

RECONSTRUCTION.

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BY A. U. BOONE, D. D., MEMPHIS, TENN.

One of the deepest regrets of my life, and there are many, is that I am not a full graduate of this Seminary. The reason for this can be found partly in my fault, but more largely in my misfortune. I thought at the time that it could not be done. One of the wisest and best men I ever knew practically advised against it. But I believe now it could have been done, and ought to have been done. I give my word of warning to-day to every student who hesitates to make all possible preparation, and this word of warning comes out of the tragedy of the unprepared.

However, somewhere among my belongings is a small parchment upon which appears the signatures of three immortal men. In attaching their names to a certain statement concerning my partial attainments there was a stretch of conscience, but the names are there, and can be identified, and I am proud of them. They are James P. Boyce, John A. Broadus and Basil Manly.

I remember Dr. Boyce as a social success, a good business man, a strong preacher, a profound and devout theologian and a great seminary president. He was all of these, and more. But as I remember him, he was pre-eminently a man of prayer. One student, who had attended the Seminary and desired to return, gave as his reason that he "wanted to study Systematic Theology and hear Dr. Boyce pray". One Missionary Day, a number of letters were read from former students, who were on foreign fields. These letters were depressing and distressing. We were all in sorrow and in tears. At the close of the meeting the leader called on Dr. Boyce to pray. And how he did pray! How tenderly he referred to our

Great High Priest, "who could be touched with a feeling of our infirmities", and how lovingly and strongly He would support those who represented Him in this world. I do not recall a moment when any of us was ever as near the Gates of Glory as in that hour. One student, who was uncommonly noisy and self-assertive, was so overcome that he could not speak. I think he was dumb for two days. When he did speak this is what he said: "Boys, I'll tell you when Jim Peter was praying the other day I caught hold of my bench with both hands, for I declare before God I thought heaven and earth were coming together". And he was not the only one who thought so.

And what shall I say of Broadus? I suppose he was undoubtedly the greatest preacher of the nineteenth century. He was superior in many ways; but I believe his teaching power was the highest peak in all the range of his mighty personality. I would be as reverent as he was when I say that of all the men I ever knew "never man spake like this man". The student soon learned, if indeed he learned anything, that every moment in Dr. Broadus' class room was more precious than rubies. No time was to be wasted, no unnecessary questions were to be asked—"while the days were going by". I speak from experience. One day in his Homiletics he was giving some illustrations of misused scripture and of over-worked texts. He said, "Brother Blank, when the Psalmist says 'thy rod and thy staff they comfort me' does he mean that there was any real difference between the rod and the staff?" "No," said Brother Blank, "they mean the same thing". I was young, but I thought my time had come, and I ventured, "But, Dr. Broadus, I thought the rod was used as a weapon with which the wild beasts could be driven away, and that the staff served as a shepherd's crook, with which the sheep could be kept in line. Was not each end used for different purpose?" And he said, "Yes, and I suspect the middle was used for another purpose also". I was mortified, chagrined and offended, but the next

question I asked was one that was germane to the interests of all.

And now for Dr. Manly. He was a combination of omnivorous learning and child-like simplicity. Some lady has often been quoted as saying that "there was more heaven in Dr. Manly's face than most people would ever see anywhere else". Those of you in the Faculty who knew him, may appreciate another short unpublished story: While we were existing in the Standiford Hotel, I found myself one January day indulging in the joy of a real, old-fashioned, genuine, case of measles. One afternoon there was a knock at my door, and who should be there but that saintly old teacher. He climbed four flights of steps to look upon my disfigured countenance and to express his sincere sympathy. That night quite a number of students had come into my room. My temperature was well above the century mark, and my tongue was loose at both ends. I was entertaining my friends with things new and old, with things false and true, with things real and imaginary. Among other things was this: "Boys, dear old Doctor Manly came to see me this afternoon, and he said, 'My dear brother, there are two views concerning this disease with which you are suffering. One is that it is a most malignant, treacherous and dangerous disease. Another view is that it is much over-rated and should not be taken very seriously. And on the one side, favoring the more radical view, are Hengstenberg, De Vette, Weiss, Lightfoot and Alexander. On the other side, those favoring the more conservative view, are Schleiermacher, Bleek, Olshausen, Hackett and Meyer'".

