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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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## Religious.

### The Luminous Side of Revelation.

A Sermon preached at the N. S. Eastern Baptist Association, July 8, 1867.

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"Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.—Psalm cxix. 105.

Very few understand the Bible,—none perfectly. As a whole, it is the least understood of any book in the world. One reason of this is, because we do not read it. A few special chapters, a few favorite texts, occupy our attention, and the average christian rarely goes beyond. The chief reason is, that, read it as you may, generally, constantly, devoutly,—in any or in every language, our capacities are too limited to receive the flowings of the Infinite mind, our powers too puny to grasp the thoughts of God, our nature too material to apprehend the unseen—the spiritual—Eternal. What has oftener attracted us than that simply magnificent announcement of the Gospel of John? Yet where is the rash man who will venture to explain? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God: the same as was in the beginning with God." The words are clear, the statement is distinct, the meaning unflinching:—The terms, shadowy, grand, and solemn, we cannot, we dare not attempt to resolve; much less their interblending or interdependence.

Who grasps the design of the prophecy of Daniel? Who understands the dark symbols of Ezekiel? Who can draw the distinction between the predictions of Christ concerning the fall of Jerusalem, and those bearing upon the final consummation of the present dispensation? What subtle analysis will elucidate the mysteries of the Revelation of John? Or who will show us the unfoldings of his majestic imagery? Concerning these the prophecy-mongers gravely tell us: "It meaneth this, and it meaneth that," and, "each time shall see the accomplishment;" but lo! the time is here, and "all things continue as they were." In the prophetic a'manacs, we are conveniently told, "Expect great events about this time." We are on the alert, and there is nothing new under the Sun.

Other some by a species of hermeneutical gymnastics, readily undertake to explain the most difficult points of this Book,—the standing still of the sun on Gibeon, the moon in the valley of Ajalon, the power displayed by the witch of Endor, the Baptism for the dead, and the primitive curiosity, "Power on her head because of angels."

In this age of earnest, simple, Christian work, expositors generally—all teachers of Christianity are going directly at their masters business, wisely remembering that from Jehovah himself proceeded the withering rebuke:

"Who is this that darkens counsel, By words without knowledge."

In certain aspects, God has left His revelation, overshadowed. In His wisdom, it is obscure alike to the man of letters and to the uncultivated peasant;—to wise and foolish, every book—from the beginning to the end—is constantly proclaiming, "Thus far shalt thou come and no further," attempting to interpret both manifest their folly.

But in keeping with its nature as a Revelation, an unfolding of the will of the eternal concerning His creatures, there is no part which does not answer to its prime purpose, to scatter beams of light concerning the redemption of man. The sun of Righteousness rising lustreless in the grey dawn of Genesis, mounts higher and shines with brighter effulgence in every successive treatise, till with undimmed splendor he breaks forth from the clouds and shadows of the older economy, the Light of the world.

Let us fools and wise, prove our wisdom, by adopting the expression of the Psalmist: "With Thee is the fountain of life, in Thy light shall we see light."

Permit a simple illustration. A lighthouse is none the less effective, because not illuminated in every apartment. It serves its pur-

pose when lighted in the the evening time, it flings its rays far and wide. The mariner knows his position and keeps away to the open sea, or it may be, steers through the channel, safely past rocky ledge and treacherous quicksand, into the great bosom of his desired haven. Is not this a fair similitude? We have a house my brethren, with many dark apartments, but, from the proper place, streaming forth on every side a flood of radiance gleams far seaward, across the headlands, and up the recesses of the quiet bay. May the word of Jehovah be to each of us, "a lamp to our feet and a light to our path."

### THE LUMINOUS SIDE OF REVELATION.

It is not to be supposed that we can enter very fully upon such a suggestive topic in the short space allotted. We shall glance at a few salient points.

The seeming mysteries of Providence are frequently set in such a light that we are enabled trustfully to acquiesce even where we cannot fully comprehend.

Said an ancient saint in comparison of his own desolate condition, wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea they have taken root, they grow, they bring forth fruit." This question still agitates the bosom of good men.

