

A TIMELY LECTURE.

Rev. J. A. Williams, D. D., on "The Religious Signs of the Times."

An Earnest Enquiry into the Present Aspect of Christianity—A Hopeful View.

The following is the full text of the able lecture delivered in the North St. Methodist church last week by Rev. Dr. Williams, General Superintendent of the Methodist church of Canada:—

Nothing is more common than to hear that the religion of the present day forms an unfavorable contrast, as compared with the religion of the past. We frequently meet with persons who are keenly defective and severely judiciously very sensitive in conscience, and alarmed by what they judge a departure from the standard which they set up.

Others, again, deplore the evils of the times, the conventionalism in worship, the Pharisaic respectability, and the unceremonious which make the professed Christian church. Others deplore the growth of infidelity, and point to the attitude of men of science and culture toward revealed religion.

There are others who are neither alarmed nor despondent with the present aspect of things; who see much to cheer and encourage them in the religious aspect of the times. One thing that stands out very prominently in the earnestness of enquiry. It is not to be denied that in some quarters there is an unsetting of religious notions, as the result of the active mental life of the age, and a tone and temper induced by the study of the physical sciences, not at all conducive to the spiritual life which the religion of Jesus contemplates.

The atmosphere in which a man's mind is saturated will color all his thoughts. For ages the highest thought of the foremost races of the world had wrought about the fabric of the Christian faith, and we had thought we had passed beyond the foundation, but our attention is arrested by questions supposed to have been settled long since, pertinent and leading questions—questions that cannot be set aside or ignored.

There are enquiries—earnest enquiries—concerning the first elements of religion. To many minds this is most bewildering and depressing, but there are considerations that greatly relieve us here. We ought to remember that the faith of each generation must be formed afresh. It can hardly be expected that men in these days will be content with the credulity of unquestioning childhood.

The belief that serves moulds character, that brings out and gives full scope to our sense of accountability is not hereditary. Every man must have his own faith formed in him. Then, again, it is no little thing that we have found the path which no foot has trodden; that we have found the path which no foot has trodden; that we have found the path which no foot has trodden.

Men everywhere ask for the truth—the right—and seek for it as hid treasure, and win for themselves solidity, constancy, security. They no longer grope, they they have found the path which no foot has trodden; that we have found the path which no foot has trodden; that we have found the path which no foot has trodden.

Again, I notice the growing appreciation of religious principle. But little objection is now made to the moral side of Christianity. It is rarely you find a writer of tales of fiction or a political thinker but bears witness to the correctness and universal application of the principles of Christianity. Indeed it would be difficult to break away from the recorded effects of the Christian system.

phy, the noblest poetry, and develop the purest humanity. Men everywhere admit these principles have the strongest hold upon the best races; that they pave the way to freedom and social elevation; they make men better by ennobling and dignifying character. At no time in the past did that one pale form that was nailed to the tree for our advantage receive more prominence, or the principles His religion more hearty appreciation than at the present time.

The world presents a different aspect in this respect than it did at the commencement of the century. Everywhere the virtuous order, the self-controlled moderation of the Christian household is admired; the patient thoroughness, the regular discipline, and the religious reverence in the systems of education are appreciated. The abundance of charities, the integrity of traffic, the nobleness of our polity, are not only attract attention, but are traced to their sources. Forms, usages, and the central reality remains, and the reality is transforming morally, into lectly, socially. Evidently Christianity is softening and shading the world to her own likeness.

Let us then, invite your thought to the energy displayed by those who accept Christian religion in the present time. Notwithstanding the remarkable extent and consequent upon the discoveries of science in these later days, the growth and unfolding of Christian truth, the moral influence and spiritual vitality of the Gospel, have been more marked than ever. The period of intellectual progress, the period of the greatest spiritual activity, practical benevolence and philanthropy, and a wide extension of Christian influence. Piety is becoming more intelligent, beautiful and attractive—the sure foundation of a true faith and a more rational happiness.

