

Whose Was the Victory?

To Stephen, who is the central human figure in the Bible lesson for next Sunday, belongs the distinction of being the first Christian disciple to lay down his life for the sake of Christ and His gospel. There had been persecution from the day of Pentecost forward. The apostles had been commanded by the rulers not to speak in the name of Christ; they had been threatened, imprisoned and scourged; but, up to this point, they had not been persecuted unto death. Until Stephen arose, the opposition to the church appears to have been chiefly, if not wholly, on the part of the rulers. The common people heard the apostles gladly, and a multitude, including many of the priests, had become obedient to the faith. But now Stephen, a man full of grace and power, came into prominence in the church. He was, it would seem, a Grecian Jew and was accustomed to speak in the synagogue and declare the truth in Jesus, as Paul afterwards also did in his ministry. And thus Stephen was brought into conflict with Jewish prejudices and with the ablest and most zealous defenders of the ancient system. It seems not improbable that Saul of Tarsus was among the men with whom Stephen disputed in the synagogue. In this way it was becoming more and more evident that, between the doctrines which Stephen and the apostles were preaching and the traditional faith as interpreted by the Scribes, there was irreconcilable conflict and that the new wine of Christianity, if received, must prove fatal to the old wine-skins of Judaism. By means of these debates in the synagogue, it is evident, the popular mind was much excited, and though the opponents of Stephen were not able in debate "to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke," they were able to arouse popular prejudice against him by declaring that the doctrines he proclaimed were against Moses and therefore against God. The wrath of the rulers had hitherto been restrained by the fear of the people, but now the fierce fanatical spirit of the populace having been excited against Christianity, the slaying of Stephen and the first fierce outburst of persecution against the church were the inevitable results.

There seemed to be in this a crushing defeat for Christianity and a corresponding triumph for the enemy. Really it was quite the reverse. Such upheavals as this were essential to the spread of the gospel. The quiet prosperity that the church was enjoying was interrupted that the disciples might go forth to greater endeavors and larger results. This persecution was the scattering of a central fire in order that the brands, scattered so widely, might become many centres of light and heat. Persecution has done what it could, but it has been impotent to thwart the purposes of God. It has been able to scatter but not to destroy, and the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the church.

Stephen's career is another example of the significant fact that a man does not need to live long in order to live to grand purpose. Here was a man of fine promise, full of the Spirit, full of grace and power, able to confound the learned Jews in debate. What might not have been expected of him if his life had been prolonged? Yet, after a brief period of service to the church, he is taken away. But what living it was! What life it was! A man like Stephen gets a large experience of life in a few months than many another who lives on decade after decade, until the utmost limit of old age is reached. Life is not properly measured by its length, but by the nobility of its experiences and its results. If a man has lived long enough to receive so much of the Divine Spirit into his soul that his speech, his countenance and his character bear evidence to that Divine presence within him, if he has lived long enough to make his name a beacon star of light to all generations that are to follow him, he has not failed of the highest purpose of living. It is possible to live a century and have experience of many things and still never come into touch with those forces that made Stephen's life so grand, so fruitful.

Stephen's enemies, when they had stoned him to death, doubtless supposed that they had won a victory, just as those who crucified Stephen's Lord

supposed that they had triumphed over the Nazarene. Who the real victor was in this conflict it is easy now to see. Certainly the honor of victory did not rest with that infuriated, fanatical mob which murdered a good man in the name of religion. They thought they had killed Stephen and had struck an effective blow against the cause which he represented. They were greatly mistaken. They had indeed bruised and gashed a human body, they had marred a face which was beautified with the light of God. But the real Stephen they had not been able to reach. Praying for his murderers, he had fallen asleep in the embrace of God. How vain to think of destroying a man who has seen heaven opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God to cheer the soul of his martyred servant! The men who stoned Stephen are forgotten. But Stephen and the cause he represented have gone marching on through the centuries—never to die.

It is here we first come in sight of Saul of Tarsus. He is keeping the garments of those who stoned Stephen, and though for a time he continues filled with hate and persecuting zeal he is ere long to take up the work which Stephen has laid down. The events of that day must have burnt themselves deeply into the memory of Saul, and made an ineradicable impression upon his conscience. May we not regard Saul's conversion as an indirect fruit of Stephen's death? Looking at things from a human standpoint, it does not seem unreasonable to think that if there had been no martyr Stephen then there would have been no Apostle Paul. No faithful life is wholly isolated from other lives. The blood of a martyr is never shed in vain.

Editorial Notes.

—An interesting letter from Boston is received, but we regret that we are unable to find room for it this week.

—Special meetings were held last week and are being continued this week at the Main Street church, St. John. On Sunday evening the congregations completely filled the spacious audience room and vestry. At the close of the service Pastor Gordon baptized three persons. The union meetings in the German Street church held last week were well attended and were seasons of refreshing. They are being continued this week in St. David's (Presbyterian) church. Many are earnestly looking and praying for gracious results from these services.

—The latest despatches from Europe indicate that matters in Crete continue in a very disturbed condition. Fierce fighting is reported between the Turkish soldiery and the insurgents. Liberal papers in England manifest strong sympathy with Greece, and in some quarters a Greco-Turkish war is regarded as imminent. It appears, however, to be the intention of the leading powers, including Great Britain, to prevent war, and it is stated that they have agreed to prevent Greece by force, if necessary, from taking further hostile action in Crete. But every government appears to be preparing for the most serious contingencies, as it is impossible to say what will come out of the present situation. Mr. Gladstone has telegraphed to the London Chronicle, "I do not dare to stimulate Greece when I cannot help her. I shall profoundly rejoice at her success. I hope the powers will recollect they have their own characters to redeem."

