

CHAPTER III. THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE.

The present is ever the stepping-stone of the future. Each stage of progress is the bud of the next. Conviction prepares the way for conversion; conversion leads to sanctification; sanctification culminates in glory; and glory begun is the entrance upon an endless career of progress in wisdom and knowledge, beneficence and bliss.

In the history of the kingdom, the dread of wrath and death induced by the flood, prepared the way for the law; the law was the school-master to drill the world into readiness for the gospel; the coming of Christ and his death laid the foundations for the temple to be reared by the Holy Spirit, and he is now erecting the temple, stone by stone, course upon course, story above story, in preparation for the millennium and the kingdom of glory.

The present — the *now* present, would seem to be around in the heavenward-stretching ladder near to the top. One step more, or two at most, so it seems at least to us poor short-sighted mortals and the summit will be gained.

What, then, are the now unfolding germs preparing the way for the incoming period?

Three things may be confidently predicted of the church of the future — its UNITY, ACTIVITY and SPIRITUALITY.

In the prayer of Jesus with his disciples on the night of his betrayal, the unity of his followers was coupled with the spread of the knowledge that Jesus is the Messiah of God as its cause, "*That they all may be one,*" prayed the Saviour, "*that the world may know that thou hast sent me.*"

One! Yes; the disciples of Christ are yet in the future, sometime, sooner or later, to become completely united, and then the world will know that he is the Messiah of God.

This prayer of Jesus is to have its happy fulfilment — When? When, if not in the period next approaching, and now at the doors?

What is the watchword of the present? Union. Fifty years ago now, it may be more or less, God began the visible preparations for the fulfilment of this prayer. First in England. The missionary spirit was poured into the heart of an obscure cobbler upon his bench, and as he cut the leather into shape, and pounded it upon his lapstone into solidity, and drew the waxed ends stitching together shoes for his customers, he was cutting out, compacting, and stitching together thoughts, which were destined to shoe the feet of thousands upon thousands with the preparation of the gospel of peace to go to the outer bounds of the earth with the glad tidings of a crucified Saviour.

His discourse delivered — the question was raised. Who will go? and whom shall we send?" *His* feet were all shod ready for the journey and his ready answer was, "Send a better man if you can — if not, here I am, send me."

This settled — next came the question, How? And the practical answer was, combine, associate. So they combined; a little nucleus, enough to send out and sustain their man.

And this was the first of the many nuclei in that land and in others around which Christians have rallied until now what do we behold? Scores, it may be, of huge corporations, gathering money by millions, and sending out and sustaining missionaries by thousands upon thousands, at home and abroad, amongst the people of every kindred and tongue almost in the world!

The missionary fathers combined, like the early settlers in a new country, in their house "raisings" and "bees," upon the principle that ten men can lift a log into place in the cabin's side which one could not stir from the ground — and upon the maxim that "many hands make light work."

The movers in the World's Protestant Alliance had other, and in some respects, higher motives for union. They desired to bring the ends of Protestantism together, and in some sort

cement all into one, insomuch, at least, as to be able to present to themselves and to their enemies, and to the world, the imposing spectacle of a single front, and the invincible strength of an undivided line of battle.

But it is only now that the highest and noblest movements have begun, in fulfilment of the prayer for unity. Young Christianity is moved to lay aside the grey prejudices of sect, and throw off the dead weight of formality. Associations are formed for the purpose of counteracting the increasing corruptions of our cities in their influence, especially upon the young men drawn from the country, into these great centres of activity and attraction. God pours out his spirit upon these associations, and united young Christianity becomes suddenly converted into a society, not simply to make a fair show before the world of the unity of the church of Christ, nor yet to send into all the world to preach the gospel, but actually to go — every man becoming himself a missionary. Union meetings are started in places and numerical attendance to startle the world, and increased in numbers to reach the masses in every locality. Circles are broken in upon by the evangelizing influence, which have ever been regarded as close corporations in the interest and under the sole control of Satan himself, and voices are heard in praise and prayer which have been wont to make the night and the Sabbath hideous with their yells in the street. And holy hands are lifted to God, and raised also for hearty blows in the cause of the Prince of Peace, raised before never in this way, but often in theatres, in brawls and fights, and in pugilistic contests.

The missionary fathers combined to send a few thousands to set up the standard of the cross, and begin the war in every land. The Alliance movers combined to show and to feel the full strength of the embattled host, not at all for actual contest, but in a sort of world's review from year to year. But now the embattled host is combining, for the contest and the conquest.

