

The Bridge of Redemption.

BY THRODOR L. CUYLER, D. D.

As over yonder superb East River Bridge thousands of my Brooklyn neighbors pass every evening to their homes, so over the gospel bridge of redemption myriads of souls have passed into better lives, and to their home in heaven. It is the costliest structure in the universe, for in bringing many sons unto glory, the author of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings. For Christ has once suffered for sins—the just for the unjust—that he might bring us to God. Whether men got his depravity from the apes, or whether he got it from his forefather Adam's fall into sin, it is an undputed truth that he is far away from God. He had sunk so far that he could not get back if he would, and would not come back if he could.

The supreme object of Christ's atonement was to bring us to God—to bring us to a right idea of God's reconciliation with God—to bring us out of selfishness and ungodliness into obedience and loving fellowship with our Heavenly Father. This is the glorious design of Calvary's cross. Christ's redeeming love reared the bridge; Christ attracts us toward God by the beauty of his example; Christ lifts us by the converting power of his spirit into a new life; Christ leads by the light of his Word and guiding grace; and the combined result of all this loving and lifting and leading is that a countless army of sinners are brought back to God. Oh, adorable Saviour! when we think of the depths of thy humiliation, and the bitterness of thine agonies in the garden and on the cross, we are amazed at the length and breadth and height of thy atoning love. But when we shall behold thee on thy throne—all thy victories complete—and all thy blood-bought faces brought home to God; when we hear the "wailing Hallelujahs" that shall make heaven ring with rapture, then we shall realize that it was for the joy set before thee, thou didst endure the cross, to bring many sons to glory.

This process of bringing sinful and sorrowful man back to God is the very core of the gospel. When the omnipotent Jesus undertakes it, he makes the process very thorough. We hear much talk and discussion about the marvels of "evolution"; but none of the philosophers who work at the gospel have discovered how to evolve a good man from a depraved one. Much stress is laid upon "culture," but culture cannot turn a thorn-bush into a grape-vine. It can strengthen mind and refine manners; it cannot renovate a godless heart. Another school, with philanthropic intent, strikes somewhat deeper and aims at the reformation of human nature. But it has been pithily said that "reformation effects forms, not substance." It puts old materials into better shapes, but provides no new ones. It is not reformation that sinful human nature needs, but regeneration. That goes to the root of things. That means the extirpation of the old principles of action and the implanting of new principles. It means—not a new form, but a new life. "Ye must be born again" was Christ's prescription to the man who wanted to enter the kingdom of God. Christ came to bring the infinitely precious boon of a new life for this world and the next: "Whoever is in Christ is a new creature." Men are away from God, in the cold; Jesus came to lead them into the sunshine of God's countenance. Men are away from God, in guilt, and under condemnation; Jesus came to secure a full pardon to every penitent soul who is ready to come back to the Father by him. "I am the way; I am the truth; I am the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me." The core of the Bible is Christianity; and Christianity means Christ.

"What shall I preach during this coming year?" Such is the inquiry of a young minister who is laying out his work for the season before him. To him and to all others I would reply, Preach to sinful souls before your pitiful redemption by the cross of Christ and regeneration by the Holy Spirit; preach it tenderly and fervently, but without defalcation or discount. Do not waste a moment in defending your Bible. God will take care of his own Word, if you only take care to preach it. Stand by that bridge of Redemption which divine love has reared, and exhort every man to hasten back to it by God. Pay no heed to the noisy challenge of the skeptics. When the bridge of redeeming grace has carried millions upon millions of sinful humanity over into a purer and holier life and onward into heaven, there is no need that you or I should be constantly digging up the piles to see whether they are sound or whether they are rotten. "Praise the bridge that carries you safe over"—and brings you to God! Jesus Christ came into this world to bring men to God; and your chief business, my brother, is to lead every one you can reach, to Jesus Christ. Preach him!

