her to enter the competitions of trade, influence and power, seek to checkmate each formidable rival, and so safeguard her own possessions, interests and prospects, whether by diplomacy or force of arms that the supremacy of her reign may be securely established. In other words as against righteousness, which is of faith, she must go about to establish her own righteousness of self-interest. She must seek to save her own life. And the word of the Master applies with as much force to the nation as to the individual—"Whosoever would save his life shall lose it." For what is a nation profited if she shall gain the whole world and lose her own soul? The righteousness of Israel, not issuing from confidence, faith in God, faith in men of whatever race as being the possible sons of God, became the mere veneer of hypocrisy, of sham religion and sheer selfishness and of death-breeding lust and sin. Do we wonder that Jesus could contemplate all the horrors of war with apparent serenity when he saw that only in this way could God humble and chasten the nations, and teach them that in His holy and righteous eyes they were despicable, undone sinners and that only a gospel of redeeming love and power could ever set them right with their heavenly Father and the rest of the human family?

Is this not being forced upon our attention to-day as never before? The fact of sin has been brought out within the past few months in all its tragic reality, and along with it a timely lesson as to the utter futility of science, education and culture and enterprise unaided by divine grace to eliminate selfishness, the root principle of sin, and make men and nations good and generous according to the high ethical standards of the Christian faith, and enable them to live together as members of one great family. Why has it been that a nation, nominally Christian, must conduct its affairs in a strictly selfish-interested and unchristian way? Why should not America set the nations an example of good will by laying by the sword, by doing away with fortifications and armaments, confident that by reasonable and just dealings with all peoples there will be no occasion of war? Two answers would probably be given. First, we cannot trust other nations to deal fairly and squarely with us. If we should disarm they would take advantage of our weakness and destroy our liberties and possessions. Secondly, our own policies, controlled more or less by national pride, race antipathies, vested interests, local and selfish prejudices have not yet reached the high level on which we can be sure that our treatment of other nations will commend itself to right-thinking men. In other words, we are not yet sufficiently Christian to deal on the simple platform of the Christian principles of righteousness, justice and patience with nations whom we regard as still less Christian than we are. What is the remedy for this diplomacy of distrust? The gospel of the kingdom, the doing of God's will in all departments and relations of life. A nation which does not have the gospel of Christ, the ethical life and power of a divine supernatural revelation cannot be dealt with on terms of Christian brotherhood until it gets that gospel. And the reverse is just as true: the nation like ours which has the institutions of enlightenment, freedom and progress based on the one and only foundation, Jesus Christ, is not in a position to lead other nations toward the goal of a kingdom of truth and good will until she stands ready to share, at the cost of any sacrifice, her highest blessing with the farthest and lowest races. To this

end the gospel must be proclaimed at home with all boldness in its application to the whole life of man so that we shall not be guilty before the world of glaring inconsistencies, and proclaimed abroad in its adaptation to the deepest needs and largest hopes of any and every man.

This imperative of the gospel corresponds to the world's real desire. The demand to-day is not so much a gospel for an age of doubt, but a gospel for an age of desire. In our time as never before the souls of men are thirsting for the living God, and the occasion for it is the trial and tribulation through which the world is passing. Isaiah declares, Let favor be shown to the wicked yet will he not learn righteousness. In the land of uprightness will he not behold the majesty of the Lord. We imagine that, given a favorable environment men are bound to be happy, and so we advocate, and very properly, legislation in the interests of childhood, and old age, in the interests of health, education, a living wage, better housing conditions and so on, but we must not overlook the fact that it is prosperity which makes most men selfish and unscrupulous and that along with the best surroundings there must be a divine power to change the heart and give to men the Spirit of him who came not to be ministered unto but to minister. And it often requires calamity to strip aside all that isolates and hardens, and to open men's hearts to the message of God. "When the judgments of the Lord are in the earth the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness." When you think what the awful carnage and devastation of the present war has cost the world, surely it is as tragic a time as this old earth of ours has ever passed through, and is it any wonder that it has had a sobering effect and that the thoughts of men have been turning to the unseen and eternal?

It is not surprising to learn that in the countries now at war the churches are thronged to-day as they have not been for decades. A professor of the Sorbonne speaking recently in Geneva, Switzerland, alluded to the great change which had come over the young men of his land. They were no longer dissipated, bent on pleasure, satisfied with unworthy pursuits. They had become heroic, noble spirited, morally earnest, and

religiously zealous. It took the calamity of a country's invasion to do it. In our own Church we have recorded the largest number of accessions in all our history. A New York daily commenting on the Tabernacle meetings in Philadelphia drew the conclusion that this interest is symptomatic of our time. Men cannot be satisfied with anything short of the love and power of an infinite God. And the whole world is waiting for the fulfilment of Christ's word, the gospel must first be preached to all nations.

This is the supreme obligation resting upon the Church of Christ which he instituted to carry out his specific commission. We may take a great deal of comfort and inspiration from the fact that the time is most favorable. Many of our greatest missionary agencies came into existence in war times, for it is when men are seriously minded that they will give earnest heed to the great Captain of their salvation. We may strengthen our faith by recalling the achievements of the gospel. A hundred years ago the East India Company declared that the project of establishing the Christian Church in India was the most madly insane notion that had ever entered the mind of any human being. A hundred years later hear the lieutenant-governor of Bengal say, "In my judgment Christian missionaries have done more real and lasting good to the peoples of India than all other agencies combined."

It is not, however, a question of human testimony or expediency. We have the word of our sovereign Lord for it. This gospel must first be preached. No matter what the situation may be, how gloomy the prospects, how remote the hope of ultimate success, see that ye be not troubled. Here is one sublime, supreme enterprise to engage your thought and command your noblest endeavors, a conquest that does not represent the competition of wholesale destruction, but the co-operation of self-sacrificial love. If we are to carry out Christ's world program we must have the Pentecostal equipment. We must have the holy boldness of those pioneers of the faith, who hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus. They were few and weak in the eyes of the world. Their experience was meager, their resources were limited, their prospects were

disheartening, but they did have an unswerving confidence in the risen Lord of their lives, and they believed that his rule was the supreme thing in life and should be extended as rapidly as possible, and they took their lives in their hands and went out to do their utmost for him, dearer than any earthly potentate, the King of their souls. We see men and women to-day who have caught the same spirit out on the frontier, down amid the squalor of a city's congested population, in the mission station abroad. Think of those eighteen young men and women, accepted by our Foreign Board, ready to go to the ends of the earth for the sake of the name, if funds can be secured. Has the spirit of daring faith come into our own hearts? It must be if we are baptized with the Pentecostal fire.

“Oh, for a passionate passion for souls!
Oh, for a pity that yearns!
Oh, for the love that loves unto death!
Oh, for the fire that burns!
Oh, for the power that prevails,
That pours out itself for the lost,
Victorious power in the Conqueror's name,
The Lord of Pentecost!”