



WALLACE RADCLIFFE.

THE
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A VOLUME OF SERMONS

BY MINISTERS OF THE

SYNOD OF MICHIGAN,

WITH

AN INTRODUCTION

BY THE

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HOW TO FIND RELIGION.

BY REV. WALLACE RADCLIFFE, D. D.,*

Pastor N. Y. Ave. Presbyterian Church, Washington, D. C.

Text: "Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master." John 20:16.

The weeping Mary is the type of every earnest soul; her ecstatic cry of recognition, its certain and ultimate reward. With an absent Lord the garden is always a sepulchre. Its beauties attract not, its fragrance pleases not, but for every pleasure there abides a thorn, for every brightness a shadow and a fear. "They have taken away my Lord." The soul, above all earthly flowers and beautiful things, lifts its eyes toward heaven. There abides the thirst for the living

* Wallace Radcliffe is of Scotch-Irish descent, a native of Pittsburg, a graduate of Washington and Jefferson College, and of Princeton Seminary. After supplying a church in West Philadelphia for a year, his first pastorate was at Reading, Pa., 1871-1885; Fort St. church, Detroit, 1885-1895; N. Y. Ave. church, Washington, D. C., 1895-. He is by nature and grace, and in future hope as well, a Presbyterian—a "high church Presbyterian," to use his own striking phrase. The Synods of Pennsylvania and Michigan and the General Assembly of 1898 at Winona have placed him in their Moderator's chair. Twice he has been delegate to the Pan Presbyterian Council. Not only the Fort Street church of Detroit, but the Presbyterian Alliance of Detroit, the Presbytery of Detroit and the Synod of Michigan, have had the blessing of his analytical faculty, sound judgment and broad attainment. The brethren of the synod will be pleased to see him make the Alpha and Omega of this volume, and the editor gratefully acknowledges the favor received at the hands of Dr. Radcliffe.

God, and he is not far from every one of us. He stands ready to minister to every need, to respond to every honest search. He is found of those that seek him. He walks in the garden. Material things speak of him, and those things that are made and seen are the proclamations of the invisible One. With closed eyes, eyes closed by fear, by sorrow, by earthliness, men walk unmindful of the nearness of Jesus Christ. Truth walks along our streets and in our homes; and across the sea, in the darkness of heathenism, Christ stands. Men see him sometimes. They look through tears and darkness. The multitude fail to recognize his voice and presence; but amid our tears, amid the enveloping cloud of ignorance and sin, Christ stands, the Divine Gardener, the sympathizing Friend, the incarnate, resurrected One.

The incident presents to us the successive steps of our search for truth, and eminently for truth in the presence of Jesus Christ. He has to be disclosed to every honest search. If we wish the truth we must hunt for it. It does not hang on the tree for the careless grasp. It does not force itself upon the inattentive and the uncaring. He that would find Christ must hunt for him. He that would know truth must everywhere buy it at its price. The search for Christ is to be a diligent one. Beautifully the record gives the figure. Early, before dawn, while it was yet dark, Mary sought for Jesus. It is not certainly foreign to the suggestion of the text for us to recognize at least the thought that truth is found by him who in the early years seeks it. The conscience becomes hard, the mind sodden, effort limited in certain distinct and material channels, and the spiritual consciousness, unstrained and unsusceptible in age, in youth is controlled by an influence afterward unknown and often un-

thought of. "They that seek me early shall find me," and Jesus gives the promise to the youthful thought, to the child with childlike faith, to the eyes that look with wonder and praise upon earthly duties and earthly experiences, that in the dew of youth the freshness of his truth and his presence will come with benediction.

