

A COMING TEST.

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We are told that as Horace Bushnell and a friend were returning home one day as night was approaching, on coming to the top of a hill the view was so impressive his companion said to Bushnell, "One of us should pray". Thereupon the great preacher dismounted and prayed so effectively that his friend afterward declared that at the time he was afraid to stretch forth his hand lest he touch God. Thus occasionally to be made keenly aware of God's nearness is no doubt profitable, but the realization of God's presence of which Faber speaks is much more profitable as well as more in accord with the facts of Christian experience:

For God is never so far off
As even to be near.
He is within. Our spirit is
The home He holds most dear.
To think of Him as by our side
Is almost as untrue
As to remove His shrine beyond
Those skies of starry blue.
So all the while I thought myself
Homeless, forlorn and weary,
Missing my joy, I walked the earth
Myself God's sanctuary.

The Almighty is constantly with and in His people, and through them and His Holy Spirit He is constantly operative in the great field of human life. History shows that there is a rise and fall in this divine activity among men, or at least in the manifest results of this activity.

A graph of the development of Christianity in the world would, in broad outline, be like a cross section of the United States from the Virginia shore to the crest of the Rockies; first a rapid rise, then a slow decline followed by a slow ascension to the present height. What lies ahead—still higher heights, or another downward slope?

When Jesus reminded the cavillers of His day that they should have been able to read more accurately “the signs of the times”, He evidently meant to tell them that there was something inherent in the days they were passing through which furnished rather clear intimation of the future developments of God’s plans. What was true of those days is doubtless also true of these, so let us venture a little in an effort to discern the signs of our times.

I.

Men want to be happy. In order to be happy they believe they must have good health and a bit of wealth. Consequently men are everywhere seeking health and wealth. They are willing to pursue vigorously any line of activity which promises better health, or, more especially, larger wealth. Christianity’s contribution to health was doubtless much more clearly recognized during its early history than more recently. Gifts of healing were prominent in the early church. But today the contribution of Christianity to health is emerging from the obscurity so long surrounding it. There appears to be a revival of the gift of healing, and it is not unreasonable now to assert that science and experience have demonstrated that the fundamental principles of Christianity faithfully embodied in life are tremendously favorable to good health. But the recognition of this fact, while already wide-spread in this and some other civilized lands, is not in any country as universal as it will be, and consequently has only begun to make its influence felt in favor of Christianity.

Today we are witnessing what is almost a new thing under the sun. We are beholding emerge to recognition from the mists of the centuries, for the first time in Christian history, another vital relationship between Christianity and the world's happiness. To some Christians this recognition comes with the paralyzing effect of an apparition, to others with the quickening effect of a galvanic current, and whether its total effect for the church of the future is to be for weal or woe remains to be seen.

In the baldest terms the relationship in mind may be stated thus: Christian living brings wealth—wealth not simply in a spiritual sense, but in an absolutely material sense—dollars and cents, houses, lands and such things.

That Jesus taught this truth is made indubitable by such statements as these: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth". In view of Old Testament teachings (Ps. 37, especially v. 9-11; 25:9-13, etc.), and of other affirmations of the Christ, it seems entirely uncalled for and not a little unreasonable to *delete* from this strong expression "inherit the earth" (land) all reference to the material world. From Romans 4:13 and other passages it is clear that Paul understood the inheritance to take hold on the material and so taught. "Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands for my sake, and for the gospel's sake, but he shall receive a hundred fold in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life". (Mk. 10:29f.; cf. Matt. 19:29; Lk. 18:29f.) Equally certain is it that this truth, since the early beginnings of Christianity at any rate, has rarely been clearly recognized by Christian teachers, and never has it been specially stressed in the thinking of the church.

II.

Different times, however, have fallen unto us, and well may some compelling voice ring out to the people of God today, as rang out Joshua's at the Jordan, "Ye have not passed this way hitherto". For today we face both the clear recognition and the earnest stressing of the fact that meekness is a "world-conquering principle", that godliness is profitable in the life that now is with respect to such crass things as real estate, personal property, etc.

