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ICONOCLASTS.

BY J. W. LAPSLEY.

“YE shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves.” This was the divine command to Israel as they invaded Canaan. Policy as well as reverence for the divine authority demanded strict obedience to the command. But it was not so obeyed as to put out of sight the temptations to idolatry; and again and again Israel sinned after the example of the heathen they had supplanted, became image worshippers, and suffered grievously for their apostasy. Hence image breaking was accounted a sign of devotion to Jehovah. Jehu said, “Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord,” and he went and broke down the image of Baal, and the house of Baal, burnt his images with fire, and slew his priests and votaries with the sword. But this was as far as Jehu’s zeal for the Lord carried him. While he had no real devotion to God, and, in fact, renewed the idol worship at Dan and Bethel, he made the divine commission an excuse for pursuing with lavish bloodshed his own schemes of worldly ambition. And there have been others besides Jehu in other ages who have trod in his steps. “Mohammed,” says Dr. Schaff, “started as a religious reformer fired by the great idea of the unity of the Godhead, and filled with horror of idolatry.” And he and his Caliphs, long after they became world-wide conquerors, full of ambition and given up to every cruel and sensual passion, continued to proclaim, “There is but one God,” and continued to the last their warfare on image and image worship. They made their professed zeal for the one God a cover and ex-

cuse for every conceivable iniquity. They despoiled churches and slew the worshippers. They burned the great library at Alexandria, the Caliph Omar saying if the books were in conformity with the Koran, the Koran was sufficient without them; if not conforming to the Koran, they were pernicious, and hence must be destroyed. So in the days of our fathers in Scotland there were rough-riders, like those who followed the banners of Murray and Morton, who went beyond what the cause of pure religion required or authorized, while intending or pretending only to be putting away the idolatries, oppressions, and deceptions of the Romish priesthood.

But it is not so much of these old warriors and their works that we wish to speak and call in question as of a better and higher class of reformers. Those old fighting men destroyed valuable works of art, tearing up pictures and breaking beautiful windows of stained glass and the like, because they adjudged them accessories to the idolatrous worship of Rome; but those material things could be replaced or restored; and hence the good or evil in their work of destruction is of slight importance.

There were in those days better men than those who carried sword and spear, and it is their work that I would have us examine. They were the really great men of the Reformation, having upon their hands and hearts the burden of reforming the rites and ordinances of religious worship, and the rules and principles of church government. They were also iconoclasts, called and commissioned to break down and cast out everything that pretended to stand between man and his Maker and Judge; and there was much of this needed to be broken and cast out. There had been built up at Rome a most imposing and seemingly all-powerful structure. At the center and summit was the Pope, exalted above all others, sitting in the temple of God and receiving worship from men, thus seeming to fill out the description by the Apostle Paul of "the man of sin," who was to be revealed, and whose coming was to be "after the working of Satan with signs and lying wonders." Macauley justly declares "the polity of the Church of Rome the very masterpiece of human wisdom, . . . and forty generations of statesmen improved that polity to such perfection that among the contrivances which have been devised for deceiving and oppressing mankind it occupies the highest place." Illustrating the power and oppression of the

