

"Barnabas and Saul"—"Paul and Barnabas."

BY REV. W. H. HINSON, MONCTON, N. B.

Acts II.

This singular text is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. And the reason this book is termed the Acts of the Apostles is that it records their doings. So with strict appropriateness it might be called the deeds or actions of the apostles.

Have you read the acts of the apostles? If so, you have been in the country whose chief characteristics are husks and swine. Or the record of the drink traffic, its debasement, have you studied them? A sad record of wailing and weeping, of loss of home, virtue, character, and soul, occasioned by drink. But the Acts of the Apostles is interesting and edifying reading. For the book tells of noble self-sacrifice and lofty heroism, of a morality pure, straight, of principle unwavering as the pole star.

Carlyle accused this age of emphasizing talk to the total ignoring of actual deed and endeavor. And there is some truth in the criticism. For, as a general thing, the man who glibly talks in meetings is held in less esteem than the brother whose talents lie in the line of a large benevolence and faithful though silent labor for God. The speaking is all right, is absolutely essential; still it is well to remember how church work at home and abroad, its educational departments and outside evangelization, requires a consecration that opens not only mouth and heart, but pocketbook also!

In this connection I have often thought of Zacchaeus. He volunteered while talking to Jesus to make fourfold restitution if any injustice on his part as a tax-gatherer could be proved. In other words, he said: "Lord, if I have cheated any man out of fifty dollars, I am willing to refund two hundred dollars." And yet some folks question Zacchaeus' religion. Would to God we had as genuine conversions in all the churches of our Convention.

Brethren, the doctrine of repentance is not half so distasteful as is the doctrine of restitution. To a man who has accumulated wealth by ways that are dark and tricks that are devilish, and bid him repent: and he will bring out a great Bible, gilt-edged, silver-clasped, and suspiciously clean, and roll his eyes skyward, he will say, "Just so," to your appeals, and "Amen" to your prayers. But preach to him restitution. Tell him that money is not rightly his; bid him restore it to its rightful owner, and if you don't hear him swear at you it will be because you make your exit rapidly.

Restitution is a revolutionary word. It scatters wealth, alters bank accounts, and creates disturbance among mortgagors such as October frost occasions among forest trees. This is true. But, ah, it is an unpalatable truth. For when I preach faith on the Sunday, men bow to me on Monday and are so solicitous concerning my health that they shout across the street to enquire after it. But when I preach faith evidencing itself by its work—a Christianity that pays its debts, stands right, and is honest in all men—they scowl at me, and suggest that a protracted stay in a more genial climate might benefit me.

The Acts of the Apostles is an unfinished book, with the exception of the Epistle by James, which, like the Acts, deals mainly with works, and the third epistle of John, which is simply a letter to Gaius, with these two exceptions, all the epistles round off into manifest completion. But this book does not thus close. It makes a break off, and just as your interest is at its full, a statement concerning Paul is made, and the record abruptly closes. Aye, it is an unfinished book. And so it will remain until the judgment. For we are all writing in this book. And each day, according to our deeds as written in God's Acts of the Apostles, shall we be applauded or condemned.

Now in this book the Apostle Paul figures prominently. He enters its pages at the seventh chapter, and its final record concerns him. And in the chapter containing our dual text he is first spoken of as "Saul," and then the record changes and you read of "Paul." At first Barnabas has the precedence, and then Paul precedes Barnabas, until ultimately Barnabas withdraws altogether, and we read of Paul's Acts and just as your interest is at its full, a statement concerning Paul is made, and the record abruptly closes. Aye, it is an unfinished book. And so it will remain until the judgment. For we are all writing in this book. And each day, according to our deeds as written in God's Acts of the Apostles, shall we be applauded or condemned.

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actual fact he suffered. He says to the Corinthians, "Of the Jews... received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a day and a night I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, and the heathen; in perils in the city, in the wilderness and in the sea; in weariness, painfulness, watching, hunger and thirst, and fasting." He knows what trial is, does this man. And as I read that record of his sufferings, I see how truly it has been said, "A man's life comes back on him."

II. But the persecuting days come to an end; and Saul appears next as a Seeker. On the road to Damascus he falls to the ground and the voice from heaven reproves him. His career of opposition to God, of fierce rebellion, is closed. And who proposed leading bound Christians out of Damascus, is himself, a poor, blind, conquered man, led into the city. And a mightier voice than his has called a "Hail," and Saul must needs obey. And in Damascus instructing as it awaits all those who truly seek it, who sincerely desire it. For whenever and wherever Saul desires the light, some Ananias is commissioned to be a light bearer. And along the line of obedience Saul found Christ, and he found in Christ the light required for the maintenance of the Christian life. So true is it that he who receives the Son, receives with Him power to become, and prove himself, a child of God.

