THE SOLDIER AND THE FISHERMAN.

By J. Denovan, D. D.

PART III.

Of these three grand historic scenes now under contemplation PICTURE THE THIRD may be seen by the attentive reader of Acts 10: 22–48.

The deputation whom Cornelius at the angel's command had sent away to Joppa, namely, the old soldier and his two companions have now successfully accomplished their tramp of seventy miles. With Simon Peter in their company they return to Cæsarea and enter the centurion's house.

I. IN ALL "SOCIETY" INTRODUCTIONS WHEN AND WHERE WAS THERE EVER AN EVENT SO INTERESTING AS THIS—TWO MEN INTRODUCED TO ONE ANOTHER BY THE HOLY GHOST? O how easily do social barriers fall and national antipathies vanish when touched by the finger of God Almighty!

Cornelius the stern Roman veteran is neither by nature nor habit an obsequious courtier addicted to flattering sycophancy, yet he welcomes Peter with the profoundest respect, stooping before him to the very ground. From the entire story I cannot see how he can possibly imagine his visitor to be some sort of super-human being; the angel had called him plainly "Simon surnamed Peter"—neither saint nor rabbi; the servants whom Cornelius had sent to seek him had found him just where they expected (not in palace or temple or academic grove) but hum-by boarding in the tanner's house, close by the raw skins, the tan-pits and the drying leather — environments neither very dignified nor aesthetic. Yet Cornelius venerates this humble messenger of God so deeply that he treats him as he would not have treated the Roman Emperor. Luke's picture shows us that "as Peter was coming in Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet and worshipped him."

Some may think that perhaps his old heathenish superstitious notions rushed back upon him for a moment and he instincively treated the messenger of deity as Mercury — divine himself. Was it not rather because his mind had been overstrained by four long days' eager expectancy that in devout gratitude he flung himself at Peter's feet? Be this as it may, surely the last particle of Roman military haughtiness must have been eliminated from the centurion's nature when he gives such welcome homage to a poor Jew.

By this unexpected reception accorded him by Cornelius Peter's self-abnegating humility and candid manliness are beautifully drawn out—"Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together."

Let us study this part of Luke's great picture carefully. The whole circumstances of this remarkable series of events would certainly have turned any other poor man's head, but Peter will not pretend to be any other than he really is. His thorough honesty is his mental balance.

Just think what had recently taken place. An angel had travelled all the way from heaven to Cæsarea to give Cornelius this fisherman's address. Cornelius a Roman centurion had sent a deputation of three men thirty-five miles on foot to solicit from him a visit. A special vision accompanied with an audible voice from heaven had given him a special commission to Cornelius. Yet this poor and simple fisherman, Peter, assumes no official airs and absolutely refuses any homage. Look well at the rough sturdy figure with these words upon his lips, "Stand up; I myself also am a man." What a contrast Peter's personality and attitude present to some religious celebrities I have met! The pontiff who claims to be the successor of this man, does not behave as he did. Amid gorgeous and imposing surroundings, arrayed in the most splendid vestments and robes and seated upon a throne, the pope demands the profoundest homage from all who approach him and even deliberately gives his slipper foot to be kissed by his devout visitors. What a contrast, startling and horrible! Surely this man, when he solemnly claims to be the successor of Peter, must verily be a shameless liar.

Further, that bronze statue in Rome which for many centuries has *universally* presented this apostle Peter has had its great toe kissed by successive myriads so frequently and so fervently that the metal has been more than once clean kissed away. Surely that statute must be a monstrous and hideous lie. Genuine christianity neither inculcates nor tolerates any such slavish sycophancy; genuine apostles accept no such degrading homage. When Cornelius fell down at his feet worshipping "Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man." Nay, honest Peter proceeds candidly to renounce all credit to himself even for the long toilsome journey he has just completed. "Please do not give *me* any credit for personal kindness or charity," cries he, "Ye known how that it is unlawful for a man that is a Jew to keep company with or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for."

This scene in the meeting of Cornelius and Peter is wonderfully refreshing as an illustration of respectful gratitude on the one part and honest manliness on the other, and oh, what a refreshing contrast it presents—what a rebuke it administers to every species of clerico-sacerdotal assumption!

