

Consecration.

BY W. N. HUTCHINS, M. A.

One is inclined to question whether any religious term has more frequent usage, in these days of Keswick and Northfield, than consecration. Likewise it is open to serious question whether any religious term is less intelligently understood. Without a consecration service a religious gathering is incomplete, and consecration vows are almost as numerous as the lips that call him Saviour. But one cannot avoid the fear that with very many there is no clear comprehension and no serious sense of the great circle of significance swept by this religious term. The most that many see is that the word stands for an ideal, but that ideal is hazy and ill defined like a coast line in a fog. Instead of pointing to a definite act intelligently performed, the word with many stands for something in the clouds, which they feel ought to be theirs, but to the attainment of which they know not how to make intelligent effort.

Yet if we turn to Scripture there is none of this haziness. Through all the Word of God, from the opening page when God said, "Let there be light," until the light breaks upon the face of John at Patmos, consecration is a specific and clearly defined act. Biblically consecration means being dedicated and devoted to God. In consecration one is set apart for God. What did Moses mean by anointing and sanctifying the Tabernacle with its vessels and altar? What was the thought of David, warrior and man of affairs as well as a poet, whose soul was an æolian harp responsive to every breath of tender emotion, when he took the vessels of brass and of silver and of gold and all the spoils of his victories and consecrated them to God? What was the intention of Solomon when in the Temple he lifted up holy hands of prayer and dedicated to God that costly and magnificent architectural achievement and place of worship? In these acts of consecration the Tabernacle and the Temple and the spoils of war were separated from common usage and set apart for God. Property belonging to men, was by the act of consecration given over to and made the property of God. Spoils won by their prowess, buildings erected by their skill and labor, vessels of silver and gold embodying their wealth and beaten into beauty at their cost, after consecration belonged no longer to David-Solomon or Moses, but to the Lord to whom they were consecrated. In a word then consecration involves a setting apart to God. Whether it be a building or a body, a temple of wood and stone or a temple of the Holy Ghost, whether it be a vessel of silver and gold designed by devoted, artistic genius or a life patterned after God's own image and redeemed not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, consecration finds its synonym and discovers its accomplishment in separation and devotion to God.

Observe, too, that consecration should follow conversion. Unconsecrated Christians are a too common commodity. Believers whose lives and whose property are used for themselves instead of for the glory of God abound. But there are not two Scriptural standards of Christian life, and wherever there is an unconsecrated Christian there is likewise a departure from Scriptural Christianity. In the natural order consecration follows conversion. Conversion and consecration are related as antecedent and consequent. As our sale of a property should be followed by our release of the rights and privileges of ownership, so conversion should be followed by consecration. Consecration is not our giving to God something he did not own before. In conversion we transfer ourselves to God and cease to be our own. Consecration is our living as if that were true by a practical recognition of God's ownership in all the details of daily discipline, as well as when making memorable marches or doing undying deeds. In his great word—"Ye are not your own," Paul was not indulging in rhetoric. When we accepted salvation through Jesus Christ we gave God a quit-claim deed of our being and ceased to be our own. His we are in all the entirety of our being and possessions—in the fulness of every faculty, in the possibility of every power, to the utmost reach of all our resources—by the free consent of our own wills. Belonging to God how then can a Christian refrain from consecration or an honest recognition of God's ownership, without either denying the reality of what he did in conversion or robbing God of what rightfully and by our own consent he owns? Refraining from consecration is using at our own will and for our own ends, property that belongs to another, daring to act toward God as we would not be allowed to act, by common justice, toward our fellow men.