Like the "Old Thirteen," in the days of American colonial dependence, the churches have all along known and felt their unity, (in the one Lord, and the one faith, and one baptism, of Christ,) and have often combined for some special practical purpose, or for some sort of colonial congress to declare unity in words and present the show of united resistance to our enemies — but it is only now that every man is harnessing for the war, and taking his position, side by side with every other man, irrespective of denominational distinctions.

And although we are far yet from the fulfilment of the Saviour's prayer, still we were never before so near, never before surrounded by so many tokens and preparations for its fulfilment as now. The unfolding bud is plainly the bud of complete unity — it cannot be mistaken. This unity is to be a unity in Christ, and so it will manifest Christ. The disciples are to see face to face, because they will all see the face of God in Christ and become like him, and so become like each other. Changed from glory to glory into his image, and so changed also from degree to degree into likeness, and love too, to each other, and so showing forth the image of Christ which they have taken.

There is a unity in Christianity which has never been realised in the church, though typified by the nucleus of early converts in the dawn, when bathed and baptized in the first rising beams of the Sun of Righteousness ascended, "they were of one heart, and one soul: neither said any that aught of the things he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." "Then they continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people, and the Lord added unto them daily such as should be saved." (Acts iv: 32, and ii. 46, 47)

There has been, and is yet, great discordance in the varied songs of the many churches — but there is to be a universal harmony — nay a universal unity in the one song of Moses and the Lamb, each church bearing its own part in the general concert, and then all earth and heaven shall hear.

Each tone on the musical scale is composed of three — three in one — one in three. And it may be there is one tone — known or unknown — itself three in one, which is the union

of all — the grand focal starting point and centre of all.

The primitive rays of the sun are white, but each ray is in itself a combination of three — three in one, one in three. And this one ray — white as it touches first the sphere of earth's vestment of air, is separated by the vapory prism into every hue and shade, clothing the globe in its beautiful coat of clouds of many colors, and carpeting it with green and gold, pink and purple, and every other lovely color and tint, in every form of grace and sweetness. God is light. The rays of the Sun of Righteousness are light, light ineffable, light alone. But they bring embosomed in themselves to him who receives Jesus, the Triune God. And they work out as they fall upon human hearts and human minds, all the separated shades and varied combinations, of grace and truth — one and yet many.

On the face of the cloud in the retiring storm the bow springs forth — the bow of promise — seven beautiful colors are numbered in the exquisite arch. The seven make one arch. And the whole seven spring from one — the one white ray of the sun separated into seven, and bent together into the symbol of harmony and of hope.

Christ is the one. The churches are the seven. And the one in the seven, is Christ in the heart the hope of glory.

Already the bow of harmony and of hope, as we have seen, is springing forth, upon the face of the retiring darkness and strife of the past. The day of unity is at hand.

Activity is equally, also, both the demand of the future and the promise unfolding in the present to meet this demand.

The church of the future is to be a living church. Every member a living member — every one doing his duty.

Too much, in all the past, since the first and glorious days of the apostles, went by; the church has been a sort of hospital or asylum, where its members have been gathered in to be cared for and nursed — provided for and dosed, or taught, like the infirm, the deaf and dumb and the blind; and ministers and officers of the church have been engrossed in their cares of the various inmates of the churches.

But now it is to be hoped the church is becoming more like a force of able-bodied industrials, ready for employment in the Master's vineyard, under the guidance of ministers and officers. Helpers together with God, not cumberers of his ground. Certainly there never has been a time, since the apostolic age, when the opportunities were so general or so generally accepted and used by all Christians, especially the young, to engage in the active spread of the gospel amongst the perishing myriads around. And there never was a time when so many had the boldness to "stand up for Jesus" as witnesses before great assemblies, or go out for Jesus into the hard places, and to the hard cases of the world. *Activity* — increasing activity — growing steadily toward universality, is certainly one of the unfolding promises of the present.

Spirituality, also. If we look to see its increase in the increase of the three abiding graces — faith, hope and charity — and of the four cardinal virtues — prayers, gifts, words and works for Jesus — more beautiful in their blended symmetry than the seven colors of the bow in the cloud, we shall not fail of a certain promise and prophecy of a bright day at hand. When has there ever been so much, or so fervent, or so simple praying, or so great faith of the answers to prayer, or so much life and power in the religious meetings, or so much wayside conversation about the works and ways of God?

