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I.

JONATHAN EDWARDS.

THE 5th of October marked the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of this great and good man. In many parts of the country notice has been taken of this fact. Especially in New England, the region of his birth, and to which the labors of his life belonged, have fresh laurels been wreathed for his brow. But it is doubtful if any part of the country, or any section of the church, can pay him as sincere a tribute as the Southern Presbyterian Church. He thought as we still think on the great doctrines of grace, being a zealous Calvinist, and was in accord with the Presbyterian Church in his views of government, though he lived and wrought and died in the Congregational Church. If, therefore, any class of persons should honor the name and cherish the memory of Edwards, those should do so who hold Calvinistic views of doctrine, and Presbyterian principles of polity.

Moreover, while Edwards commands our admiration on many grounds, yet his chief title to our esteem is the almost unparalleled excellence of his Christian character. His life was radiant with the beauty of Christ, sweet and fragrant with all the tender and winsome graces of the Holy Spirit. To pass his life in review, and reflect on those qualities that marked him as the eminent Christian, must be a wholesome spiritual exercise.

The story of his life, quiet and uneventful for the most part, is quickly told. He did not figure as the hero in any great and thrilling conflict; there were few dramatic episodes to give variety to the usually smooth tenor of his career; but his days

### III.

## ST. ANTHONY THE GREAT.

A STRANGE and mysterious man inhabited the ruins of the old castle in the craggy mountains—so the peasants of Middle Egypt said—about the year of our Lord 281. He was mentioned with bated breath, and amazing stories were told concerning him. Tired wayfarers had heard appalling shrieks and moans issuing from his unopening cell. Stories were told of wild scenes around it, and lurid lights; of angry voices, in hot debate; of muffled sounds of stripes and wails of agony; of scanty supplies of food, semi-annually handed to and mutely received from above by the ghostly tomb-dweller.

Who was he, and whence, and why there? Would you know? For the stories of that hermit-life cluster around a true, living personality.

It was Anthony, surnamed the Great. He was born at Coma, near Heracleia, in Middle Egypt, A. D. 251, from an old and quite wealthy Coptic family. Even in his youth, so they say, he had been different from other boys, avoiding company, and loving solitude and musings and seriousness. Dainties and delicacies he cared not for, luxury he hated, learning he detested. The early death of his parents plunged him still deeper into the depths of his own mysterious self, and gave an unrestrained sway to his peculiarities.

And so it came to pass one day, a Sabbath day, as he sat in the house of God, that the gospel of the day was read, the story of the rich young man—"Go, sell all that thou hast, and give it to the poor, and come thou and follow me." It sunk into his heart, and he obeyed it literally. The broad, rich acres were sold, his estate disposed of, and the proceeds divided among the poor. A little remnant he kept for himself and for his only sister, but even that he gave away, as again he heard, "Care not for the

morrow." And so he dwelt in a little hut opposite the old parental estate, and began a life of "training," laboring with his hands for sustenance, and giving to the poor what he needed not. He associated with old, ascetic persons; for even then, although sporadically, Christians had begun to follow the example of the Jewish Essenes and the Egyptian Therapeutae. A burning zeal to excell them all devoured the soul of the young ascete. Torments untold he daily endured, not so much physically, although he was ascetic almost unto self-destruction, but especially mentally and spiritually. The violent perversion of every natural trait was not accomplished in a day, the power of his young life not broken without a dreadful struggle; the past not relinquished without a vigorous protest. The mental horrors of those dreary days assumed an objective form. To his diseased fancy the internal battle was fought externally. Demons appeared to him, and smote him and wrestled with him in his solitude, and so the tale of the peasants, profusely embellished as it was, yet rested on a sure foundation, and had in it a germ of a potent reality.