Then from a definition of consecration and the observance of its place in Christian experience, our thought moves out to its nature. Observe that consecration should be definite, embodied in a specific, intentional act. While consecration should be the immediate result of conversion, it is a mistake to think that it will come of itself. Nothing comes of itself. In the realm of morals as in the stress and struggle of this strenuous business world, the initiating and sustaining power of all achievement lies in a will. Dr. Doddridge in his "Rise and

Progress of Religion," recommends a written compact with the Lord. "Set your hand and seal to it," he writes, "that on such a day of such a month and year, and at such a place, on full consideration and serious reflection, you came to the happy resolution, that whatever others might do you would serve the Lord." John Howe, in his discourse on Self-Dedication, tells of a devout French nobleman who made a quit-claim deed of himself to God, and signed the document with his own blood. Among the papers of the godly John Frederick Oberlin there was found a document with this sentence, "I consecrate to Thee all that I am, and all that I have; the faculties of my mind, the members of my body, my fortune and my time." Strasburg, Jan. 1st, 1760. Renewed at Walbach 1st Jan., 1770. A similar written covenant was made by the excellent Samuel Pierce, of Birmingham, England, who to add to the solemnity of the transaction, opened a vein in his arm and signed it with his own blood. Perhaps that was going too far. Perhaps even to write out a deed of transfer would be going beyond the bounds of moderation. But whether we do or do not write out a deed of consecration and sign it as a solemn witness to the transaction, we must see to it that our consecration comes down out of the clouds and walks the earth, and is more than an enjoyable emotion and shallow, sentimental words. By a definite act when alone with God we should solemnly hand ourselves over to him, and promise to recognize his ownership in everything that enters into and goes to make up a human life.

Then from the thought of consecration as a definite act, we move to the thought of it as volitional rather than emotional. For myself I confess a dislike for consecration services, for my unfortunate experience has been that such services are conducted under the conception that sentiment is a synonym for sanctity, and that religion finds its measure and equivalent term in emotion. But a moving of the emotions is not consecration. Tears may be in the eyes when there is a refusal in the will to acknowledge God's ownership in ways that are practical and to the point. Between consecration and emotional reverie there is a vast difference, and the proof of this is that many who weep the quickest or whose emotions stir the easiest, give the smallest and do the least in the kingdom of God. Believe me, the secret of consecration lies in the will. Nor in saying this are my eyes holden to the splendid service sentiment renders to every noble cause and high aspect of life—no love, no patriotism, no religion being possible without emotion. Life is saved from materialism by emotion. The heart is the organ of heat, and in the last analysis heat is the effective agent of all activity; the power that gives swiftness and smoothness, and strength and service to every achieving effort and progressive movement. And yet the centre of consecration is the will. Man's citadel is there. What the outposts and trenches were to Caesar's camp that unconquerable centre of British strength, the intellect and the emotions are to the will, and until the will is surrendered, the outposts and trenches may be God's, but the citadel is in the hands of the owner and its own is not consecrated.

Nor must I hesitate to affirm that this dedication of the will, which is but another term for obedience, must be complete—carried to the full measure of our acquaintance with the revealed will of God. Frederick William Robertson called obedience the organ of spiritual knowledge. In other words the path of the obedient, like the path of the just, is as a shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. To obey God's will means fuller light, and we must walk in the light, treading the golden path that leads to

"The shining table-lands,
To which our God himself is moon and sun,"

if we are to make life consecrated. Few things work more havoc in the spiritual life than to act in any single matter contrary to the light we have upon it. Disobedience whether in the form of omission of duty or the commission of prohibited deeds will hinder real communion with God and rob the soul of capacity for enjoying spiritual things. Whatever we know to be out of harmony with God's will must at once and at all cost be given up. Likewise wherever we recognize his will either in duty or command we must with equal readiness and prompt obedience do it. In the consecrated life the voice of command or a recognition of duty are a signal for immediate and hearty action. Human taste may have its likes and dislikes and speak out strongly. Obeying the will of God may raise up opposition and cause us to go against the desire and advice of relatives and friends. Shall we therefore refrain from obedience? Certainly not. Consecration stands for obedience; dedication is equivalent to an unqualified devotion; being set apart to God, means being set apart from listening to our own inclinations or heeding human counsel in preference to the will of God.

