



SUNDAY READING

WHAT MEANS THIS SYMBOL?

The Cross Once a Mark of Shame, but Now of Glory and Honor.

Singular as is the fact that the greatest religious revolution known to history should have been brought about by a humble member of one of the least powerful and the least esteemed of the ancient nations, there is something far more singular to be considered.

As we look up towards the summits of many churches we notice that they are surmounted by a cross. This symbol appears on the altars of ten thousand times ten thousand churches through the length and breadth of Christendom. It is emblazoned on the banner of the conqueror. It is worn on the breasts of emperors and kings. It is signed on the forehead of the child at its baptism. It is the last object on which the eye of many a weary sufferer has fastened, before they finally closed in death. It is found alike on countless gravestones in village churchyards, and on stately monuments in the cathedrals of Christendom.

What is this symbol? There is but one answer to the question. It is the instrument of a slave's death, and of a murderer's punishment. It was once looked upon with the profoundest horror, and was closely connected with "ideas of pain, of guilt, of ignominy." It was the instrument of crucifixion, a punishment once in use amongst the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Persians, Assyrians, and very frequent from the earliest times amongst the Greeks and Romans. It is universally considered the most horrible form of death, worse even than burning. The Romans reserved it specially for slaves, and exemption from it was the privilege of every citizen of the Republic and the Empire. The profound horror with which it was regarded is strikingly expressed by the great Roman orator Cicero, when he says, "Let the very name of the cross be absent not only from the bodies of Roman citizens, but also from their thoughts, their eyes, their ears."

But why is the symbol of such a degrading death to be found on churches? How is it connected with the author of this great religious revolution? For an answer I will appeal not to any Christian writer, but to a classical historian, whose testimony is universally regarded as absolutely trustworthy. Any facts he records regarding Augustus, Tiberius, Nero, or Domitian, are accepted without dispute. We turn then to the 44th chapter of the xvth Book of the "Annals" of Tacitus. He is describing the burning of Rome in the reign of Nero, and the popular belief that it was due to the Emperor himself. "To get rid of the report," he says, "Nero fastened the guilt, and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, and called by the populace Christians. Christ, from whom this new sect had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius, at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus. No one will dispute the identity of the "Christus" here spoken of with the founder of the Christian Faith, or will deny that the expression "suffered the extreme penalty," denotes His submission to crucifixion, and His death thereby.

When, then, did the symbol begin to attract to itself associations of honor and glory? When did men begin to lay aside the ideas of shame and horror, which had ever been connected with it? The reply is that it began within so short a period as fifty days after that death of ignominy took place, which Tacitus speaks of as an undoubted fact. The writers of the Acts of the Apostles tell us that on the day of Pentecost, one of the disciples of the Crucified was not ashamed to proclaim the fact of that crucifixion, and to connect with it ideas of deliverance and redemption—redemption from sin. Thirty years afterwards another disciple speaks of the Cross and of Him who suffered upon it as "the power of God and the wisdom of God." Nay, he declares himself determined not "to know anything, save Jesus Christ and him crucified." And though he had given up everything that makes life dear for the sake of his crucified Lord and had cut himself off from every tie of family, kindred and nationality, yet he gloried in this, and counted the surrender he had made as nothing, if only he might learn to love, adore, and follow the example of Him, who died the death of the malefactor and the slave.

If this was a single instance of loyalty and devotion to a crucified provincial of the Roman empire, the fact would be marvellous beyond all words. But so far from standing alone, the incident was but the beginning of many hundreds of the same kind. Thousands were found willing to follow in the steps of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, and to be ready to endure anything rather than deny Him, who died on His Cross of pain. Rather than to be false to Him, the aged Ignatius could endure to be thrown to the amphitheatre at Rome. Nay, old men like Pothinus, and young maidens like Blandina, and mere boys like St. Pancrasius could cheerfully, nay triumphantly, submit to the keenest torture, and calmly await in the amphitheatre the fatal leap of the lion or the tiger. It cannot be denied that their persecutors did their worst. They resorted to the utmost refinements of torture. They wearied themselves with inventing new forms of cruelty. But it was all in vain. "The fagots wherewith we are burned, and the stakes to which we are tied," cried Tertullian, "these are our robes of victory, our triumphal chariot." And yet terrible as it was, their end presented to these sufferers nothing gloomy or distressing. It was associated with no idea but those of joy and victory. The subjects inscribed on the catacombs of Rome represent what is peaceful and pleasing. The Good Shepherd, the Dove the Vine,

the Lamb, these are the favorite emblems. "There is no sign of mourning, no token of resentment, no expression of vengeance." All breathes innocence and resignation.

