

DISGUISED BLESSINGS

PREACHER BRINGS RECONCILING REASON TO BIBLE PARADOX.

A NEW INTERPRETATION

How the "Prince of Peace" Could Say "I am Come to Send Fire Upon the Earth," and Still Maintain His Character as a Benefactor of Mankind—Symbol of Heat a Strange Blessing in Disguise.

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1906, by Frederick Dyer, Toronto, at the Dept. of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Los Angeles, Cal., Aug. 28.—In this sermon the preacher gives an altogether new interpretation to a passage which teaches us that God's mercies and blessings sometimes come to us in strange disguises. The text is Luke xii, 49, "I am come to send fire upon the earth."

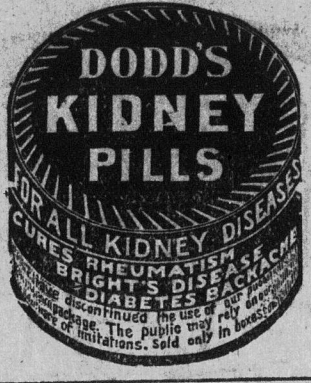
To the casual Bible reader these nine words may seem to convey a meaning which it is hard to reconcile with other passages. You cannot understand how Christ can be called the "Prince of Peace" and yet how he could send fire upon the earth. "Fire," you say—"why, fire is the agent of death, not the forerunner of life. It is the most ruthless destroyer known to man. Go to-day through any of our great forests, and what do you see printed by the road-sides? It is a warning to the campers and the travelers to beware of starting a forest fire. Why do the Government officials in Yellowstone Park and Yosemite and in many of the mountain reserves refuse to allow the camper to carry a shotgun? Is it for fear that he will kill game out of season? Perhaps that is one reason, but the chief reason is that the forest rangers are afraid that the shotguns might set fire to the woods. Have you never attended a country college, and witnessed the deadly forest fires burn for weeks and weeks upon the mountain side? What was the only danger the western cowboy feared worse than the Indian's warwhoop? It was the prairie fire, which could lick up the dead grass, sweep faster than a horse could run or deer could scurry away. Have you ever read of the unsheathed sword of fire which razed Moscow to the ground? These flames were able to devour the indomitable ambitions of the "Little Corsican."

Will our people ever forget the ghastly tragedy that destroyed America's western metropolis, which overlooked the Golden Gate of San Francisco bay? One of the first lessons we teach our children is to leave matches alone and fear the danger of fire. The so-called "Prince of Peace" says, "I am come to send fire upon the earth." How can you explain this anomaly? I can only suggest some of the effects of fire, which may give you a hint of our Lord's meaning, for, though we may look upon fire as an agency of death, we cannot forget that it may become in God's hands an agency of eternal life and of the purest and the best of all earthly lives. May God help us as we try to understand these holy words.

Fire, in the first place, is the symbol of heat. Heat is the first and true life comes from God, even as all heat of the earth primarily comes from the fires of the sun. In every bird that flies, in every bee that hums, in every squirrel that chatters, in every flower that grows, in every tree that stands and in every human being that walks we see the great divine fact illustrated that the God who sent fire upon earth is the great God who was and is the Creator of all. Now, the fact that all animal and vegetable life is dependent upon fire and heat for creation and development is well understood.

I am sitting upon the farmer's kitchen porch, and I hear a cackling noise. The old speckled Plymouth Rock hen is calling: "I have laid an egg! I have laid an egg! I am going to hatch out a little chicken, for I have laid an egg!" But the farmer's wife has another use for the egg. Each morning she goes and takes that egg away from the hen. She is absolutely merciless in this respect. She cooks for her summer boarders the best food for a breakfast—namely, a fresh laid egg. When you break it open, there it lies out in half, with its centre of gold covered over with its wrappings of purest white. The snow could not be whiter than the albumen of a new laid egg. At last the old hen grows tired of having her eggs eaten, so she, in turn, finds a secret nest. She flies away to the top of the haystack, or she goes off to the other side of the grain field and crawls under an old board near the fence, and there she makes her nest. Day after day the white beauties grow in number. The old feathered fowl keeps very still about her secret. When you go out and say, "Biddle, where is your nest?" she looks as innocent as an old owl. Then after twelve or thirteen of those eggs have been laid side by side Biddle suddenly disappears. She comes around once a day for food, but that is all. Then after three weeks you hear a great commotion, and up to the kitchen door marches the proud mother, leading a large brood of fuzzy little creatures which are her children. Now, how were the contents of those eggs turned into little living creatures? Simply by the agency of heat. Day after day and week after week that old hen sat upon those eggs. She sat so long that the feathers were worn off her breast. She sat so long that her breast became like fire. The warmth of her body went into the eggs, and that warmth developed there the little germs of life which grew until they were able to burst asunder the shells and walk forth as perfect chickens.

