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SERMONIC.

PAUL AT ATHENS.

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Ye men of Athens, etc.—Acts xvii : 22-31.

THE methods and the utterances of the greatest missionary produced by Christianity must be well worth the study of all Christian workers. In his apostolate Paul chose great cities as the centres of operation, and was undoubtedly directed and assisted therein by the Holy Spirit. He was in Jerusalem, in Athens, in Rome—the cities that represented religion and culture and power. Perhaps for the generation existing in the nineteenth century there are few points in the great apostle's history more needful and profitable to study than his visit to Athens, because it presents to us the first contact of Christianity with culture as developed in high art and philosophy. These were the only fields for culture, as science cannot be said to have existed in that day.

Paul seems to have had no just idea of Athens before reaching that city; but his quick eye took in the strategic advantages of the place for Christian movement, and he sent back to Berea for Silas

and Timothy, that he might have these valued coadjutors in his apostolic work. In waiting for them he was not idle. He studied Athens. While thus engaged he employed every opportunity that presented itself to plant the seed of the Gospel.

The city was about sixteen centuries old when Paul saw it, and during a few of the centuries immediately preceding his visit it had been magnificently adorned by architecture and sculpture in the interests of the prevailing idolatry. Everywhere there were temples; the small were elegant, the large were magnificent. Everywhere there were altars to all the gods known to Greek mythology; and in the liberality and hospitality which ordinarily accompany spiritual indifference, there were to be found altars inscribed, "To the Unknown God."

The gratification of this æsthetic instinct could not blind Paul to the deadly cancer which was eating out the spiritual life of the people under this complexion of external beauty; nor did he for a moment feel that he was a mere curious traveler, or forget for a moment that he was a Christian missionary. On the Sabbath-day he reasoned with the

[The first several sermons are reported in full; the remainder are given in condensed form. Every care is taken to make these reports correct; yet our readers must not forget that it would be unfair to hold a speaker responsible for what may appear in a condensation, made by another, of his discourse.]

Athens. The system of philosophy in Paul's discourse is to-day maintained, and explained, and enforced, by more brains and moral power, and with more richness of illustration than ever before since Paul's voice was drowned in the mockery of the men who could sneer at what they could not controvert. And to-day a man's intellectual and moral worth, his height and breadth and weight among men, are all measured by that man's faith in the Man whom God has ordained to be the world's judgment, "whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

THE TRUE OBLATION.

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The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.

—Ps. li: 17.

IN the temple at Jerusalem stood two altars of sacrifice, the only ones whose stated use was allowed to the chosen people. They were the fitting representatives of the two distinct orders of sacrifice which entered into the cultus of the Jews. Standing, not strictly speaking within the temple itself, but within the court which enclosed it, and near the door which conducted into the "Holy Place," was the first of these altars, the great brazen "Altar of Burnt Offering." Sacrifices of various kinds were offered upon it, but that which constituted its crowning glory was that it was the altar of atonement, the only one in all the world on which, with the approval of heaven, sacrifices that were expiatory of guilt could be statedly offered. To this altar there were brought from the remotest borders, the sin-offering and the trespass-offerings, of the humblest as well as the greatest of the land. At its base flowed the blood of every victim that was slain. On its broad bosom it received, and with its fiery breath it consumed, the holocausts and hecatombs of the thousands of Judah. It was God's grand and impressive type of the one invisible altar upon which the one great

spiritual sacrifice of expiation for the sins of the world should in due time be made. The "enduring brass" of which it was composed, pointed to the eternal deity of our Lord, the altar which sustained and sanctified the humanity that was laid as an offering upon it. The never extinguished fire, and the ever recurring sacrifice pointed to the perpetual efficacy of the atonement which He should make. And thus, as with trumpet-tongue, this altar, standing hard by the door into the sanctuary, proclaimed that there is but one way of admission to communion with God, and but one way of entrance to heaven, and that through the one great expiatory sacrifice of Calvary.