Such was the constancy of the martyrs. And what was the result? The answer is that the persecution had to be given up. Rome found she had to do with "a host of Scovolas," and at length, after his vision at the battle of the Milvian Bridge, Constantine ordered his friends to make a crown of gold and gems, and the once hateful symbol of the death of the malefactor and the slave was emblazoned on the banner of the conqueror, and was inscribed on the shields and helmets of the legions. Thus did "the proudest of earthly sovereignties, arrayed in the completest of material resources," humble herself before a Faith whose ensign was a Cross of shame.

Professor Freeman, the historian, has declared the conversion of Constantine to be an event "greater than dried-up seas and cloven rocks." But if this was so, it must have had some great cause. It could not have stood isolated and alone, without any connection with the past. Something very strong and irresistible must have induced the conqueror to banish the eagle and substitute the cross upon his banners. "Nature," it has been said, "abhors a vacuum." But is not this true of history also? In uplifting, then, the cross to the summit of her towers every church and cathedral bearing it confronts us with a question which demands an answer. How comes it to pass that the symbol of the most cruel death the Roman could inflict on the lowest criminal has come to be associated with ideas of triumph and victory? What has transmuted its shame, and transformed it into an object of universal and instinctive reverence? Every heart where faith has found its home can give the answer.—Adapted from Dr. Macleair's "The Church Fabric."

THE CROSS IN ITS INFAMY.

Powerful Picture of it Before the Time When it Was Glorified.
Here is a powerful, but terrible, picture of the cross, as seen by Onesimus in "Darkness and Dawn." It reminds one of two kindred pictures—that of George Eliot, when in Adam Bede she writes of coming across the image of a great agony, and that of Walter Besant when he pictures the multitudes going past and pursuing their usual talk underneath the same terrible reality.

The cross, accused of God and man, the gibbet of the malefactor, the infamy of the slave, confronting the eye of heaven with a sight which, no less than that of the Thyestean banquet, upon it, might have made the sun itself turn dark; and there, upon it, a mass of living agony, conscious and burning with thirst, and blinded with glare, and unpitied, and burdened with an awful load of guilt, hung the human victim who had once played an innocent child beside his mother's knee. The soul of Onesimus was harrowed as he gazed on that awful insult to humanity. The existence of crucifixion showed how far the shadow had advanced on the dial-plate of Rome's history. That form of punishment—so cynical, so ruthless, so abhorrent, which less than three centuries later was to be abolished by the indignation of mankind—had been not indigenous in the Western world. It had only been borrowed by Rome, in the days of her commencing corruption, from the dark and cruel East. That such a spectacle should be permitted to the gaze of women and children, that it should inure the hearts of the callosity of hardened hearts, was in itself a token of degeneracy.

The heart of Onesimus was full, even to bursting, as he saw that fearful instrument of inhuman vengeance standing there by the roadside among the darting lizards and chirping cicadas and murmuring bees; and the goats stared at it with glassy eyes as they cropped the luxuriant grass at the very feet of the victim in whom the majestic idea of mankind was thus horribly laughed to scorn.

Messages of Help for the Week.

Sunday.—Psalm, 100: 4, 5: "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations."

Monday.—Proverbs, 28: 9: "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination."

Tuesday.—Isaiah, 66: 13, 14: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and when ye see this your heart shall rejoice."

Wednesday.—Isaiah, 34: 16, 17: "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles."

Thursday.—John, 20: 9: "For as yet they knew not the scripture." Friday.—Romans, 13: 1, 2: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: Who-soever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."

