

Triumphing of the Christian Church.

BY REV. W. C. COCHRAN.

A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the Lord will hasten it in His time.—Isa. 60:22.

Is the world growing worse and worse? Is the religion of Jesus Christ merely holding the world already possessed and failing in its attempts to push beyond the limits of present attainment? Are there just a few, comparatively, of the Christian church holding up tiny tapers shining with faintest ray against the blackness of a world bent on its downward course, with the hope for onward struggle? In the signs of the times say, "Come up," or do they say "Go on," and with more relentless energy, with more buoyant heart, with a tighter grip of faith on the promise of complete success?

Such are the questions propounded by many discouraged Christian workers—questions breathing sentiments which must lessen and destroy Christian efforts. I would tonight offer words of cheer and encouragement to any looking thus darkly upon the kingdom in its relation to a sinful world, and pray that the Divine Spirit applying the truth will change fearful foreboding into glorious happiness, causing present lethargy to give place to more active activity.

Under the heads of Retrospection and Agency, I invite you to consider the thoughts suggested by the text.

The Triumphing of the Christian church, not triumphant, for we would not presume to lift the veil of the future, and comprehend the world once more by converting its conquerors to the faith.

In the first century there were 500,000 Christians. In fifteen centuries the church reached 100,000,000. In three centuries 15 to 18, she gained 100,000,000, as much in the three centuries as fifteen preceding. But here is the grandest triumph: in the nineteenth century she has reached nearly four hundred millions, as much in one century as all the preceding. They are coming as doors of the East.

1. By way of retrospection. First, note the triumph of the church over the Jews, who were the church's enemies. Her first great battle was with Judaism—Judaism came with fire and slaughter, but victory was on the side of the church. Judaism as a system is broken. Her people, like a wave, were swept away with madness upon the rock which was the church's foundation, and were dashed into ten thousand fragments. In the apostolic age the chief controversy was with the Judaistic spirit. This element is unnoticed in modern thought. There are perhaps a few synagogues here and there, but the synagogue is not a Christian church. The Jew as a man has some force in the business of the world, but the religious system makes no impression on the world's life. (b) Paganism has gone down before the conquering Christ. A Christian tradition says that when the heavenly hosts led the Shepherd at Bethlehem of the birth of Christ, a deep groan heard through all the isles of Greece, told that Pan was dead, and that all the royalty of Olympus was destroyed, and the several deities went wandering in cold and darkness. This tradition has become a fact. The stories of the gods, the legends of the past, through a truth proclaimed by Christ's church.

(c) Heathenism is rapidly being conquered. Just a little more than a century ago, as never before since antiquity, was the church at the question of God, "shall we go up against a vast and embattled heathenism?"

The answer came as it came to Moses of old, "Go forward." For a hundred years the combat has been waging. We are just entering the century of modern missionary endeavour, and the light is surely on the church triumphing.

More than seven thousand missionary leaders in foreign fields sent out by Protestant churches, and more than thirty five thousand missionary workers of various sorts, ordained and unordained. Surely God's little one is becoming a thousand. The car of Juggernaut no longer rolls its ponderous wheels over the living bodies of zealous devotees.

The whole system of Heathenism is either being crushed or vanishing under the light of Christ's gospel, which provides in place of empty merit won by penance, His real and perfect righteousness; in place of the awful rigor and grasp of penance, forgiveness by His infinite atonement; in place of the despair and mystery of death, His glorious resurrection and ascension. These certainties heralded by Christ's church are causing the adherents of Brahmanism and Buddhism to distrust their systems of uncertainty. Pagans are changing into Christian temples, and the bells of the church are calling men to worship the King of kings, in the hills and valleys of the Eastern world, where once they sounded out the echo of superstitious offerings to evil spirits or idol gods.

Philemon, his master, and tells Philemon to treat Onesimus "as a brother." The Old Testament truth of the unity of the race enforced in the New Testament church of common brotherhood, settled the question of slavery; and the church will not rest in her march till the personal and eternal dignity of man shall be the subject of acknowledgment.

Third, The church has triumphed altho' in the ever increasing number of human hearts who have received her teachings, trusting for salvation alone in her founder and foundation, Jesus Christ. We study this suggestion for a little and we see the reality of that which was vision to the prophets. "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation."

She was a little despised one, persecuted with the sharpest of wickedness. The gates of hell combined against her, the kings took counsel against her, but opposition only helped her to succeed. Mr. Ruskin says: "You roll grass and it is stronger next day; you mow it, and it multiplies its shoots as if it were grass; you cut it up, and it only sends up richer perfume. It is always green, and it is only brighter and greener for the frost." So all that has happened of trial to the church has only multiplied her strength and beauty. How wonderful that in the nineteenth century the Christian religion has permeated the civilized world; it had mounted the throne of the Caesars; it had spread beyond the limits of their sway, and had made iron rods upon barbarian nations, and had conquered the world once more by converting its conquerors to the faith.

It has accumulated itself to every period and every clime; it has retained through every change a silent spring of life which enables it to throw off corruption, to resist decay, and to resist youth small outward hostility and inward division.

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1. The agencies through which the church's final triumph will be achieved. This is an assurance of final triumph in past achievements. As we follow it from its beginning, out in the Gentile world, into the chaos of paganism, we see it growing in spite of the combined malignancy of the forces of this world. As one has said, "It fought in the shade only to emerge in the sun." It was perhaps a few synagogues here and there, but the synagogue is not a Christian church. The Jew as a man has some force in the business of the world, but the religious system makes no impression on the world's life. (b) Paganism has gone down before the conquering Christ. A Christian tradition says that when the heavenly hosts led the Shepherd at Bethlehem of the birth of Christ, a deep groan heard through all the isles of Greece, told that Pan was dead, and that all the royalty of Olympus was destroyed, and the several deities went wandering in cold and darkness. This tradition has become a fact. The stories of the gods, the legends of the past, through a truth proclaimed by Christ's church.

