

Devotional Service

BY REV. T. J. PARR, M.A.

FEB. 21.—"CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO THE MAN OF CULTURE."

John 3: 1-21.

The great fundamental doctrine of the New Testament is found in the topic for this week's study. It is what is called the doctrine of the new birth, or the doctrine of regeneration. The thought of Christ expressed in the words, "Ye must be born again," may be expressed with equal fidelity to the original, "Ye must be born anew," or "Ye must be born from above," the first indicating a radical change in nature, and character, the latter referring to a like change brought about by the divine spirit. Our Methodist young people should carefully study, and thoroughly understand this doctrine, which lies at the very foundation of Christian life, and which has been declared and emphasized by the Methodist Church service in its very commencement.

Mortality versus Regeneration.—The teaching of Jesus regarding the new birth stands out in strong contrast to the belief of some people that they are safe when they are trying to do what is right—trying to practice an external morality. They say, "I am as right as I can, I don't do anybody any harm, I pay my debts, I obey the laws, I live in peace with my neighbors." Such a creed reminds me of the boasting of the ancient Pharisee, who, instead of praying for God's mercy and help, simply told the Lord how good he thought he was. Notice, too, the prominence and frequency of the perpendicular "I" in this worldly creed, unwittingly showing the pride of self-sufficiency, and the independence of man as to God's claim upon him. Indeed, such a creed might be possible if Christ had never come to the world. Our Saviour's teaching to Nicodemus sets aside every hope of salvation through morality, and declares that there is but one way, "Ye must be born anew." Nicodemus, as far as we can find out, was a man of morality and unblemished life, a teacher of the only true religion that was in the world at the time, and not some dark sin-drenched creature who had trampled on all divine law. But the Saviour says to him in effect: "Your unblemished life, your external morality, Nicodemus, cannot save you; you must be born anew."

THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

Jesus in his night talk with Nicodemus referred to the kingdom of God, stating that it could not be possessed without fulfilling the one condition. No doubt Nicodemus thought that already he was in the kingdom, for being a Jew, he would have no doubt about that. He was a teacher, a leader in the nation, which, since Abraham, had been the kingdom of God. There was, to his mind, no other kingdom of God on earth. The Messiah was promised to the Jewish nation. All the glories and possibilities of the new heavens and the new earth were to come from Jews. The Messiah was to be the royal monarch of this kingdom, and was to triumph over all nations. So thought Nicodemus, and he considered himself a member of this kingdom, which to him was the kingdom of God.

NOT THE GOSPEL.

But this Jewish idea of the kingdom is not the Gospel idea. The true conception of the kingdom of God is that condition when God reigns as King, where he is the supreme object of trust and service, where his will is the law, where all are inspired with the spiritual

life, and where all are being formed after the image of the King. Find the heart, and life in which the will of God is done, and there you find the kingdom of heaven. Being part of an external institution such as the Jewish nation or the Christian Church does not make one a member of the kingdom of God, unless he also belongs in spirit and in life to the spiritual kingdom of which Jesus Christ is head.

THE NEW BIRTH—WHAT IS IT?

It is the new spiritual life from God given in response to repentance, faith and prayer. This spiritual life to the soul is not only to enter into the kingdom of God, but to form a correct conception of it. As one born deaf can know nothing of the entrancing delights of music; or as one born blind cannot conceive of the glories of vision, so, without spiritual life, no one can understand the nature of the kingdom of God. This new spiritual life cannot be attained by education or culture of any present faculties, excellent as that may be in its place. It must be born. It is a new creation. No culture makes a stone of a rose, a rose to be a bird, a bird to be a man, or a sinful man a spiritual child of God. The new birth is not a constitutional change, the imparting of new faculties to the soul. It is a greater change than this—a change of nature, of character, of the disposition of the entire inward life. It is like entirely and wholly refitting an old ship, and employing it in the service of a new and better master. By nature a man is sinful, sailing under the colors of the world. When a man is born anew, Christ takes possession of the ship, puts in a new pilot, a new compass, and turns its prow another way, and all the while one ship contains which he dislikes he throws overboard, and fills it with a better cargo.

LIGHT FROM INDIA.