Says Athanasius, the venerating friend and enthusiastic biographer of Anthony, whose story of this wonderful life reads like a weird romance: "He protected his body with faith, prayers and fastings, setting his thoughts on Christ and on his nobility through Christ, and on the rational faculties of the soul, and again on the terrors of the fire and the torments of the worm, and thus escaped unhurt; . . . therefore he chastised his body more and more and brought it into slavery." Would you know how? He denied himself sleep; often for whole nights in succession. He ate but once a day, after sunset, and then but sparingly. At times but once in two days, and not rarely but once in four. Bread, salt and water were his only food. This dreadful asceticism culminated in a frenzied state of mind, in a sort of wild delirium, in which the hosts of hell appeared incarnate, and he felt himself overwhelmed by agonizing physical suffering.

At one time, as he lay faint and exhausted and prostrate, on the damp floor of his cell, he claims to have heard the voice of God: "Anthony, I was here, but I waited to see thy fight. There-

fore, since thou hast withstood and not been worsted, I will be to thee always a succor, and I will make thee to become famous everywhere."

From that day onward there comes a change over this mysterious life. Like the mighty river of his native land, which, bursting from its sources, in its onward course, is often convulsed by foaming cataracts, which come at greater intervals until finally the broad current flows peacefully and majestically into the wide sea—such was the life of St. Anthony.

His fame had spread meanwhile, and his example was eagerly followed. He was compelled, almost by sheer force, to open the long-locked door of his cell, and to come forth to superintend the life of numerous hermits, who, without his knowledge, had gathered around him during the quiet twenty years of his entire seclusion. His abnormal endeavors to literally enforce misunderstood demands of the gospel had led him, along a cruelly tortuous way, to the peace of God. No doubt but his later years are full of noble sentiments of a truly evangelical spirit, and suggestive of such growth in grace as has been but rarely attained by man on earth.

Meanwhile, the clouds had been gathering on the ecclesiastical horizon. Galerius Valerius Maximinus, the "shepherd emperor," had ascended the throne. A brutal and shockingly profligate tyrant, he was easily induced to renew the stringent edicts against the Christians, and once again the martyr-blood began to stream, and the amphitheatres to resound with their dying wails, and the sun to be darkened by the smoke of devouring flames. In Alexandria a hot persecution raged. And suddenly, on the streets of the luxurious city, a strange apparition was seen, a man with streaming beard and attenuated form, with unkempt hair and blazing eyes, sparingly dressed, in the coarsest possible garments, made of the skins of animals, a girdle around his loins—a veritable picture of the Baptist preacher of repentance, who of yore had caused Judea to tremble at his word. His penetrating voice encouraged the martyrs before the judges, on the scaffolds and piles, on the forum and in the amphitheatre, creating a burning enthusiasm, carrying dismay into the hearts of the judges, and

reversing the rolls, so that the judged became judges, and the judges the judged.

It was Anthony. He had said to his monks, "Let us depart, that we too may wrestle, if we be called, or else see them wrestling." And so the city saw him, which he had not seen for many decades.

Unrestrainedly he witnessed for Christ, and "by pagans and Christians regarded as a sign from God, he succeeded, in a few days, in converting thousands of heathen." He went unscathed. And when the fire of persecution died out he disappeared as suddenly as he had come, and tired of the world and its turmoil, he once more returned to the desert and to greater asceticism.

Even there he soon tired of the company of the monks, and longing for the past, with its entire self-occupation, its unbroken solitude and constant communings with heaven, he desired to go to the upper Thebaid. But a voice, he says, came to him, "If thou wilt have rest, go to the inner desert." Obeying, he bade his monks farewell, forbidding them to follow, and journeyed into the wild wastes for three days. There he found a solitary mountain, at whose foot a tiny spring promised a lasting supply of water. It was Mount Chalzim, between the Nile and the Red Sea, where even now the ancient monastery of Deir Antonius, overlooking the Wady-el-Arabah, preserves the name and fame of the saint. There he lived for many years in entire seclusion, weaving baskets, tending a small plot of arable soil, from which he subsisted; seeing the Lord. But as his retreat was discovered it became once more the Mecca of the miserable and weary and disconsolate. Many are the miracles attributed to him, of power over brute creation, and power over disease, and power over demons. Wonderful are the stories, told by Athanasius, of the powers of his mental vision, strongly reminding us of the mysteries of "clairvoyance," as for instance that memorable desert scene, in which pilgrims, dying from thirst, are stretched out on the burning plain, saved only by the timely intervention of Anthony, who was aware of their distant need; or again, that other instance of the death of Ammon the Nitrian monk, which occurred, at the time indicated by Anthony to his companions, at

a distance of thirteen days' journey from him. Weird were the visions which ever and anon interrupted the monotony of his solitary life.

