

More Than Conquerors

THE ARCHBISHOP OF DUBLIN

*This Sermon was preached by the Archbishop of Dublin (the Most Rev. J. H. Bernard, D.D.)
in Westminster Abbey, on July 14th*

"More than Conquerors"—Rom. viii., 37.

THIS was the triumphant claim of Christian men in the days when the mission and work of Jesus Christ were still a living memory. His victory was their victory. They were more than conquerors henceforth.

As we look back, we cannot fail to see how wonderful a claim it was and how little justified to all earthly seeming. For the achievement, the victory, of Christ, as we like to call it, as we ought to call it, was not recognized outside a small company of men and women of little consequence in the world's eyes. The gallant mission of Jesus ended on the Cross. Those who sought to destroy Him and His teachings had succeeded, or so they thought. He had called Himself a King, and had persuaded a few simple folk that His claim was true. But—so the world said—there had been an end of all that. And those who ventured still to call themselves by His Name were despised as crazy fanatics. That was the world's verdict upon the Cross and the Sepulchre. Yet St. Paul challenges it. "We are more than conquerors."

And again. It is surely a wonderful thing that the most exultant rejoicing that has ever been put into words comes from the darkest hour of the Christian Church. The visions of the Revelation are not imaginary. The man who wrote about the horrors of famine and battle and death had seen them. All this had come upon the world as he knew it, and yet he hears heavenly voices calling, "Now is come the salvation and the power and the kingdom." He was one of those who had looked for an earthly kingdom, and his hopes had been destroyed. "How long, O Lord?" is his cry. But his thought rises above the present agony and disappointment. Like St. Paul, he would have counted himself "more than conqueror," although long centuries were to pass before the Crucified became the Master of the world.

OUR DEFERRED HOPES.

My brethren, we need to remember all this, if our religion is to support us, as it ought to support us, in this grave hour. God help us! We are grimly determined to stand firm, but words of triumph do not readily come to our lips. We had thought of something quite different. Two years ago, as we watched the advance of our troops on the Somme, we hoped for a swift and decisive victory. And we were right in our deep conviction that victory must come, for we believe in God Who is the God of righteousness and truth, which must prevail at last in the world that is His. But it has not come yet. Were we wrong? Nay, indeed. Not wrong in our faith that right would finally triumph. But perhaps we had not counted the cost. And in this dark hour we are passing through the Passion which must precede the new life, for nations as for men. It is being long drawn out. It is full of torture to aching hearts. "How long, O Lord?" is the natural, instinctive cry of every one among us. It is no unworthy outburst of impatience, surely. Every hour of delay means blood and tears and broken hearts. We cannot but be impatient. Yet this impatience must not, shall not, cloud our faith in God

Who knows what is best, Who does what is best eternally.

There is a wonderful story in the Gospels of Divine intervention long delayed which it is well for us to recall this day. When Lazarus was dying, Jesus knew it. After his death the Jews wondered that Jesus had not hastened to relieve His friend, and to dry the tears of Mary and Martha. "Could He not have caused that this man should not die?" The sisters cried, "Lazarus is sick." But Jesus did not go to heal him. "Hadst Thou been here my brother had not died." It was a trial of faith, indeed. Is this love which will allow loved ones to suffer? And the disciples wondered and were perplexed. But when all earthly hope had passed and Lazarus was dead beyond recovery, to all human seeming, the Deliverer came irresistible, wonderful, compassionate, and the dead came back to life. And then some remembered that Jesus had said, to their great perplexity, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there." The delay was for their sakes, that they might be the more greatly assured of the power and the love of God.

It is a parable of our life and of the way in which God deals with us. Perhaps it is a parable of the way in which He is dealing with us now. Perhaps it is only through this cruel and prolonged trial and sorrow that the nation is to learn how overwhelming is the dominion with which God rules the world and all its powers. Not yet, it may be, is our darkest hour. I do not know; you do not know. But Christ knows, God knows, and His love is never in haste. Like the best human love, it moves slowly, but when the time has come it moves triumphant. "How long?" We ask it with a certain wistfulness but not in despair. For the echo of the brave voices of St. Paul and St. John still find a response in Christian hearts. Despite these tears, this anguish, we may be more than conquerors in the strength of the Christian hope.

THE POWER OF PRAYER.

Is it, then, that we are not to pray for a speedy victory in its plainest and most literal meaning as we think of the dreadful struggle in which our splendid armies are engaged? God forbid! What is the use of prayer if it is not to be about the things that fill our hearts? And this is the thing which is in all our thoughts. We have learnt more than we ever knew before of the power of prayer, as the war has taught us afresh to pray for the things that interest us. No prayers are more real than the prayers offered for those in need and adversity, when we commend our gallant men to God, that in death or life they may serve Him, when we pray that by their victory they may bring a little nearer the victory of righteousness. Of course. We cannot do otherwise. And please God, our prayers will be answered.

But beloved in Christ, do not stop short here. For the real and abiding benediction of Christ is not a promise of earthly satisfaction, of ease, or victory. Those who claimed to be "more than conquerors" in the first Christian age knew well that the world counted them beaten men. The truth is that Christ opens

the door into a new world of hope and activity and devotion—a larger world than that which is always before our eyes. And a larger world is being opened to us to-day. The things on which the nations have been accustomed to set store are being swept away—gold and ease and the joy of life. The mutterings of revolution are heard all over Europe as the old social order is being threatened with destruction—the social order which has been built up by the long effort of civilization.

We need not make excursions into high politics to observe the signs of readjustment, of the revaluation of our old standards that are apparent all around us. It is true not only of our brave men who have dared all for honour and liberty, that the outlook upon life has been changed. It is true of us all, and we are all learning that the New Life to which God calls is a life only to be reached through sacrifice and the gates of grief. This is the austere message of the Cross. But to those who will take it for their own, the Victory of the Cross is their portion. For the Cross could not bind Him Who became more than conqueror through its pain.

A LARGER LIFE.

And is that all? Is it that a Christian preacher has no message in this hour save this counsel of the higher life, which is unmoved by adverse fortune, which is independent of the changes and chances of the world? It would be a great message even if this were all, although few of us could heartily accept it perhaps. But there is a plainer message in the Christian Gospel, a message which can bring peace, even joy, to sad hearts. Large part of the trouble and the anguish of the present hour comes from the thought of the tens of thousands of young lives cut short, young lives in whose future the hopes of many homes were centered. And is this the end of all our love and care and striving, that they have passed into nothingness, into the darkness of night? Never! This is not the end. The Cross was not the end. Death is never the end. It is only the beginning. It is the beginning of that larger life which awaits the Christian soul—a life of which we know but little, a life which will certainly be full of surprises, but a larger life with opportunities of service and work beyond our dreams. This is the life into which many, many, splendid young men have entered gladly, joyfully—in these last tremendous years.

There is a fine elegy which has come down to us from the days of Elizabeth. I will read you a verse. It is from Raleigh's poem on the death in battle of Sir Philip Sidney, then still a young man.

"What hath he lost that such great grace
hath won?
Young years for endless years, and hope
unsure
Of fortune's gifts for wealth that still shall
dure.
O happy race, with so great praises run!"

That is it. That is the Christian hope, the Christian certitude. The loss is less than the gain. They, with all the faithful departed, are more than conquerors. Anchor your souls on this thought, brethren in Christ. So will you see the glory of the Resurrection even through a mist of tears. Let us say St. Paul's brave words to ourselves again: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."