These three men with Dr. Williams, whom I never saw, were the founders of this seminary, and I am glad to be permitted to lay upon their graves to-day the flowers of immortal gratitude.

But now for awhile I will speak to my subject: *Reconstruction*. Not reconstruction in the political sense,

but as it relates to the work of the kingdom. What I have to say centers largely about a person, whose name was Nehemiah. He was a re-builder.

The men who dreamed of this institution knew there would be need for men like unto this ancient governor of Jerusalem. Ninety per cent. of the men who go out of this Seminary go to the work of rebuilding. True, some like the Apostle Paul will lay their own foundations, and build thereupon; but in most instances these students are going to serve in places where the walls are broken down and the gates are burned with fire. A 'remnant' will be there, and the work must be done with caution, wisdom, grace and persevering prayer.

I. *Nehemiah was called to a very difficult field.*

Oh, I know he was not a pastor, nor was he a preacher in the ordinary acceptance of that term; but the principle is exactly the same, and there is no reason why we should not think of him as a pastor. At any rate it was a hard field. Every field is hard. Some may be what we call old, some what we call new; some high, some low; some rich, some poor; but when God calls a man to a task that man may prepare for a man's job.

One day in one of the royal palaces of Persia this good man heard some persons speak in his own tongue. It is not certain where Nehemiah was born, but to him home was old Jerusalem. These men were from home, and one of them was his own brother. He inquires, "What's the news? How is the dear old city?" They could only tell him the truth. The news was bad enough. "The people are in great affliction and reproach. The walls are broken down, and the gates are burned with fire". Some men would have said, "Too bad! I am sorry! What a pity". Not so with Nehemiah. While he saw all the sorrows of the situation, and while he suffered in his inmost soul, he did not yield to the temptation. The tidings came to him as challenge of faith, courage and consecration. Blessed Nehemiah! Blessed are the men of God, who are big

enough to hear God's call in the woe and want of the world! Blessed are the men who are willing to go to the bottom or to the top or all around and do the task God gives them.

Some sixteen years ago, down in Tennessee, a pastor became very much discouraged. And you know what a pastor can do when he gets discouraged. He can quit. One of our strongest men said some time ago, "Every decent pastor thinks about once a month that he ought to resign". The truth is a pastor can resign when he cannot do anything else. Well, this pastor resigned. About a month later, while his resignation was still pending he attended the State Convention, and was presiding over its deliberations. A representative of this Seminary was there. He was given the courtesies of the floor and was making a speech. Among other things he said something like this, "In our Seminary, we are not only trying to develop the best there is in the preachers who come to us, but we are also trying to train men for the pastoral office. We are trying to prepare them for the solving of problems". He further said that a pastor would be called to a church, and he would move on and up to a certain place, and then he would strike a difficulty, and resign. Then another would come and he would move on and up to the same place and resign, and so on and on. The Seminary was trying to discourage this process and persuade men to go on with prayerful wisdom and watchful waiting and holy determination until they could see the mountain dissolve and the work go on to completion.

The professor was talking to young men, and to the congregation at large; but the man who heard most profitably that day was in the chair. At any rate when the President of the Convention went home he found the brethren ready to kindly ask him to withdraw his resignation, which he did, and went on with the work and is with it yet, and has just closed one of the most gracious years of all his life, and is by the grace of God laying

larger plans for the future. We justly honor some men to-day who have gone on to their reward; but I want the pleasure of publicly acknowledging my debt of gratitude to Dr. W. O. Carver, who is very much alive and capable of helping the weak knees and feeble hands.