But within the Holy Place, to be reached only through the door which led by the altar of burnt offering, was another, and less imposing place of sacrifice. It was the altar of incense, fit representative of an order of sacrifices that were not expiatory in their character, but of the entirely distinct nature of oblation. They were not like the former, offered with the view of atoning for guilt, and securing pardon for sin and acceptance with God. On the contrary, they pre-supposed the expiation of the guilt, and the acceptance of the person of the offerer. They were expressive of the consecration to God of the body and spirit which had been redeemed by the blood of the divinely appointed victim, and had been admitted to favor and communion with God. Of this order of offerings, the altar of incense was the typical, but by no means the exclusive seat. Many of the sacrifices on the great altar of burnt offering were of this order. The meat-offerings, drink-offerings, and peace-offerings, were all of this character. Even the burnt-offerings, as distinguished from the sin-offerings and the trespass-offerings, were oblational and not expiatory, as is seen in the fact that they were preceded by a sin-offering for purposes of atonement. They expressed the consecration of the whole self "a living sacrifice" upon the altar of God's service.

But this idea of oblation, found in these multitudinous sacrifices made upon the same altar with those of expiation, finds its most beautiful expression in the offering of the fragrant mixture upon the altar of incense. Composed of rarest and most costly ingredients, compounded only within the sacred precincts of the temple, and according to the formula which God Himself had prescribed, its white clouds wreathing heavenward, and its grateful odors pervading the sanctuary and regaling the sense, told of the delightfulness, both to heaven and to earth, of those devout aspirations, those climbing tendrils of affection, those hopes overleaping the boundaries of time, those spiritual—might I say transcendental?—exercises of the soul which only arise when, within the inner sanctuary, the heart redeemed with blood has been laid upon the altar of love.

It is, I need scarcely assure you, this second class of sacrifices of which the Psalmist is speaking when he says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." He is not referring to the sacrifices of expiation, but to the sacrifices of oblation. The atoning sacrifice, the great sin-offering, has already been completed. The blood which purchases pardon has been shed and has been sprinkled. The flesh has been consumed in the fires of holiness, and the expiatory smoke has ascended to heaven; and now the penitent, whose sin has been atoned for, whose acceptance has been secured, whose pardon has been sealed, approaches the golden altar, not to deprecate wrath, or to propitiate favor; not to purchase pardon, or to plead for ablution; but, as a forgiven sinner, an accepted suppliant, a reconciled son, to offer upon this altar the gifts which testify of gratitude and devotion—which give expression to the new principle of love which wells up with overflowing fulness in a heart redeemed from sin.

This is the order of sacrifice to which continual reference is made in the New Testament. To this belongs the "living sacrifice" (Rom xii: 1), to

which the apostle exhorts his brethren in Rome; the sacrifice and service of faith (Phil. ii: 17), of the Philippians, upon which he was willing to be poured out as a libation; the odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice well pleasing, acceptable to God (Phil. iv: 18), which these Philippians had made on his behalf; the "sacrifice of praise" (Heb. xiii: 15) with which God is well pleased; and the "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God" (1 Pet. ii: 5) which are rendered by the royal priesthood of believers. Chief of all these, and indeed including all these, is the sacrifice of which the Psalmist speaks in the text: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." Let us look at it and see the lessons which it conveys:

I. We see the spirituality of the service which God requires. That which is to be laid upon His altar is not something material, however rare or beautiful or costly it may be. The true oblation consists, not in the offering of bullocks or of rams, not in the presentation of the finest of the wheat or the richest of the oil; but in the offering of a spiritual sacrifice—the oblation of the soul upon the altar of God. We are prone to think that God's true people in ancient times had little conception of the spirituality of religion; that their service was a mere routine of ceremonial ordinances and ritual observances. Nothing can be further from the truth. Under the old economy, the sinner in whose heart the Spirit of God had wrought a genuine conviction of sin, could no more rest his hope of salvation in a mere compliance with the Levitic ritual, than one under genuine conviction now can be satisfied with a barren use of forms, or a lifeless attendance upon the ordinances and sacraments of God's house. There were many then, as, alas! there are many now, whose religious experience went no further than these mere externals of religion. But then, as now, wherever there was a genuine work of grace in the heart, the conscience could not be appeased by these. The soul, conscious of its deep-lying needs,

pressed its way in beyond mere forms and rituals into the great spiritual verities of which these were the outward symbols and types. It realized then, as now, that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Of this we have a signal instance in the text. David, so long as he was not convinced of the terrible guilt and pollution in which he had involved himself by his sin with Bath-sheba, may have felt much complacency in the holocausts and hecatombs which, with royal munificence, he offered upon the altar of the tabernacle. But when Nathan the prophet came to him with that searching message from God, and pointing his finger at him said, with words which the Holy Spirit winged with fire, "Thou art the man," then, overwhelmed with a sense of guilt, the royal penitent felt that no blood of bulls or goats could reach the measure of his deep defilement, no offerings of flocks or herds could reach the measure of his obligation for pardoning grace. And so he cried, "For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it. Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, oh God! thou wilt not despise." It must ever be so with any genuine religious experience, any real and profound conviction of sin. However we may content ourselves with fair externals now, in the day when "the iniquity of our heels shall compass us about," we shall realize, it may be to our everlasting undoing, that "God abhors the sacrifice, where not the heart is found."