The clearest, most emphatic and comprehensive statement of the relationship of Christian living to material prosperity is doubtless that of Roger W. Babson, President of Babson's Statistical Organization, in two recent volumes entitled "Religion and Business", and "Fundamentals of Prosperity". This man of wide experience and recognized good judgment says concerning the "meek": "These are the people who seek to know the will of God. They are the people with a scientific frame of mind who meekly seek the truth, who meekly preach the truth, and who meekly adapt their ways to the truth. Of course, such people will inherit the earth. Nothing else could happen". He calls attention to the fact "that the church people of most communities are the more prosperous people of those communities", and gives it as his personal conclusion that "interest in the church is the *cause*" of men's success, "rather than the *result* of their success". Many unsuccessful persons come to him for help in a business way. "Whenever", he says, "I have occasion to have any business dealings with one of these unfortunate people, I always see the reason why they are not succeeding. They lack religion". "Ninety-five per cent of the people who do not get along well materially owe their misfortune to the lack of these religious qualities of faith, industry, courage, imagination, and thrift". In one paragraph he sums up his contentions thus: "Statistics teach that a business man will be happiest by fol-

lowing the teachings of Jesus; statistics teach that the Golden Rule is practical; statistics teach that prayer is a real force with unlimited possibilities; and statistics teach that religion is the greatest of undeveloped resources”.

Now if this were a lone voice crying in a wilderness, its cry would merit consideration. But it is neither a lone voice, nor is its cry reverberating in a great waste. Other voices are heard, and while, like nature to those who love her, they speak a “various language”, the heart of their message is identical. Moreover, their cry is falling on the ears of multitudes many of whom are prepared to listen sympathetically, if not altogether intelligently, to their message.

III.

Workingmen are ready to listen sympathetically. Such teaching is in line with their contention that justice requires that a larger portion of the production of their hands and minds be allowed to the producers. They are sure that Christian principles applied to industry would bring them great material betterment. Less profit would go to capital and larger returns to labor. To be sure, the application of the truth they regard so sympathetically is the application to the “other fellow”, and many of them would be quite unwilling to apply the same truth to their own lives, yet it is a comparatively easy step from the conviction that they would profit by the reign of Christian principle in the life of the employer to the recognition of the fact that the rule of such principles in the life of the employe would also be profitable.

Business men as a class are possibly less in sympathy with this new message than workingmen, yet clearly they are manifesting interest in it. Babson’s books are selling by the thousands. He and others who write and speak essentially the same message are being listened to by

thousands of all classes of business men all over the country. Furthermore, here and there employers are beginning to test the practicability of the Golden Rule in business, and some at any rate are thereby finding increasing and even phenomenal success.

Not only in Christian lands, but all over the earth the ear of man is being attuned to listen kindly to this message. A newspaper correspondent in China last year wrote:

“A leading official of the South was asked by your correspondent, ‘Why don’t the North and the South get together? Can’t you see that this division is injuring China in the world relations?’

“‘I can tell you in one word: Selfishness’, he replied. ‘It is selfishness in the North and selfishness in the South.’

“‘What is your solution?’

“The official answered, ‘I am convinced that nothing can save China but religion’”.

A Southern leader and vice-speaker of the first Senate, addressing recently a large assembly of both foreigners and Chinese, said: “China needs Christ, and the best contribution we can give to the rebirth of the nation is to bring Jesus Christ to the people. There is a growing sense among our leaders all over the country of their powerlessness to make the country stronger and better”. As the leaders of China are reasoning, so are the leaders of other lands also. Wherever the missionary has gone with his message and labors of love believers have been found. A few years and these believers compel acknowledgement from all that they are more intelligent, of better character and more prosperous than the masses about them. They constitute evidence of a power to uplift that cannot be either overlooked or denied. The peoples of the earth may be very far from a readiness to accept Christianity *en masse*, but beyond question there are

myriads upon myriads who are longing to share in the better health and enlarged happiness and prosperity which are being enjoyed by the Christians among them, and who are becoming more and more fully persuaded that the readiest and surest way to these better things is through the acceptance of Christianity.