Not now, however, to dwell upon this. Looking rather to the bow of promise, arching the heavens, as the gateway of the future. What are the three words traced by the finger of Providence along the front of this royal arch? What but the triune promise, *unity, activity and spirituality?*

And now to ask and answer again more at large the question asked and answered in the conclusion of the preceding chapter. What do we now need to swell and unfold this triune promise into the universality and strength required for its own happy fulfilment?

Simply the prevalence of a full experimental union with Jesus by a full trust in his name.

Our union of the future is not to be one merely of convenience or interest, or necessity, to accomplish the work given us to do; but the union of heart and soul, vital as the union of the several members of one's own body. And our activity is not to be that of excitements and occasions, or of the pressure of duty merely, but the increased activity which comes from increased vitality. Life within — life more abundant — must be the sustaining power and central spring of the increased life without. And our spirituality will be made full by the full indwelling presence and power of the Spirit of God.

We need, therefore, to turn attention increasingly to the higher form of Christian experience. Not by any means to lose sight of conversion, but rather to press it more urgently than ever upon the attention of the world; but not as the all in all — not as the stopping place of the Christian, or as introducing the convert into all the fulness of the blessings of the gospel of peace.

Suppose Luther had been content to rest where he was when he first found the forgiveness of his sins in the convent at Erfurth, and had not pressed on until he found also the way of full justification, including sanctification from sin. What would have been the result?

Simply that he might have remained a monk, after all, to the end of his days, and the Reformation untouched by him to the last. It was the final, full conscience of the way of salvation by faith, into which the Lord introduced him on Pilate's staircase at Rome, and not his conversion at Erfurth, merely, that made him the reformer he was. And D'Aubigne. Suppose he, too, had never passed beyond the first great stage of his experience, but remained to the end where he was during the years after his conversion at Geneva, and before his second conversion at the inn-room in Kiel; where now had been his great work, the History of the Reformation, and other like works, bearing the stamp of his faith as well as the stamp of his genius? Unwritten, unwritten; every word of them unwritten.

Two books, (Narratives of Remarkable Conversions, Conant. Derby & Jackson, N. Y. The Divine Life, Kennedy. Parry & McMillen, Philadelphia; Presbyterian Board) of very great value and of deservedly wide circulation — may their circulation be a hundred fold greater — have been recently given to the public. In both, the experience of Luther is professedly given, and truly as far as they go. And in one, also, that of D'Aubigne. But in each instance the narrative stops short with conversion, leaving in each the after and deeper experience untold, without so much as an allusion, even. The after and deeper experience, without which neither the one or the other would have been qualified by the faith of Jesus in its fulness, or the light of the gospel in its power, for the work and the mission so happily and so nobly fulfilled by them.

The same thing is true, also, of Baxter and Hewitson and others whose conversions are narrated in the two volumes referred to, but Luther and D'Aubigne are singled out because both of their exalted position in the regards of the church, of every name in every land, and also, and especially, of the ample distinctness of their own narrations of their own experiences, in the second great stage as well as the first; and because also of the illustration, peculiarly impressive, in their cases, that the second experience is the indispensable requisite of power to glorify God in the highest degree, by witnessing for Jesus in the fullest, freest, boldest, clearest manner.

This omission is very significant. One of the straws showing the drift of the popular current. It indicates a great historical fact and phase of the present, and a glorious one it is — only less glorious than the more excellent phase of the future. It shows the profound absorption of the mind and heart of the church in the matter of conversion.

But then does it not also show the almost equally profound forgetfulness of the deeper experience exemplified by these great and good men, their second conversion?

This ought not so to be — must not be so.

The keynote of pulpit and press now for a hundred years, and the clarion note as well — sounding out so loud and clear as to rule every other into the harmonious line with itself on the

theological staff — has been the new birth. May it never lose one particle of its clarion clearness. Rather let it be sounded out a thousand fold louder and clearer than ever until it shall reach every ear, and every heart in the world, thrilling them with its heavenly power.

But then, in the baptism of John, are we to forget the baptism of Jesus? In the new birth shall we forget the deeper power of Pentecost? In the regeneration by water and the Spirit shall we lose sight of the deeper regeneration by fire and the Spirit?

The new birth is indeed a reality and a blessed one, an experience and an indispensable one, and may it be urged in all the burning, convincing power of the spirit of Elias. So also is the baptism of the Holy Ghost a reality and a more glorious one. Let it be also urged in the spirit and power of the apostles.