Church, and showing that none were too high to escape attack, the same writer says, "Frederick the Second, the ablest and most accomplished of the long line of German Cæsars, in vain exhausted all the resources of military and political skill in the attempt to defend the rights of the civil power against the encroachments of the Church. The vengeance of the priesthood pursued his house to the third generation. Manfred perished on the field of battle, Conradin on the scaffold." This mentions but one of a thousand of its oppressions, running through the centuries, and crushing all, high and low alike, who dared oppose its power. It was against this blasphemous exaltation of the bishop of Rome that our fathers rose up, and which they overthrew; and the grievous yoke that had weighed so heavily on the necks of mankind for a thousand years, they broke for us and trampled under foot. They did well, and they deserve well of us who enjoy the liberties that were the fruit of their toils and battles. But in the Reformation and its result we see a repetition of some old Israelitish history. Though the Canaanite power was broken, yet the new power was never fully established over the whole territory to which Israel had a title. So our fathers proved that it is sometimes much easier to pluck up than it is to plant and make grow; that pulling down may be an easier task than rebuilding and reëstablishing within proper limits the power and authority of the Church. The men of war who had risen up against and broken the power of the Romish Church hesitated about submitting to the reformed church power; and we can see even to-day that the rightful authority of the Church is not recognized by us as it should be. Did the fathers of the Reformation do too much breaking down and pulling up by the root? It may be that while Cromwell's Ironsides were toppling over images and thrusting their pikes through costly windows and pictures, the reformed ministers were saying and doing that which led to the loosening of the bands of ecclesiastical authority over the lives of the people; so that while able to break the yoke of a corrupt Romish priesthood, they were not able to properly adjust the bonds of a lawful church authority. The unquestioned law is, "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls as they that must give account." It is also unquestionably the fact that we do not obey as we should them that are lawfully put over us in the

Church. Whether traceable to the old war of our fathers against the tyranny of Rome, and their successful opposition to the demands for blind obedience to the priesthood, or to some other cause, certain it is that through the bounds of the Reformed churches there is a lamentable lack of discipline, and an easy, careless deafness to the voice of command coming from those lawfully exercising the authority of the Church. Synods and sessions and councils may enjoin ever so solemnly, yet we find excuses for neglects or half-way obedience. Nor is this all. Notwithstanding indifference and outright disobedience, the discipline of the church courts is neglected, and is coming to be despised. The church courts seem in many cases to have surrendered their power, and to have become but empty names or figure heads, instead of being, as they should be, a living and abiding force in the Church and the world. It is not strange, then, that in reading the religious newspapers and other literature that comes to us, we carelessly skip over or put in the waste basket the reports, appeals and demands made upon us in the name of the Church by the committees and secretaries who are commissioned to attend to the various divisions of the Church work. Nor is it strange that it is becoming more and more difficult to draw the line between the Church and the world, and say who are Christians and who are worldlings. It would seem that we need another reformation to teach the people submission to lawful authority and impress the rulers with a due sense of the responsibilities resting on them, making them remember that they must "Watch for souls as they that must give account."

In the olden times it always characterized the lives of God's devout people that they should attend upon his worship, give to his cause, and humble themselves before him with fasting and prayer. He plainly showed his acceptance of, and his blessing upon, these things, when offered in the spirit of true contrition and devotion. But there have always been those who thought that by the mere outward observance and offering of these things God's favor was obtained. The proud Pharisee evidently thought he was making out a conclusive case in his own favor when he said, "I fast twice in the week and give tithes of all that I possess." The thought that the divine favor might be bought by outward conformity to rites and ceremonies, by gifts, penances, pilgrimages, vigils, prayers and fastings has seemed to grow up

naturally in the hearts of men, like noxious weeds in our gardens. We see evidences of it in every land and in every age, among heathen as well as among worshippers of the true God. At the time of the Reformation this evil was at its height. Tetzel was selling indulgences to sin and immunity from punishment, publicly and by authority of the Pope, when Luther rose up to denounce him and his errors, and to announce the great truth that man is saved not by gifts or works, but by God's grace through faith. Men had easily learned to look to their own works to save them, instead of finding salvation in and through Christ the only Saviour. Thus they indulged in an idolatry as pernicious as any the heathen ever engaged in, and more seductive. The reformers had for their great work the breaking down and putting away of this idolatry. They preached that there is but one "Name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved;" that our works do not and cannot save us. Thus they broke down the idolatry of works. It may be, it probably was the case, that there were some who, being persuaded that there was no salvation by their acts of worship, their gifts, their prayers and fastings, said to themselves, "If these things do not save us, why need we so much burden our lives with them?" It may be that, in breaking away from the idolatry of works, there were some who learned to undervalue those acts of worship and those deeds of righteousness which God teaches and requires. There is a natural law which causes us to rebound beyond the centre when we have been unduly drawn to one side. Good works exalted to a throne high above their due position and cast down from the pedestal may have fallen below their just eminence. Certain it is that in regular observance of outward acts of devotion, we of the Reformed are below our duty and privilege, and manifestly below the devotees of Rome.