Now let us look

II. At the UNSELFISH ACTIVITY AND CONFIDENT CANDOUR OF THESE TWO MEN, THE FISHERMAN AND THE MILITARY OFFICER.

As to the Evangelist he sprang forward to his work—(vs, 23, 24). "On the morrow Peter went away with them, ... and the morrow after they entered into Cæsarea." He does not even take time to consult the executive officers of the "Home Missionary Board."

As to Cornelius while he waited for Peter's arrival he "had called together his kinsmen and near friends." Another man in the circumstances would doubtless have exercised a little more caution—would not have committed himself so rashly, but have reasoned cautiously thus, "I shall see this man Peter myself in the first place, and, after hearing his opinions and proposals I'll sleep over the matter before telling any body else—before committing myself." Nothing of this sort seems ever to have occurred to Cornelius. Having received God's directions, as a soldier he accepted them as his marching orders, *first* by sending the deputation right away for Peter, and *secondly*, by convening his relatives and friends. And now when they are all met, after having stated his recent interview with the angel, he says to Peter, "Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou has well done that thou art come. Now, therefore, are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

Was this very frank and prompt behaviour of Cornelius right? Undoubtedly it was, for he was dealing *with God's commands*. Have you and I any word—any command of God's? Then let us instantly and without hesitation believe and obey it. We may debate and discuss the opinions and advice of man, but God's word is unquestionable truth and imperative law.

Now see, as the effect of this candid and honest spirit manifested by Peter and Cornelius,

III. THE SIMPLICITY OF MIND AND THE CANDID SUSCEPTIBILITY OF THE ENTIRE ASSEMBLY IN THE CENTURION'S HOUSE. "*Now, therefore, are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*"

O that we saw such a spirit in our religious assemblies! This is the only proper attitude of any soul in relation to Divine Truth. Let us not call this superstition, ignorant devotion, or blind credulity. It is blind credulity and ignorant superstition for us to receive thus religious doctrines directions and commands *on human authority*. Unless a man be truly *God's messenger* to us, unless God tells us that the words of a man are *His words* we dare not accept either him or them either to guide our steps or to rule our conduct. If our preacher cannot say "Thus saith the Lord" let him be silent.

With the greatest simplicity, with the most undisguised frankness the congregation told Peter that they were convened "to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." And Peter's sermon consisted of what? It was not a political harrangue about the provincial relations of Palestine to imperial Rome, nor was it a scientific and philosophic disquisition about monism and evolution, nor a poetical elaboration of transcendental moral sentiment, nor a burst of burning eloquence about some distant paradise, terminating with the brilliant pyrotechnics of dramatic verbiage. Verses 36–43 tells us that the sermon was a plain statement of what Jesus was and said and did—a sermon very like the one the same man preached on the day of Pentecost—"Jesus *Christ and Him crucified*." Peter was a preacher who "repeated himself." And don't some good physicians frequently repeat the same prescription?

Luke's picture now before us shews

IV. THE EFFECT THIS PRAYERFULNESS, THIS EARNEST WORK, THIS STRAIGHTFORWARD CANDOUR AND SIMPLE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL. "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word."

Many preachers (myself among the number) have been in the habit of finishing our sermons by making, what is called, "practical application of the subject." This language, strictly speaking, is not correct, for the Holy Ghost alone can *apply* the gospel to the heart, while the *practical* part must be done by the hearer believing and doing what God has told him.

All that any preacher can do is just what Peter did on this occasion, that is, State plainly and fully, earnestly, affectionately and solemnly God's WORD concerning GOD'S CHRIST, and then prayerfully expect God's blessing there and then upon the hearers.

Alas, how seldom do we who preach preach with such prayerful faith! If we did should we not be more frequently rewarded by seeing what Peter saw in the centurion's house? The Holy Ghost gave the word point and power, there and then.

No part of this great historical picture of primitive christian mission work is more impressive or more instructive than this.

V. THE GENUINE REGENERATION OPERATION OF THE HOLY GHOST IS ALWAYS ACCOMPANIED WITH OPEN CONFESSION OF JESUS CHRIST. That time serving selfish religion which shrinks from public confession will not be acknowledged by Jesus Christ. Whom does Jesus Christ declare He will deny before His Father and the holy angels?

