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→*SERMONS*←

VENERABLE AGE: ITS TRIALS AND CONSOLATIONS.

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And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live? I am this day fourscore years old.—II. SAMUEL xix., 34.

TO THE Christian pastor, there is no loss so affecting and absolute as that which is realized in the departure of those who, by manifold tokens, have long been ripening and making ready for death—who, for years, have been far on the way, and waiting for the end. Whether he looks forth upon the gathered assembly of his people from the desk, or altar, or pulpit, his search for devout interest and for reverent sympathy is largely among the aged, who here and there are crowned with the almond blossoms of life's appointed term. Or whether he goes forth in pastoral visitation to meet the members of his charge in their homes or on their daily round of life-work, it is most frequently from the well advanced and venerable that his heart finds its cheer, and his work its appreciation. And when these disappear, entering the Paradise of God, while others may grieve over the sundering of a closer tie, the pastor of the flock, as I have said, very often sustains an irreparable loss, and carries deep in his soul a sense of heavy bereavement. I can most easily revive their wonted aspects, their devout engagedness in holy worship, and their respectful attention to the discourse. How is this place re-peopled with the dead! The elders of a past generation—the faithful, and the excellent, who earned a good report and entered the world of light, how do they return in the remi-

a point of transition and must stand ready for the change. Transition Change! Heavenly words! Not termination, not annihilation, but a marvellous transformation awaits him; a putting off of defilement, a putting on of light and celestial beauty; an assumption of his true life, an ascension to his true destiny. This is the day-spring about to visit him. This is the dawn about to break. O thou dying saint, thou expiring mother in Israel! the time of thy departure is at hand. Thou hast known suffering; thou shalt know it no more forever. Thou hast tasted the waters of Marah; they were bitter, but thou shalt taste them no more. Thou hast wrestled with temptation, and contended with the powers of darkness, but the adversary shall come near thee no more. Passing within the veil, thou shalt also pass from weakness to strength, from humiliation to glory, from faith to sight, from the arms of mortality to the bosom of God. Behold, I come quickly. Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out, and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the City of my God, which is New Jerusalem.

Yes, there is golden beauty in decay,
 As autumn's leaves outshine the leaves of May;
 The calm of evening with its roseate light,
 The starry silence of the wintry night;
 The stillness of repose when storms are o'er,
 And the sea murmurs on a peaceful shore;
 The brooding memories of the past that make
 The old man young again for beauty's sake;
 The hope sublime that cheers the lonely road
 Which leads him gently to the hills of God.

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AND ITS WORK.

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Preach the word.—II. TIMOTHY iv., 2.
Thy word is truth.—JOHN xvii., 17.

THE ministry is Christ's ascension gift. It represents our absent Lord. The human teacher goes forth to his mission with an open Bible. From this he receives his authority, and from this he draws his theme. He tells of God and our original relations to Him, disturbed by sin; of Christ the God-man, in whom God is reconciling the world unto Himself, and of the Holy Ghost whose province it is to lead men from sin to holiness and back to God.

The minister of the Word should be thoroughly furnished for his important mission. Hence the theological seminary is a needful parenthesis separating his call from his work. Here it is expected that he shall acquire a wide range of knowledge adapted to his calling, and advance his spiritual fitness for a spiritual work. But the training in the school of the Prophets

must be followed through all the term of ministerial service with the devout and critical study of the sacred Scriptures. He must be always learning more about the truth which he knew at the first, and exploring fields of knowledge which are continually inviting him to earnest inquiry. Emptiness has nothing to impart to others. The teacher, whatever the sphere he would fill, must be a student. This statement is not made in the interests of a New Theology. I wish simply to emphasize the necessity in the ministry, of habits of study, and then advert to certain rules which relate to the proclamation of the Word.

In entire consistency with this purpose is my first thought, which has respect to:

I. The Immutability of Truth.

Truth is reality or its expression. In its nature it is indestructible, unchangeable and eternal, if the reality be so. In its divine sphere it is the memory and foreknowledge of God. It may be unknown, as to astronomers worlds have been undiscovered; but our ignorance does not affect its existence. It may be eclipsed, but it still shines in its native heaven. It may be entombed in the catacombs of a corrupt Church, or concealed in distorted creeds, or remanded to the shades of a barbaric age, but it lives unchanged and changeless as God Himself.

Saving truth, written as with a sunbeam, is immutable as the soul's need, and the eternity of God. The germ of the Christian system was embodied in the first promise. The Babe of Bethlehem appeared at the gate of Eden. Sin and salvation were the great facts of the earliest theology. The symbolism of the patriarchal times, the institutions of the Hebrew Church, and the adumbrations of prophecy, were the unfoldings, in logical sequence, of original truth, and when Christ came He could do no more than repeat the old story. Hence He said to the Father, "I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me."

