

The Ancient and Honorable.

Ancient ruins revealed—old organizations—humanity crowned with long eventful years, like far away voices call back from the tombs of buried centuries—hands that reach out and beckon us from the shadows of a forgotten past and bid us listen to their silent messages and look reverently on the strange mysterious pictures they reveal to us.

Some of them perish of little importance—many of them in their long ago beginning evolved from the trivial need of a short lived necessity, but possessing some sympathetic chord that responded to and vibrated upon the heart of humanity, have come down to posterity as a heritage of the "Old changing Order as it yieldeth to the New."

Some of these long silent voices whisper through the mystic shadows of the dim centuries when the world was young in strange unknown tongues, or such uncouth symbols, that tell a mute message of human ambitions and desires and forge new links in the chain which binds in a common brotherhood all whom the Almighty made in his image.

In ancient Egypt, beneath the mudd-strata of the ruins of Abydos where they lie buried behind seven thousand centuries, the secrets of ten dynasties stand revealed before the world, and the highest civilization of the nineteenth century stands with uncovered head to listen reverently to their mute message. Brought forth from his sleep of centuries robed and crowned—the face and form of the mighty Malna is exposed to the view of the world—the same as when the old time wily ruler held despotic sway before Remeses—before the pyramids lifted their inscrutable faces heavenward—before the Greek or Persian or Roman were known.

An outstretched hand from the shadowy realms of forgotten greatness to greet the present age bringing to us a mute reminder that we too must be forgotten in the fast approaching ages of the future.

In the month of October in the city of Boston from ten thousand American throats a shout of welcome rose up to "fill the hollow heaven tempestuously," as the two hundred doughty knights of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of London—the oldest military organization in the British Empire—filed past in their towering bearskins—their quaint old time costumes amid the wild hurrahs of the welcoming hosts to be dined and feted, and honoured by their American cousins of the ancient and honorable company of Massachusetts.

The Ancients of London—ancient and honorable indeed—its charter dating back to 1537 of whom King Edward is at present commander, has in its membership men of the highest distinction in the empire, and kings and princes have many times been its commander.

The Massachusetts company also claims rightly the title of ancient and honorable—having been formed in 1638 when the flag of England floated over the city, before "Boston harbor grew black with unexpected tea."

In 1869 the Massachusetts company went with friendly greeting to their old world comrades across the sea. Then for the first and only time in the history of the world the streets of London echoed to the tramp of armed Americans with the stars and stripes floating hoily above them.

From the terrace of Windsor Castle Square, Victoria gave then royal welcome, and from the time of their landing on the shores of old England until the last vestige of the ship on which they embarked homeward bound, their visit was one glad ovation of courteous welcome. And now as the London Ancients returned the visit unique and wonderful were the preparations for the reception and banqueting of the veteran warriors. From city and town, from every part of the Great Republic the most distinguished men of the nation, hastened to welcome and do them honors and to receive the message of good will from the British King.

And now whatever else may be the significance of this visit which has already passed into history, these quaint pictures of a by-gone day fling their mute messages "across the vast years" and teach us—

"That the centuries that lie between are thought to close, they bind the present to the past."

This year has witnessed the passing of the venerable Roman Pontiff. Long waiting by the shore of the silent sea he has at last laid aside the triple crown and the fisherman's ring and gone to render account to a greater than he. Keen, active and alert, he watched from the windows of the Vatican the great events of the nations, and touched with his long slender finger the secret springs that controlled great issues. Whatever may have been his failings his voice rang clear and true in the interests of peace and good will. With the closing of this long, eventful life the world has seen the last of the four most notable personages of the nineteenth century.

The "Iron Chancellor" whose strong hand an empire in its grasp—Gladstone, the "The Grand Old Man" strong champion of truth and integrity—and then—the great Queen—grand central figure of the century, royal woman, throned and crowned in the hearts of her people, was borne reverently away, followed by the Princes of England's royal house, the weeping daughters of dead kings and the mourning rulers of all lands.

And now Leo, thy sun too has set, no length of years, nor oft repeated prayers shall win reprieve from the last

final summons and in the city of seven hills, the mourners trod the streets because the pontiff lay dead in the palace of the Popes. Who shall fill the places or tread in the footsteps of the illustrious dead? What horoscope shall pierce the shadows of the fast approaching years or interpret the portentous signs of this restless age.