—"Deep-seated purpose, not mere habit," says the Sunday School Times, "should dominate life. An English critic of Coventry Patmore notes that his poetry was always 'the poetry of living intention, which rebukes all poetry that is in any degree the poetry of habit.' That is, he did not write because it was the habit of his set to write, nor in any fashion prescribed to him by custom, but because he had something in his own deepest mind which must make its way to other minds, and clothe itself in such shape as was fitted for it. And in the larger poetry of living this is equally a true distinction. To take life at second hand; to live it in the ruts of traditions, whether good or bad; to dwell afar from unexhausted wells of inspiration, — is to live feebly and to little purpose. It is to be of the world as well as in the world, a creature of the play of circumstances, a product of one's mere surroundings, not of free, spiritual, and therefore spontaneous, being. It is to miss the majestic energy of those who are led by the Spirit."

—Recent despatches from India go to show that the famine is much more wide-spread and terrible in its effects than has been generally supposed. The world had been led to believe that, though there would be great scarcity over a wide area of country and much suffering and many deaths

be inevitable, yet, partly on account of rains which had fallen in the autumn, and partly because of the provisions for relief made by government, the results would be by no means so terrible as in the case of some Indian famines of the past. But if the reports recently received are to be credited, the famine is prevailing over an area larger than that which has been similarly affected in a century and it is likely that the morality, resulting from the scarcity of food and from attendant diseases, will exceed that of any previous famine within a hundred years. The accounts given of the sufferings of the starving people are horrible to read. The people of Canada, we are glad to know, are responding with a degree of liberality to the call for help. Surely the appeal on behalf of those famishing millions cannot be heard unmoved by any who share the plenty and the abundant blessings of Canadian homes.

In Re Prohibition.

At our last convention a special resolution passed in regard to prohibition—to the effect that "Convention petition the Legislatures of N. S., N. B., and P. E. I. to enact laws prohibiting the sale of liquors in their respective provinces." This we are doing. It was also resolved, "that the convention request every Baptist church within our bounds to make similar petitions."

Will our pastors kindly see that at once—during the present week, such petitions are signed and sent in. The more the better.

Let the churches in each province petition their own Legislature—read also the clause of the resolution—year book page 23 in re of Dominion Parliament.

For the sake of uniformity may I be allowed to suggest the following—taken from the petition we are sending the Legislatures, be used as the heading for the petitions sent by churches.

To the Honorable House of Assembly of the Province of.....

The Petition of the Baptist church in..... County of..... Province of..... humbly sheweth, that the general traffic in intoxicating liquors is a recognized evil, producing a large proportion of the poverty, suffering, disorder and crime in this province.

That your petitioners believe that a law enacted by the Provincial Legislature, prohibiting the sale of all alcoholic liquors for beverage purposes, and containing ample provisions for its strict enforcement by the proper authorities will greatly diminish these and other evils, and largely increase the prosperity, and promote the health, peace and morality of the people.

Therefore your petitioners respectfully pray that your Honorable House may be pleased to pass such prohibitory law. And your petitioners will ever pray.

Where there are both Assembly and Legislative Houses two petitions will need be prepared. Hoping our brethren will act at once and unitedly.

G. O. GATES, Pres. of Con.

Tyne Folk.

Tyne Folk, by Joseph Parker, published by the F. H. Revell Company is a duodecimo volume of 200 pages. There is nothing in the title page (and preface there is none) to indicate more definitely the personality of the author, who, we presume, however, is to be identical with the famous Dr. Joseph Parker, minister of the City Temple, London. The book contains a number of character sketches of Northumbrian folk—the author being himself, as we gather, of Northumberland birth. "Tyne Folk" has in it suggestions of the work on similar lines of Ian Maclaren. There is nothing to show when these sketches were written. If they are, as we suppose, a recent production, the author fortunately had already won distinction before they were published. At any rate it does not appear that he was destined to win fame in this particular field of literature. The sketches, however, are readable and interesting enough, some of them especially so. One of the best is "John Morra," which has the air of being drawn from life. John Morra was a hard working farmer, and "the most popular local preacher for miles around Horsefield." John's speech exemplified the full power of the Northumbrian and the other peculiarities of that northern dialect, "Nyen of your fein toke for me," John would say. In the pulpit, in the byre, in the harvest field, it was all the same to him; the more barbarous the lingo the better. John was a very direct and practical kind of preacher. His hearers were hardly likely to go to sleep when he discoursed in the following fashion: "Now Tommy Carr, what's brout ye here t' neet? Ye're only here becose ye want to seeave candle leet at heaam. Ah ken yer beggarly ways, Tommy, ye're on yer way to the devil. All misers are his prizes. Tommy, how monny pennies ha' ye given to the poor this week? How monny little bairns ha' ye made happy? Dinna try to shuffle off with some lee or another, Tommy, yer rest this verra neet will be sair broken if ye divvant put a shillin on the plate. Mr. Bell teake the plate tiv him this verra minute, for death comes sudden sometimes. Tommy if ye put five shillin on th' plate it wunna beggar ye, and it'll do good to th' chepple. Ah's glad to see Betty Stoka oot th' neet, for a drizzlin, dorty neet it is, and Betty's not so young as she was forty year sin'. But ye're quite right to coom oot, for ye've had a vast o' trouble and this is th' place where Jesus comforts His people and makes them warm with His own love. . . . Mr. Bell, I see Tommy Carr pat haf a croon on th' plate; noo give it to Betty, for ahe's poor and she needs the money; and Tommy Carr, ye'll be blist for this, and see if ma words divvant come true. Noo, hinnies, let's sing a verse, and then I'll gan on ageean."