Why do you not plant your flowers and vines on this side of the house? I asked a wealthy gentleman at whose country home I was stopping. "These archedways would form a perfect trellis where the vines could cling. Then, the first view the visitor has of the house is from this driveway. Instead of planting most of your flowers toward the east side of the house, I would plant them on the west." "Ah," said my friend, "nothing I would like better than that, but my flowers will not grow here. You must remember



that the sun rises in the east and that means that during the morning hours the west side of my house is shut out from the light of the sun. That means the ground here is always cold. Seeds and flowers must have heat in which to grow. Heat means life for the vegetable world, and cold always means death. So you see that fire is not always destructive, but is the symbol of life. Now, when I hear Christ say, "I am come to send fire upon the earth," in a broad sense, I seem to hear Christ say, "I am come in order to put children into the cradles of the nurseries and to weigh down the orchard branches with fruits and to cover up the harvest fields with golden headed grain and to fill the gardens with busy bees and to hatch out the salmon eggs which have lain in the shallows of the rivers." Oh, the wonders of nature as revealed in the miraculous creations of life! Have you ever ceased to be amazed at the first sentence of the Apostles' creed: "I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord?"

Utter folly it is to deny the Fatherhood of God and the divinity of Jesus Christ as revealed in the creations of nature. Many years ago in a debating society the Earl of Rochester, in order to fill out the list of debates, tried to prove that this world had no need of an overruling or a creating Providence. After he had finished his speech and won the applause of his auditors he turned and said, "How can a man who walks upright, who sees the wonderful creations of God and has the use of his senses and reason use them to the denying of his Creator?" So say we all of us. When we witness the miraculous effects of heat in the creation of life we bow before the great God who has built the fires of reproduction upon every hillside and in every valley, whether we see that life illustrated in the wing of a bird, the leaf of a tree or in the throbbing heart of a mortal and yet immortal man.

But I find that fire is the symbol of purification as well as of creation. When Christ says he will send fire, I remember that one of his purposes is to take the dross out of the hard metallic heart. This is as truly a part of his mission as to create the seeds of life and by heat burst those seeds into the white blossoms of the springtime. The more I study Christ's life the more I am impressed with the fact that Christ continually has to make us over and purify us, even as the nuggets of gold must be burned in the smelting furnaces to separate the alloy from the pure gold. "What," you say, "all?" Yes; all. There is no exception to the

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rule. We have all erred and strayed like lost sheep. We have all followed too much the desires and the desires of our own hearts. There is none that doeth good—no, not one.