The Evangelical movement is influencing the great human world, and recognizes all human activity which tends to development and progress as belonging to its realm—all that blesses man in body and in soul, and in spirit, is an essential part of Christ's saving work. The relations, the industries, the interests, the thoughts, the sympathies of men in their physical, intellectual, social and political life,—these we claim for His kingdom. Today the world is full of agencies for the disseminating against the sin that degrades and destroys, and, blessed be God, they are multiplying daily on every hand.

Christians were mistaken as other men had been mistaken, and have in time corrected their mistakes about science, about the principles of government, about the polity or economy of state. It is not the firmament of heaven that is widely as men are living and acting, all that now is false, rotten, wrong; our present hopes are utterly extinguished, our present motives are as unsubstantial as bubbles on water—we are living in a dream. This is no matter to be content to play with. Is it any wonder that the minds of Christians were saddened, for if all the vanities were true it was a grave thing for any thinking man. If over the whole moral world a shadow has fallen which was not there before; if in the firmament of heaven the sun has gone out forever, without hope of return; if for the fact of sin, of unholiness, of pain, of death, there is no longer any remedy, but what nature (and we know what that is) gives us; if the Redeemer of mankind, the Saviour of the world, has not appeared, if the Comforter has not come; if Christ has no church on earth; if there is a thing to make men stand aghast—a conclusion, which, if true, is the most terrible announcement ever made to man—the ruin of all that millions have lived for—the most frightful proclamation of the history for ages over the good, the wise, the pure, the suffering, the living, the dying, of the most deadly, the most dreadful of cheats. For we, not like the heathen before us, know what we have believed, we have believed deliberately; we know what we had, we know what we had. But let us bless the God of our history, that while the truth of religion has been attacked, and many thought of sapping a solemn creed by solemn sneers, champions were raised up for the defence of truth and of religion, and we, on second thought, conclude that the authority of a scientific man extends only so far as his specialty extends, and though he should understand all knowledge and all mysteries, yet the facts of human nature are the same, and are beyond his ability to remedy or to alter. And the attitude of scientific reason today is that it acknowledges itself incompetent to pronounce against any of the great truths of our faith.

In reading lately Huxley on Hume, it was with glad surprise that I fell on this statement:—"There can be no just ground on the principle of natural philosophy, for denying the possibility of miracles." Here then is a great point gained. Science, by its most distinguished representatives, puts itself out of court—hesitates, falters—and, instead of the hardihood of denial, simply confesses ignorance. From science itself in the theory that is now held, and is likely to be more widely held, of the origin of man, the doctrine of universal infirmity is assumed, not as a dogma, but as a conceded, universal fact. Unexpectedly from right on the camp of science comes the belief of the doctrine which underlies the whole truth of religion, the doctrine named of the universal lost condition of man; the modern doctrine of the solidarity or union of the race in interest and responsibility, corroborates this fundamental truth of the Bible. Even Roman calls Christ divine, and speaks of his divinity as "resplendent before our eyes," and declares that "he is the center of the eternal religion of humanity." Schelling declares that "Paul's language of 'For Him and through Him, and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever,' is the foundation and last word of philosophy, the keynote of the harmony between revelation and philosophy." And a great present day thinker, on the second of the sphere of its operations, and in the record of its triumphs will be found the names of champions for the truth that were equipped for the work in the Sunday school. Nor can I omit here an homage to those who are seeking to introduce a civilization of approval, in accord with Christian truth and principle, that should be marked by solemnity and abstinence from the lust of strong drink. The organized and individual effort for the reclaiming of men from the vice of intemperance, and the prohibition of the traffic by public approval, discredits the religious instinct is to throw doubt on all the powers of the soul, and involve it in the blindest atheism. The fact is men are beginning to discover and

distinguish between the permanent essence and the shifting form of religious truth, and wherever makes this distinction will perceive how Christian truth can account for its changes, and defend its history. Containing the principles and revelations of eternal truth, it has its own data and phenomena, and they are not to be classed in any other category. Hostile criticism has not succeeded in discrediting the Christian record, nor have world-wide, self-seeking and the misconceptions of illogical defenders perverted the character, defaced the beauty, or destroyed the influence of Christianity. That they have not done so, constitutes the miracle of these later ages.

