

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWSTHE NEW BIRTH.
Its Opportunity.

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The New Birth is the awakening of the soul to a prevailing consciousness of obligation in connection with the Spiritual world. It is a process of the soul going away back to the beginning of things and was just as possible and necessary for Plato and Noah as for Nicodemus and John Bunyan.

Life and Immortality were always possibilities of the soul by the Grace of God. It was Christ's special office to bring them within our reach; whereas formerly they had only been seen as through a glass darkly Christ brought them into sunshine and awoke men to a consciousness of their supreme worth. Like natural birth, spiritual birth is a synonym for weakness. It is a grain of seed; a promise of greater things yet to be.

Without attempting to scale perfection's sacred heights or even the alpine ones of revelation in connection with the possibilities of the incipient soul, we shall try to point out its grand opportunity and to suggest some simple and familiar lines along which that opportunity may be realized. The great opportunity of the New Birth is concisely expressed by the Saviour Himself—entering into life. It will not of course be gratuitously supposed by any one that this entering into life means the same thing as being "born again." The one is the starting point the other is the goal of all spiritual endeavor—at least as far as this world is concerned. "Except a man be born again," the one is the starting point, God," because he is stone blind, spiritually dead; whereas in order to "enter into life" various spiritual qualifications are necessary. Knowledge is necessary—"the world knew him not;" reception is necessary—"as many as received him;" faith is necessary—"even to them that believe on his name" as well as the New Birth itself—the sine qua non—"which were born . . . of God." Did Nicodemus himself enter into the Kingdom of God as Christ presented it? Did that scribe mentioned in Mark 12: 28? Did John the Baptist? Did any of the disciples with the exception of Peter—prior to the Resurrection? Saintry men, all of them, and subjects of the new birth, but were they spiritually qualified to "enter into the Kingdom?" These and a hundred other perplexing questions suggest another. What is it to enter into life and what is it to enter into the Kingdom of God? As we take it both mean one and the same thing. The Kingdom of God is simply a concrete representation of Christ's conception of Eternal Life. Much labor has been spent in identifying the Kingdom of God with the Church, with the Body, with the bride and with various other states and conditions of the soul in time and in eternity; but we venture to suggest that this phrase is simply an orientalism adopted and adapted by Christ to introduce and elucidate his conception of Eternal Life—the sum substance of all his teaching. But not to dwell on this point it may be remembered with what facility Christ passes from discoursing about the Kingdom of God to the subject of Eternal Life in the subsequent part of his conversation with Nicodemus, and again in Matt. 19: 16 and 23. The peculiar use of the word "inherit" in connection with both subjects may also be recalled.

Certainly no words have ever illuminated Christ's conception of Eternal Life so brilliantly as that phrase, the Kingdom of God; none have afforded a more practical and comprehensive

guide to its meaning and though perhaps a little time-worn now, it may still serve to suggest some of the more important and the more practical opportunities of the soul that has been "born again."

To the few the most imposing and the most impressive characteristic of the Kingdom of God was its endlessness. The Lord shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. "And in the days of these Kings shall the God of Heaven set up a Kingdom, and it shall stand for ever."

The idea of a Kingdom that was eternal made it easier for men to understand a Life that was eternal and accordingly the one was used by Christ to suggest and introduce the other. Infirmity and death limit all human opportunity and possibility but, consider the opportunities of a life that is eternal! Eternal youth is one of the opportunities of the soul that has been "born again." Again the essential dignity and worth of this life is suggested by the idea of a Kingdom. To many people, perhaps, life sometimes seems poor and vain and empty like "a cottage in a vineyard, a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, a besieged city," but a life that could be compared to a Kingdom was in no danger of falling under such reproach. The idea was inspiring, it gave wings to the imagination. And so a life of magnificent resources, of boundless possibilities is another of the opportunities of the infant soul suggested by the Kingdom of God.

Again this Kingdom was exclusively for the Jews—without let or hindrance—so at least they understood it. Nothing about the Kingdom seemed so captivating and precious as the thought that it was all for them, and simply because they were the children of Abraham. This was their conviction and they based it on Scripture, "the saints of the Most High shall take the Kingdom and possess the Kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever." That conviction has been their salvation. It has bound Jews together, wherever they might be, by ties at once the strongest and the tenderest, ties that have proved quite adequate to preserve among them the spirit of genuine patriotism and an enthusiasm for national ideals in spite of disintegrating forces entirely unparalleled in the records of history. The opportunity of the Jew—that counted for so much to him and that was prized so highly by him is the opportunity of every new born babe in Christ Jesus—to enter into—"the inheritance of the Kingdom of Christ and of God," to enter into eternal life without tax or toll, without money and without price as—"the children of God in Christ Jesus."

The last opportunity to be referred to here is perhaps the greatest and comes to us in the way of an obligation. Sentiments of a social, political and national nature that were created and developed by the conviction that the Kingdom in all its greatness and glory was especially for Jews, as the children of faithful Abraham, were prodigiously intensified by the thought that their Kingdom was the Kingdom of God Subjects of an everlasting Kingdom and of an everlasting God, children of a common parentage, with a common history, with a common hope; rationally stood for mutual helpfulness, for religious fellowship, for brotherhood. In a way in which these terms had never been understood before. And so this phrase, the Kingdom of God, freighted with all its wealth of holy and precious associations came to Christ's hand as a familiar study by means of which he could teach the people many an im-

portant lesson concerning the nature, relations and obligations of Eternal Life. In this way, too, he made it easier for Peter and Paul to speak of a love that was no respecter of persons and for God who is the Father of all the families of the earth; and, again, recalling the marvellous social and national homogeneity of the Jewish people as the result of their conception of the meaning of that phrase, the Kingdom of God, it should be easier for us to understand and, easier for us to remember, that the spirit of Eternal Life is Eternal Love. Toronto, Nov. '09.

THE ELDERS' OPPORTUNITY.

(By Rev. W. H. Jordan.)

Never have the ruling elders of our Church had greater need of the most thorough preparation for their office. How can an elder be equipped for his best work as an officer in the Church which has honored him as leader if he does not inform himself about the general work of the Church at home and abroad? Let these honored men of the Church magnify their office. Let them familiarize themselves with the polity and the history of the Church. Let them get a vision of the world-wide work, and see that the local church is not the end of the work, but a means to the end that the gospel may be proclaimed to the uttermost parts of the earth.

What a field the office of ruling elder presents to the younger men of the Church, if they but make that thorough preparation which the congregation will not be slow to appreciate. The layman or the ruling elder can specialize in a way that a pastor cannot. He can take up the work of any one of the Boards, as Home Missions, Sabbath-school work, Foreign Missions, and study and emphasize them until he comes to be considered an authority on this or that great work of the Church. Such study and labor which absorbs the best thought of many of our ablest ministers and laymen will greatly develop the man, his Christian experience, his enjoyment of Christian work, and his usefulness. Such a man will be greatly used in the presbytery or synod.

It is just as true to-day as in the days of the apostles that the layman must look after the many details of the work that the ministry may give itself to prayer and to the Word. Not until we get back to apostolic practices will we have apostolic results. It is not the money a man has, but the consecrated knowledge and ambition, constant spiritual growth, that makes a man an efficient worker for God.

Such a man is a live wire, and his power is mighty for good as he moves in and out among old and young in the church and community. Blessed is the pastor who has such men on his session, men who, like the strong men of old time in the tribe of Issachar, knew what Israel ought to do. May God give us such men, sun-crowned men, Spirit-filled men, whose highest ambition is the advancement of God's kingdom.

Jerseyville, Ill.

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