

Canadian Churchman

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The Offence of the Cross

It is strange how some people think that the test of the up-to-date intelligence lies in the *dissecta membra* of their rejections—as though any position whose chief point is its negations could ever be satisfying and permanently essential.

About nineteen hundred years ago there were some people who found the preaching of a crucified Christ a stumbling block and others who found it just foolishness. The first were Jews, the second were Greeks. The same two types exist to-day. The death of Christ as having any specific bearing on our relation to God is something to be explained away if possible. They find nothing in the idea of a crucified Christ—indeed, less than nothing, a hindrance.

The Jewish type are looking for a Christ, for a Messiah, a Anointed Leader who will set things right in a material fashion, politically, socially, industrially, commercial and in every way. But they do not see how the Cross comes into things at all. It is a stumbling block, a black shadow in the picture, a discord in the music, an intrusion in their Utopia, like a voice in a language they do not understand.

The Greek type, too, are looking for their ideal leader. All things to them must be beautiful. The ideal state will be made up of citizens who will follow good as soon as they know it and whose mistakes will be only those of ignorance. To them the Cross is an ugly flow that mars the statue, a grim gallows that disfigures the landscape.

Both fail in their view of life for sin and the Cross are facts of life. Sins are, unfortunately, of the *will* as well as of ignorance. There are men who deliberately do wrong, who traffic in their fellows' sins. Nothing in life is so ugly as sin and never was it so ugly as when it did to death the Son of Man. The only way things will be set right will be by men who are right. Changed men are the necessary condition for changed things. And it requires some more powerful lever than a knowledge of failure and sin to change them.

Ever since the Gospel has been preached there has been an emphasis on the death of Christ. It was the burden of the Apostles' message. As they looked back over the earthly life of Christ, it was the deep significance of the closing week that stood out in the perspective. It occupied the foreground. The life and teachings which showed what manner of man He was filled the middle ground and there was the background of the thirty years of silence with the illumination of the Temple visit in His boyhood. His death was not a death, but the death of such a One who lived and taught and rose again. We can understand this emphasis, because, of all that Jesus did it was His death which most revealed the heart of the Father. Other men might live and teach, but, His death stood out in brutal ugliness against the purity and goodness of His life and teaching. It arrests the mind. It challenges the whole man.

There are some, who say, that the doctrine of the Cross, the Atonement, as it is called, is only the reflection of St. Paul and St. John on the events of Passion Week and that they originated the thought. (The entire agreement of all the

New Testament writers in this thing has to be explained for they did not agree on all things.) But, it is to be noticed, that this special regard to Christ's death we find also in the mind of Christ Himself. It is true that in St. Paul and St. John we find a degree of emphasis on the death of Christ such as we do not find in our Lord's Teaching and such as could not logically be expected. But our Lord has left us in no doubt as to how He regarded His death.

To take no other instance than the Holy Communion to which is the witness of the Church borne back through the centuries to that dark betrayal night; every account of the Institution give this thought in Jesus' mind. "This is my blood of the covenant which is shed for many unto the remission of sins" (Matt. 26: 28); "This is my blood of the covenant which is shed for many" (Mark 14: 24); "This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you" (Luke 22: 20). Any one who will fairly examine the evidence will observe the constant, "My blood of the covenant shed for many." It is impossible to gainsay the conclusion that these words refer to His death, and it is clear that He looked upon His death as having a value for others in relation to God. The idea of a covenant is distinctly stated and it is a covenant in His blood. To go no farther we have here the Atonement in the mind of Christ. And the man who sees in Christ's death *only* the inevitable result of a course of action opposed by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities has not thought of that death as Jesus thought of it.

How did Christ's death avail for us? We are not told by Christ. From His lips we hear only one thing: "The Will of the Father." Christ was convinced that His death was not simply inevitable. It was indispensable. Theories of the Atonement have been framed and will be again, for we must ever try to relate the stupendous fact of Christ's death for us to all our thinking. But in every explanation there is the unknown element: "the Will of the Father." We have got no farther than that.

"As the flash of a volcano discloses for a few hours the elemental fires at the earth's centre, so the light on Calvary was the bursting forth through historical conditions of the very nature of the Everlasting. There was a cross in the heart of God before there was one planted on the green hill outside of Jerusalem."

"Oh heart I made, a Heart beats here!
Face, My hands fashioned, see it in Myself!
Thou hast no power, nor mayst conceive of Mine;
But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,
And thou must love Me, who have died for thee."
—Browning.

THE limitations of "Church work" to work that is done in the buildings or under the direct auspices of the Church is opened for discussion by the valuable report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Committee (with Dr. Cyril Jackson as chairman) on the CHURCH AND SOCIAL SERVICE.

"We need a little more imagination in enlisting the sympathies of laymen and laywomen, who might be workers, and a little more discrimination in allotting their work. In other words, we want to take a new view of Church work if we are to induce able and intelligent men and women of to-day to play their part. A Churchman or Churchwoman who is serving his fellows is doing Church work, whether the actual machinery through which he serves them is ecclesiastical or not. If this is admitted, it brings vitally important consequences."

The Quiet Hour

Rev. Canon G. OSBORNE TROOP, M.A.

THE GREATEST MIRACLE IN THE WORLD.

THE greatest miracle in the world is the Death of the Incarnate Son of God. If He be in very deed the Son of God, then His Resurrection follows as a matter of course. God "loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible that He should be holden of it." But that He should die; that is the mystery of mysteries; and we may boldly claim that it is impossible to explain the mystery of His death, except as it is explained in Holy Scripture. "The wages of sin is death." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." But a conscience-stricken world is witness that in Jesus of Nazareth is no sin. He is not a sinner; therefore death had no claim whatever on His stainless life. Yet He died, and that the death of the cross. He was treated as the lowest and vilest of sinners, while all the time His soul was as white as the very light of God. Who can venture to explain that death, except as it is explained in the Word of God? He is God manifest in the flesh, yet He actually died and was buried. The unflinching Scripture says not only that He died "the just for the unjust," but that God MADE HIM TO BE SIN FOR US. "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Well may Hooker exclaim in the name of all believers: "Let it be counted folly, or frenzy, or whatsoever. It is our wisdom and our comfort; we care for no knowledge in the world but this; that man hath sinned and God hath suffered; that God hath made Himself the sin of men, and that men are made the righteousness of God."

Eternity will never reveal a greater thing than the death of Christ. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." If Christ had done everything else but die for us, He had left us in despair. We are saved not by the Sermon on the Mount, but by the awful death on Calvary's Cross. Whatever else we remember or forget, our Lord would have us always remember and never forget the "supreme sacrifice," which alone takes away sin. Therefore He gave us the cup, saying: "Drink ye all of this, for this is my Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins: do this as oft as ye shall drink it in remembrance of Me."

In the opening passage of the will of the late J. P. Morgan these striking words are written: "I commit my soul into the hands of my Saviour, in full confidence, that having redeemed it and washed it in His most precious Blood, He will present it faultless before the throne of my heavenly Father; and I entreat my children to maintain and defend at all hazard, and at any cost of personal sacrifice, the blessed doctrine of the complete atonement for sin through the Blood of Jesus Christ, once offered, and through that alone." Let me close in the name of us all:—

"Upon a life I did not live,
Upon a death I did not die,
Another's life, another's death
I stake my whole eternity."

Friendship! mysterious cement of the soul.—
Blair.

ch 25, 1920.

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