More than ever before, grave questions—unsolved problems pregnant with incalculable results press themselves upon the serious consideration of the nations—especially is this true of Great Britain and her colonies—of this young nation—loyal daughter of her mother's house.

And now the year is old, and soon wrapped in his icy garments he must lie down with the dead years that are hidden away in the vast sercophagus of the universe—one by one the years rush past—we hear the tramp of the centuries in their onward march to mingle with the cycles of eternity—each successive age carrying out the infinite purpose of the Almighty.

But the day has fled—night and storm and darkness has fallen about the world. The stars gleam out in the murky sky—the planets roll their trackless course through the fathomless depths of space, the same as when the mighty Malna was slipped in the ancient temple of Abydos—the same as when the sons of Noah descended from the great ship that rested on the brow of Ararat, and scattered themselves over the face of the earth to increase and replenish it.

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The Preacher and his Theme.

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"The unsearchable riches of Christ!" It suggests the figure of a man standing with uplifted hands in a posture of great amazement, before continuous revelations of immeasurable and unsearchable glory. In whatever way he turns, the splendor confronts him! It is not a single highway of enrichment. There are side ways, by-ways, turnings here and there labyrinthine paths and recesses, and all of them abounding in unsuspected jewels of grace. It is as if a miner, working away at the primary vein of ore, should continually discover equally precious veins stretching out on every side, and overwhelming him in rich embarrassment. It is as if a little child, gathering the wild sweet heather at the fringe of the road, should lift his eyes and catch sight of the purple glory of a boundless moor. "The unsearchable riches of Christ!" It is as if a man were tracking out the confines of a lake, walking its boundaries, and when the circuit was almost complete should discover that it was no lake at all, but an arm of the ocean, and that he was confronted by an immeasurable sea! "The unsearchable riches of Christ!" This sense of amazement is never absent from the apostle's life and writings. His wonder grows by what it feeds on. Today's surprise almost makes yesterday's wonder a commonplace. Again and again he checks himself, and stops the march of his argument, as the glory breathes upon him the new freshness of the morning. You know how the familiar peans run. "According to the riches of his grace!" "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory." God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." "The riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles." "The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." "In everything ye are enriched by him." "The exceeding riches of his grace." His thought is overwhelmed. He is dazzled by the splendor. Speech is useless. Description is impossible. He just breaks out in awed and exultant exclamation. "O, the depth of the riches of both the wisdom and knowledge of God!" The riches are "unsearchable," untrackable, "beyond all knowledge and all thought."

OBJECTS OF APPROPRIATION.

But now, to the Apostle Paul, these "unsearchable riches" are not merely the subjects of contemplation, they are objects of appropriation. This ideal wealth is useable glory, useable for the enrichment of the race. The "unsearchable riches" fit themselves into every possible condition of human poverty and need. The ocean of grace flows about the shore of common life, with all its distresses and gaping wants, and it fills every crack and crevice to the full. That is the sublime confidence of the Apostle Paul. He stands before all the desert places in human life, the mere cinder heaps, the men and the women with burnt-out enthusiasms and affections, and he boldly proclaims their possible enrichment. He stands before sin, and proclaims that sin can be destroyed. He stands before sorrow, and proclaims that sorrow can be transmuted. He stands before the broken and perverted relationships of men, and proclaims that they can all be rectified. And all this in the strength of "the unsearchable riches of Christ!" To this man the wealth is realizable, and can be applied to the removal of all the deepest needs of men. Let us fasten our attention here for a little while in the contemplation of this man's amazing confidence in the triumphant powers of grace.