The Evangelists, in their retrospect, tread a familiar path. One outstrips another along the line of immutable truth. Matthew sets forth the offices of Jesus as the Son of Abraham, His ancestral line passing through the house of David, illustrating the old facts of the Abrahamic covenant, and the fulfilment of ancient promises in the life of the regal law-giver. Then Mark enters a wider field and tells of Christ's expansive sympathy, before which old barriers fall and old lines fade; and of His power which traversed both visible and invisible realms, superior to disease, and devils, and death itself. Luke follows in an orderly succession. He removes the middle wall which separated Jews and Gentiles. The Apostle of a world-wide humanity, he announces Jesus to be the Son of Adam, the King of nations, and the brother of all mankind. In the last of the four Gospels, John enters the invisible spaces beyond the creation, and stops not until he conducts us into the Heaven of heavens, where we behold Jesus, the Son of Adam, enthroned as the Son of God, angels adoring Him, whilst His glorious train fills the temple. Then the Apostles declare the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh,

justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up into glory; maintaining still the unity of truth, pursuing the same undeviating line which joins two eternities, the great principle of truth unfolding as inspiration extends and culminates in the apocalyptic vision, the circle completed amid the splendors of that world from which Christ came to ours that we might ascend to His.

It is true that revelation advanced with the ages. It was like the sun when he goeth forth in his might. The field of prophecy widened continually. Isaiah attained greater heights and a more comprehensive vision than David, whilst Daniel and Micah saw the tops of distant thoughts which had been dimly outlined to the son of Amos. Yet all this was largely the growth of a primal truth. Take a representative fact which illustrates this development. Revelation begins with the announcement that God made the heavens and the earth. The patriarchs and Moses believed in a personal, extra-mundane God, and assigned Him an imperial throne. They studied the heavens in the land of the Chaldees, on the plains of Canaan, and in the classic schools of Egypt. They accepted, on God's authority, the great facts of creation, as do we. So far we are simply their equals. Nothing essentially new has ever been learned in this department of truth. With Job we affirm that God hangeth the world upon nothing, and with Isaiah, that the Creator sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and with Paul, that by Him all things consist.

Since inspiration ceased, no additional truth has been declared. Nothing can be added to that which is its own complement. Revelation is a full-orbed sphere, steadily shining through the long night of time. As the noon-day sun has not shifted its position since the morning, nor undergone any essential change, though the early mists have disappeared, so our investigations may eliminate mere traditions from a formulated creed and present in clearer symbols our holy faith, but can never change a single feature of truth, or supplant any Bible doctrine by a new hypothesis. Athanasius made no new discoveries concerning the person of Christ, or Augustine concerning original sin, or Luther concerning the doctrine of justification by faith. They simply developed or recovered truth, indicated the relations of the several parts, and made more intelligible facts already revealed.

Interpretations may grow. Historical reconstructions may advance. Ethics may attain higher ground. Eschatology may clarify the vision. Ecclesiology may realize organic unity. And yet we would emphasize what even an advocate of progress has declared, that "Primal Christian faiths are not departing, and shall never be swept away." "The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth forever." At the same time we recognize the fact that there is:

II. Progress in the knowledge of Truth.

It is so both as respects nature and revelation. The first utterance of inspiration brings all worlds to view. And yet great highways of travel have been opened across the fields of nature, and fleet couriers come and go. We have learned much about the extent of creation, the laws which govern it, and

the omnipresence of that energy by which all things, minute and vast, continue. Respecting all this Copernicus knew more than Ptolemy, and Ptolemy more than Hebrew shepherds who watched their flocks and scanned the heavens by night. The professor of theology goes in advance of his pupil, and the theological student of the spiritual novice; always learning more concerning what they knew at first. Biblical hermeneutics bring into clearer view and set in more logical order truths that are eternal as their source. In every stage of their progress they may add confirmation to the Word of God, and strengthen our faith in that system of doctrine which Martin Luther restored, and John Calvin formulated, and John Knox preached in the grand old temples of Edinburgh and St. Andrew.

We might study the mystery of godliness forever and be always learning, yet never fathom its depths. The glory of Christ's person is as measureless as His infinity. The doctrine of justification by faith is as inexhaustible as its author. But all progress is along a straight line. Essential truth is a ladder, on the first round of which we planted our feet the moment we believed.