If we turn to the 73rd Psalm, we find that to another this had proved a stumbling-block and became the testing point of his faith.—

"My feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped." What is the intent of this dubious language? Had some great passion nearly effected his overthrow; and had he escaped by the skin of his teeth? By no means. The struggle was purely internal; one man had to battle fierce doubts, concerning the righteousness of the moral government of Jehovah. "For I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." Behold these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world, they increase in riches. "Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." Now let us mark the solution of the perplexity. "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end." There under the recital of the Divine word, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, he was brought to perceive that this prosperity was but specious and momentary; that these happy ones whom he had been envying, were like the gay moth flitting before the lamp, about to be consumed, or to use his own striking figure that they were in and on "slippery places," ready to be hurled to destruction. Thus was the "grieved heart," of Asaph assured, as he was led to see that when "the dreams of the wicked shall have become like foam, our faith shall be changed into vision," and the strong assurance, "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart."

We have no special revelation concerning another perplexing enquiry, alas, how frequently forced upon us! The removal of the useful in their prime. But we are by no means left in darkness. We have, at all events, this broad ground for our feet,—that the Infinite Wise is taking them, and it is right, that he is translating His own at the time when it is best for them, as well as for the universal interests of His kingdom; for we must not confuse our views of that kingdom to a particular community, nor to a special spot called earth. Moreover, from the Divine record we have this instructive lesson, that from the beginning it has been the same. To speak Abel absolutely needed in that new world? But he was smitten by the hand of the first murderer. And surely the Church of his time could ill spare Enoch, the man "who walked with God." Yet "God took him," and Elijah must needs be prematurely taken up, when the witnesses of Jehovah were few in a degenerate age. The austere censor of morals John Baptist, in the full flush of young manhood gave his head to the executioner.—And was there not a peculiar field for the wisdom and energy of the devout Stephen? But in the midst of his work, and the tears of an infant church, he sealed his testimony with his blood. The son of Zebedee, too,

according to his prophetic wish, was "baptized with the baptism" of his Master,—slain by the sword of the wicked in the midst of his usefulness. Thus it has continued. The bright particular spirits, the men of grace and wisdom are constantly bidden higher by the Lord God of the prophets, while the weak, the timorous, the faithless and the fore of heart are left to wage the warfare of the Lord.— But what have we to say? "Who gathered these flowers?" asked the gardener, as he came into the garden and found some of his fairest and loveliest lilies cut. "I did," replied the master. Then the gardener held his peace.

Are we correct in making use of such language, as the mystery of non-success? The sower sow for months,—it may be for years, without being permitted to reap. Others around him, with no sunnier skies, with not more frequent showers, and apparently a similar soil, have joyfully brought in their sheaves. Mournfully he contemplates the barren fields, anxiously he questions if he have sown good seed, for, if so, Where is the blade, the ear, the full corn? If he closely examine the inspired testimony, he will recognize the underlying truth that the gospel is a witnessing principle as well as a converting power, and that prophets have cried "Lord who hath believed? that communities "repented not" at the preaching of the Son of God; that one may sow, while another reaps; and not seldom shall this glow of radiance illuminate his dejected soul.

"He who goes forth and weeps, Bearing precious seed Shall doubtless return, Bringing his sheaves."

The Bible is probably luminous where it is deemed obscure.

The world is blessed with a series of religious societies, generally dignified with the name of churches, or it may be that one of these bodies, changing to have a little more status in certain countries, boldly pushes itself forward as the church, or the aggregate of religious bodies is vaguely denominated the church.— From the fact that there is a great diversity of form in these societies, and a much greater diversity of opinion, it is sometimes inferred rather randomly, that any denomination may spring from its teachings. Without entering into a discussion to show the untenableness of the assertion, or delaying to point out that some denominations do not depend upon the Bible for their dogmas, but rest them solely upon the authority of the church or upon human reason, we venture the assertion that from its teachings as a whole, but one church can arise. Whether the world has ever witnessed this since apostolic times, we gravely doubt, that it will yet be manifest we as sincerely believe, and we have our own conviction as to which of the various bodies approach the nearest to primitive Christianity. Whether we have recognized it or not, the Divine model for the conversion of the world is here clearly drawn. Perhaps it is so simple that human nature has instinctively turned from it. The diversity which is so manifest springs partly from a vulgar pride, which bankers after something more showy than the severe simplicity of the school of Jesus Christ—a simplicity pertaining to the doctrines on which the church must rest, the manner in which the church should be governed,—a simplicity which condemns all hierarchies, leaving all christian men on the level of common brotherhood,—which is absolutely repugnant to the gorgeous semi heathen temples so often consecrated to her service, by devotees decked out in the gaudy trappings of mountebanks,—which stands aghast at the religious jugglery which pretends to offer a sacrifice on account of sin. Partly also from an unwillingness, founded deep in our nature, to take the bare word of Jehovah, which turns inquiringly to Tradition, of which there is more among Protestants than some of us would readily admit; and partly from an almost universal tendency to strain and pervert God's Word to accommodate our notions.