But far beyond any suggestion is the wider teaching of the incident, that in any search for spiritual truth Jesus Christ is found by him who gives honest, earnest and continuous effort. Do you not notice that Peter and John, transient visitors in the sepulchre, did not see the angels; and that to the women who came with their spices and their eagerness, and who stayed in their sorrow, the angels came and spoke? Early, while it is yet dark, *feeling* the vaguest promptings of the heart, the merest glimmerings and suggestions of the truth, is that which leads into the larger realization of truth and Christlike living. The sun does not burst forth with a noon-day splendor. Truth does not come full-orbed to any soul. Christian lives do not spring like Minerva, full-armed and grown, but first the seed, then the ear, and by and by the full corn in the ear. The young Christian cannot have the maturity of thought nor the consistency of life that belongs to older hearts and professions. Revelations of truth always, knowledge of Jesus Christ eminently, is progressive. First the dawn, and then the light unto the perfect day. First, the honest feeling of the truth we have.

What a vague suggestion, what a remote hope in the heart of Mary, that brought her in the darkness of the morning to the tomb of Christ. But to that hope, to that vague suggestion there came an answer at last. Men are not honest with themselves. They play with the truth and with Jesus Christ. They are the veriest tyros in their search for truth, tyros whom they would

not permit for a moment in their secular life. They take to-day a detached sentence from a speaker's address, a clause from the word of God, a chance word of a passing conversation, a skeptical thought in the drawing room or at the place of business. They dally with it, they play with it, that there may be some awakening for truth. To-day it quickens the mind, but to-morrow it is forgotten again. And men everywhere are walking in their truth as in a tread-mill, never getting on.

Some men are just as far to-day as you were 30 or 40 years ago in your knowledge and in your Christian experience; a little edge or fragment of the truth, a little drop of dew, it may be, of Christian experience, and that satisfies you, or at least you compel yourself to a satisfaction therewith. You question the being of God, but you never enter into a thoughtful discussion. You talk flippantly about the inspiration of the Scripture. You have never given one hour's solid thought to it. You play with the theories upon the divinity of Christ. You never have read one volume of proof or of argument upon it, and through days and years you play with fragmentary truth and go round and round your weary, blinded, inoperative tread-mill of so-called thought. He who attains the full day begins with the dawn and follows it. He who attains the mountain top climbs through many a valley, round many a rock, as Mary, by and by, welcomes the resurrection of Christ because she sought before the dawn the place of his sepulchre.

It is to be a search not only of diligence, but of affection. We attain truth when we love it. Upon what a small basis Mary wrought! She came to the grave of Jesus. "We thought it had been he who would have redeemed Israel." They had dreams of crowns and thrones and organized monarchy and exalted life and

nationality. "We trusted it had been he," and this is all, a buried sepulchre, a crucified leader. But to that dead hope Mary came. Her love brought her back and back again to that idea with no definite thought of what might be, but vaguely imagining something must be, round him in whom centered so tenderly and so really the love and life of the disciples. The truth is not a matter of formularies, of accumulated doctrines. We do not attain the highest ideal and result when we come at the truth with scalpel, with dissecting knife, with crucible. Jesus Christ is known most directly by those who come loving the truth. The revelation is not only by degrees, but it is by certainties to him who desires to know what truth is. Men labor for victory. They have the pride of attainment. They desire argument. They would accumulate knowledge. The richest truth is not to such, but to those who in the sense of sin come, though it may be weeping, to the grave of the dead Christ; who in the darkness, conscious of their need, hope that somehow, somewhere, in some strange way, there may come ministry and relief. He that loves the truth, that loves redemption, that loves the idea of immortality, of reconciliation, of peace, of everlasting life, to him, though he comes in the darkness and to his grave, is the ultimate result, the restoration and life.

We notice that our search may often have its mistakes. There are paradoxes in Christian life and in Christian search. Joy is a sorrow to this seeking one. Mary weeps because there is an empty tomb. That empty tomb spoke of the fulfillment of all the words of prophets, of psalmists, of kings through the ages. It spoke of an accomplished fact, of a declared atonement, of a radiant hope for heaven and immortality. That empty tomb proclaimed a triumphant Christ, yet that empty tomb meant only tears to Mary's heart. We