That there has been advance in systematic theology the most conservative admit. Charles Hodge has done a nobler service for the Church than did Thomas Aquinas, and furnished better definitions of truth than did Anselm or Turretin. And some now living may discover more clearly the relations of truths, such as God's sovereignty and man's free agency, faith and works, the proper Godhead and true humanity of Christ in the hypostatical union, than the evangelical teachers of the seventeenth or a later century, and yet they will believe what Owen, Newton and Henry believed, and believe because thus "it is written."

And of this we are assured, that whatever the progress of theological and physical truths, there can never be any conflict between them. Natural science when matured will join hands with revelation, and the two will vie with each other in adoring Him who is the truth. Moses and Bacon, Isaiah and Kepler, all alike sit at God's feet, and in the interchange of thought find the testimony of His works in accord with His Word. Further we would magnify:

III. The Authority on which we believe.

Reason does not occupy the first place, as John Scotus and many others have taught, but revelation. The latter deserves our credence and demands it. With us the question is not, what is the testimony of personal illumination, or what does the Church teach, but what say the sacred Scriptures? God's Word is the standard of truth, and the electrometer of creeds. We should watch against the rationalism which throws the shadow of discredit upon the divine Word, and guard ourselves from drifting into the fog banks of agnosticism, or entering on the deceitful sea of so-called liberal Christianity, or adopting any theory which refers the teachings of the Holy Ghost to the subjectivity of the sacred writers.

We do not surrender our intelligence when we subject it to authority. We are never so divine as when we sit at God's feet. We never pursue our

investigations so safely as when His Word is our guide. This recognition of authority enters the whole domain of truth. Intellectual philosophy travels through invisible realms with firm yet cautious steps, accepting the testimony of personal consciousness derived from God, and bowing to divine authority expressed in the constitution and laws of sentient being. Physical science, guided by the senses and native reason, with its crucible and drills, its microscope and telescope, its logarithms and scales, intelligently or unwittingly admits, at the first and always, that God's voice in nature is true and His Word more enduring than earth and skies. And if in one field of inquiry we recognize the authority of God and take no steps without it, why not do the same in the other? The stairway which is planted on the earth reaches into Heaven. The laws of the visible govern our passage into the unseen. The spirit of the age opposes old systems of faith. Republicanism is restive under imperial rule. But we must submit ourselves to God and accept His Word as our rule of faith, or we shall walk in darkness and see no light. This suggests the indispensable necessity of:

IV. The Knowledge of Truth.

We cannot be saved without it. We cannot communicate what we do not ourselves possess. The student of theology is not to stand on the margin of great thoughts catching some gleams of the radiance further on, but he is required to enter the great world of truth, explore its heights and depths, mark well its bulwarks, study its means of defence, seek the source and trace the channels of its life-giving rivers, and take his outlook from the summits God's own hands have reared.

Much of our literature is permeated with the virus of unbelief. Great intellects, blinded by the god of this world, are arrayed against revealed religion. The high priests of modern civilization are seeking to swathe in cerements what they pronounce an effete religion, born of superstition and to be buried with it. It is the old warfare which Cain inaugurated; the reproach of Christ which Moses accepted; and the false philosophy which Paul confronted on Mars Hill. It will wane with the increase of light and be destroyed with the brightness of Christ's appearing.

Moreover the Church should earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. We are called not to defend the outposts simply of Christianity, but the citadel itself; the authority of the Divine Word, and the Christology of revelation. It is doubtless true that some should be pre-eminently qualified to command the defences of religion, whilst others are occupied with more peaceful pursuits. The Captain of our salvation will distribute His forces wisely. It is not necessary that every minister should be an invincible disputant like Luther, or have the scholastic acumen of a Calvin, or possess the varied attainments of a Theodore Beza, yet the wider the acquisitions the greater the fitness of the ministry for their work. It is well to have Wallace's double-handed sword, though Cincinnatus-like, we are habitually engaged with fallow ground and harvests. There have been ministers who could not read the Scriptures in the original tongues, who could

not state the Augustinian doctrine of sin, or the Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity, or define the higher criticism, or tell anything about the Council of Nice, or the Solemn League and Covenant; who could not answer intelligently Hume's objections to miracles, or Owen's to the chronology of Moses, or Tyndall's to prayer, and yet were wise in winning souls to Christ. But their influence would have filled a wider sphere and been a mightier factor in the world's redemption, if, whilst they preached Christ with simplicity and power, they had been able to compass the gravest errors, maintain the truth with an irresistible logic, and with the dignity of conscious intelligence defend the sanctuary of our precious hope. There is no theological or scientific or scholastic learning that may not be consecrated to Christ and extend the triumphs of the truth, whilst a ministry which combines piety with inexcusable ignorance only degrades the faith that was born in Heaven.