The disciples of Jesus needed and received the promise of the Father upon them, conferring the power to be effectual witnesses for Jesus in the introduction of the gospel in its fulness into the world? Do we not need, shall we not receive the same blessed promise in all the fulness of its plenary power — the miraculous only excepted — for the struggle of its final victory and the introduction of its glorious fulfilment in the world?

But a case so plain is only weakened by arguments, as if arguments were needed to establish it, when, in fact, it is self-evident at a glance.

One illustration of the power and blessedness of full salvation may suffice to close this chapter, and this part of our discussion.

A better might be looked for in vain than the following parable from life, of

THE JUDGE AND THE POOR AFRICAN

In one of the populous and beautiful towns on the banks of "La Belle Riviere," the Ohio, there dwelt and for aught I know, dwells now a just judge, honorable in life as well as in title; and also a poor lone African woman, long since gone to her crown and her throne in the kingdom above. She was queenly in the power and beauty of her spiritual progress, though poor as poverty could make her in this world's goods here upon earth, but she is now doubtless queenly in position and external adorning as well as in heart, transformed and transfigured in the presence of the glorious Saviour in heaven, whom she loved so dearly and trusted so fully upon earth.

The judge was rich and highly esteemed. He dwelt in a mansion, not so fine as to repel, not so splendid as to make him the envy of the foolish, large enough to be the social centre of the town, and plain enough to make every one feel it a home, and his heart was in keeping with his house, large and open.

The poor African woman lived in a cabin on an alley all alone without chick or child, kith or kin.

Her own hands ministered amply to her own wants while she had health, and at home or abroad at work by the day, she often earned that which found its way to India, or Africa perhaps, in the spread of the gospel. Her home though poor and small was always neat and tidy. She belonged to the church of which the judge was an officer, and often sat down with him at the table of the Lord, in the house of the Lord, as she will again, O how joyously at the feast of the Bridegroom in the palace of the King, but it so happened that they had never had free conversation together about the things of the kingdom. He respected her. She venerated him. At last she received a severe injury, from which she never recovered, and for many weary months before her death was dependent and helpless, alone and bed-ridden.

During this time the judge's ample table and abundant wardrobe had contributed its full share to the comforts of the poor woman. Never a day but she was remembered. But for a long time, for one reason and another, he put off from time to time a personal visit which yet he fully purposed in his heart to make her. Until at last one day as he thought of the cheeriness of his own pleasant home the thought of the contrast between this and the loneliness and desolation

of the poor woman's cabin came into his mind, and while it heightened his gratitude for the goodness of God to him, it filled him with sadness and sympathy for her.

"Who can tell but I may cheer her a little, and perhaps by a little timely sympathy save her from repining at her hard lot? Possibly, too, I may be able to throw some light upon the rugged pathway along which she is going to the kingdom?"

The judge loved to do good; it was a great luxury to him. So, taking a well-filled basket, and making sure that purse as well as scrip was stored with convenient small change, he sallied forth to visit the poor woman.

As the door opened, he was struck with the air of neatness in the cabin. If she was bed-ridden, some kind hand supplied the place of her's. Everything was in order, swept and garnished neat as a pin. "Not so desolate after all," thought he.

But again, as the judge looked around, and contrasted the social joys of his own ample mansion, where the voice of children and of music, as well as the presence of books and friends made all cheerful and happy, with the cheerless solitude of the poor woman alone here from morning till night and from night till morning, only as one or another called out of kindness to keep her from suffering, his heart filled again with sadness and sympathy.

Seating himself on the stool at the side of the poor woman's cot, he began speaking to her in words of condolence:

"It must be hard for you, Nancy, to be shut up here alone so many days and weeks?"

"O no, thank God, massa judge, the Good Lord keeps me from feelin bad. I'se happy now as ever I was in all my days."

"But, Nancy, laying here from morning till night and from night till morning all alone, and racked with pain, dependent upon others for everything, do you not get tired and down-hearted, and think your lot a hard one to bear?"

"Well, I'se 'pendent on others, dat's sure, 'deed I is, an I was allers used to have something to give to de poor, an to de missionary, too, an to de minister, but den I'se no poorer dan my good Lord was when he was here in de worl, and I'se nebber suffer half so much yet as he suffer for me on de cross. I'se bery happy when I tink of dese tings."

"But, Nancy, you are all alone here?"