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heaven in a brightness celestial. In the splendour of offices, the apostles were to set Him on high before men, offering reconciliation with God, on the condition of patient faith; proposing renovation of heart and life by the inward operation of a divine grace; summoning to unequalled consistency the world and of self, yet supplying strength for successful struggle, and rewarding it with a joy in communion with Himself which the heart of man had not conceived; "abolishing death, by giving life and immortality unto all men." We study this suggestion for a little and we see the reality of that which was vision to the prophets. "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation."

It was by this manifestation of Christ to His essential moral effect was not to be by arguments, nor by ethics, not by the display of miracle, that the church wrought effects benignly revolutionary, which marked a new era in human experience. In the acceptance of this personal Lord, the gospel found its first fruits in the heart. In love to Him, its essential moral effect was not to be by arguments, nor by ethics, not by the display of miracle, that the church wrought effects benignly revolutionary, which marked a new era in human experience.

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worshipped as gods, non-quire as to the length of time occupied in the tour, nor tell of their return to Antioch, nor ask how they were employed between their return and what we call Paul's second tour, nor speak of the reason why Paul and Barnabas parted, nor ask why Silas was chosen as Paul's associate, nor why Lab became one of the company, nor why Timothy was pressed into the ark; but simply state that Paul set out on a second tour, his object being to visit the brethren in every city where he had preached, and learn their welfare. This plan was but partly carried out. "A man's heart devise his way, but the Lord directeth his steps." The Holy Spirit by a strong moral impression forced Paul to press longer in the locality. These words are not strongly: God the Spirit forbidding the proclamation of the gospel of the Son. Let us look for the reason of this prohibition. Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us in the parable of the sower, that the seed is the word, and in a parable that the good seed are the children of the kingdom; and as in Asia it had been preached, and there were several groups of believers, it was as reasonable to expect that there the knowledge of God would increase, and simply be content as that seed would germinate when cast into the soil; while in arope the gospel had not yet been preached, and there were no believers to exemplify its truth by its lives.

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their lives for the truth, but Philip II, exceeded his father both in cruelty and tenacity of purpose. Heretofore no man's life was safe. Liberty was crushed, and a dark cloud of oppression settled over the land. Men and women were tortured, drowned, strangled, burnt alive, or buried alive, for no other crime than reading the Bible, praying with their children, and teaching them to look to Jesus as their only Saviour.

It would shock you too much were I to tell you the title of that these poor Christians endured at the hands of their fellow-Christians. Saddest of all human delusions when religion is used as a mask for tyranny! Happy are we who have the privilege of serving God according to the dictates of reason and conscience!

In Holland cruelty and injustice produced their natural result; the people rose up against their oppressors, and an army was sent by Philip to reduce them to obedience. Thus the misery of war was added to the terrors of the Inquisition.

The Dutch were a commercial rather than a warlike people. Stern necessity obliged them to fight for their homes, and for their wives and little ones; but at first the well-disciplined Spanish troops had them at a terrible disadvantage.

In one way, however, they were superior to their foes. They were as much at home on water as on land; and in winter they could skim about upon the frozen seas and lakes to the great confusion of their enemies. When the battle was fought upon water or upon ice, it was the Dutch who were to win.

But the Spaniards were persevering as well as brave. They soon bought skates and learned to use them, though not so skillfully as those who had been accustomed to them from childhood. Dirk William was one of those who suffered for conscience sake. Although he was innocent of any offense beyond the reading of his Bible and attending religious meetings, he was taken prisoner, tried, and condemned to death.

Dirk felt it hard to submit to this cruel injustice. He was young and life was sweet—even life such as it then was in Holland. He set his wits to work out a plan of escape.

His plan succeeded. Once more he was free. Free, but not safe. He still hid from his enemies. In this, his first hide-out, he was discovered by a Spanish soldier, and he was pursued across the open country. At no great distance was a lake, now a broad sheet of frozen water. Here was a chance for Dirk. He knew that upon ice he could outstrip his pursuer.

He was right. The Spaniard was a bold runner, but upon that slippery surface he was no match for the young Dutchman. Moreover, at this season, the lake was not to be traversed without danger. Winter was nearly over; already the snow had been melted in spots, and the ice was unsafe. It trembled and shook beneath the flying footsteps of the hunter and his prey.

Dirk was no stranger to the lake. He knew well what parts to avoid. The soldier over his head had a pair of skis, and suddenly the snow beneath him gave a splash! The fugitive turned to look, and behold! his enemy was gone. A large hole in the ice surrounded by many a deep crack—that was all now visible.

But as he looked the head of the Dutchman appeared above the water. He stretched out his hands and grasped the edge of the ice, which bent beneath his weight. Dirk saw that he could not get out unaided. He was caught as securely as any rat in a trap. In a few minutes he was sunk.

Dirk was safe now. Intense gratitude for his escape filled his heart to overflowing. "The Lord hath delivered me!" he cried. "It is not my work. Truly God hath fought for me; He hath overthrown my enemy like the Egyptians in the Red sea!"

But this thought was rapidly succeeded by another. "I say unto you, love your enemies; do good to them that despitefully use you and persecute you." Would he not be disobeying his Saviour's command if he left this man to perish? It was a terrible moment for poor Dirk. He covered his face and fell upon his knees. A fierce battle raged within his soul, the powers of good and evil striving for mastery. God give us grace to fight such battles on our knees!

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