mistake oftentimes. God is revealing himself in daily experiences. He moves in the mysteries of providence and of grace, and we see, in a present denial, in temporary defeats, in contradictions to our intellectual aims or spiritual desires, the darkness of an irreparable and eternal defeat. God moves in the winds and in the storms. Our disappointments are oftentimes his ministries and best interpretations of his grace, "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform," and by these things that bring us often disaster and defeat, by lives burdened and darkened and troubled in many ways, by plans and purposes which have their ends apparently in darkness and in a tomb, God speaks to us. All prayers of his people are answered, not always as we desire, not always as in the limitation of our ignorance and sin we ask; but as we really ask, asking for the best thing, the most enduring thing, the most blessed thing, prayer has its answer. Mary wept at that empty tomb, a disappointed hope. Jesus was answering it in the supposed gardener. He stands by us with the answer and the revelation, waiting for the recognition of faith.

And truth, as it comes to us, is known not so much by its statement as by its tone. "Mary." That was all, and she knew him. Doctrines may be formally stated. There may be a succession of formulas that after all shall carry in them no life; whilst the daily experiences, the stumbling even into evil, may have in it revelation of a better life and a dearer love. There is a trend in truth. There is an aroma, as it comes here from stammering lips, there from humble lives, again in the conflict of daily trouble, in the struggle of sin, that carries the aroma of truth, that bears in itself, though feebly stated, though illogical to human ears, the fact, the reality, the unconquerable argument of life in Christ.

“One thing I know ; I cannot tell you other things. I cannot explain the physician’s method, I do not know how it came to pass, but this man touched my eyes, and whereas I was blind, now I see.” And against the accumulation of arguments, against the sneers of men, against the philosophies and theories that seem in themselves as we read them oftentimes so irrefutable, we place against them the tone of the Christian voice, the atmosphere of the Christian life, the constant experience of the Christian faith ; and, above all logic and rhetoric and sneer and assault, it lifts itself up and in the word “Mary,” speaks to questioning ears, the voice of Christ, in the experience of its consciousness ; declaring solemnly, certainly, against the world, “Whereas I was blind, now I see.”

And the result of this search is the acknowledgment of his masterhood. When we find Christ, the utterance of the soul is “Rabboni.” It is sentiment, but Christianity is not sentiment, and sentiment merely is not Christianity. It has statements of belief, but formulated statements are not Christianity. It has religious acts and experiences, but acts and experiences in themselves are not Christianity. It is the soul’s acknowledgment of the principles, not the intelligent reception of a truth alone, or chiefly. To the glad eyes of Mary it was the risen Christ, and in his resurrection, truth divine. Piety is the acknowledgment not of doctrine, nor of professional name or station, nor intellectual assent alone ; it is the acknowledgment of the presence of Jesus Christ, the one who was in the beginning with God and was God, and in his very presence, resurrected by his own power, in his very presence carrying the proof of his divinity. Piety is the acknowledgment of the submission of the soul to the divine Christ. I must not touch that crown upon that royal head. I must not

bring him to that equality with myself that shall claim kindred not only, but equal place and equal right with him in his humanity. "Touch me not." Christianity builds itself, if it has life at all, if it has existence, if it has endurance, upon the divinity of Jesus Christ. Whatever others may do I shall not criticise. For myself I cannot even understand the desire on the part of those who refuse to acknowledge the divinity of Jesus Christ, to claim the name of Christian. Christ in the glory of his divinity; Christ in the transcendent triumph, the divine triumph of his resurrection; Christ who carries himself to the grave, and by his own power carries himself from that grave; Christ in whom I have life, promise, power, is Christ the almighty, the omniscient One, very God of very God. It is the personal appropriation of this person. "Rabboni" means not only master, but *my* master. The submission of a person to a person. The acknowledgment by a person of a person. The appropriation of a person by a person. The appropriation, acknowledgment, submission of a human person to the divine person; that is Christianity. And that submission is complete. He is Master. Undoubted, absolute submission of the heart and will to that divine heart and divine will. The heart and will with us are free. It is blasphemous to claim submission of heart and will to other than a divine will. You assail my manhood, you belittle my self-respect when you claim an unquestioning, absolute, entire submission to any other than God. Christianity brings the man into the presence of him of whom to-day it can be said as of old: "What manner of man is this that even the winds and the waves obey him?" Disease cast out, sickness banished, death itself conquered, and not only thus in his omnipotence, but entering into the hearts and wills of men, claiming them with an absolute au-

thority, ruling over them with a scepter, in all things and through all things, to which they are cheerful to bow.