Familiar illustrations occur to us all. I have recently observed on Sunday mornings the Roman Catholic congregation coming from mass, dispersing from their church door, and it always seems to me that I see every one of them, old and young, rich and poor, decent and profane alike. In our Protestant churches, however, how many empty benches we see! Romanists make a merit of attendance, and are called to a reckoning if absent. And so it is with giving to God's cause. Three times by the mouth of Moses the Lord commanded that "None shall appear

before me empty;" and the Catholic priests see to it that no professed Catholic fails in his due payments of what the church requires. On the other hand, but few of us ever see our church members disciplined for failure to attend church or for their many failures to pay church dues, and the delinquents are sadly numerous.¹

There are many in all our churches who "neglect the assembling of themselves together," and thus lose the means of grace appointed for our enlightenment, strength and comfort; and there are some who profess to be Christians who constantly fall short of their duty in giving to God's cause, and religious teachers and rulers, seemingly afraid of following in the track of the Romish priesthood, who made hard exactions of money from the people, hesitate to exact and enforce these prime duties and privileges of the Christian life. In breaking Romish idols we should not turn our hearts away from the good and true things which Romish idolatry misrepresented and tended to dishonor. Giving to the church was exalted by Rome to an unholy pre-eminence. In casting it down we should not forget its essential honor and value. Those who neglected it should be taught their sin and folly. They should be made to know that as the two first born of our race were taught to bring their offerings to God's altar; and his chosen people were forbidden to come before him empty-handed, so now, with enlarged means and privileges, we have increased responsibilities and should be held to a stricter accountability; and if other means of correction fail, the kind hand of discipline should be put forth to correct and heal the erring ones.

¹ The negroes as well as Catholics are an example to us. As I write this I hear from some young friends who were recently camp-hunting on Ossabaw Island, on the Georgia coast, of what they observed at a negro meeting. They went one night to the negro church. "Daddy Ben," the patriarch of the colored community, was leading the meeting, and at an appropriate time he called the roll of delinquents, beginning something like this: "Sis Tempe Smith, wharfore wuzn't you to prar-meetin' larst Wednesday night?" And so he went on through the roll, imposing punishment on those who couldn't give good excuses. Then the table was put out in front of the pulpit, and, without exception, all brought up their silver and copper to give to the Lord's cause. The young white men marched up then, and each put down a dollar, which brought from "Daddy Ben" an earnest prayer, in which he named each of them for a special blessing.

And so with prayer, the divinely appointed way of communion between man and God. His word teaches us to pray. The Pharisee prayed standing on the corner of the street, to be heard and seen of men, and for a pretense made long his prayers; and as the rising sun first salutes the earth, the white-robed Pharisee hastens to make his devotions with body bowed to the east. In like manner, following the sun around the earth from eastern Asia to Africa's western shores, there is heard from ten thousand minarets the muezzins' far-resounding cries, telling that "God is great," and that "There is but one God," and calling all to prayer. The common features in all these are the regularity of observance, and we fear the empty formality and essential worthlessness of all such performances. They call to mind the lively caricature or pantomime of prayer seen in the thousands of prayer wheels which adorn all the water-courses of Thibet. The same faults are in much of the prayer services of Rome. *Paternosters* and *Ave Marias* are required to be said as penance. For an appropriate money reward the priest will offer an agreed number of prayers or masses for the repose of the soul of your father. By all these means prayer exalted as a merit, put in a false light, when cast down with other Romish fallacies falls into undeserved neglect. Some among us, having no regular forms or seasons for prayer, learn to forget and neglect its duties and privileges. We have a distressing fear that in many of our families the morning and evening service of family prayer is being neglected and forgotten. Ought not the firm, kind hand of church discipline be stretched out here, too?