V. And now we pass from the Knowledge of Truth to its Proclamation.

It has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. We are born of God's Word, then others are born of ours. Vinet has well said, "Natural paternity is the symbol of our spiritual relationships; we mutually engender one another." Thought finds expression in speech. Christ is the Word. The Voice that walked in the garden, still walks in the persons of the Christian ministry, among men.

Preaching is both a science and an art. It is knowledge appropriately expressed. "Because the preacher was wise he still taught the people knowledge. . . . The preacher sought to find out acceptable words." Hence the teacher of sacred rhetoric is at the top. His responsibility is great. His influence is far-reaching. He teaches others to teach, and he lives in other lives. He should see to it that his students obtain proper conceptions of their work, and secure every attainable qualification for it. The preaching demanded by the age may not be that adapted to it. Our duty is plain. The ministry is commanded to preach immutable Bible truth; that to which all the learning of the schools is subsidiary and subordinate. Bible truth; not philosophy or science, poetry or aesthetics, morality or hygiene, though he should know something of all these. Apologetics and polemics, as already indicated, have their place, but it is an inferior one. Our primary and habitual duty is not to combat the errors of Plato or Aristotle, as resurrected in the teachings of a Parker or Emerson, or to disprove the positivism of Comte, or the pantheism of Spinoza, or to wander through the labyrinths of Hegelian metaphysics. There is little use in contending with old enemies, though they come in new clothes. Direct assaults upon error are of little account. You may pierce the night with bayonets, or smite it with battering rams, but it will stay on. Only when truth is in the ascendant does error flee. The last words of Goethe may well be the preacher's motto, "Open the shutters and let in the light." He must be familiar with error if he would resist its assaults and maintain the respect of his people. Justin Martyr, Tertullian and Carlstadt illustrated this necessity by their polemic failures. But the

truth remains firm as Gibraltar and luminous as the sun, that the ministry is true to God, to itself and to souls only when it preaches the fundamental truths of sin and of salvation by the Cross. It has been well said that, "The pulpits of this land need have no panic about infidelity if they will faithfully preach Christ as the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Men attain to a knowledge of God only through His Son. Nature is interpreted in man; man is interpreted in Christ; and the divine-human Christ conducts to God. The devout Greek, leaving the plain watered by the Ilissus, and passing the contiguous foot-hills, ascended to the summit of Hymettus, where the earth seemed less earthly, raised above the world's turmoil and toil, and nearer the concave of the heavens, and hoped he might there receive some communication from the invisible One that would answer his anxious inquiries, and a divine afflatus by which he would be better fitted for life's duties and a residence with God. It was the soul's instinctive searching for the ladder of Jacob's vision, that which conducts through the incarnate Son to the Father, in whom man who was made for God, finds eternal rest. Ah, the soul needs Christ; it hungers for Him, aspires to be with Him and by Him attains the end of its creation. It demands nothing more; it can be satisfied with nothing less. "So vital is Christ in Christian experience," said Professor H. B. Smith, "that many are withheld from speculation upon His nature from the unspeakable depth and tenderness of their love for Him."

When we come to the house of God we want to see His glorious Son. It is a crime to take away our Lord and not even tell us where He is laid. We can get on without hearing one syllable about Darwin, or Huxley, or John Stuart Mill, but we cannot live without Christ. Theories of sound and light and heat, of spontaneous generation and evolution, may interest us at other times and in other places, but the pulpit should enthrone Christ and the sanctuary should be the vestibule of Heaven. Hence that preaching is meaningless, a mockery, dead, which does not give prominence to Christ. Sinai should point to Calvary. Sin should suggest the atoning Lamb. Sorrow should lead to Jesus; joy should sing its *Te Deum* in His presence. History should find its centre in Him. Nature should ascend to its Maker. There is no pulpit theme that should not be born of Christ or discover Him. He is the root and offspring of David, the premise and conclusion of all truth, the author and finisher of our faith, the world's light and Heaven's glory.

Whether we preach without the manuscript, as did Christ, His Apostles and the early fathers, as did Origen, Augustine and Chrysostom, as did Robert Hall and Robertson, whose premeditated thoughts were caught by reporters on the wing of impassioned utterance; or whether we read our messages, as did Chalmers, Candlish, and Bethune; whether the sermons lack rhetorical finish and logical order, as did those of Livingstone and Whitefield, whether they are ornate and imaginative and argumentative, as Guthrie's, Hamilton's and Melvill's, it will not matter greatly if we only adhere to our commission,

set up the cross against the background of sin, awaken longings after holiness, and make men more meet for Heaven.