How shall we know this will? Some men tell us that it is to be known in the radiancy of love; yet love can be mistaken. They speak of a Christian consciousness of men; and yet, whilst we rejoice in the divine immanence, we recognize that the Christian consciousness can sometimes, even in the days of the apostles, be led into heresy, into wrong and evil living. They tell us of reason; but reason itself is based only upon facts, and facts must be given it from which to formulate its principles and method of life; and even reason is not always infallible. They say the church shall guide us; but there have been days when the church has not spoken with infallible voice, nor led in ways of heavenly peace and quietness. All are good, the radiancy of love, the Christian consciousness, the dictates of reason, the guidance of the church; each has its place in the direction and impulse of Christian life. You direct your affairs by the time which your watch indicates. I direct by my watch. All over this city and throughout the land men are guiding themselves in business appointments and in daily duties by their own watches, but all have the one guide, the one test, they are guided by the stars. You and I may have our Christian consciousness, our radiancy of love, our voice of reason, our dictum of the church, but church and reason and consciousness must themselves be guided by the only infallible guide, the star of heaven, the Word of God, given by inspiration, and profitable to direct. By these words we are justified, and by these words we are condemned.

In the Word of God we find the will of the Master, and our submission to that is absolute. You will remember how Loyola subdued the will of his agents;

they were to be as a corpse and as a staff in a blind man's hand. To this will of Christ we come, not that we may become corpses, or an insensible staff in another hand, but in our very submission the dead becomes alive, that which was lost is found, and in submission we find our largest liberty.

To this masterhood there is a development. It is a beautiful suggestion of the usage of Jesus Christ, as we follow the terms by which he called his disciples. At first they were disciples of the Master, submissive. Further on in history he calls them friends. When nearer the end, he speaks of them as little children, and after his resurrection he tells Mary "to go and tell my brethren." He that yields to the Master becomes not only a disciple, but a friend and companion; and he who walks in the companionship of Jesus Christ, in submission to his will, becomes by and by as a little child, the highest ideal to the divine lips of heavenly life and character; and walking and submitting, in the love and unquestioning obedience of the child, we are brought into the brotherhood of the risen One, pulse beating with pulse, shoulder standing to shoulder, hope joining in hope, love inflamed by kindred love, spirit informed by kindred spirit, joint heirs with the elder Brother unto the heavenly inheritance.

"Rabboni," says Mary. Here she would find her rest in the arms of the risen One. "Touch me not. Go tell my brethren." It is well that by voice of him, by Sabbath service, by actual experience, we be lifted into recognition and exultancy in the presence and communion of Jesus Christ. It belongs to our life that there shall be sweetness, rest, exhilaration and uplifting of thought and life; but that is the best obedience which carries itself out into the companionship and service and brotherhood of Jesus Christ, and yields itself in

loving service, like unto the Master himself; for the disciple must not and cannot be greater than the Master. Not pleasure but labor, not ecstasy but service, not experience but works, are the testimony of the fact of our Christian faith and our Christian life.

Thus Jesus brings himself to you and me, pointing in the ascension to my Father and his Father, to my God and his God, as he sends us now, here in the lowly Sabbath school work, there among the poor, now on sick beds, wherever the word can be spoken, wherever the tone of truth, of love, of sweetness can be heard, not always in formulated statement, not always nor chiefly in stated solemn service, but in our casual experience, in our daily work, in our common task, carrying the inspiration of his presence and power, that all our life shall have the divine presence, and the greeting "Mary," shall wake the hope and unlock the sealed lips and give recognition, not of us, but of the Christ within us, "Rabboni."

How sweetly quaint George Herbert speaks of our life. "How sweetly does 'my Master' sound; 'my Master,' as ambergris leaves a rich sense unto the taste, so do these words a sweet content, an oriental fragrance, 'my Master.'"