At the age of ninety years he discovered the retreat of Paul of Thebes, who had spent well-nigh a century in utter solitude, forgotten by the world he had discarded. He came just in time to hear the dying words of the old recluse, whom he considered "far better than himself," and to lay him at rest in the warm sand of the desert, in the shade of the ancient palm-tree, which had fed and clothed him.

Once more in 351, in the height of the Arian troubles, he was seen in the streets of Alexandria, testifying against the doctrines of the heresiarch Arius. The wide-reaching fame of the great anachoret, the halo of piety which surrounded his venerable head, the almost superstitious veneration in which he was held by the mass of the people—all these gave special weight to his visit, and to his testimony in favor of Athanasius and the orthodox faith.

Returning to his mountain home, he lived on for five more years, and finally fell asleep in Christ at the patriarchal age of one hundred and five years, lamented by all the East, sorely wept by the monks of the desert, and buried, at his own request, in an unknown spot, by two faithful attendants, who had ministered to the needs of his declining years.

How touchingly does Athanasius write of him: "He was altogether as a physician given by God to Egypt. Who met him grieving and did not go away rejoicing? Who came troubled and did not obtain peace of mind? And now he has fallen asleep, all are as orphans who have lost a parent, consoling themselves with his memory alone, and keeping his instructions and exhortations." Truly Antony had been great, great through his simple and unadulterated piety, and that alone. Worldly wisdom he had none, and yet he was wise.

The ready power of repartee, and the keen sarcasm which show themselves in some of his preserved utterances, the eminent weight of some of his sayings, almost seem to justify the saying of Synesius, the philosopher, that "the natural genius of Anthony did not require the aid of learning." The great of the earth

strove to do him honor, and even Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor, wrote him a letter, begging for some reply, which request Anthony hesitatingly granted, saying to his monks, "Wonder not if kings write to us, but wonder rather that God has written his law to man and spoken to us by his Son." And in his reply he gave to the emperor such counsel as kings but rarely receive from their subjects.

"His countenance," according to Athanasius, "had great and wonderful grace; his temper was inexhaustibly tolerant, except towards schismatics and heretics." The daily bath, so highly prized in the East, was entirely discarded by him, "he never washed himself, never even wetting his feet by passing through water, unless it was absolutely necessary." So great, says Athanasius, was his asceticism that "even if he was going to eat or sleep he was ashamed, when he considered the rational element of his soul, and often, when about to eat in the company of monks, he remembered the spiritual food, and declined and went away, thinking that he should blush if he was seen eating by others."

This strange, and yet great man made a deep impression on his own and subsequent times; or, rather, the great principles he embodied impressed themselves so deeply on the Christian Church that an irresistible force carried them along through thirteen of the most eventful centuries of her history, and that even to-day they cannot be said to have completely wasted their energy. True, Anthony was not the first Christian ascetic. Long before him Paul of Thebes had sought in the desert what the busy world did not afford; many others had done the same, and separating from the world, had sought after a closer communion with God in the silence of nature's wastes; but many of these had been driven into the wilderness and solitude. More than eight hundred years before, Buddha, the young Hindoo rajah, had voluntarily left palace and wives and glory, that he might find rest unto his soul.

