

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

HOPE AMID TEARS.

(By Rev. Professor John E. McFadyen,
M.A.)

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." Thus wrote the Psalmist in one of the most beautiful songs in literature. He traverses swiftly, but in images of surpassing beauty, the strange vicissitudes of human life—the laughter and tears, sorrow and joy, dejection and exaltation, exile and redemption, spring and autumn, the beautiful dream and the cruel reality: but the sorrow of it all is swallowed up in the lovely vision with which it ends—of the harvesters coming home with shouts of joy, their arms full of sheaves.

The men who sang this psalm (Ps. 126) had passed through an experience of redemption. They had come back from the Babylon which they hated to the Zion which they loved. They knew and confessed that their God had done great things for them; and they were at once humbled, grateful and glad. They moved about as one in a dream, because they could not trust themselves to think that so good a thing was true. And they were so happy, that they could not find words to express their joy. Their mouth was filled with laughter, their tongue with ringing shouts; but all they could say was, "We were glad." That is all; but, on the lips of sincere men, that is everything.

Have we any such experience of redemption which enables us, even afar off, to appreciate the rapturous joy of the psalm? Have we ever been delivered from anxiety, from disappointment, from defeat, from danger, from oppression, from sorrow, from evil habits, from sin, from death? And if we have, do we acknowledge our Redeemer? and are we grateful and glad for our redemption? and have our sluggish hearts ever been moved to say, "The Lord has done great things for me; I am glad!" And if we have never made such a confession or known such a joy, are we quite sure that we have been redeemed indeed?

The psalm further reminds us of the duty of hope. Men to whom the dream of redemption has become a fact, may look to the future through eyes blinded by tears; but they see afar off the golden harvest, and to the listening ear the shouts of the merry harvesters are borne back from the future days, as they bring their sheaves in armfuls, home. In days of disappointment, this is a consolation of which no one can allow himself to be robbed who truly believes in God—that no honest effort is ever in vain, that in due time the faithful worker will reap, if he faint not, that the seed sown in weariness and tears will be brought back as sheaves with shouts of gladness: if not in this world, then in some other. No seed is ever flung from any faithful hand in vain. In God's good time, if not in ours, it will spring up and bear its destined fruit. In this world, sometimes one sows and it is another that reaps; but God is as mindful of the sower as the reaper, and one day—how far away we know not—he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.

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Richard Harding Davis is not prejudiced in favor of the missionaries. says the Philadelphia Presbyterian, but as a result of his travels and observations along the African coasts, he declares that their unceasing and unselfish labors have been a most potent force in behalf of civilization.

GOOD WORK IN WALES.

The parliamentary commission sitting to consider the condition and determine the future of the English Church in Wales, recently heard Rev. John Owen Thomas of Menai Bridge, secretary of the Calvinistic Methodists of Wales, upon the work of the free churches in that principality. Mr. Thomas showed that the Welsh Calvinists had increased the number of their ministers from 354 in 1884 to 669 in 1905. Rev. Evan Jones of Carnarvon, a member of the same denomination, which is identified with the Presbyterian Alliance of the world, reported that they sold half a million religious books from their publication society in sixteen years, adding so potent was the religious sentiment in Wales that no secular paper there ever printed the details of divorce trials, and there had never been issued in the Welsh language an immoral or erotic work of fiction. No betting or gambling transactions are reported in their daily papers; but on the other hand, nearly every journal, secular as well as religious, gives full accounts of religious meetings and publishes regularly the discourses of their best known divines. Where such results had been accomplished among classes never reached by the Anglican establishment in Wales, the witnesses did not find any need of an established church to be supported by the state.

NOT CONVERTIBLE TERMS.

Dr. Patton sums up on the functions of the teaching and ruling elder in this way:

Ministers in our Church are members of Presbytery by virtue of their ordination; ruling elders are not. Ministers are ordained by Presbytery; ruling elders are not. Ministers are required to have a liberal education, and are rigidly examined in theology before they are ordained; this is not true of ruling elders. Ministers are supposed to have a divine call to preach the Gospel, and usually give up all secular business; this cannot be said of ruling elders. Bishops and elders are convertible terms in the New Testament, but minister and ruling elder are not convertible terms in the Presbyterian Church.

Briefly stated, the Doctor's position is this: "Whether there are or not two classes of elders in the New Testament, there are two classes in the Presbyterian church. Bishops and elders are convertible terms in the New Testament, but ministers and ruling elders are not convertible terms in the Presbyterian Church." When this discussion on the functions of the elder is over there will still be differences of opinion. One good thing is being done: young people who have never given any consideration to such topics are led to think over them. However old a question may be, it is always new to the generation coming up. Old and middle-aged people speak a vast amount of nonsense about books, sermons and discussions of topics just because they forget this fact. "Oh, that is old!" Old to whom, pray? Old to a man of sixty, who read it when he was twenty, but not old to the present men of twenty. An old man ought to have sense enough to know that everything is new to a beginner.

It is with words as with sunbeams, the more they are condensed, the deeper whose cause is God.—Cowper.

NECESSITY AND FREEDOM.

By Rev. Joseph Hamilton, author of "Our Own and Other Worlds," "The Spirit World," Etc.

Happily the old controversy between freedom and necessity troubles us no more. The reason is, that we now discern that both are true. In fact they are mutually complementary truths. They are the two sides of the shield. If this had been seen sooner, a great deal of uncharitableness and want of unity might have been avoided. One particular church emphasises one of these views, to the almost total extension of the other. Another church extends equally in the contrary direction. The consequence was a long continued rivalry amounting almost to opposition. What was wanted on both sides was balance, and breadth of view. The history of the whole case ought to teach us a lesson of modesty and toleration.

The union of necessity and freedom may be clearly seen in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. At the first glance it may seem wholly a case of necessity. Saul was suddenly and unexpectedly arrested in his evil course. He was overpowered by the wonderful vision. He was smitten to the earth, and blinded by the heavenly light. His will was captured at once. He surrendered immediately to the divine will. If ever there was a case of sovereignty, surely it was there. Paul speaks of it later in that way. He says that God called him by his grace.

Yes; but at another time Paul clearly recognizes the element of human freedom as well. He says he was "not disobedient to the heavenly vision." There was free will. Necessity and freedom were mysteriously blended. How far the one encroached on, and modified, the other, I presume Paul could never define, and did not try to define. If ever the crucial question occurred to him—could he have resisted? I think he would have regarded it as certainly beyond him. He did not know—and he did not want to know.

And such is the mystery in most conversions, if not all. We cannot define the sphere of divine sovereignty, nor of human freedom. But between them there is harmony and co-operation. It is a marvel that Peter could put the case so clearly in the early days of his apostleship, when he spoke of this union in compassing the death of Christ. Speaking of that event, he says: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." There we have a most happy statement of the unity of divine sovereignty and human freedom.

Thus even in the mysteries of grace there is infinite consolation. Yes! even in the depths where all our thoughts are drowned, the heart can find a sure resting place.

The Presbyterian Standard quotes an elder, "a college bred man, a practical and successful business man," as saying that the chief thing the Church needs in order to greater growth is the harnessing of the laymen, and putting them to work. The presbytery need just the assistance the men of the church could give and would give if they were assigned the work. In his view there would be a widening of interest in the rank and file of the membership and a deepening of consecration in the workers.