

ON TRUE GREATNESS

THE PREACHER SHOWS THE MEASURE OF A MAN.

TWO GREAT POINTS OF VIEW.

Distinction Between the Worldly and the Spiritual Estimate—Training and Preparation Necessary for True Greatness—To Be Reached by John the Baptist.

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1903, by William Bailey, of Toronto, at the Dept. of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Chicago, Oct. 11.—In this sermon the preacher draws the distinction between the worldly and the spiritual estimate of greatness and shows the character of the training and preparation necessary for true greatness. The text is Matthew xi, 11, "There hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."

"Great men, great events and great epochs grow bigger and more colossal as the years pass away from them," once wrote the biographer Robert Burns. Like the mountain shadows they increase in size and their reputations lengthen in importance as the sun of their day sets and the long night of their rest separates us from them. Man is seldom called great and truly great until he has been dead at least twenty years.

But standing to-day under the lengthening shadows of many great reputations these imminent questions naturally arise in many minds: What is true greatness? What are the elements which distinguish the truly noble from the merely selfish famous?

Can Napoleon himself truly be called a great man, great in all the elements which go to make up true greatness? When his companions in arms, Marshal Lannes, was shot on the fatal retreat from Moscow, he called the Emperor to his side and said: "Your Majesty, I am your friend. I am dying, and this is my parting advice! Give up your merciless ambitions, or they will ruin you, as they have already ruined thousands of others." Did not the dying soldier picture the French Emperor as he was? With the penetration that often comes to the dying he saw beneath the splendor and grandeur of the conqueror a man mean of soul, selfish and unscrupulous. Can Robert Burns, the unscrupulous weak that was the victim of intemperance, be called truly a great man? Lord Byron, the licentious destroyer, or Thomas De Quincey, the opium eater, or Mark Anthony, the traitor, or Caesar, the coward; or Lord Bacon, the taker of bribes—can they be called truly great men?

"Well," you say, "instead of picking flaws in the reputations of men of commanding genius, tell us who is truly a great man. Give us one whose character is stamped with the divine approval. Describe one, who, though we may copy his life." That I will do, my friend, and do gladly. Such a character is to be found in John the Baptist. Though we may go into the richest of all palaces and stand upon the most famous of all battlefields and read the epitaphs of all the poets, philosophers, statesmen, inventors, reformers, we cannot find anywhere in any generation up to the time of Jesus Christ a name standing so high as his, of whom Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

The purpose of this sermon is to show why John the Baptist was greater than all other men before Christ's Jordanic baptism—John the Baptist great, although he was so poor that his home was among the rocks and sands of the wilderness, lying between the capital and the Dead Sea; so poor that his only garments were the coarse skin of the wild beast, through the holes of which stretched his long limbs and hairy chest; so poor that his only food was the grasshoppers or locusts and the honey which had been hidden by the bees among the ravens and the hills.

From the world's standpoint this is a strange portrait of a great man. But how wonderful is its setting. The faded portrait was at a gold face with a silver frame, but the portrait of John the Baptist is a silver face with a gold frame. Like a ruby glowing red it is set in a circle of most precious diamonds. Like a mirror of burnished brass, pure and spotless, it reflects the light of a

rising sun. It was John the Baptist's character that was the harbinger of a greater than himself. As the direct forerunner of the Son of God he came at the supreme crisis of the world's history.

Great men are produced only by great occasions. Great thoughts are born only amid the throes and convulsions of great agonies. Great hopes are only the rainbowed colors arching the dark heavens, black with angry tempests.

There must be a training for greatness. The occasion does not create greatness; it only develops and produces it. It cannot create or make greatness out of common clay. But great needs bring great men from obscurity into prominence. The occasion furnishes the opportunity. Ulysses S. Grant would have lived and died an unknown tanner but for the Civil war. The Duke of Wellington could not have become the dictator of Europe had he not overthrown at Waterloo the little Corsican, who threatened to crush all nations Cromwell would have been unknown to fame and his life would have been that of a simple country gentleman had not Charles I. been obstinately determined to seal his royal follies with his royal stubbornness.

Great men are produced only by emergencies. This premise being granted, what greater event is there in all history than that of the coming of the promised Messiah? How much it meant to the world and to us! What life of eternal joy have we except that which revolves about the personality of him who was once baptized by John the Baptist in the River Jordan? What hope have we of ever meeting our loved ones, our parents and our friends who have gone beyond except through the Divine Being of whom John the Baptist was the direct forerunner? Oh, my friends, as John the Baptist's name was great by being linked to the name of Jesus Christ at his first coming, will you not make your name great by doing your part toward preparing the world for Christ's second coming? Will you not carry forth the news that Christ is coming to the help of his struggling followers? As the swift, footed runner from the bloody battlefield of Marathon startled all Athens with the news that the Persian invaders had been hurled back, will you not spread abroad the news that the victory has been won by our Christ over sin and death and that he is coming again to rule the world in righteousness?