II. We learn from the text that in the "sacrifices of God" the heart not only enters as an integral element, but constitutes the very essence of the sacrifice itself. The religion which God has instituted in this world, is pre-eminently the religion of love. Its fountains in the divine nature are the fountains of eternal and immutable love. Its outflowings are in channels of love. Its great constraining motives both in the Creator and the creature, both in the

Redeemer and the redeemed, are motives of love. It must follow, therefore, that the only true oblation is the oblation of love, the only true sacrifice the sacrifice of the heart.

Very significantly was this represented in the symbolism of the ancient tabernacle. The great brazen altar which stood without the holy place was the symbol of God's hatred of sin. The sacrificial knife that lay at its base, ready to bathe itself in the blood of the victim, represented the sword of God's eternal justice slumbering at the base of His throne. The fires that leapt up on that altar were the fires of retributive justice. The black smoke that rolled up in vast volumes to heaven told of his awful hatred of sin. Only the substitution of the innocent lamb for the guilty sinner spoke from that altar of God's love to the sinner mingling with his hatred of sin. But from that noisy court, filled with the groans of dying victims, and the piteous lowings of those appointed to death, where the air is redolent with the fumes of consuming flesh, and red streams of blood and black clouds of smoke meet the eye on every hand, we pass in now through the olive-wood gates and enter the holy place. What a change! Instead of distracting noises, only the faint echoes of which reach us through the cedar walls, there is a holy calm, unbroken save by the musical notes of the bells upon the vesture of the high priest. The sunlight falls through the open roof upon an altar of small dimensions, but of pure burnished gold. No streams of blood lie about its base. No slowly consuming flesh lies upon its bosom. Only the fragrant incense noiselessly melts away upon its living, glowing embers. Instead of the dense volume of black smoke, white wreaths of vapor, heavenly in their purity, rise from the altar, float gently upward, and are turned to gold in the morning sunlight. Instead of the unpleasant odor of consuming flesh, the delightful aroma of the fragrant balm pervades the room, regaling every sense, and the worshiper in this sweet seclusion

bows his heart in prayer, or lifts up, his voice in praise, feeling that surely this is "none other than the house of God and the very gate of heaven."

The holy place was the sanctuary of forgiven hearts. It was the retreat of those whose sins had been forgiven through the expiation upon the bloody altar without. True, they entered it then only vicariously in the person of the priest, "the Holy Ghost thus signifying that the way was not yet made plain by the sacrifice of Christ." But all in that sanctuary spoke of reconciliation and love. The altar was the altar of love. The flame upon it was the flame of love, and the costly offering of the fragrant spices was symbolic of the offering of the heart's best treasures, its loftiest ambitions, its richest affections, its purest and most fragrant devotions.

Here then have we another lesson for all time. Oh man, it is thy heart which the God of heaven demands as an oblation upon His altar; not thy hands, even though they be busy hands; not thy feet, even though they be swift feet; not thy brain, even though it be a tireless brain; not the homage of intellect to truth; not the stern bending of the will like the oak before the blast, but thy heart, oh man—thy heart, with its capacities to love and hope, to fear and trust—thy heart, with its wealth of affection. It is that alone which can be fuel for the flame upon the altar of love. Nothing but love will satisfy love. Upon that altar of redemption where the love of God to thee is burning with so quiet, holy a flame, the heart, thy whole heart must be laid, that under fires which burn but consume not, its purified affections, set free from earthly dross, may rise like the white cloud of fragrant frankincense to heaven, and be glorified in the light of the Sun of righteousness.

III. We see that in the "sacrifices of God," the true oblation is not only the heart, but the broken heart, that is, as it is defined in the same verse, the contrite heart, the heart broken in contrition for sin. This is one reason why the way which conducts to the altar of

oblation, leads fast by the side of the altar of expiation. It is that the lesson of sin may be learned—its exceeding sinfulness be made to appear; that men may look in type "upon Him whom they have pierced and mourn;" that they may realize that sin is a bitter thing, and say:

"O! how I hate those lusts of mine

That crucified my God;

Those sins that pierced and nailed His flesh,
Fast to the fatal wood."