III. And after conversion, with the eyes of body and understanding opened; with heart glad in the love, and a tongue swift in its praise, the Apostle stands forth as a Subordinate. For we read of him now as the companion of Barnabas, and thus the first part of our double text is utilized, "Barnabas and Saul." Great is my respect for Barnabas. The fiery persecutor is likely to be shunned by the afflicted Christians; hard is it for them to believe that the lion has become a lamb. But just then, before the heat of Saul becomes despondent, Barnabas, who has been in the work, first found and takes Saul as his assistant. Beautiful it is to see the two men step out together, and to hear Barnabas say, "Now, Saul, some of these folks have little confidence in you; they hope for the best, but they fear the worst; and because you so testify them in the past, they desire you to take a back seat now. But we can manage all that, Saul. You just come with me, and I'll call on you to pray; and then after a while you can give out a hymn; and then when they get a little used to you, I'll ask you to read the lesson; and some night, when everybody is in a good mood, I'll say, 'Now brother, Saul, give us your experience; and so little by little we will put you nearer your right place.' I say all that to Barnabas, and pity it is that his descendants should be so few!" We may regard this as a lesson from all this we pass on. When the prodigal in Christ's parable returned to his father, his thought was to occupy a servant's place. And when Jesus invites the heavy laden to Himself, He offers rest; but He also speaks of the yoke, brethren, there is deep suggestiveness in the facts. At first, when conversion lies in the near past, the observance and demands of religion often appear irksome as a yoke; and the matured Christian, who is ready with John declares, God's commandments are not grievous, once spoke of even so simple a thing as baptism as being a "cross." At first our holy religion appears to us as if avowed of servitude; but blessed be God, ere progressing far on the divine life, the irksome becomes the pleasant; the old nature decays, the new nature becomes stronger, and the strife between the two confined to a smaller area, with the heaviest battalions in favor of the new. All which leads up to the remark—

IV. That in the Acts of the Apostles, Paul appears as a Superior. When we have passed the Acts of chapter of our book we read, not "Barnabas and Saul," but "Paul and Barnabas" and ultimately, "I Paul." And long ere the record given by Luke—the writer of the Acts—is closed, Barnabas has receded, and the central figure is the apostle to the Gentiles. And again, we break away from our narrative, that we may ponder a truth that forcibly concerns us. Friends in your life—which is, rightly viewed, one chapter in the great book of Christian conduct—you will not have gone very far ere you are conscious of the new man's superiority over the old. We often lament, and doubtless, wisely, our shortcomings. But do we rejoice sufficiently in our achievements, victories over sin, and progress in grace?

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rents in the Lord for this right." "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." "But if you provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." These sweep away entirely any such charges as may be brought forward like those quoted.

Let us also learn how after conversion a man retains his individuality. Christianity alters the heart, not the head; the life, not the voice. The quick and fiery nature, full of enthusiasm and dash, will be distinguished by those characteristics after conversion even as before; while the retiring, unobtrusive disposition will avoid publicity even when in the church of God. By remembering this fact we should avoid many blunders. Experiences are diverse, as they indeed must be where temperaments are so varied; and he who expects from all the same publicity and utterance is grievously astray. The young girl who early transferred her allegiance to Jesus, cannot give the same testimony as does the old man whose life was wasted in sin. If we had Nicodemus and Paul in a conference, they would not be able to talk of the same Christ, but they would do so in different tones. O brother, Christianity seeks not the destruction of the energy, force and vehemence, but it does seek to uplift all that on to a higher plane, and into a nobler service. Looked at in this way, the cooperation in certain sources, and because I failed to find it was cast down. And I had pleaded with some to accept of the great gift, and their refusing to do so, I find a mist over my spirit. But as I in that service, and heard lips that two years ago were ready to blaspheme, praising God; as I heard those whose lives in sin were many, consecrating themselves to the Lord; as I heard men whose trials, whose perplexities, whose temptations I am well acquainted with, stand up and praise God for His infinite, all-conquering grace; I have heard all that, I was ashamed of my distrust and depression, and I flung all my fears to the winds. Ah, these living epistles, these bodies of divinity, these standing advertisements of the gospel, these are they that silence the unbelief's sneering, and you, O wandering brother, out in the world where the devil rules so many, and the great wickedness abounds, you can find comfort in this subject of ours.

For the grace that subdued Saul, that changed his heart, and transformed his life, is the grace that freely offers to us. And as he was enabled to keep his body under, to live so as to recommend the gospel, to witness for Christ under all circumstances, and in all places, so if thou receivest Christ into thy soul, so shall he be able to keep thee under, to let go despair, for he is able to take thee to the uttermost; though thy sins be as crimson, he can make them as snow; though thou hast defiled thyself with iniquity, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all unrighteousness. O listen to the clear voice that bids thee to "Come," and obtain forgiveness and rest; and for thy encouragement, as thou approachest, remember He who invites thee has expressly declared, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out."

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