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evil. The beneficent results of the temperance reformation, even for a day, cannot be estimated. The amount of good done in the correction, and particularly in the prevention of evil, and its influence on public opinion surpasses all our modes of calculation. The movement is of God, and must succeed. My heart and prayers are with all the earnest and organized temperance workers—men and women, old and young—and with all who have a word to say for their encouragement. It would furnish a point of thought did time permit, to survey the territory won from heathenism and vice within the memory of this congregation as the result of the deep and deepening vitality of the church. It is without parallel in the history of the ages. We have Christ reigning over a territory unrivalled in extent, greater benevolences awakened and sustained by deeper religious emotion, rapidly multiplying home, city and foreign mission stations—the outcome of intense consecration—magnificent departments of Christian labor, many of them hitherto unknown, and none of them less numerous before, or so recent in activity. The text of the church pulsates with an unequalled velocity; the fire of evangelism burns with uncounted brightness on multiplied altars; a religious literature such as has characterized no other age, replete with faith and power, animates the practical intensely fervid and richly evangelical, all tend to show the living power of religion. Who can estimate the greatness of our privileges or the responsibility that attaches to us from our advantages? Let us live in hope. Christ will not fail, nor our great leader in the right hand of the Throne and all power is His. Let us be loyal to the gospel, loyal to men, loyal to Christ; for amid all the agencies that are working so heroically around us, the schemes of the philanthropist, the disburse of the scholar, the lesson of the teacher, the song of the poet—the Church, the organ of Him who is the life of the whole human sphere, the master light of all our seeing, is spending the whole force of its intellect and spirit in making God's great love in Christ a reality to all human hearts. The gifts we need, the grace we require, be successful in aiding the world in its course toward the nominal triumph of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost is now waiting to bestow.

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THE TWO MRS. TUCKERS.

CHAPTER I.

"You can make the pie while I put the horse out," said Amasa Tucker, as he opened the backdoor of a gray house, set on top of a treeless hill, tracked here and there with paths the geese had made in their daily journeys to the pond below, and only approached at the back by a lane to the great red barn, and a rickety board gate set between two posts of the rail fence.

This was Wealthy Ann Tucker's home coming; she had married Amasa that morning at her father's house in Stanton a little village twenty miles away from Peet's Mills, the town within whose wide limits lay the Tucker farm, and had come home with him this early spring afternoon in the old wagon behind the bony horse that did duty for Amasa's family carriage.

Mrs. Tucker was a tall, thin young woman, with a sad, reticent face, very silent and capable; these last traits had been her chief recommendation to her husband. There was no sentiment about the matter; old Mrs. Tucker had died two weeks before this marriage, but Amasa was "fore-handed," and knowing his mother could not live long, had improved his opportunities, and been "sparkin'" Wealthy Ann Minor, all winter, in judicious provision for the coming event of his solitude.

He had thought the thing all over, and concluded that a wife was cheaper than a hired gin, and more permanent; so when he found this alert, firm-jointed, handy girl, living at her uncle's, who was a widower on a great farm the other side of the village, Amasa made her acquaintance as soon as possible, and proceeded to further intimacy. Wealthy liked better to work for her uncle than for a step-mother with six secondary children, but she thought it would be better still to have a husband of her own. So she agreed to marry Amasa Tucker, and this was her home-coming.

She opened the door into a dining room with an open fireplace at one end, a window on the north and one on the south side, small paneled, with old, green and imperfect glass, and letting in but just light enough to work by. One corner, to the north, was partitioned off to make a pantry, and a door by the fireplace led into the wood-shed. The front of the house contained two rooms: one opened into the kitchen and was a bedroom, furnished sparsely enough; the other was a parlor, with high-backed, rush-bottomed chairs against the wall, a round table in the middle, a fireplace with brass and iron and fire-iron, a family Bible on the table, and a "mourning piece" painted in ground hair on the mantel. Green paper shades and white cotton curtains, a rag carpet fresh as when it came from the loom—if its dinginess could ever be called fresh—and a straight-backed sofa covered with green and yellow glazed chintz, made as dreary an apartment as could well be imagined.