We have all been contaminated by sin from the very atmosphere which we have breathed. To a certain extent it is possible in operating rooms to keep the patient's wound free from poisonous infection. In the first place, the patient before being operated upon has his body thoroughly cleansed. Then he is etherized and carried to the operating table. There every instrument and every place of furnishing and cloth has been made antiseptic to receive the patient. There the nurses and the doctors are all dressed in pure, clean, antiseptic linen. They even wash their hands, their faces and their hair in carbolic solution. The very atmosphere is altered through apertures covered with gauze. Thus is the sick patient cared for in the operating room. The attendants are thus careful that no external dust or impurity touch that patient. But the atmosphere we breathe in life is not made antiseptic from sin. The hands that touch us upon the streets are not always pure hands. The lips which speak to us are not always pure lips. Indeed, we were born in sin; we have grown up amid the vitiating atmosphere of sin. Though we have again and again bowed in the mercy seat and made the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," yet to-day we find that we have just as great a need of Christ the Purifier as we ever had of Christ the Creator of our souls and physical bodies. Now how does Christ purify our lives? It is done by the hot fires of trouble. A fire is always the best of all purifiers. I stand at one of the great kiln doors of an East Liverpool pottery. I say to the potter: "What are you doing? Why are you making those fires so hot?" "To bake the clay," he answers. "Why do you bake the clay?" I ask. "To get the impurities out of it," he answers. Then I stand and hear the roaring noise of those seething fires. They leap, they hiss, they try to burn asunder the heavy, massive brick walls which are confining them. As I peer through the little hole I seem to hear the clay calling: "Let me out! Oh, let me out! They are burning me to death!" "No," answers the potter, "we are not destroying you; we are merely taking the impurities out of you." Not only do they burn some of the clay once, but twice and even thrice. Each time the furnaces are made hotter. Then the clay comes forth as the beautiful vase, perhaps with its sides decorated with flowers by the master artist or into the exquisite features of a beautiful maiden, to be among the treasured wedding gifts of a king's bride. Thus Christ purifies us by the hot fires of trouble. He burns us and keeps on burning us until we may be like unto himself. So I begin to see that when Christ says, "I am come to send fire upon the earth," he may mean a fire that shall purge and purify us and make us fit for his companionship in heaven.

But God's fires do not allude only to the flames of creation and purification. Without doubt they allude to the fires of battle and carnage as well. If a human being will not be purified by the hot furnaces of trouble, then he must fight God and fight him to the death. In the book of Ecclesiastes we read, "There is a time to weep and a time to sew, a time to keep silence and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time of war and a time of peace." Yes, there is a time for gospel carnage. And Christ furthermore said, "He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." In other words, you and I must be mustered under Christ's standard and warm ourselves by the campfires or else we must be enrolled among the cohorts of his enemies and have different purposes for which we fight. These fires of my text are the conflagrations of an advancing army on the march, as well as the signal flames which shall announce to the world a universal peace.

Now, war may be a curse or it may be a blessing. It depends upon the purposes or causes for which we fight. And when I speak thus I have well in mind the awful words, "Give me the money that has been spent in war," said a noted speaker, "and I will purchase every foot of land upon the globe. I will clothe every man, woman and child in an attire of which kings and queens would be proud. I will build a schoolhouse on every hillside and in every valley over the whole earth. I will build an academy in every town and endow it, a college in every state and fill it with able professors. I will crown every hill with a place of worship consecrated to the promulgation of the gospel of peace. I will support in every pulpit an able teacher of righteousness, so that on every Sabbath morning the chime on the hill shall answer to the chime on another part of earth's wide circumference, and the voice of prayer and the voice of praise shall ascend like a universal holocaust to heaven." That eulogy of the power of peace was most beautifully said, but, though past wars may have shed rivers of blood, I do not believe the awful gashes of the soldiers' grave trenches were so deep or too wide for to blessings which many of them brought to this suffering world.

Were not the blessings which came to mankind from the overthrow of the feudal system worth their sacrifices of human life? What was the intrinsic value of a few thousand or even a few million lives in comparison to the freedom of the home and sanctity of our loved ones and the independence of a man's life, whereby he could put his arm about his daughter and say to a petty king who claimed to be his master, "Haste off. She is my child. She is mine." Were not all the sacrifices for religious freedom well made? Would you put out the fires which burned to death the mortal life of Ridley, Latimer, Huss, Savonarola, and those who died to go to the stake and grope above amid the superstitions and the tyrannies of the dark ages? It is said when Gustavus Adolphus, the great King of Sweden, was fighting his last battle at Lutzen that amid the roar and crash of carnage a little frightened bird knew not where to go, so he alighted upon the shoulder of the mighty warrior. Gustavus reached up and took the little fluttering heart in his hand. Then he spoke a few

soothing words to the bird and hid it away for protection inside of his own armor. After Gustavus was slain and the loving soldiers reverently gathered about the bleeding corpse it is said that this little bird flew out of the cloak of the dead warrior, and no sooner did he start to fly away than he began to sing. So even upon the corpses of the martyrs and amid the persecutions of the covenants and amid the bitter attacks made upon Luther, Knox and Calvin we can hear the song birds of thanksgiving singing. We can say they died well. Aye, these martyrs died well, for by their sacrificial blood we won our religious liberty.