The Pharisee fasted also. He told the Lord that he fasted twice every week. The followers of Mohammed have their regular fasts, thus making merit with the Almighty. Rome also, with minute particularity of time and specification, orders and requires her people to fast. The Abyssinians, with their Emperor Menelik, who is also their high priest, and calls himself "King of Kings," go beyond the Pharisee. They have 192 fast days in the year, and are careful in their observance. These all have much in the authentic history of God's people to warrant and encourage these manifestations of humility and self-denial. The examples are very numerous, and the allusions to fasting as an exercise profitable to men and approved by the Lord are in various parts of the word of God. In fact, our Lord Jesus seems

to expressly declare that when he should be taken away his disciples would fast regularly, as did the disciples of John and the Pharisees. But there is very little fasting among us now. We cannot deny our need of humiliation. Our sins are as many, and our temptations as strong, as any that ever afflicted and threatened the church. We have wealth and worldly prosperity and much of vainglory among us. Yet we scarcely ever heard of any who fast regularly; and a proclamation of a fast by the authority of the church is seemingly a thing entirely of the past. Occasionally some devout soul uses this means of humbling the flesh and spirit before the face of the Almighty. Such instances are remembered and sometimes spoken of as accounting for a life of unusual consecration and power with God and man. And let us remember the church does not ignore or despise fasting. In fact, our standards expressly approve and provide for public and private fasts. (See Chapter XIV. of the *Directory of Worship*, and Section 24 of *Form of Government*.) Yet our fathers soon learned to neglect it. I observe in one of the letters of Samuel Rutherford, one of the commissioners who framed our Confession, that he complains of the people's neglect of fasting in his day. The Methodist discipline is still more explicit in requiring and providing for the regular observance of that which our Presbyterian form of government calls "an ordinance established by Christ."

We ask, why this neglect of an institution of the church so sanctioned and so solemnly enjoined? It may be, as in other instances, that Rome made merit, in other words, made an idol, of her fasts, and in casting away the idolatry, our fathers loosened the reverence and regard of the people for fasting as a means of grace appointed of God for our spiritual prosperity and peace.

Possibly, also, it is brought into contempt because Catholic fasting is so often made a butt of ridicule. Thus Edmond About, in *Le Roi des Montagnes*, pictures a company of Greek brigands standing around some English prisoners whom they are holding for ransom. Their hands were then red with the blood of unransomed prisoners, but they held them up in holy horror, crying, "Schismatique," because the English wanted to eat meat on Friday, their priest or chaplain meanwhile crossing himself with utmost anxiety and energy.

But we must let these illustrations suffice. If we see from them any lack of strength in our organizations, any want of authority, or neglect of discipline in our churches; if there is any lack of attendance on church services, any slackness in prayer and gifts to God's cause; if God's people do not humbly "give themselves to prayer and fasting" as holy men of old were wont to do, it were well that the devout and thoughtful among us should seek the reason and remedies for these delinquences. The very wisest may hesitate, and with diffidence attempt to prescribe the remedy; but all can see and say that because Rome oppressed princes and people, and made the church yoke a grievous one, is no reason why the rulers in the Lord's house, here in our day, should not demand and require of the people under their charge obedience to the laws and constituted authorities of the church. And if men refuse or neglect their regular attendance upon God's house, or refuse to obey and support its ordinances, giving of their money duly and regularly for God's cause, the hand of discipline should be firmly laid upon them to restore them, and to maintain the honor and authority of the church. Fasting being an ordinance of the church, why should not the wisdom and power of our rulers provide how and when this means of grace is to be enjoyed, so that the ignorant may be instructed, and the zealous be guided and encouraged?

Rome had, and still has, a perfect organization and a recognized and an exercised authority. She requires of her votaries due attention on her church services and systematic contribution and payment of church dues. Instead of turning from and avoiding her example in these matters, let us learn from her how to guide and govern the people given to our care, avoiding only her vices, but emulating her wisdom and courage, remembering at all times we must give account for the souls committed to our care.