Wealthy shut the door behind her quickly, and went to the shed for material to make her fire. It was almost sundown and she was hungry, but she found only the scantiest supply of wood and a few dry chips for kindling; however, she did her best, and she had brought some provisions from home, so that she managed to lay out a decent supper on the rickety table by the time Amasa came stamping in from the barn. He looked disapprovingly at the pie, the biscuits, the shaved beef, and the jelly set before him.

"I hope you ain't a waster, Wealthy," he growled. "There's vittles enough for a township, and there ain't but two of us."

"Well, our folks set em over, and you no need to eat 'em," she answered cheerily.

"I ain't goin' to. Den't ye break into that yell; set it by. Sometime or nuth'er somebody may be comin' here, and you'll want it."

Wealthy said no more; they made a supper of biscuit and beef, for the pie was also ordered "set by." She was used to economy but not to stinginess and she excused this extra thrift in her husband more easily for the reason that she had been always poor, and she knew very well that he was not rich, to say the least. But it was only the beginning.

Hard as Wealthy had worked at her uncle's, here she found harder brudens. She had to draw and fetch all the water she used from an old-fashioned well with a heavy sweep, picturesque to see, but wearisome to use; wood was scarce, for though enough grew on the hundred acres that Amasa owned, he grudged its use.

"I shan't cut down no more than is really needful," he said, when ye don't cut, and a makin' for lumber; and lumber's better to sell, a sight, than cord wood. Ye must get along somehow with brush; mother used to burn next to nothin'."

Then there were eight cows to milk, the milk to strain, skim, churn, or make cheese; and nothing but the simplest tools to do it with. A cloth held over the pail served for strainers; the pails themselves were heavy wood; the pans old and some of them leaky, the holes stopped up with bits of rag often to be removed. The milk room was in the shed, built against the chimney, that it might not freeze there in winter, and only aired by one small latticed window. The churn was an old wooden one with a dasher, and even the "spaddle" with which she worked her butter was whittled out of a maple knot by Amasa himself, and was heavy and rough.

Then to her belonged the feeding of the pigs, cant, lean animals, with sharp snouts, ridgy backs, long legs and thin flanks; deep set eyes that gleamed with intelligent malice, and never-sated hunger. Wealthy grew almost afraid of them when they clambered up on the rails of the pen in their fury for food, and flapped their pointed ears at her, squealing and fighting for the scant share that she brought. For Amasa underfed and overworked everything that belonged to him.

Then there were hens to look after; the old-fashioned barn-door "creepers," who wanted food too, yet catered for themselves in a great measure, and made free with barn and wood-shed for want of their own quarters, and were delectated every season by hawks, owls, skuks, weasels and foxes, to say nothing of the little chickens on which cows and cats would their will if they dared to stray beyond the ruinous old coops contrived for them by Amasa's inventive genius out of sticks and stones.

Add to this cooking, washing, baking and serving; the insufficient supply of pork, potatoes, and tough pies; the "biled dinners," whose strength lay in the vegetables rather than the small square of fat pork cooked with them, of which Amasa invariably took the lion's share; these accumulating and never-ceasing labours all were day by day on the vitality of Mrs. Tucker, and when to these was added an annual paby, life became a burden and a terror to the poor woman.

But what did Amasa care? He, too, worked from "sun to sun." He farmed in the hard, old fashion with rude implements and no knowledge, but—

"My father done it afore me, so I'm goin' to do it new; no talkin'."

One by one the waiting, puny children were laid away in the little yard on top of a sandhill, where the old Tuckers and their half-dozen infants lay already; a rough enclosure, full of mullens, burdecks, and thistles, overrun with low black-berry vines and surrounded by a rail fence. It had been much handier for the Tuckers to have a graveyard close by than to travel five miles to the Mills work every funeral, and they were not driven by public opinion in regard to monuments; they lay there like the beasts that perish, with but one slant grey stone to tell where the first occupant lay in his tired bones.