It is therefore an essential element of this acceptable sacrifice that the heart shall be broken—transfixed with a sense of personal guilt and defilement, crying out with David in the earlier part of the Psalm: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin; for I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me." This it is which makes it so hard for man to lay upon this altar of oblation the acceptable sacrifice. If the way which leads up to it were not the bitter way of repentance and confession of sin; if a man might bring his heart as a whole heart, with its carnal pride unbroken, with its stubborn self-will unsubdued, with its estimates of personal merit unchanged! But oh! this humbling of self in the dust; this writing bitter things of one's self; this being made to possess the sins of one's youth; this gathering up all the buried misdeeds out of the musty past, conning them over with shame and anguish of spirit, until the heart is ready to burst with the agony of its self-condemnation; this telling of them all with shame and grief in the ear of God, and humbly suing for pardon through the sacrifice of Christ—this it is which keeps so many on the vestibule, gazing in, wishing themselves amongst the number of the accepted worshipers, and yet evermore remaining without, because their proud hearts refuse to be broken in the view of the Cross.

And yet, this is the acceptable sacrifice, and the only acceptable one. It puts man in his true relation as a sinner to the mercy of God. It makes it possible for Him to be "just and yet

the justifier of him that believes in Jesus." Blessed, indeed, is the man who has tasted the serene joy of that inner sanctuary, where the heart, broken by divine grace, yet sweetly healed even in the breaking, lies in the flame of God's forgiving and communing love, ever melting away, yet ever renewed, whilst its holy aspirations rise like the clouds of incense toward the heaven of eternal love.

SPIRITUAL HUSBANDRY.

By S. GRAVES, D.D., IN FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.—Jer. iv: 3.

ANCIENT PALESTINE was largely a farming country. Most of the inhabitants tilled the soil; and when the prophet came to them with this message they knew just what he meant. "Fallow ground" is not barren soil, but land that has once been under cultivation, then left to nature until a thick turf has gathered over it. It may be fertile, but in its fallow state it is waste and useless. It was not the soil of the ground that needed to be broken up, but the soil, the soul, of the nation.

From the middle of Solomon's reign, and onward, there had been a gradual decline in the piety and morals of the people. Bad kings had reigned in Jerusalem; worldly and ambitious priests had ministered at the altar. Influence generally strikes downward from the higher to the lower classes; and so the people had more and more corrupted their ways; had become idolatrous. The spiritual life was dormant. The soil was overspread with briars, and before the word of God could find place and make root in the national heart and conscience, the "fallow ground" must be "broken up."

The first thing in all moral and social and spiritual reforms, is this feature of husbandry—breaking up the fallow ground. Nations, society, churches, get into the "fallow-ground" condition,

and nothing can be done to improve or advance them until the plowshare is used. England was in this condition during the reign of the Stuarts, and it took the plow of 1640, which Cromwell held, and then the drag with iron teeth which William of Orange drove over the land in 1688, to prepare the soil of English life for the better things that have since grown and ripened there.

What called itself "the Christian Church" was choked by weeds and briars when God raised up Martin Luther and his collaborators to clear the field and "break up the fallow ground;" and lo! the Protestant faith, the Protestant churches, with all the new civilization which they have brought in, are yielding their fruits to-day in Europe and America. Communities get into this "fallow-ground" state; men of wealth become unenterprising, settle down to live at ease and on their incomes, and something is necessary to work off, to "break up" the apathy that creeps over the place.

But this is especially so in *Christian churches*. The Church is spiritual in its aims and forces. And it is so easy to become unspiritual, to lose the beautiful savor of Christ; and when this leaves, disappears, they fall into the "fallow-ground" condition. Churches, when they become rich; when, by the enterprise and energy and spirituality and sacrifices of former years, they have won a place in the community, are very apt to fall into this condition, and the seed which has God's life and salvation in it can make no vigorous root. Unless such churches work out from themselves, "break up the fallow ground" of contentment and self-satisfaction in their elegant appointments and easy surroundings, and get into large sympathy with missions, and give for them until their benefactions cut down into the quick of true sacrifice; unless they are going out after sinners, whom Christ was ever seeking, of whom the streets and the highways and the by-ways and the business places are full, they soon lose their Christliness and spiritual power. And instead of becoming the liv-