

The Pulpit.

VOL. IX., No. 2.

BUFFALO, N. Y.

FEBRUARY, 1894.

“GO FORWARD.”

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And Moses said unto the people, Fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you to-day; for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more forever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.”—Ex. xiv., 13-15.

DR. ARNOLD, of Rugby, in one of his letters, says: “But it boots not to look backwards. Forward, forward, forward—should be one’s motto.” The beloved and lamented Dr. Goodell, of St. Louis, speaking of one of the exigencies in which he found himself, says: “There are times when the only way for a man is to go straight forward.”

How true this is! It is true of individuals. It is true of business houses. It is true of churches. It is true of institutions like schools, and colleges, and seminaries. It is true of great organized bodies, such as religious denominations, and political parties, and reform leagues. It is true of States and nations. It is true of humanity. The condition, in nine cases out of ten, on which difficulties are overcome, and progress is made, and victory is achieved, lies coiled up in that one word of burning significance—Forward.

This is the immediate practical lesson which the passage now before us yields to men and women who believe earnestly in God. So it fitly becomes the theme to be revolved in our minds and talked about and prayed over this morning. There are many reasons for accepting the principle, and acting on the policy of moving right ahead in the affairs which most deeply concern us and the cause we cherish.

I. To begin with, as has already been intimated, this is just what God teaches in the narrative now under review,—teaches in the

THE MINISTRY OF SILENCE.

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And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in Heaven about the space of half an hour.— Rev. viii., 1.

I DO NOT know what this text means ; except that this silence in heaven was beautiful in its time, or the jubilant strains of that joyous life would never have need hushed for the space of half an hour. And if silence has its uses in the heavenly life, it must have it uses in the earthly life, for earth approaches perfection only as it approaches heaven.

God uses silence in Nature. He unbinds the roaring cataract and rolls the thunder into the air, but He also calms the torrent into placid smoothness and stills the air into the silence of night. These moments of restful cessation have their uses in Nature as well as its tumultuous activities ; and as God thus works in Nature, so also in providence and revelation He not only at times speaks, but also at times keeps silent.

The power of speech is one of the glories of man, the sign of his thought, and a mark of his divinity. Speech expresses thought, transmits thought, preserves thought. Speech is the shuttle that weaves society together into a common web ; it is the telephone that puts our minds in connection with every other mind ; it is the engine that drives the business of the world ; it is the soil that blooms into all the glories of literature. Beyond all comparison, it is the most potent instrument of our life, and if we were deprived of this faculty human life would fall to the lowest level. The power to speak clear, forcible thoughts in fitting, eloquent words is one of the highest gifts and most masterful attainments of life. But the serviceableness of any power depends as much upon what it does not do as upon what it does. It is quite as important that the locomotive should be able to stand still as that it should be able to move. The musical instrument must not only be able to speak, but it must be equally able to keep silent. The dampers that hush the strings of the piano are as necessary as the hammers that make them vibrate ; for silence is as essential to music as sound. So the serviceableness of the human tongue may depend as much upon its power to keep silence as upon its power to speak. Incessant speech

would be intolerable, and one spoken word may do infinite harm where silence would have been golden wisdom. There is a time to speak, and there is a time to keep silence; and the silence may be as useful and beautiful in its time, as rich in meaning, as fruitful in growth, and as full of life and joy as the most urgent and eloquent speech. For silence in man is not simply the absence of speech, but the restraint of speech. The dumb animal is silent, but it does not keep silence. Man is often silent because he restrains himself by an act of masterful self-control, so that his power of silence may be as great a dignity as his power of speech.

What are the uses of silence? It has many uses, but I shall touch only on such as may have been signified by this silence in heaven.

First, it may have been the silence of rest. Heaven is a restful place: there the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest, and this is one of the most comforting thoughts of heaven. Yet we are not to conceive of it as a place of uninterrupted rest and eternal inactivity. Such rest would make us tired. Rest is a relative term and has no meaning except in connection with labor. To get rest we must first be tired. There are intense activities in heaven which must be interrupted with periods of rest; and this silence in heaven when the whole vast city lay in unbroken stillness may have been the profound rest of wearied spirits. But we are not to wait until we get to heaven for rest; we need it here. We have limited energies and cannot run far without slowing down or stopping to replenish our store. Muscles, nerves, brain, mind, after being strained and wearied, must have rest and recuperation. A disregard of the need of rest is a peculiarly American sin. There is such a feverish spirit of ambition among us, so much push and rush, that bodies and minds are being broken down under the ceaseless strife and strain. Some people rest too much—some rest all the time—but many people do not rest enough and need more silence in their lives. God has built a time of silence into the very solar system in the night which soothes the world to sleep. We ought to sleep all we want to. Jesus went apart and rested a while. An occasional change of scene and occupation is a wonderful refreshment and tonic. As this half hour of silence fell upon heaven in the midst of great activities, so there should be brief periods of rest interjected into all our work. The heart takes a short rest after

every beat. There should be restful half hours of silence in every day. Do not let life run on and keep up an everlasting din, like a limited express train that never stops, but, like an accommodation that stops at every station, bring it to a frequent standstill, and let there be silence for about the space of half an hour.