Two children of Wealthy's survived, Amasa and Lurana, the oldest and youngest of seven. Amasa was a considerate, intelligent boy, who thought much and said little; and Lurana, or "Lury," as her name was usually given, a mischievous, self-willed little imp, the delight and torment of her worn-out mother. Young Amasa was a boy quite beyond his father's understanding. As soon as he was old enough he began to help his mother in every way he could devise; and when his term at the village school was over, to his father's great disgust, he trapped squirrels and gathered nuts enough to earn his own money to subscribe for an agricultural paper which he studied every week till the contents were thoroughly stored in his head.

Then began that "noble discontent" which philosophers prize. The elder man had no peace in his old-world ways; the sloppiness of the barnyard was an eyesore to this "book-learned feller," as his father derisively called him, and the ashes of the woodpile were saved and sheltered like precious dust, instead of thrown into a big heap to edify the wandering hens. That desolate garden was ploughed, fertilized, and set in order at last, and the great ragged orchard manured, the apple trees thinned and trimmed and ashes sown thick over the old meadow sod. Now these things were not done in a day or a year, but as the boy grew older and more able to cope with his father's self-conceit, more was done annually, not without much opposition and many hard words, but still done.

Then came a heavy blow; Lurana, a girl of fifteen, fresh and pretty as a wild rose, and tired of the pinching economy, the monotonous work and grinding life of the farm, ran away with a tin-peddler and broke her mother's heart; not in the physical sense that hearts are sometimes broken, but the weary woman's soul was set on this bright winsome child and her life lost all its scant savor when the blooming face and the clear young voice left her forever.

"I don't blame her none, anyway," she sobbed out to her boy, new a stout fellow of twenty-two, raging at his sister's folly, "I can't feel to blame her; I know 'tis more'n a girl can bear to live this

way. I've had to, but feel hard. I've wished could be laid down like babies out there on the spell; but there was wanted, and so my t' ever you should get 'pess you will, men in 'tis needful, whether make it easy for her. Don't grind her down like me, dear; 'tain't j'en't, never to make no than if she was a hor don't do it."

"Mother, I never will son, as energetically as he were taking his oath. But Wealthy was no than she knew; the con dirt, neglect, poor food and pleasurable excite body, and when least down and does its fa isolated farm-house, crowded city slums, the England—typical for the Tucker household.

Wealthy turned away one Saturday morning pie was set on the l and fainted on the kit Amasa the younger l after, muttering, de What he could do doctor, or an old woman self a nurse, was all best skill of any kin equally futile. She w again for a week. Th ed to see what was abe she looked up at her cheek on his hand, an

Hardy had her was away under the mull whee, her husband ca field smitten with the was harder to con-quer alternate burning, a chills ended at last in repose of death for Amasa Tucker reign house on the hill.

It is not to be supposed Amasa the young to the charms of the c "been caught with had met at singing matches, or who said Sunday bonnet as he his end" in the village. He had been fair shy, delicate, dark was his girl sweetly Mary Peet that he share his life and he ed to take a farm summer, and work ward to a place o great surprise he fo the bank at Peet's ings of his father's gan at once to e he longed to build advice restrained h with this. The whitewashed with ed its one begrimed more, so that it was house was scrubbe ome, a bonfire n comfortable and repainted a soft y downs, with clear l of the dingy old as was filled with store of pine cones ings, a new mill little way from the brook that ran de house, and under up a cool draught passage connecte and a door into t of that a conveni removal of the el coarser gave to the air and light. boiler filled up th place, but furth left for Mary.

A different b mother's she had kring day as W kitchen shone cl of pink aratus bi phere freshly a laid ready for l tea-kettle filled such stores as A ledge of househ—flour, butter, abundance; an gave more pleas guests than the d and baked for t dried apples, th the fragrant to happy evening their wedding new and sensib just bought, wi draw it.

"I want you had said the m is needful here thing is wantin fur fiery, but anke your w

CHAPTER II.

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