The Jewish Essenes had separated themselves from the nation, that, unrestrained by family ties or the taint of luxury, amid self-inflicted misery, they might see the pitying face of Jehovah. The Greek Cynics had taught that the truer man is he who has lesser wants, and that the truest man has the least; and

so they had studied to become insensible to all the affections and all the changes of life, amid self-imposed privation. The Therapeutae in Egypt, the connecting link between the Jewish Essenes and the Christian Anachorets, had done the same, and so fertile a soil their tenets had found in the "Morning Land" that Eusebius, on the authority of Philo, says "that they abounded in every district, and teemed around Alexandria." But it was reserved for Antony to call the attention of the church to these principles, to clothe them in the garb of holiness, to open a vent for that zealous spirit, which you may call, if you desire, "religious sensationalism"; which, whetted by centuries of bloody persecution, had gloried in martyrdoms and exulted in suffering, and which now, pent up in the bosom of the church, threatened serious harm. The world persecuting could be endured, but the world pacified appeared a *monstrum horribile*.

And so Antony's fame had no sooner spread through the church than thousands of men followed his example, and in lonely spots, amid want and self-denial, which not rarely degenerated into self-torture, these anachorets "sought after that sanctification which they deemed it impossible to attain in the midst of a corrupt world."

The church applauded and goaded these hermits on to redoubled efforts. It became a struggle for the mastery, a rivalry of reputation; for they were, after all, but men—even if then life was called *α βιος αγγελικος*—an "angelic estate."

Not rarely they were driven to despair, and in some instances the excessive privations they endured, together with a mere spiritual pride, engendered by the veneration of the masses, totally unbalanced their minds.

If wonderful stories are told by these old anachorets of impossible horrors they passed through, and miraculous occurrences they experienced in the dead silence of their solitary lives, remember that they were not wilfully deceiving, but that many of these things appeared real to their diseased fancies, which were but apparent. And tradition never lessens, but always enhances the mystery surrounding these sacred dwellers of the desert. "Distance lends enchantment to the view." They were held in pious



reverence, and nothing appeared incredible which was told of this "knighthood of asceticism."

Some of these anachorets were subject to curious fancies. The life of Anthony fairly teems with them. Hilarion, the great recluse of Palestine, maintained, with the greatest earnestness, that his body was an ass, which he must feed straw and hay, lest he should become too lively and frolicsome. Pior, an Egyptian monk, being allowed to see a loved and long lost sister, deliberately shut his eyes during the entire visit. Says Gibbon: "Some aspired to reduce themselves to the rude and miserable state, in which the human brute is scarcely distinguishable above his kindred animals, and the numerous sects of anachorets derived their name from their humble practice of grazing in the fields of Mesopotamia with the common herd."

A simple asceticism, such as was practiced by Antony, soon was found inadequate to quench the fiery flames, which would burst from these souls, warring, as they thought, Christ's warfare; and so the element of deliberate torture soon was added to the ascetic life. They loaded themselves with chains and crosses, they endeavored to make life one continuous misery, and happy was he who invented a seat or detected a dwelling place whereby comfort in any sense became absolutely impossible. Pleasure and sin had become synonyms.

Women were considered with contempt, almost with abhorrence. Marriage was decried. The woman was a "noxious animal," a "fragile vessel," "the cause of all man's misery," and yet the spirit of Anthony entered into them as well, and the hermits lived to see the day when they were compelled to acknowledge that women could suffer and endure and adore, as well and as persistently as men.

The progress of the new movement was not less rapid than that of Christianity itself. The cells of the anachorets soon completely covered Lybia. The Nitrian desert is said to have been peopled by no fewer than five thousand anachorets, and still abounds with ruins of monasteries; and it was a fond thought of the Egyptian of those days that they numbered as many monks, in his country, as other inhabitants. Indeed, "Antony had be-

come the father of a numerous spiritual progeny." It must have been a curious phenomenon to the thinker of those days to see this constant exodus, from the world into solitude, of men—some of whom were noble and learned, ay leaders of men—joining a people "which subsisted without money, which was propagated without women, and which derived from the disgust and repentance of mankind a perpetual supply of voluntary associates," and not unjustly does Gibbon sneeringly remark that "posterity might well repeat the saying, which had formerly been applied to the sacred animals of the same country, that in Egypt it was less difficult to find a god than a man."