Second. *This silence in heaven may have been the silence of reserve.* As these seals were successively opened, each one disclosed some portion of the Divine plan in providence, but when the seventh and last seal was opened, there was silence in heaven. One theory of this silence is, that it signified the reservation or concealment of the final purpose of God in creation. All things are not explained, and there is plenty of room for faith even in heaven. This is God's method of dealing with us in providence and revelation. He opens many seals and shows us many things, but when the last seal is opened, and we look for a revelation and clearing up of the great mysteries of the world, there is silence. At the point where, perhaps, we are most anxious to see, but not at the point where we most need to see, the light fades into darkness and mystery. So wise and good is this Divine silence, that it is the glory of God to conceal a thing. There must be infinite reserve in God; He can let us see only the outskirts of His ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of Him! Jesus did not tell the disciples all He knew. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." He revealed much, but He concealed more. All that He said unto them was only a hint of what He might have said. Jesus did not make the mistake, so frequent among leaders, of talking too much; He never blabbed, but maintained a Divine reserve. He said enough, but not one word too much, and when pressed on some points He held His peace; and what He did not say was almost as impressive as what He did say. There is a large place in life for the silence of reserve. The teacher always knows more than he teaches his scholars; the painter has visions of beauty in his mind he cannot put upon canvas; and the poet more musical thought than he can express in verse. The sun does not let all its light shine. Every one ought to have in him more than he ever puts out. It is the suggestion of reserve force that makes a character impressive. We never quite respect the man that tells us all he knows; and we do not want our most confidential friend to let us too far into the secrets of his life. We must practice this reserve to some

extent with our children. There are many things we cannot tell them, because they cannot bear them now. We can explain some of the seals of life to them, but others we must veil in silence. We ought never to tell them anything but the truth, and when they cannot bear this, we must bid them wait. We are not bound to tell all we know to anybody, we may conceal much in silence, but when we do speak we must tell only the truth. Silence is a mantle that would cover many of the ills of life. When Jesus was falsely accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Is not this very often the best defense that can be offered against misrepresentations and slanders? Do not try to run every false word down. Innocence does not need to explain everything, and often only harms itself by talking. When trouble arises, when a mistake is made, when a fault is pointed out, what will often so surely cover it and heal it as simple silence? The history of many a quarrel, whether private or public, whether in a church or in a denomination, is simply a history of too much talk. An impulsive rash word is spoken, which is repeated and made more impulsive and more rash, until it becomes hot and bitter, and largely false, and does infinite harm. Beware of a gabbling, gossiping tongue. Know more than you say. Speech is silver, but silence is golden. Study to be quiet. And when trouble is brewing, when evil tongues are busy, when anger is rising, let there be silence about the space of half an hour.

Third. This may have been the silence of meditation and preparation. As these seals disclosed the course of Providence in symbolic forms, the heavenly inhabitants would need to gaze upon them earnestly and meditate upon them profoundly, that they might discern their meaning: for things do not explain themselves, and there is still need of mental effort and high thought in heaven. And this meditation was necessary as a preparation for the understanding of disclosures and the discharge of duties yet to come. Thus that minds might grasp what had been revealed, and ripen knowledge and gather strength, it may well have been that there was silence in heaven. Meditation is always the soil out of which true knowledge grows. Facts and thoughts can be put into our minds from the outside by the book or teacher, but we do not masticate and digest and assimilate these facts into our mental life until we have reflected upon them in our minds. The word meditation means working our way into the middle of things; it means getting an interior view of

a subject ; and this we do by quietly and earnestly thinking upon it until it opens up doors of suggestion, and lets us into it and through it. This is the most vital part of all study. Reading is simply a way of letting other minds do our thinking for us ; and while it has its necessary and great uses, yet there is such a thing as doing too much of it, or worse still of becoming the mere slave of it. The student that simply knows what others have thought, and has not thought something out for himself, does not know anything as he ought to know it. So with the Sunday-school teacher or reader of the Bible who simply knows what others say about its lessons, but does not work his own way through silent meditation into its inner depths and rich meanings and come into personal contact with the living Mind of God. So with the citizen who simply knows what his party newspaper says and has no judgments of his own. We cannot understand any opened seal, ourselves, our work, life, duty, God, until there falls upon us the silence of meditation.