We are perfectly aware that the statement is sometimes put forth that the different bodies are like the sections of an army, all with their distinctive colours, yet all ranged under one banner against the common enemy. It looks plausible and pretty,—but will hardly bear scrutiny. Which section is Roman Catholic.

ism? What position shall we ascribe to the Greek Church? Or, if you will not allow these as fair illustrations of the church militant, come forward a step, and ask yourselves, What part of the field you will assign to Episcopalianism, with its arrogant assumptions, its semi-infidel Broad Church notions, and its Popish sacramentalism? Or where will you place the ghostly shadow into which three hundred years ago, Luther infused so much of his sledge-hammer power? We will not go on to make individual comparisons; we but stop to say, that if these parties are God's church, we are not. No! no! We do not fight under the same banner, the actuating principles differ as light from darkness. They are contending for skeleton systems, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, we for truth pure and simple. Let the truth be apprehended and clearly taught that the New Testament knows of no kingly mandates, except that of king Jesus, of no authority of priest, pope, or president; of no church, except a body of baptized believers, with its own Bishop, voluntarily chosen as lovingly obeyed.

It may be, indeed, that the action of sects differing so widely is controlled by the Lord for the good of the world; and in as far as a crucified Saviour is set forth by any society all believers rejoice; but believers and angels alike would rejoice more abundantly, if in addition, first truth, the rest were as generally proclaimed; if thy converts were taught to observe "all things whatever Christ has announced."

It has been held a mark of juvenility to deplore sectarianism. What if it should be a token of servility to uphold it? Pardon our youthful audacity, brethren, and endeavor to look through young eyes, as we ask, Is it likely that the machinery for the carrying out of the stupendous enterprise of the Deity should have been left indefinite, without form or comeliness? God is not the author of confusion, who will assert that there is a shape to the fragmentary masses so hustled together? Upon what I ask, shall the glory of the Lord arise? Upon these heterogeneous elements? or upon a certain definitely beautiful ideal?— If we could detect it, there is a harmony of the universe, a harmony of proportion, a harmony of color, a harmony of sound.—Everything coming from the Divine will harmonize, surely, then, the Divine idea of the Church. It seems to me, my brethren, that sectarianism as such can find no favor in His sight, who were the seamless garment,—although in mercy he overlooks and overrules it, and as from some other evils educes good. The day is drawing on, when the Divine ideal shall be seen, the resplendent image of the heavenly kingdom. "Who is this that looketh forth as morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?"— There it stands, in all its simplicity and sternness, relaxing no demand, making no concession, yet inviting all to conform. When all agree to make their appeal solely to the Bible for every doctrine and every usage, Christianity will exhibit more oneness, who shall say not the oneness prayed for by our blessed Master?— The records of the day show us that the assimilating process is going on,—that the heaven is doing its work. May we be found with hearts alive to the exigencies of the times, and tongues touched to speak the truth of God. Meantime the onus of schism, must rest upon those who have separated themselves from the simplicity that is in Christ.

In all which underlies and relates to salvation the Bible is superlatively clear.

The idea of sin must come before that of salvation; the doctrine of human transgression and guilt must be apprehended before a Saviour can be welcomed. This is the long lesson of the Old Testament. Man's sin which he is ever slow to recognize, was brought before the Jews after a long novitiate, and is characterized by the strongest of terms: "a horrible thing" "abominable iniquity," "the abominable thing that I hate," "sin. . . . exceeding sinful." God's lamp strews its rays on sin, and reveals its hideous deformity, manifests it as that evil which necessitated the thoughtful planning of the Deity,—which involved so tremendous a sacrifice. The escape from its penalty, salvation from sin, is the burden of the whole, the theme of Moses and the prophets and the psalms, no less than of