But the movement swept on, in its divinely appointed historic channel. These followers of Anthony had the consciousness of walking in the steps of the prophets of old. They divided their time between prayer and meditation and labor for themselves and the poor, and in the frivolous times in which they arose, they were a living proof of the vanity and unreality of the pleasures of life, and of the dreadful reality of eternal things, which should have a foremost place in the thoughts of man. And this very thing, the reality of their religious beliefs, and the intensely practical application of these principles to life it is which attracts to them the very leaders of the church; which causes Basil the Great to leave his wealthy bishopric and to assume the leadership of the monks scattered along the dreary coasts of the Black Sea; which makes of Athanasius and almost all the church fathers such earnest defenders of the new movement.

Jerome does not hesitate to say "that if all the members of his body were changed into tongues, and if all his limbs resounded with a human voice, he would yet be incapable of sufficiently praising the monastic life."

There can be no question but, originally at least, these men were actuated by noble impulses, in the great majority of cases. They sought after God, and went out after him; and everything around them reminded of and drew towards God.

The lazy, changeless days, the deep blue sky overhead, the profound quiet of that rainless climate, the impressions of nature, which Antony called his "great book of study"; an atmosphere

of which it was said that "man needs there hardly to eat, drink or sleep, for the act of breathing will give life enough"—all these must have reminded of the eternity and immeasurability and love of God.

And so, if for the above reasons many of the followers of Anthony went hopelessly astray, even if such extravagances as those of the pillar saints must be acknowledged to be shoots from the selfsame tree, it is equally true that some of these hermit lives contain an inspiration, of which Mons. de Montalembert truly says, "Who is so ignorant or so unfortunate as not to have devoured these tales of the heroic age of monachism; who has not contemplated . . . with the admiration inspired by an uncontrollable greatness of soul, the struggles of these 'athletes of penitence.'"

Through all the ages of the world solitude has been esteemed a sovereign remedy against frivolity. It has in it an element of compulsion. It has certain irresistible demands of its own. It has a rare power of revelation. Brundley, the engineer, is said to have remained in bed with a great problem till he had worked it out. Turner, the great painter of nature, spent whole days in solitude, observing but one thing, and when he had once spent an entire day in fixedly looking at the water, into which he threw pebbles, and was mocked by his friends, his wise reply was, "Now I know at least how water looks when stones are thrown into it." The great poets and thinkers of all times have experienced the soothing and elevating power of solitude. And for this revealing, elucidating, elevating power of solitude the anachorets loved it. Anthony, in his mountain home, enjoyed a vision of calm, stern beauty, such as but rarely is seen by man, and its daily unchanged recurrence drew him aloft to God; and hundreds of his followers with him found in the desert what they had sought there—communion with God.

It is not difficult to assign the causes from which this movement sprung. A glance at the church and the world of that day will suffice.

When Anthony and his immediate followers had already given to monachism an impulse which swept everything before it, the

church had not yet authoritatively spoken on doctrinal points. Religious teaching was marked by a strange, almost inconsistent, individuality. Chameleon-like, it changed hues according to its surroundings. Dreadful heresies arose from this source, and convulsed the life of the church, for longer or shorter periods, and some of these storms had swept the church before Anthony left for the wilderness. The great monarchian heresies had had their sway, and left the church with a tolerably clear idea of the Trinity. Montanus had preached his wild doctrines in Phrygia a hundred years before the birth of Anthony, and one of these had been a rigid asceticism. Tertullian, the great church father, had preached these doctrines, in a refined form, in Carthage, and some of the cotemporaries of Antony must have remembered the teacher whose doctrines had become the salt of Africa. And, in a sense, Anthony was but a child of his time. Had he not taken the lead, some one else would have done it, for men waited but for one who would boldly dare to embody in life what lived in many a heart. Manichæism had arisen, and was working in the East, and, whether we believe it or not, more of the condemned heresy of Mani was embodied in the life of the church than she was ever aware of. Again and again in the history of the church, it cropped out in many a way, and lives on till this day, leaving old forms and assuming new as the times vary. And the fundamental idea of asceticism is the dualistic tendency of Manichæism. All matter is inherently evil; and so sanctification degenerated into something physical. The crushing of every carnal thing was, therefore, a gradual rising in the scale of perfection, till one reached the sphere of the divine, where all temptation was forever dead. Arianism was just then ruining every prospect of peace and growth. Do you wonder that men became tired of all this confusion, that they longed for solitude, where perhaps beatific visions of God might be vouchsafed to such as fled the trials and temptations and wranglings of life?