Such meditation is necessary for the growth of character. We are much given to society and excitement and show. Many want to live in the glare of publicity, in a whirl of pleasure. They are always itching for a crowd. Life without some new sensation, plain living, is intolerably dull. They shrink from quietness and have a horror of being alone. They live on the outside and have no inner resources. They do not know how to keep company with themselves and fly to others. This is a superficial life that has no deep roots and solid growth. It tends to make life shallow, feverish, and fretful. Such a life is not likely to ripen and grow sweet and mellow with age, but rather to grow sour and bitter. Society has its great and noble uses, but it is not the whole of life. Society and solitude are complementary, both are necessary, and either is unnatural and unhealthy without the other. They are like the soil and the air ; the tree cannot grow in either alone, but must have both ; first it must bury its roots deep in the soil, and then it must spread its branches and unfold its blossoms in the air. Solitude is the soil in which the roots of character must grow. It is by quiet reflection and solitary communing with ourselves that we lay our deepest principles and form our holiest resolutions. We can see things in their right relations and proportions and frame right judgments only as we look at them out of the window of meditation. The excitement and glare of the world confuse and blind us. Solitude cools

the pulse and clarifies the vision. Reflection ripens character and makes us strong. A half hour of silence would often save us from mistake and sin and keep us true to right and duty.

Such meditation is a necessary preparation for service. Silent growth always precedes fruit. The tree pours years of hidden life into the rosy apple. The meteor gathers momentum through many invisible silent miles before it explodes in splendor. Every great thing somewhere has its roots in silence. Paul after his conversion buried himself three years in Arabia in meditation before he set out upon his ministry. Jesus took thirty years' preparation for just three years' work. Solitude is the mother country of the strong. No man ever learned to write a great book or paint a great picture in a crowd. He toiled long and patiently in secret before he came forth to minister to the world. Let us live in society and fill our lives with intense activities, but let us also bury our roots deep in meditation and prayer that we may ripen character and mature wisdom and gather strength for the work of the world.

Once more, this may have been the silence of wonder and worship. The marvelous visions disclosed by these opened seals may well have filled heavenly inhabitants with a sense of awe and struck the whole city silent. For there are times when speech is a sacrilege and talk an impertinence. How vexatious it is, when some master musician is touching the instrument into matchless harmony, to have silly persons sit chattering by. The first effect of a great thing, a great building, a great historic scene, a great work of art, a great mountain with its majestic mass and solemn silence, is to hush the soul with a sense of awe. Wonder does not gabble, but stands in reverent silence and slowly feels the mystic power. Wonder is akin to and shades into worship, which is appreciation of the infinite worthship of God. If wonder, then, courts silence and grows best in its stillness, how much more does worship! Worship needs and ought to express its appreciation and devotion with voice and harp, in speech and song, in prayer and praise, but it also delights in quietness and calm communion. Mere noise and confusion are unfriendly to reverence, and are painful to a worshiping soul. Hence, the sanctuary should be a quiet place, its services should be orderly, and whispering, talking, laughing, and all disorder should be refrained from. These things are ill-mannered and irreverent, and are the marks of a thoughtless or superficial mind. The Lord is in

His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him. The more worth we have in us, the more we shall appreciate the worth of God, and the more we shall be filled with wonder and worship. God is great, full of all truth and righteousness, wisdom, and goodness, and beauty, and the thought of His presence should touch our souls into reverence. Speech does not always help us to know God, there are times when silence brings us into more vital contact and sweeter communion with Him. The mountain lake, however close it may be to the sky, reflects heaven's blue and mirrors the full-orbed image of the sun only when it lies still. And so, at times, we need to "be still and know that Thou art God."

Silence, then, has its uses on earth as in heaven. We are not to think that we must always be talking and working and rushing and fuming and fretting. The tongue is given power to speak, but it is given equal power to keep silent. We need society, but we also need solitude. Cessation and silence are as necessary to our growth and fruitfulness as are the most urgent activities. It takes both to make the full-rounded sphere of life. Let us not cultivate either at the expense of the other. Let silence fall upon us at frequent times that we may rest and meditate and worship, that we may grow character and ripen wisdom and gather strength, that our souls may touch God, and then let us come forth strong and patient to do the work and bear the burdens of life.

THE SIMPLICITY OF PRAYER.

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After this manner pray ye.—Matt. vi., 9.

THE more the years pass on the deeper becomes my conviction that religion does not mean and has little to do with many things which it is taken to mean. It does not mean elaborate theologies; it does not mean membership of this or that organization; it does not mean orthodoxy in matters of opinion respecting which Christians differ—it means a good heart and a good life, right conduct, and a holy character. These are the tests of the only sort of religion which is of the smallest value. All else will vanish, this will remain. Of all the lies which God's infinite and fiery finger will shrivel from the souls of men, all sorts of