An English missionary speaking to a Brahmin and Hindoo crowd, used the following illustration: A great and deadly serpent entered into a hole in the wall, and made its abode in a hole in the wall. The family was greatly alarmed and the neighbors came running to know what was the matter. "A snake, a deadly snake, has come here to live. Oh, what shall we do?" said one, and gave the house painted, and sent for a carpenter to mend all the doors and windows." Said another, "Send for a Brahmin to utter a mantra (a sacred voice)." The house was whitewashed and painted, and the learned Brahmin came and repeated the mantra; and the family reassured, ate, drank, and slept in the house in peace. About a month after, one dark night, when all were asleep, the snake came out of its hole and bit the father and the son. Two nights after the reptile bit the wife. No he died too. What is the meaning of this parable? The house is the human body; the hole in the wall is the soul; the serpent is sin. By all your washing, and painting, and ceremony, you will not get sin out of your heart than they got the serpent out of that house by paint and whitewash. Christ is the only remedy, who by his spirit comes into the soul, and old things pass away and all things become new.

FLASHLIGHTS.

1. How to obtain the new birth—
 - (a) Obey Christ, he is the way to the new birth.
 - (b) Believe Christ, he is the truth about the new birth.
 - (c) Receive Christ, he is the life, the new life, the new birth.
- (d) If you obey Christ, and believe Christ, you will receive Christ, you will not know how; and then, although you will not know how, you will have been born again.

2. Faith is the act of choosing Christ

as our Saviour and Lord, of opening our hearts to his influences, of devoting ourselves to him. Faith is believing what Jesus says, and doing it.

3. Food will not save a starving man unless he eats. School and books will not make one learned unless he studies. A child, although signed by a rich man, will do no good, unless he has faith to present it. A guide cannot lead us through the forest unless we believe him enough to follow him. And Christ can save no one unless he believes what he says, and does what he commands.

4. The new birth is a birth into new eyes—we begin to see God; it is a birth into new brains—we begin to have the mind of Christ; it is a birth into new joy—Christ's joy is within us and our joy is full. It is a birth into new achievements—we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

POINTS FOR THE PRESIDENT.

Keep before the meeting that the topic contains the most important truth that Christ ever uttered. Remind those present at the meeting that: truth in a book is of no value unless appropriated. This great doctrine of the new birth must be experienced. Ask some such questions as these:

Has each one present been born again? Are you willing to receive it? Are you eager to obtain it? Have you put yourself in the way to secure it? Will you not receive it now to-night? Arrange to have two or three brief addresses or papers read on such subjects as the following: "The Character of Nicodemus," "The Meaning of the Kingdom of God," "How May I be Born Again?" "Why are People Excluded from the Kingdom of God?"

FEB. 28.—"OUR MISSION IN WEST CHINA: BEGINNINGS."

(See "The Heart of St-Chuan," Chap. II.)

There seems to be a providence in the occupying of our mission field in West China. "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform." Although the Missionary Society of the Canadian Methodist Church was organized in 1824 for home missions, and for work among the Indians, it was not till 1873 that foreign work was undertaken. In this year a mission was begun in Japan, and for eighteen years this was the only foreign field occupied by the society.

NEW FIELDS.

In December, 1889, the Executive of the Mission Board met, and among other things, considered two letters which had just been received. One was from David W. Stevenson, who offered himself for medical missionary work. He expected to graduate and be ready the next spring. The other letter was from Dr. O. L. Kilborn, tutor at Queen's University, Kingston. He stated that another young man, George E. Hartwell, and himself were anxious to go as foreign missionaries. And then came the important question, "Will the Missionary Society send us together to China in 1891?" We would work together—Mr. Hartwell as preacher and myself as doctor—in pushing forward the cause of Christ in some of the as yet untouched provinces of China."

CHINA ADOPTED.

This proposition being made, the Missionary Board in October, 1890, resolved that they would respond to what seemed to be a clear providential call, and to appeal to the whole church to sustain the board in this forward movement. Shortly afterwards, the Woman's Missionary Society passed a similar resolution and advertised for two candidates. At once the church rallied to the support of the new mission, and by the time the missionaries

were ready to send, we found the Rev. Dr. charge of the St-Chuan was chosen, Chentu, Four men, two evangelists, Hartwell, Kilborn, Stevenson, and Hart, on experience of the mission of 1891, the Missions of the started or reached 300, riots had, it was decided, interior in Shanghai was profited, Chinese life, any method.

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