Life is a school in which lessons are to be learned and problems are to be solved, and there is demand for men and women who are able and willing to solve them. Life is a load, full of burdens, and there is demand for men and women who are willing and able to carry them. Life is a battle field with many battles, and there is demand for men and women who are willing and able to do the fighting. Life is a condition, and there is a demand for men and women who are willing and able to adjust themselves to it. As Father Ryan has said,

“Life is a duty, dare it; Life is a burden, bear it,
 Life is a thorn-crown, wear it.
 Though the burden crush you down,
 Though it break your heart in twain,
 Close your eyes and bear the pain.
 First the cross and then the crown.”

II. *Nehemiah was a man of prayer.* The first chapter of the book bearing his name gives us the record of a model prayer. In it there is reverence, humility, confession, faith and definite petition. These elements enter into the real form and spirit of prayer.

He was cup-bearer to the king. This office was really one of honor and trust, but it was also one that made him a slave. Like Paul, he was “an ambassador in bonds”. So the first thing he needed was to get a leave of absence; and then his passports, recommendations to other kings and material for the rebuilding of the walls. He prayed for this to be given him from the king of Persia. It was four months before he could have an interview with the king. But he was waiting on God, and he did not wait in vain. All the things that he could not get in another

way must be given him in answer to prayer. And they were given him. None of us will get very far until we learn that some things come to us only through patient, persevering, importunate prayer. He knew the secret and acted accordingly.

Some years ago while on a visit to the city of Rome, in company with others, I entered a building where there was something like a slanting desk. The members in the party who were in advance, seemed attracted to this piece of furniture. I supposed they were registering their names, as is quite comon in this country; but when my turn came I found that it was a mirror so adjusted that when you looked into it you could see the reflection of the ceiling, and there, on that ceiling is the most beautiful fresco in all the world, Aurora. It could be seen to the best advantage only when your head was bowed as if in prayer. And I say unto you, the best way to see the things which are above, the best way to see that which is high and holy, the best way to get our visions of truth and duty is when we humbly bow our hearts and heads in earnest prayer.

Nehemiah found the will and power of God at the throne of grace. Some one may ask a good question just here. I anticipate. "Can we get our guidance; can we get our difficulties removed, as did the characters in sacred history? Did they not have some advantage over us in some ways?" Yes, Enoch walked with God. Abraham talked with God in the most confidential manner. Moses was given his commission from a voice in the burning bush, and it was afterwards confirmed by other miracles. Gideon saw his fleece wet and saw it dry, while in both cases the ground around was just the reverse. Samuel had a midnight audience with the Holy Father. Elijah called for fire from heaven and it came. Daniel could sleep like an infant with lions, and the Hebrew children passed through the fiery furnace unharmed. John and James, and Peter, and Paul, and the rest of them had

wonderful signs manifested in their presence. But listen, Nehemiah had no more advantage than we have to-day. Without miracle, sign or symbol he felt his way in the dark and was led out into the light. With only a small portion of the Word of God at his command, with little experience and little history and little fellowship he went right on and trusted in the unseen arm of the Lord. So far as we know he had never had even a dream that might have been counted as extraordinary. He had never seen a miracle he had never heard the audible voice of God, he had never been startled by any supernatural manifestation of any kind. He walked by faith, and by faith alone. If you ever find a Christian asking for a sign, give him the story of Nehemiah. Tell him also of Judson and Cary and Müller, and Spurgeon and Boyce and Broadus and Manly and Williams, and a countless host of men and women, who through faith, and faith alone, have gone from victory to victory. Jesus said to Thomas, "Because thou hast seen me thou hast believed, blessed are they that have not seen and *yet* have believed".

III. *Nehemiah exemplified the true blending of faith and works.* He prayed as though everything depended upon prayer, he worked as though everything depended upon works. He knew the truth of that which was written in the book of James centuries later, that "As the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead." He not only availed himself of all the natural, artificial and diplomatic advantages in his homeward journey, but he took with him a good supply of prudence and good sense. I do not know of any good reason why a leader in the kingdom of God should not have good sense, nor do I see any good reason why he should not use his sense if he has it.