He stands before sin and proclaims its possible destruction. It is not only that he proclaims the general ministry of pardon and the general removal of sin. He finds his special delight in specializing the ministry and in proclaiming the all-sufficiency of redeeming grace in its relationship to the worst. There is about him the fearlessness

of a man who knows that his evangel is that of a redemption which cannot possibly fail. Turn to those gloomy catalogues which are found here and there in his epistles, long appalling lists of human depravity and human need, and from these estimate his glowing confidence in the powers of redeeming grace. Here is such a list: "Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with men, thieves, covetous drunkards, revilers, extortioners." Such were some of the foul issues upon which the saving energies of grace were to be brought. And then he adds—"And such were some of you. But we were washed!" And when the apostle uses the word "washed" he suggests more than the washing out of an old sin, he means the removal of an old affection more than the removal of a pimple, he means the perfection of the blood; more than the cancelling of guilt, he means the transformation of desire. Such was this man's belief in the saving ministry of divine grace. Do we share his confidence? Do we speak with the same unshaken assurance, or do we stagger through unbelief? Does our speech tremble with hesitancy and indecision? If we had here a company of men and women whose condition might well place them in one of the catalogues of the Apostle Paul, could we address to them an evangel of untroubled assurance, and would our tones have that savor of persuasion which would make our message believed? What could we tell them with firm and illumined convictions? Could we tell them that the cinder-heaps can be made into gardens, and that the desert can be made to rejoice and blossom as the rose? I say, should we stagger in the presence of the worst, or should we triumphantly exalt in the power of Christ's salvation?

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOUL WINNERS.

It has always been characteristic of great soul-winners that, in the strength of the unsearchable riches of Christ, they have proclaimed the possible enrichment and ennoblement of the most debased. John Wesley appeared to take almost a pride in recounting and describing the appalling ruin and defilement of mankind, that he might then glory in the all-sufficient power of redeeming grace. "I preached at Bath. Some of the rich and great were present, to whom, as to the rest, I declared with all plainness of speech, (1) That by nature they were all children of wrath. (2) That all their natural tempers were corrupted and abominable. . . . One of my hearers, my Lord ———, stayed very impatiently until I came to the middle of my fourth head. Then, starting up, he said, 'Tis hot! 'tis very hot, and got down-stairs as fast as he could.' My Lord ——— should have stayed a little longer, for John Wesley's analysis of depravity and of human need was only and always the preface to the introduction of the glories of the unsearchable riches of Christ. My Lord ——— should have waited until Wesley got to the marrow of his text, 'The Son of Man is come to see and to save that which was lost.'

There was a similar sublime confidence in the preaching of Spurgeon. What a magnificent assurance breathes through these words: "The blood of Christ can wash out blasphemy, adultery, fornication, lying, slander, perjury, theft, murder. Though thou has raked in the very kennels of hell, yet if thou wilt come to Christ and ask mercy He will absolve thee from all sin." That too, I think, is quite Pauline. Henry Drummond has told us that he has sometimes listened to confessions of sin and to stories of ill-living so filthy and loathsome that he felt when he returned home that he must change his very clothes. And yet to these plague-smitten children Drummond offered with joyful confidence the robe of righteousness and the garment of salvation. We need this confident hope today. Men and women are round about us, willless, heartless, hopeless, and there is something stimulating and magnetic about a strong man's confident speech. If we proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, let us proclaim them with a confidence born of experiential fellowship with the Lord, and with the untroubled assurance that the crown of life can be brought to the most besotted, and the pure white robe to the most defiled.

What else does Paul find in the unsearchable riches of Christ? He finds a gracious ministry for the transfiguration of sorrow. The unsearchable riches of Christ bring most winsome light and heat into the midst of human sorrow and grief. "Our consolations also abound through Christ." Turn where you will, in the life of Paul, into his darker seasons and experiences, and you will find that the sublime and spiritual consolation is shedding its comforting rays. "We rejoice in tribulations also." Who would have expected to find the light burning there? We sorrow, yet not as others who have no hope." "Not as others!" It is sorrow with the light streaming through it! It is an April shower, mingled sunshine and rain; the hope gleams through our tears. And the light transfiguring what it touches! Even the yew tree in my garden, so sombre, and so sullen, shows another face when the sunlight falls upon it. I think I have seen the yew tree smile. Even pain shows a new face when the glory-light beams upon it. Said Frances Ridley Havergal, that exultant singing spirit, with the frail, shaking, pain-ridden body, "Everybody is so sorry for me except myself." And then she uses the praise, "I see my pain in the light of Calvary." It is the yew tree with the light upon it! Such is the ministry of the unsearchable