In apostolic days christian confession was formally and intelligently made by christian baptism. "Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptised, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? Then he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." Thus those Gentiles passed, body and soul, into the kingdom.

What this decided step so suddenly, taken by the centurion Cornelius and his friends involved we are told; what they suffered next day in slander and insinuation, or what explanation about the convertical he had held in his house and his own very strange conduct at it Cornelius gave to his superior officer and to the Roman consul we do not know. No doubt many of the newly christianized Centurion's military associates looked upon him with pity as a crank who had abandoned the respectable and dignified Jupiter of his famous forefathers to accept for his diety a poor crucified Jewish criminal. What misrepresentations of his motives and conduct were industriously circulated! How many hard things evil tongues said about him, questioning his sanity—questioning his loyalty to Cæsar and his ability to hold his government situation! No doubt but every one of those heathens and Jews who constituted the congregation in his house and who were also baptised had, in after days, to "fight the good fight of faith," to suffer afflictions and persecutions, to carry their cross and to die daily. Their Jewish neighbours despised and shunned them as wretched apostles; the Roman acquaintances regarded them as mere fools and fanatics.

With any particulars of their interesting subsequent history we are not acquainted; but the day is coming when from the lips of Cornelius and his fellow disciples we shall hear the interesting story of their experience, how they struggled and hoped, how they suffered and triumphed, how the world and the flesh and the devil harrassed and hindered them, and how the Holy Ghost sanctified and sustained them.

Meantime here the curtain drops over these three beautiful pictures by the artist Luke—three immortal pictures of earnest prayer and earnest godliness, simple faith and simple obedience.

Now you and I are writing the record of our own life. Soon, soon our present religious experience and conduct will be part of precious or worthless religious history—of genuine or spurious christianity, making the church stronger or weaker and the world better or worse.

Before turning away from the study of these Luke-drawn pictures of religious life in the first century, is it not proper to enquire, On what ground and for what reason were those auditors of Peter's sermon in the centurion's house baptized?

Were they baptized in order to constitute them children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, or were they baptized because they were already the subjects of the Holy Ghost's regenerating power?

Was each one of them in their solemn baptismal engagement supported and guaranteed by sponsors—*viz*, a god-father and god-mother? Why has Luke omitted to mention such an interesting fact?

Did the parents who then believed and were baptized get all their infants also baptized as "the seed of the righteous"? If so, why is there no mention made of the christianized children?

Is not Peter's question the most satisfactory and final answer to all such interesting enquiries—"*Can any one forbid water that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?*

CORNELIUS THE CENTURION.

"Now therefore we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." Acts 10: 33.

I will not rehearse the providences of God by which Peter was led to Cæsarea to preach to Cornelius and his friends. They are all recorded in this 10th chapter of Acts of the Apostle. But wish to write of Cornelius' piety and the interest he seemed to have in Christ when he sent for Peter. The text is carefully guarded—to hear, not the things that any man may choose to speak—not a few things that God commands, but all things that God commands. Happy the preacher who has such a congregation to preach the word of the Lord to every Lord's day. I fear but few ministers have so teachable a congregation as Peter had.

Cornelius was a man of faith in God and prayer to God. And his praying was heard of God—that means favorably. He was acceptable to God, and more than acceptable to God no person can be. Christ died and rose again to bring men into acceptance with God. Observe, the beginning of Peter's discourse to the congregation "Of a truth I preceive that God is no respector of persons but in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." This coupled with the preceding verses show that Cornelius was a child of God, and further I understand from the scripture that Cornelius was a believer in Christ before he sent for Peter. This I find in the narative. Peter says "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel (preaching peace by Jesus Christ). He is Lord of all "that word, I say *ye know*." It is no strange thing that they knowing that word of life should be trusting in it and accepted with God—though living in a pagan country. Peter continues—"That word I say ye know which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached." Again, call to mind that a great work of grace is in progress in Lydda and Joppa where Peter has wrought the miracles of curing Eneas of his palsy and bringing Dorcas to life. The testimony is that all that dwelt in Lydda and Saron "turned to the Lord." Saron was Sharon named in 1 Caron. 5: 16. It lay between Mount Carmel and the Mediterranean, and stretched along the coast of the Mediterranean from Joppa to Cæsarea. Lydda was in this region also and was six miles from Joppa, and from Joppa to Cæsarea was about thirty miles, and from Joppa to Jerusalem was about forty miles, making Cæsarea about seventy miles from Jerusalem. Cæsarea was a young city founded in honor of Cæsar about ten years before the birth of Christ. It was a place of military importance. Councils were held there.