And now let every reader of this article raise the question honestly to himself—or herself—"Have I through faith in Jesus Christ been brought to God? Have I decisively broken from myself and my old sins, and crossed that bridge which atoning love has built? Have I been borne again? Am I a new creature? Do I make God's will my will, and God's Word my daily law of conduct? Am I growing into the sweet temper of Christ, and in

love for my fellow-creatures, and in purity of heart, and in that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord? Do all men take knowledge of me that I am on God's side—striving to keep his commandments and to glorify him by my lips and by my life, my purse and my time, my votes and my influence? Am I living so as to attract other people to the Master whom I serve and doing my utmost to lead precious souls to the Lord Jesus Christ?"

These are vital questions which everyone who professes and calls himself a Christian may put squarely to his own conscience. He who is commencing his work afresh in his church, his Sunday-school, his business, his home or elsewhere would do well to make sure of his own position toward God. "Examine yourselves" is one of the plainest of Bible injunctions. I know the tremendously strong currents there are to sweep us away from God and carry us back to the dominion of this sinful world. Those currents sweep in a minister's study as well as into your stores and shops, and counting-rooms and homes. He who led us upon this bridge of redeeming love alone can keep us from being drawn back, or driven back; he only can keep our feet from falling and our souls from death. In the Christian life, standing still is impossible. Pushing onward is the only way to prevent going backward; and he who strives the most unselfishly to bring others to Christ, will get nearest to Christ himself.

Perhaps this article may fall under the eye of someone who is yet conacionally far away from God. You are not satisfied with yourself, and your conscience condemns you. The Bible is to you a true book, and that Bible tells you that unless you are converted you never can see God; and that if you refuse Christ, you choose death. There is an impassable chasm between you and God which you can only cross by that bridge of redeeming grace which Christ has thrown across it. Repentance means quitting your old sins, and faith means setting your foot on that bridge. With an outstretched hand Jesus stands waiting to help you, to lead you and to guide you into a new life, a stronger, sweeter, purer, holier and happier life. He will bring you back to God. He stands ready to welcome you—not to a selfish religion which cares only to save your own soul, and not to an easy trip to heaven in a palace car—but to a noble, unselfish manhood or womanhood patterned after Christ in this world, and in the next world a life everlasting. To stay where you are means perdition! The first step you take toward Christ is the first step toward heaven! At the Day of Judgment it will probably appear that nearly every one's eternity has hinged on the decision of some single moment—Ex.

BY W. F. COOKE

The Model Church.

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The model church has the best building in the community. It is the handsomest house, the best ventilated, the most perfectly warmed and lighted, the cleanest and neatest and in every way adapted to its purpose.

The members look upon it as truly "the house of God," and do not abuse or deface or defile it in any way. It was solemnly dedicated to God, and is, therefore, a sacred place.

No church fairs are held beneath its roof; no candy pulling or spelling bees; no dramatic entertainments or lectures for the purpose of making money ever take place within its walls. It is not a house of merchandise. Its bell never calls the people together to hear a political speech. It is the house of the Lord.

The glad, joyful tones of the bell call the people to worship the Almighty God, and in his house there is no distinction between the rich and the poor—the Lord is the maker of them all.

The model church has good deacons. They are men who most nearly comply with the qualifications as laid down by Paul in 1 Timothy, 3rd chapter. They are earnest, God-loving and God-fearing men who love the church and are willing to make any sacrifice for it. They attend strictly to its material welfare, and see that the pastor is entirely relieved of any financial embarrassment. Through their good management all debts and obligations of the church are promptly met. They are always found at the various meetings of the church, in their accustomed places, unless providentially hindered, and often meet for prayer and consultation in regard to the welfare of the church. They hold up the pastor's hands; they pray for him and he can rely upon them for help and co-operation. They set the church an example in their daily walks and conversation; in their regular attendance; in visiting the sick; in administering to the necessities of the poor, and in giving to the Lord. "They are foremost in every good word and work."