But, lastly, I learn from the words of my text that God's fires are to be the fires of triumph. The same soldiers who plod wearily along upon their forced marches and tramp through the long hours of the night doing sentinel duty; the same soldiers who, week after week and month after month and year after year, suffer exile from home and loved ones; the same soldiers who make the battlefields destructive, with the flames leaping out of the cannons' mouths and with the tongues of fire splitting bullets from rifle barrels, are the soldiers who will most joyfully build the campfires of triumph after glorious peace has been declared. It is said that when the peace agreement was signed at Appomattox every company plied the wood in its company streets. Then, as the flames leaped higher and higher, the soldiers, like a lot of schoolboys, joined hands and danced about these fires. They kept singing: "No more war; no more war! Peace has been declared! We are all going home to our loved ones! No more war! Thank God, no more war! Blessed peace—blessed, triumphant peace!" Thus shall it be when our Divine Leader shall be triumphant over sin. Then the campfires of war shall be changed into the leaping flames of triumph. Sin shall be forever done away. Dear ones shall then be reunited. Oh, the glorious triumph of earth and heaven when God shall conquer all his enemies and everlasting peace and everlasting reunions shall be ours.

Can heaven be a truly happy place for our loved ones if we are not there to sing with them the song of redemption and of Moses and the Lamb? One of the saddest sights I ever witnessed was when the Second Illinois regiment was about to leave for the Spanish-American war. I was its chaplain. Just before we left the armory the cry was taken up, "Does any one know a man by the name of So-and-so?" "What is the matter?" I asked. One of the majors turned to me and said, "A young boy ran away from home to enlist. His mother is here, and she thinks he enlisted in our regiment. She wants to bid him good-bye and give him her blessing." No sooner did the major speak thus than I saw this little old mother in faded dress among the soldiers. I followed her. She looked from face to face, and as she looked she kept saying: "Do you know where my boy is? Do you know my boy?" Not a soldier laughed. Hardly an eye was dry. Why? They were watching a mother's breaking heart hunting for a lost child. Can it be that such a scene as this shall be repeated in heaven on account of our absence? Can it be that in the most momentous hour of all time, when Christ shall build his fires of triumph, our mothers and fathers and our wives and dear ones and our Christ shall be looking in vain for our faces among the rejoicing hosts of heaven? Shall it be? Shall some of us never be seen by the campfires of heaven which shall leap and blaze when the flaming torches of sin shall be forever snuffed out?

Paupers Make Rugs.

Some of the male inmates of the New South Workhouse have been utilizing their spare time in making wool rugs, which find a ready sale in the town and district.

A NOBLE ENEMY.

The Fate of Mokran, a Moslem Chief of Africa.

France was never in greater danger of losing her colonies in Africa than during the war with Germany in 1870. The troops were recalled from Africa to take part in the conflict that was going on against France, and Algeria was left almost defenseless.

The hour for which the conquered races had long waited had come, and if a holy war had been proclaimed it is probable that the French would have been driven from northern Africa.

But the tribes did not rise while the French had their hands full on the other side of the Mediterranean, and the fact was due to their fidelity to a solemn pledge.

When the war broke out a chief of great influence among the tribes, Mokran, gave his word to the governor general of Algeria that there should be no insurrection while the war lasted. That word was faithfully kept. Disaster after disaster followed the French arms. The defeats of the war culminated in the surrender of Paris. But not a man of the tribes of Kabylia stirred. The Moslem's faith was pledged; the Moslem's faith was kept.

When, however, the last battle had been fought and the treaty of peace signed, Mokran, then released from his word, gave the governor general notice that in forty-eight hours he would declare war. The French armies, released from duty at home, hurried across the Mediterranean, and war was inevitable. Mokran, seeing that all was lost, put himself at the head of his warriors and set fighting in the front rank. The French erected a monument to mark the spot where their noble enemy perished.

Where He Was.

"To what do you attribute your good health and remarkably robust condition?"

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