A complete withdrawal from the world seemed a necessary consequence of the rupture between Christianity and the world. True, that world had ceased to persecute, but that by itself but added to the horrors of the time; for the martyr-agonies had

hitherto been the bond of union between diverging spirits. They were one at the stake, on the scaffold, in the arena, wherever else they might differ. The serious minds in the church had considered the last persecutions as divine judgments to arouse the apathies of the church. And now peace prevailed, and the church had come to honor, the ballast seemed removed, and the ship rolled dreadfully amid the tempestuous waves. Martyrdoms ceasing, the world appeared to afford no longer a fit opportunity for the full exercise of Christian virtue. And so the desert naturally took the place of the amphitheatre, among a people and in a country over which, like a dreary pall, hung a heavy, mystic, gloomy past, leading, and fitly leading, to just such developments as these; for it is in Egypt that monachism principally arose and earliest developed. These men fled from the world, I said, and what a world it was! Look at it! Hardly a ray of light in it. The emperors on the throne, call them pagans or Christians, as you please, for if Christians, they were but Christianized pagans, reducing the empire to the low level of pure oriental despotisms. The morals of the people, high and low, beyond the power of description. Marriage fidelity almost unknown. Blood streaming without provocation. The slaves in a condition, compared to which the worst-treated serf of modern times appears like a soul in paradise. The ignorance of the masses proverbial. The people crying to heaven under a load of taxation, which crushed, without killing. Bloody internecine wars, devastating the provinces and ruining the resources of the empire. And, above all, the horizon black with approaching horrors. The wildest rumors afloat of barbarians, of prodigious strength and dreadful appearance, who dressed in the skins of wild animals and wielded swords six feet long, who drank the blood of their victims and knew no pity. Nations rolling like irresistible tide floods over nations, till their place was found no more.

Such were the things which terrified the world, and caused the church to look upward for the coming of the Lord. Do you wonder that many left that world and longed for solitude, that there they might prepare to meet God? Do not hastily condemn Anthony or his anachoret disciples. They had a divine mission.

Developing into brotherhoods, when the reaction of the social principle in them set in, they served a grand historic purpose. Humanly speaking, the church of Christ in the earth could not have been what she is to-day, if it had not been for monachism, of which Anthony is rightly termed the father. It is a tree of life and of death in mysterious union. It was the main divine agent for the preservation of the Holy Scriptures, and the many monuments of Grecian and Roman literature, multiplied by their indefatigable pens, for soon they added study to meditation.

Let Gibbon sneeringly say, "that monastic studies have tended for the most part to darken, rather than to dispel, the clouds of superstition." He is obliged to add, "that the curiosity or zeal of some learned solitaries have cultivated the ecclesiastical and even the profane sciences, and posterity must gratefully acknowledge that." That sentence we will adopt, as our own, and gratefully subscribe. The chaff has been blown away, the heavy golden corn remains. If our reader has obtained a glimpse of St. Anthony, in his solitary life, with its underlying principles, let him remember that he has seen, on history's wall, the chrysalis from which, at God's own good time, in the sixteenth century, burst the strong-winged, glorious Reformation, which brought to us, in these later days, that purer vision of the Lord, which the hermits of the desert, amid their ascetic training, have often longed for in vain.

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