Most luminous, too, is the word of consecration on doubtful habits, practices and pleasures. Life is full of serious questions, of knotty problems, and so it comes to pass that the earnest soul is often uncertain concerning the moral character of a personal habit, a business practice or a social amusement. Of course all questions

should be settled in anticipation of Christ's judgment upon them. But the question, "What would Jesus do," does not entirely remove the difficulty of reaching a solution. Under such circumstances of uncertainty what then is to be done? I remember a word by Paul, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." That is whatever cannot be done under the belief that it is right and pleasing to God, becomes sin to the individual concerned, whatever it may be to others. Doubt upon the character of an action is a call to pause. Until we are certain it is better to wait and refrain. Until we know it to be right we had better act as if it were wrong, standing meanwhile with our faces to the east waiting for the breaking of the dawn. Consecration requires that we lay aside whatever is doubtful and refraining from indulgence until we are certain.

Then from the nature, place and definition of consecration we turn to its field. What is the field of consecration? It is a common objection that there is little time for religion and still less for consecration. Is there time for life? Then there is time for religion and consecration, for an utter abandonment of ourselves to God, with a determination to do his will and seek his glory in every phase and detail of life. Religion is not something apart from life, and needing much leisure and few duties for its higher reaches. Religion has its field in life, and rightly understood religion is as possible to the busiest toiler as to the man of leisure, and consecration has to do as much with the home, the school, the shop, the farm and the office as with the altar and church. That which transfigures our work and makes it consecrated is the spirit and motive. Done for the glory of God, as it can be, a lesson may be learned, or a prairie ploughed, or a ship sailed, or a supper spread, or a stoop swept, or a business run with as much acceptance to God as the service of an angel or the praise of the seraphic hosts. For the Christian there should be no such distinction as religious and irreligious, sacred and secular employments. That which makes an employment secular or sacred, by the employment what it will, is the spirit and motive of the worker. Given a secular, worldly life, and the highest and holiest service loses its halo and becomes degraded by its touch. Given a consecrated, spiritual life, and the lowliest, smallest and most commonplace duty is dignified, ennobled, made worthwhile and becomes a religious service. For its true inward character all work depends upon the spirit and motive of the worker, rather than upon its nature as normal, mental, obscure or observed; and what consecration requires, and the divinest thing any one can do is to regard every task in life as a holy service and sacred trust from God.

In closing permit me to suggest that we have touched the secret of a satisfactory life. One has said that Christians sometimes pray for joy as if heaven were a factory where joy is manufactured and then exported in lumps convenient for insertion in human life. But we know very differently. God's world is one of order, where cause precedes effect, where consequent looks antecedent, law operating in character as well as in the clouds; no virtue, grace or spiritual acquisition being obtained without a previous and adequate cause. In religion, as elsewhere, we receive in proportion and after the kind that we put in, and a Christian satisfaction is the result of a Christian consecration. A Connecticut farmer went to a well-known clergyman, saying that the people in his neighborhood had built a meeting house, and wanted him to come and dedicate it. The clergyman, accustomed to participate in dedicatory services where different clergymen took different parts of the service, inquired: "What part do you want me take in the dedication?" The farmer, thinking that the question applied to the part of the building to be included in the dedication, replied: "Why the whole thing! Take it all in, from underpinning to steeple." "From underpinning to steeple"—that is the consecration necessary to peace and joy and satisfaction of soul; for one cannot know the full joy of Jesus Christ until he is a full man in and for Jesus Christ.

Canning, Nova Scotia.

A Joyful Saint.

Until recently the name of Isaac Watts has been with me a synonym of ponderous gravity and tomb-like solemnity. A study of his hymns contained in one book alone,—the "Calvary Selection of Spiritual Songs", convinces me that no more cheerful mortal ever existed than this same good old Isaac Watts. He is like a meadow spring, bubbling up through frost and drought alike with never-failing life and freshness. If our ideas of religion depended upon his leading, the idea as well as the word "gloom" would be entirely unknown. The burden of his message is, sing, praise, rejoice, be glad!

It is natural then to find the name I, Watts inscribed over a large proportion of the hymns brought under such heads as "Worship" and "The Sacrifice of Praise." Most of them are old favorites, and the opening lines thrill one with the emotion that accompanies the rising of a great throng of worshippers;—this partly from association, and partly because the lines themselves are full of noble music. A few examples will illustrate, though it is hard to omit some equally good.

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Ye nations bow with sacred joy:
All people that on earth do dwell
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

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