Throughout all the country we have mentioned, excepting Cæsarea, the gospel was preached and carried to the very gates of Cæsarea. Was it strange that such persons as Peter was addressing in Cæsarea should know of Christ and his work? When there is a work of grace in any town or country district, people across the county line usually hear of it and become acquainted with the teachings. It is not singular then when all throughout Saron the gospel was preached and people were receiving it in Cæsarea on the border of the country, some should become interested, for, notwithstanding the restrictions of social intercourse, there was business intercourse, and in this connection notice, Cornelius was a military officer, captain of 100 men called Italians. Judea was at this time subject to the Roman government. His military position would bring him into notice among the Jews, calling him occasionally into Judea as bands of soldiers were required by government at public places in Judea and at Jerusalem. And this would give an opportunity to hear of Christ. There was a centurion present when Christ was crucified and believed in him, saying, "Truly this was the son of God," Matt. 27: 54. Who can say this was not Cornelius?

When we consider all these things, it ceases to seem a mystery that Cornelius knew and believed in Christ before he sent for Peter. He had facilities for knowing Christ, and Peter, in his discourse, addressed Cornelius and his company of friends as saved men. What then was Peter's mission to Cornelius? To teach the duty of a redeemed sinner. As given in Acts 10: 6. The angel said to Cornelius of Peter, "He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." He, like all beginners in the christian life, needed the sincere milk of the word. The term "saved" is not restricted to believing in Christ, but includes also the development of the christian life. "Work out your own salvation," Phil. 2: 12. "By which also ye are saved if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you," Acts 2: 47.

This was the character of Ananias' instruction to Saul call Paul. Every Christian now has similar work to do. Nor does the statement that while Peter was speaking the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word, contradict my exposition but confirms it. It was not the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost that fell on them. But the baptismal power, the evidence and fruit of which was: "They *spake with tongues* and magnified God. This the christian Jews present witness with astonishment. Then Peter challenging any objection to their baptism, commanded them to be baptized into the name of the Lord. This is his first command to them, because they are already believers in Christ and accepted with God. I write this not in the spirit of controversy, but as giving the conviction I get from the scriptures, of Cornelius at the time Peter visited him. LOWELL.

DR. A. J. GORDON AND THE PRAYER MEETING.

The Standard.

Perhaps no subject is of more interest to the spiritually minded, than the prayer-meeting. In "The Ministry of the Spirit" by Rev. A. J. Gordon. D.D., under the discussion of "The Spirit's Administration" the writer has found some words so suggestive and impressive he ventures to give them to the readers of the *Standard*

After speaking very earnest words concerning the importance of being in accord with the Spirit of God and emphasizing the necessity of depending upon the Spirit to direct the worship of God's house, the author says: "Most solemn and suggestive words these have ever seemed: 'The Father seeketh such to worship him.' Amid all the repetitions of forms and the chanting of liturgies, how earnestly the Most High searches after the spiritual worshiper, with a heart inwardly retired before God, with a spirit so sensitive to the hidded motions of the Holy Ghost that when the lips speak they shall utter the effectual inwrought prayer that availeth much!

"If any shall interpose the objection that what we are saying is too high to be practical, it may be well to confirm our position by the witness of experience. We are not speaking of pulpit prayers especially, in what we have said.