John the Baptist was a direct runner. He was more than that. He was ready to sink and submerge and entirely cover up his individuality with the personality of Jesus Christ. He was ready to let Christ be all in all. He wanted to be merely a foot light to make the divine face shine forth the more clearly. He was willing to decrease so that the glory of his Saviour might increase. Do we, like John the Baptist, sink our individualities in Christ's or do we, like some of the ancient forerunners of the east preceding the King's chariots wish to be dressed so gorgeously and to make so much noise that people will be watching us and admiring our strides instead of turning eyes toward the royal Master whom we are proclaiming? In our work for our Divine Master are we wishing that all eyes shall be turned upon us instead of upon Jesus? Are we trying to preach so that men may say, "That is a fine sermon?" or are we trying to preach so that, as when Demosthenes harangued, his auditors cried, "Let us go and fight Philip!" our hearers may say, "Come, let us enlist under the banner of Jesus?"

But let us inquire a little more closely how John the Baptist submerged his life in Christ. Jesus was an unknown man at the time John the hermit and recluse, was making the very palace walls at Jerusalem shake. Up to thirty years of age Jesus was an unknown dweller in a country village. The whole extent of Christ's earthly ministry extended over only a short period of three or four years. We read of Jesus when he was born. Then he disappears. We read of him twelve years later, when, as a boy, he talks with the doctors in the temple. Then he again disappears for eighteen long years. Up to thirty years of age Christ was politically and sociologically an unknown factor in eastern life.

In the meantime who was this John the Baptist? This second young man, of about the same age as Jesus, was the most famous personality in the east. He had lived as a hermit. But the voice he lifted reached, not only echoed throughout the villages, but also throughout the great capital itself. The rich and the poor, the old and the young, the

Government officials and the peasant alike left their homes to sit at his feet. Great crowds swarmed about him. As this strange teacher wherever he went. They pressed into his caves as though they were temples. As a result John built up a great school of devotees and baptized his followers by hundreds and thousands. Many of them were ready to bow down and worship him as a temporal as well as a spiritual king. Yet when Jesus appeared this illustrious man was ready, and gladly ready, to surrender all for Christ. Like John the Baptist, are we willing to lay our fame, our wealth and our entire life work at Jesus' feet?

Great was John the Baptist! At the risk of his life he was ready to denounce and attack the entrenched and the practically invulnerable sins of that day. He was not one of those men who always stop and ask, "Does it pay?" before they attempt to do what they ought to do. He preached on the duties of men and waged war against wickedness in all places. He declared against evils as mighty in his day as the liquor traffic is in ours and never condoned crime though the criminal was a king. He was ready to look the hideous monster sin squarely in the face and then hit at that sin, though his arm might seem to be as helpless and weak as the hand of a young girl striking at the wild beast leaping upon her in the Roman arena. He called a spade a spade, a lie a lie, an adultery an adultery, blasphemy blasphemy and hypocrisy hypocrisy wherever they were found. He denounced and exoriated the sins of the Jewish church. When Herod the governor, fell in love with his own brother's wife and married Philip that he might marry her, John instantly hurled the divine condemnation against the ruler. He raised such a storm of popular indignation that Herod flung him into prison and afterward, at the behest of his step-daughter who was dancing before him at a drunken feast, he beheaded John and gave to her the bloody trophy upon a charger. Oh, my brother, dare we, with John's courage, attack entrenched sin wherever may be found? Like John the Baptist, are we swift and sure, as brave enough, no matter what the direct cost may be, to uphold the great principles of gospel truth in the store, the home, the factory, the city hall—aye, through the sacred aisles of the church itself? Dare we do this thing which you abhor, the "powers that be" should unhesitatingly glittering sword of death and wave it over our heads and the heads of our loved ones?

But, though John the Baptist was great in life, he was also great in death. Like the pioneer who enters the American forests and cuts away the trees and pulls up the stumps and builds the home and plants the corn, in order that his children may reap the harvests after the father is gone, so John the Baptist, not for himself, but for those who should come after him, lived his life and, at last laid it down, a martyr.