Christianity has now made contacts with human life almost universally, and wherever the gospel has gone large benefits have uniformly come to those accepting and practicing its precepts. To sustain such a statement is today a comparatively easy task; to deny it is to invite annihilation by an avalanche of fact. These facts are becoming more widely known among all peoples through almost innumerable channels and are preparing the minds of men to receive sympathetically the message that shall rightly explain the facts. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how such vast accumulating of facts could have gone on much longer without compelling from some quarter a clear and ringing declaration of their import. And now that the fundamental relationship between righteousness and prosperity is being not only recognized but emphasized, must we not assuredly acknowledge that the times give great promise of a favorable hearing? Or can we expect that this message will fail to have its "day", as every other new phase of truth has enjoyed its season of special prominence? If we catch correctly the testimony of history, we shall surely expect this truth to be receiving shortly from many sources more stress and acclamation than it deserves.

IV.

If, then, it is to be clearly and perhaps over-emphatically pointed out to men that Christian living brings prosperity, what are likely to be the results?

A bit of recent history intimates rather clearly one thing that may be expected. At the beginning the agita-

tion against liquor in this country was based on moral considerations. It was maintained that liquor was hurtful to human life, that it made homes infernos, injured human bodies, laid its blasting hand on unborn children. From platform, press and school books these things were taught, but prohibition came not. Then came the recognition that the use of liquor was an economic evil; that it was costing the nation, the states, municipalities, corporations and individuals millions of dollars annually. With this economic argument in the forefront the campaign against alcohol went rapidly forward, and some years before even the most sanguine had ventured to predict, prohibition was written into the constitution of the United States. Other arguments for prohibition had prepared the way, but it was the clear demonstration and the wide recognition of the fact that prohibition would be better for the country economically that brought the victory. Thousands were won to active espousal of the prohibition cause by this argument who had been little, or not at all, moved by the moral arguments.

Now the economic argument is coming into use with respect to Christianity. It is as valid with respect to Christianity as with respect to prohibition. There can be brought to its support facts, facts and yet more facts. What are likely to be the effects of this argument as it finds place in the thinking of men? Will thousands come rushing to the support of Christianity as they came hurrying to the support of prohibition? Is the church about to face the supreme opportunity of the Christian centuries so far, the grand culmination of nineteen hundred years of ceaseless activity? And what prospect is there that the opportunity will be met with sufficient wisdom to avoid a catastrophe similar to that of Constantine's day?

That the economic argument will bring many to a favorable consideration of Christianity may safely be accepted as a certainty, and the number throughout the

world is likely to become enormous. From the recognition of the fact that Christian living brings prosperity to men and nations there may easily arise such a knocking for admission at the door of the church as history has not yet seen. And assuredly, if that knocking comes, it will be to the church both a supreme opportunity and a superlative test.

For those multitudes will approach the church with motives not always simple and pure. "Rice Christians" will then be found everywhere. Many will come, as in Christ's day, for the loaves and the fishes, caring little for the teachings. That they come will furnish the great opportunity, that they come from mixed and even selfish motives will constitute the fiery test. To welcome without sifting will be courting irreparable ruin. Will the church do the sifting?

V.

It scarcely needs to be said that the necessary sifting will not be done unless the spiritual ideals of the church are maintained and elevated, unless the supremacy of the spiritual is kept clear. In many of the denominations of today Christianity is too much a matter of the head and too little of the heart; too much the confession of a creed and too little the devotement of a soul. Whoever would safeguard the future must cling to sound learning, but give himself with utter abandon to the "tillage of the heart".