The universal priesthood of believers, which the Scriptures so plainly teach, constitutes the ground for common intercession, for 'the praying one for another' which is the distinctive feature of the Spirit's dispensation. The prayer-meeting, therefore, in which the whole body of believers participate, probably comes nearer the pattern of primitive Christian worship than any other service which we hold. To apply our principle here, then, what method is found most satisfactory? Shall the service be arranged beforehand, this one selected to pray, and that one to exhort; and during the progress of the worship, shall such a one be called up to lead the devotions, and such a one to follow? In a word, shall the service be mapped out in advance and manipulated according to the dictates of propriety and fitness as it goes on? One, after many years of experience, can bear emphatic testimony to the value of another way—that of magnifying the office of the Holy Spirit as the conductor of the service, and of so withholding the pressure of human hands in the assembly that the Spirit shall have the utmost freedom to move this one to pray and that one to witness, this one to sing and that one to say 'amen to our giving of thanks,' according to his own sovereign will.

"Here we speak not theoretically but experimentally. The fervor and spirituality and sweet naturalness of the latter method has been demonstrated beyond a peradventure, and that too, after an extended trial of both ways, the first in ignorance of a better ways with constant labor and worry and fret, and the last with inexpressible ease and comfort and spiritual refreshment. Honor the Holy Ghost as master of assemblies; study much the secret of surrender to him; cultivate a quick ear for hearing his inward voice and a ready tongue for speaking his audible witness; be submissive to keep silence when he forbids as well as to speak when he commands, and we shall learn how much better is God's way of conducting the worship of his house than man's way."

Whenever confronting conditions press us into lines of organization and activity, we are in danger of overlooking some matter of great importance. The human effort and church organization demanded in our time, may have put the emphasis upon these two so that we have, to some extent, overlooked the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Pledges are of great value; but they should be in the interest, and in obedience to Christ, and not the church nor the society. Prayer-meeting topics may be suggestive; but in our efforts to move our minds along fixed lines, may there not be danger that the hour of prayer will degenerate into a frantic effort to shoot at a mark. It is a fair question, and time to ask it, whether our prayer-meeting topics, and the manipulation of leaders, has increased the volume of rich expression of deep Christian experience, or given to the churches, in many instances, appointed hours of talk. Of course it would be useless to adopt a method calculated to make the Holy Spirit the leader of the meeting, without first securing a good degree of intelligence on the part of the people as to the explicit teachings of the Scriptures concerning the Spirit's personality and presence with Christ's people in Christ's stead, and the importance of every Christian accepting him for a guide and sanctifier the same as Christ was accepted for salvation. A spasmodic effort in one or two meetings would be equally useless and unsatisfactory. There should be conviction and continuance, and sowing and waiting, and then the harvests of deep, refreshing Christian experience will follow. CLEVERTON.

SAVED, OR UNSAVED.

I have been much interested, in the recent discussion, in the MESSENGER AND VISITOR of the case of Cornelius.

Will you kindly permit me to ask, in the same paper, if the teaching of the angel, does not help to settle the question, whether Cornelius was saved or unsaved previous to Peter's visit?

In Acts 12: 14, (R. V.) the angel speaking of Peter, says, "Who shall speak unto thee words, whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house."

JAMES MORRISON.

Onslow Station, April 26, '95.

Can anything be more beautiful than the following lesson from the "Nautilus?"

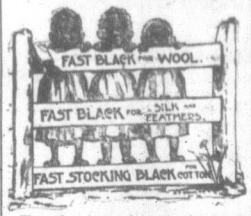
Year after year behold the silent toil
That spread his lustrous coil;
Still as the spiral grew
He left his past year's dwelling for the new,
Stole with soft step its shining archway through,
Built up its idle door;
Stretched in his new-found home, and knew the old no more.

Thanks for the heavenly message brought by thee,
Child of the wandering sea,
Cast from her lap forlorn; from thy dead lips a clearer note is borne
Than ever Triton blew from wreathed horn;
While on mine ear it rings
Through the dark caves of thought,
I hear a voice that sings:

"Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll;
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a home more vast,
Till thou at length are free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea."

O. W. HOLMES.

EVERLASTING BLACKNESS



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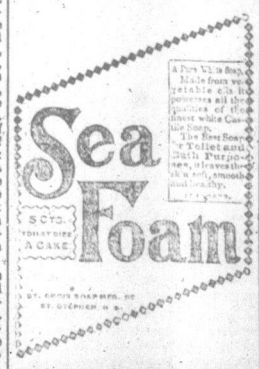

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