There is much preaching in these days which plays on the circumference of saving truth, and never reaches the centre ; that does not possess the spirit, or seek the end or attain the results of the ministry of Christ. The Great Teacher went to the roots of sin, to the heart of salvation by blood, and with an intense earnestness and affection held all truth on the battlements of Heaven or on the border line of hell. We cannot preach like Him, but we can make Him our model. We may not attain the perfection of the pastor of Anworth, of the preacher of Dundee, or of the loving Tillotson whose portrait hangs on the wall of Lambeth Palace, but we may rise by setting our standard high ; by maintaining the devout study of the sacred Word, and by long communings with Christ in the oratory of private devotion. This suggests:

The necessity, on the part of the religious teacher, of personal spiritual culture.

The ministry must be unmistakably Christ-like or their work will come to nought. Soul culture is the highest form of culture, and the most important. It stands alone as Mont Blanc among the Alps. There is no power comparable to this. It is of the nature of that which in far Palestine raised the dead. Here let us make no mistake. The Bible may be critically studied, and as an exegete the preacher may excel. He may present the truth with logical exactness and homiletic perfection. Orthodoxy may determine every shade and expression of thought, and yet his soul may be as barren as a desert-heath, and may utter messages which will suggest the marbles of Angelo beautiful but cold ; scriptural but dead. Life is begotten of life. Heart-power, born of Bible truth, is worth more than scholarship or logic. Hence the preacher, and the same may be said of any religious teacher, should read the Bible devotionally, should translate the truth into holy living, and keep the heart warm by fellowship with Christ. He should aspire to high degrees in holiness ; not taking Thomas a-Kempis, or John Flavel, or David Brainerd for his model, but asking Christ to determine his type of piety, and fit him for his appropriate niche in the spiritual temple.

What the Church needs most is not men of great intellects, profound scholarship, rare accomplishments—though all these have their value—but men full of faith and of the Holy Ghost ; men who possess that holy unction which cannot be feigned, born of communion with God and a faith which dwells beyond all visible worlds. We need more preachers like Payson, Nettleton, McCheyne, Wesley, Burns, John Welsh of Ayr, and him whom our fathers heard with the marrow of their bones, whose night cry is yet heard in Heaven, "Give me Scotland or I die." An army of these, though small as Gideon's, would soon bring the latter-day glory. Without them it will never come.

The spiritual needs of this age are great. The field of labor is widening, extending. Our own country is a vast empire, exceeding in extent all the

Russias, reaching to the long mountain ranges, and thence to the far Pacific. Civilization was never so fleet of foot. Potential events come in battalions. The possibilities of power rapidly increase. The mysteries of nature are trooping into the light. The very elements are our messengers. Highways pierce the mountains. Oceans shrink into rivers. The one word of God is the polyglot of nations. Christian England is advancing eastward, and Christian America is hastening westward. If both are faithful to their trust they shall soon meet in the land of Sinim, and possess the world for Christ. Have we not come to the kingdom, brethren, for such a time as this—a momentous period, when history is written with the lightnings, and to be living is sublime?

Dedicatory Service.

DIVINE STRENGTH AND BEAUTY IN HOLY WORSHIP.*

BY THE RIGHT REV. WM. BACON STEVENS, D.D., LL.D., BISHOP OF PENNSYLVANIA.

Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.—PSALMS xcvi., 6.

THE occasion of writing this Psalm was the removal of the ark of the Lord from the house of Obed-Edom, the Gittite, to Jerusalem. "On that day," says the sacred historian, "David delivered first this Psalm, to thank the Lord, into the hand of Asaph and his brethren." It is thus linked with one of the most interesting events in Jewish annals. But besides its historic connection, it was also eminently prophetic. The whole Psalm, which contains these words, has ever been regarded as Messianic, and as foreshadowing the future glories of the Messiah's kingdom, when all the people would give unto the Lord "glory and strength," when all nations would "worship before Him in the beauty of holiness."

This declaration of the Psalmist eminently befits this occasion. We gather to consecrate this strong and beautiful house to the worship of the Triune God. It is a jubilant day for this parish, and should be celebrated with all the grand accessories of holy worship. It is the crowning act of the parochial work of sixty years, and embodies in its celebration, more than half a century of precious and holy memories.

But here a question arises in many minds; why do we now consecrate a building which has been in use twelve years as a place of worship? Have not the solemn services of these years already consecrated it, and set it apart for God? and is not that enough? What need we more? To these very natural questions I reply, that notwithstanding its long use, it has hitherto been so encumbered by debt, that it could not be given as a full and free

* Preached at the consecration of St. Thomas' Church, New York.