If, then, we have in any sense correctly discerned the signs of the times, it is of the gravest importance to Christianity and the world that the spiritual nature of the church be exalted, that the essentiality of a regenerate church membership be stressed. And what one among the denominations of today is as well qualified to render this needed service as the Baptists? In the light of our history and present standing we may well ask ourselves,

and the world may well ask us, whether God has not brought us to the kingdom for such a time as this.

At least two-fold should be our service as a denominational body in the present crisis. First of all, by the prestige and power given to us, we should strive earnestly to assist other evangelical bodies to appreciate the essentiality of regeneration and spiritual living. The more difficult and delicate part of our task will lie here, especially if we postpone a more vigorous undertaking of it. Indeed, whatever is accomplished at this point must be done quickly. An increasing membership is attractive, and the deleterious effects of receiving unsaved people into membership are usually not immediately discernible. There is in some denominational bodies today a rather marked tendency to substitute instruction for regeneration in the Christian process, and it is almost inevitable that such bodies will find in such an opportunity their undoing, unless that tendency can be checked before the pressure on them becomes great. As a great body of the Lord's people we may well ask ourselves, therefore, whether we are at the present moment sufficiently faithful to the task assigned us. It is not enough to point with pride to the past.

“We are living, we are dwelling
In a grand and awful time,
In an age on ages telling,”

and the question is as to our fidelity just now. And the urgency of the need that our faithfulness at this point come under careful review may be partially estimated by the fact that rather increasingly it is being whispered abroad that even the Baptists are lessening their emphasis of the spiritual.

The second aspect of our duty as a denomination in the coming crisis is to maintain steadfastly our adhesion to a spiritual church membership in the midst of the upheaval and confusion which will surround us and the

temptation which will come as a rolling tide upon us. Are we able to endure the baptism with which our forefathers were baptized? Will our children be able to endure a severer baptism? It will not be easy to see the wealthy and the wise according to the estimates of the world turn from our doors and enter those of other denominations; to see these denominations rapidly overtake and pass us in church membership and bulk of activity. Today we are second to none. Can we, in steadfast adherence to unpopular truth, bear the acid test of taking second, or third, or even lower place? And to make adherence to the truth still more difficult, in addition to this loss of rank and prestige, the charge of intolerance will be hurled against us. Loyalty will be branded as bigotry, and devotion to Christ as unworthy assumption of superiority. And the atmosphere of the times and the appearance of things will make it impossible for us to refute the charge. Verily our forefathers were brave, but we and those who come after us may need to be braver than they; our forefathers were strong, but we and our children may need to be stronger still.

But let us not be too much dismayed at the prospect. Loss of rank will not destroy us, nor will it much hurt us. Not our standing among the denominations need concern us, but our standing with the Christ. And the charge of intolerance under such circumstances should not be regarded as something to be shunned, but rather as something to be sought. For as we meet it we shall come again into company with the Christians of the first century. In many respects the whole world of the twentieth century is much like the Graeco-Roman world of the first century, and among the points of similarity is that of tolerance. "Never", says a recent writer, "was there a more tolerant age than that in which Christianity appeared. Racial and religious barriers had been thrown down. Men were everywhere exchanging religious views. Syncretism was

the religious hall-mark of the time. The empire was full of religious communities in which men of different races met. Men were willing to try every religion and philosophy in the field". Into this atmosphere of tolerance Christianity came with a surpassing intolerance, and in this intolerance found one of the elements which contributed much to her safety and success. In a similar intolerance of love towards Christ and men we may well find our "refuge and strength".

If, in the stress of this promised crisis, we as a denomination shall fail, God cannot fail. We shall but compel Him to take the banner He entrusted to our keeping and give it to another people who will, at the price we are unwilling to pay, keep it from the dust, and the glory of service will have departed from us. But if we shall prove faithful, if the stuff within us shall be equal to the test, if God shall find us ready as a man to stand in the breach for Him, then shall the Shekinah-glory of an enlarging service be ours throughout the generations.