One of the first things he did was to make a survey of the situation. Did you ever hear of a survey? He looked over the field. He wanted to know just what was to be done. And he kept his own counsel. If some of you

young gentlemen expect to hold a long pastorate be sure to study the art of holding a long tongue. Many an unfortunate pastor can say, in the language of the late Mrs. Partington, "Every time I open my mouth I put my foot in it". The pastoral tongue is a necessity, but like electricity it must be controlled, and the wires of speech must be well insulated. The flow of pastoral language is essential in the ongoing of the kingdom, but like a river this flow will do its safest and best work when it is confined within proper limitations. We can learn much from Aesop, Uncle Remus, Hambone and the others, but I would commend especially the warning of the Master Himself, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves".

Did all things work smoothly? Well, it would have been remarkable if they had. They tell me that true love does not even do that. Strong opposition developed on the field soon after he arrived, and continued in one form and another all the way. Had our hero been a man in whose vocabulary could be found the word "fail", the work never would have been done. But he had such faith and moral fiber and force of character, as would meet and conquer every foe. No life can count for much if it runs along the lines of the least resistance. The divine order of Christianity is conflict. Bible history, church history and the individual experience of every normal Christian will confirm the truth of this statement.

In one of the darkest days in the history of our Seminary, one of the professors said: "the Seminary may die, but let us die first". It did not die.

Nehemiah met with opposition from all possible directions. It is a most interesting story. There is a series of sermons in it. I must hasten to mention the different things that would hinder him.

1. The first was ridicule. Sanballat, the Horonite, and Tobiah, the servant, the Ammonite and Geshem, the Arabian, the ring-leader in it all, were ready with stumb-

ling blocks and everything else that in any way would hinder. So the first weapon used was ridicule.

Many men have allowed themselves to be laughed out of court and away from duty, and away from the ministry and away from the cross and the crown because somebody laughed. But not so with this leader of the olden time. Of course, he felt it, just as you and I would feel it; but he laughs best who laughs last, and he knew this long before the expression was coined.

2. Then there was actual warfare. When they found out that sneers would do no good they decided to use spears, but the man of God says: "We made our prayer to God and set a watch". It is the same story as the one which tells of trusting in God and keeping your powder dry.

3. Then there was the discouragement of friends. These, like the poor, are always with us, and sometimes we may do them good. This man of God succeeded in spite of his friends, and I submit that this is an accomplishment.

4. Then there was financial depression. Corn and cotton and tobacco were greatly reduced in price. Farms and houses and even children were mortgaged. There was a panic. The old story of capital and labor was just where it is to-day. Then Nehemiah said he was angry. He had a right to be angry. It was an hour of righteous indignation. But listen. He said: "I took counsel with myself". Sometimes when one really advises with himself he does not have to trouble other people. He decided on the persuasive method. He called the people together, and asked them to do right, and they did it. He asked them to give up some of their rights and he gave up some of his. A great many years after this another "thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in

fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”.

5. Then there came an invitation to go into a union meeting. But he knew the game, and said he was too busy. Mr. Lincoln must have known this little bit of history when he said, “Peaceable relations with all men, entangling alliances with none”.

6. Then they sent him a threatening letter, and his answer was a consistant life.

7. Then they tried to scare him and make him take refuge in the temple. It was then that he rose to his full height and said, “Should such a man as I flee?” He was not afraid.

No wonder this man could say: “So we built the wall . . . for the people had a mind to work”. He led in it all, but he never forgot the faithful individuals, and the faithful families, and the grace of God, which made it all possible. He did not write to the papers and tell how much better he had done than his predecessors.

You will recall that in the famous picture of Michael and the Dragon, the face of a young man, or an angel if you please, is as calm as a morning in May. There is no strain of muscle, no shade of doubt, no confusion, no uncertainty, no excitement. It is a picture of masculine gentleness and grace. Then we look again and see his feet firmly placed upon the head of the dragon. That monster is in complete subjection, as powerless as if the weight of the world was upon him. Michael calmly holds his place in placid confidence as the conqueror. In this work of art the artist has given us the picture, unconsciously, not of a mythological or ecclesiastical dream, but of the real character of a real man of God. Such was Nehemiah. And grant, O God, that such may be the character of every one who goes from these walls as the representative of the Man of Gallilee.