The model church has sweet and soul-lifting music. It is led, not monopolized, by a choir of well trained voices accompanied by the sweet and solemn tones of an organ. All the congregation join with the choir and sing with the spirit and understanding; sing as unto God and not unto men. They apply the words of the songs to their own spiritual needs, and, in song, breathe words of praise, thanksgiving and prayer to their Maker. They sing to

his glory and honor, and not to have praise of men. Such singing as is a sweet incense to the Lord.

The model church conducts a model Sunday-school. The superintendent is a man adapted to the exalted position he holds. He is kind, loving, patient and tactful. He is punctually present every Sunday, and his opening prayer is helpful and uplifting to all. He is deeply interested in his work and feels keenly his great responsibility. He is assisted by a corps of earnest teachers who love their work and labor zealously for the tender souls entrusted to their guidance. They love their pupils and knowing that their minds and hearts are as clay in their hands, they feel that God will hold them accountable, in a great measure, for the souls of those whom they teach. The superintendent and teachers meet once a week and pray for the success of the Sunday-school, and study the lesson that they may obtain all the light possible on the word of God and be able to impress its great truths upon the minds of the pupils. When a teacher is unavoidably absent the superintendent is notified in time to procure a substitute.

All, both old and young, attend the Sunday-school. The young and unconverted to learn the way to Christ the Christian people and older members that they "may grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ Jesus." The whole Bible is taught in this school. It is the word of God and the revelation of his will to man, and as such no portion of it is rejected. No effort is made to lower it to the level of sinful man, but to raise man to its high requirements of right living and perfect obedience to God's will.

The model church has a mid-week prayer-meeting; a halting place where Christians may secure spiritual help to carry them through the week to the next Sunday. The members attend punctually, gladly. They enjoy the services, take part in them and are helped and strengthened by them.

In the model church the members do not neglect to assemble themselves together every Lord's day, "as the manner of some is," but meet regularly, not to be entertained by a fine sermon, but to worship God and hold sweet communion with him.

At regular and stated times they lovingly eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance of him who died for them and to "show the Lord's death till he come."

When the pastor is unavoidably absent, or the church is unable to employ a pastor for all his time, a prayer-meeting is held or some brother gives a word of exhortation or encouragement, or a sermon is read.

The model church has a converted membership. Its members did not join for social prominence or commercial advantage, but because they had been convicted, converted and regenerated by the Holy Spirit; born again; "born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Having been saved by grace, through faith, they deem it a "reasonable service" that they present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God. Having been "buried with Christ in baptism, to show forth his burial and resurrection," they deem it their duty to walk in newness of life. Realizing that they are not their own, but that they have been bought with a price and belong to Christ, they desire to serve him as long as they live, hence they have consecrated themselves, with all they have, to his service forever. Hence they are "living epistles, known and read of all men."

They are always present at the stated meetings of the church. They never look upon it as a duty to attend divine worship, but deem it a blessed privilege. Like the Psalmist they are glad when it is said "Let us go up into the house of the Lord," and feel that they have lost a means of grace when they are denied that privilege.

They are punctual in attendance. They do not come dragging in a half-hour after service has begun, annoying the congregation, interrupting the preacher, and missing the devotional part of the service entirely, but they are in time to take part in the exercises. They sing, with gladness, the songs of Zion; they enter into the spirit of prayer as led by the pastor. They pray for the pastor that God may give him a message for the people and that the service may be to the honor and glory of the Almighty. By these means, being in a devotional service, they are ready to listen attentively to the sermon—not to criticize the preacher, but to receive a message according to their needs.

Having dedicated their all to Christ, and regarding themselves as his stewards, they do not neglect to "lay by in store every Lord's day" according as God has prospered them. They give gladly, willingly, cheerfully of their means to every enterprise of the church.

All give: the young and the old, the rich and the poor; even the poor widow gives her mite. They give promptly, remembering that they give doubly who give quickly. They do not wait until they have been begged and urged by the deacons. Hence there is always money in the Lord's treasury and the church is not hindered in her glorious work of saving souls.

The model church remembers the poor and the sick. The deacons look promptly after such, and their needs are fully and tenderly supplied.