If you follow the teachings of the Bible very carefully you will find there was a war, a rivalry, a jealousy, between the followers of Jesus Christ and the followers of John. There was no war between John and Christ. No sooner did Jesus appear than John bent the knee and rendered unto him full and complete obedience. But this obedience was not true in reference to the Johannian school. In the fourth chapter of John we find that in order to still this rivalry Christ with his followers left the southern regions of Judaea and traveled north and went through Samaria. But the disciples of John the Baptist, great before his sacrifice, took the headless trunk of his body and buried it and "went and told Jesus." Ah, yes, by John's death all these factions were healed. The Johannian school became in toto the school of the Nazarene. Is it not a blessed thought that if we live for Christ this side of the grave we may still continue to live in influence for Christ after we are dead? John the Baptist, great before his sacrifice, John the Baptist, great after he was martyred.

That posthumous influence is mighty for good or evil we all know. We have felt it. In the village where my grandfather lived there labored for many years a gospel minister. He never seemed to see any great results from his ministry. Everybody loved him, yet few confessed Christ under his preaching while he was alive. But no sooner was that good man dead than a mighty revival of religion sprang up. My father said that at one communion 300 people confessed Christ in the little village church. And the revival was fact about that revival was that every one of those new converts traced his conversion directly to the teachings and influence of the dead pastor. Posthumous influence, a mighty influence! Oh, yes, after death we shall live on. A good influence, like that of John the Baptist shall never, never die.

But though I honor and extol the noble characteristics of this great man, there is still another lesson we must learn from the verse of my text. Christ said, "There hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." Oh, yes, that is true as far as it went. True, if you speak in reference to those men and women who lived before Jesus was born. But there is one part of the verse you must bear in mind. It is the last part, it goes thus: "Yet, notwithstanding this, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." What does that mean? Simply this: If you and I become part of Jesus Christ, if we accept his atonement and are cleansed by his blood, we become in a sense greater, yes, far greater, than the greatest man who ever lived who has not been sanctified by the Saviour's sacrifice.

Perhaps I can illustrate the Bible thought in a simple way. A great wall or fortress has to be built. The work must be pushed. One group of workmen ascend the scaffolding and lay on one layer of stone and then go to their rest. Another group

lay another layer of stone upon the preceding layer and then go to their rest. And so the work upon the wall grows higher and higher, each group of workmen standing upon a better scaffolding than that of the preceding laborers. Well, the great wall of progress has been built in this way. Each generation represents a batch of workmen, each layer of stone the completed work of the preceding generation. The college boy of to-day knows more of geography, more of chemistry, more of astronomy, more of all the sciences, than the ablest man living three centuries ago. Why? Because he has absorbed the compact knowledge of the last 300 years, which the great scholars of those three centuries have laid at his feet.

But as the wall of mental and spiritual progress went on growing higher and higher, century after century suddenly about 1,900 years ago spiritually it took a miraculous lift. Christ's sacrifice was laid upon the top of it. The Calvary stones were the layers of the year 30 A. D. Those stones will lift all succeeding generations higher in knowledge and in possibilities, higher than all sin and higher than all future condemnations. I once heard a worldly man say: "The best man that ever lived never went to heaven on his own merits. If we ever reach the city of the redeemed, it must be through what Christ has done for us and not through what we have done for ourselves." This statement contains the kernel, the essence, the heart of all the gospel. John the Baptist in his own life great? Yes! "Yet, notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

Now, my friends, from a worldly standpoint it is almost impossible to compare the influences of different lives and to positively find out which one is the greater. But, though we cannot tell who is the greater in a worldly sense, we do know that in a spiritual sense no one can be great save through Christ's blood. To-day I would see a royal robe placed about your shoulders. To-day I would you might become a prince, a princess at a king's levee. To-day I would see you enter the royal family of which God is the Father and Jesus the elder brother. To-day I would have you grow into greater spiritual importance than any one who ever lived up to the time of John the Baptist, because Christ's Calvary sacrifice you above the stars. To-day I would have you a companion of Jesus, Great in life! Great in death! Great in your resurrection! May you be great through the time which shall never end!

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German the Greatest Readers. According to recent statistics, Germany heads the list as a reading nation, Russia falling to zero. With regard to newspapers, the following facts are even more significant: In the United States of America 75,000,000 of inhabitants are catered for by 22,000 journals, while Russia, with its population of 130,000,000, has only 500—i. e., thirty-seven times less. This paucity is easily accounted for by the censorship. In Germany the actual number of professional writers is estimated at 12,000, 400 of whom are poets. It would therefore appear that Deutschland is not only the "readingest" but the "writingest" country in the world.—Kansas City Journal.

How Long? As a general rule, for the hatching of chickens twenty-one days are required, for partridges twenty-four days, for pheasants twenty-five days, for common ducks twenty-eight days, for peacocks twenty-eight days, for turkeys twenty-eight days, for Barbary ducks thirty days and for geese thirty days.

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