"Yes, massa, I'se all alone, dat's true, but den Jesus is here, too, all de time. I'm nebber alone, no how, and he's good company."

"But, Nancy, how do you feel when you think about death? What if you should die here all alone some night?"

"O, massa judge! I spect to. I spect nothing else but jes to go off all alone here some night, as you say, or some day. But it's all one, night or day, to poor Nancy, and den, massa, I spec I'll not go all alone after all, for Jesus says, in de blessed Book, I'll come an take you to myself dat where I am dare you may be also, an I believe him. I'se-not afraid to die alone."

"But, Nancy, sometimes when I think of dying, I am filled with trouble. I think how bad I am, what a sinner, and how unfit for heaven, and I think now what if I should die suddenly just as I am, what would become of me? Are you not afraid to die and go into the presence of a holy God?"

"O no, massa 'deed I'se not."

"Why not, Nancy?"

"O, massa, I was 'fraid, berry much. When I was fust injer, I see I mus die, an I thought how can such a sinner as I is ebber go into such a holy place as de new Jerusalem is? An I was miseble, O, I was miseble, deed, sure! But den by an by, after a while, I jis thought I mus trus myself to do blessed Jesus to make me ready for de kingdom jis as I did to forgib all my sins. An so I foun res for my poor soul in Jesus, an sen dat time I feel some-how, all better; I know now he will make me all ready pure an white for de new Jerusalem above. An now I love to think about de time when I shall come to 'pear befo the Father's throne, wid him in glory, all starry spangly white."

For a moment the judge sat in silence, admiring the power of grace. Not yet himself deeply affected by the light reflected from this star in disguise. A little pressure more was required — another chafing question — to bring out the ray destined to pierce his own soul.

“Well, Nancy, one thing more let me ask you; Do you never complain?”

“Complain! O, now massa judge, complain, do you say, massa? Why, massa! Who should such a one as I is complain ob! The Good Lord He knows bes what’s bes for poor Nancy! His will be done!”

Nancy said this in tones of the deepest sincerity. And a little more. There was just a shade of wonder at the question — as much as to say, “What: you an officer in the church, and a man of education, a judge, and yet think that a poor creature like me might complain of the dealings of a merciful God and Saviour like mine?”

The arrow took effect. The judge bowed his head in silence a moment, and then rose and bade Nancy good-bye, without the word of consolation and prayer, which he fully purposed when he went into the cabin.

All the way home he kept saying to himself, “Well, I never yet said ‘His will be done’ in that way. I never felt it. Alone, poor, helpless, bedrid, dependent, miserable in body, and yet happy as an angel. Ah! there is a power there I never felt. But I must feel it, and God helping me I will. Not afraid to die. Trusting Jesus to purify her from all sin, and present her spotless before God. Waiting joyously his summons. O, blessed faith! I must know more of this, and I will.”

Two weeks, night and day, the arrow rankled, rankled, rankled. His pain increased. Sleep forsook him, and his family became alarmed. He said nothing, but often groaned in spirit and sighed deeply. Sometimes the tears were seen to steal down his manly cheeks. All wondered, and all waited to hear what had come over the strong mind and manly heart of the judge.

At last, one day while he was bowed before God, he felt in his heart “Thy will be done.” The storm-tossed sea of his soul was suddenly calmed, and peace filled his heart — peace as a river. Now he, too, could trust Jesus to make for him his pathway on earth and fit him for heaven, and take him to it whenever amid from whatever place it might please him.

It was the beginning of a new life for him — a change quite as great as at the time of his conversion, and as it has proved, the beginning of blessed things for his own family and church and town, and for the cause of Christ generally. Consistent and steadfast before, he has been a burning and a shining light, letting his light shine far and near ever since.

He went in the fulness of wealth and education, and influence and honor, to the poor, lone, lorn African woman, to do her good if he might with either counsel or food, or clothing or money. This was the full purpose and prayer of his heart; and yet, while he gave nothing to her, he received from her what all his wealth could not purchase or all his wisdom devise.

She, poor body, had nothing to give, nor so much as even dreamed of giving aught to anybody. And yet, without a thought of it, she did give to the rich and honorable judge what was worth more to him than the wealth and honors of all the world.

And what does this illustrate to us? What but the power of spirituality? What but the power which poured upon the few illiterate fishermen of Galilee in the Pentecostal baptism, fitted them for the reformation of the world, almost in a single generation? What but the very power now needed to transform the world and introduce the golden age of complete gospel triumph?