Saturday.—Rev., 3: 19, 21: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous, therefore, and repent. Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

The next Lambeth conference is arranged by the Archbishop of Canterbury to take place in 1897. The first of these gatherings was in 1857, when seventy-six bishops met at Lambeth. In 1878 a second conference, with 100 bishops, was held. In 1888 145 bishops attended.

NEWS AND NOTABILLA.

The famous cathedral at Vienna is now lighted with electric arc lights.

About 450 of the 1,961 magazines in the United Kingdom are religious publications.

A new sect that has sprung up in Russia holds that hair is sinful, and that bald-headedness is the mark of sanctity.

At the Moody and Sankey revival services in Baltimore over fifteen hundred have signed cards expressing a desire to become christians.

The Ministering Children's League reports over three hundred and thirty branches in the United States. New York State has fifty-five.

The Jewish institutions of New York will be represented at the World's Fair by photographs of each institution and bound volumes of all reports.

The Home Mission Board of the Presbyterian church in the United States hopes to close the year ending March 31 free from debt. Last year the debt was \$67,000.

An inmate of an Armenian convent has recently died after being 98 years, without once going outside the convent walls. Her recorded age was 115 years.

Referring to the assignment of Dr. Briggs to teach systematic theology, the Canadian Presbyterian says: "Unit Seminary seems determined to heap insult upon the Presbyterian Church."

Pope Leo XIII. owns a pearl, left to him by his predecessor on the throne of St. Peter, which is worth \$100,000, and the chain of thirty-two pearls owned by the Empress Frederick is estimated at \$35,000.

E. W. Gorton, Young Men's Christian Association provincial secretary for the maritime provinces, is being considered for the secretaryship of the local Committee for Organization of Evangelical Associations.

Mr. Arnold White estimates that £6,000,000 is every year given by the public to London charities, which is equivalent to 5s. a week for 48 weeks in the year to 500,000 people. He thinks that private benefactions amount to about twice that sum, making the grand total nearly £20,000,000.

The late H. G. Onderdonk, brother of the Methodist bishops of New York and Pennsylvania, left between \$3,000,000 and \$3,500,000. But these are the conditions of inheritance: No heir must be an idler, sluggard, spendthrift, profligate, drunkard, gambler; use liquors or tobacco; go hunting or fishing on Sundays; attend races; neglect to rise, breakfast, and be ready for business by nine o'clock a. m.; or get married before he or she is twenty-five.

Lady Wolverton, the towness of the English Needlework Guild, started that remarkable organization when lying on a sick bed. Her ladyship used to beguile the weary hours by making articles of clothing for the poor people of her village. One winter, owing to severe weather and much illness, far more clothing was wanted than her needle could produce, and she then thought herself of forming a guild of all the ladies in Dorsetshire who would undertake to make a certain number of garments during the year. From Dorsetshire the guild rapidly spread through the country.

It is the custom of the Methodist House of Bishops in the United States to delegate one of its members every two years to visit the churches, missions and schools of the denomination in the continent to the south. Besides this supervision the object of the visitation is to inquire into the condition of the members of the church and especially that of the clergy. Bishop Newman, this year's delegate, is an old traveller, and his experience will make his trip one of more than usual interest, as he intends to study the general and political condition of the South American countries through which he will pass.

Rev. J. H. Garrison, editor of the St. Louis Christian Evangelist, met Dr. Briggs at Ann Arbor and questioned him as to the reported secession in the Presbyterian Church. Here is a part of Dr. Briggs' reply as it appeared in the Evangelist of March 2: "Oh, I shall be defeated I think. I have no hope to the contrary. The West and the South are against me, and Pennsylvania will send an almost solid delegation against me. So far as I can now see it will result in a division of the Presbyterian Church. It is only a question of how large a part of the church will go with me."

The population of the world is estimated at 1,456 millions: Protestants are put down at 160,000,000, Catholics at 210,000,000, or including the members of the Greek church at 300,000,000—so that 450,000,000, or nearly one-third of the people on the globe, are nominally christians. Of 1,006,000,000 people who are non-christians, the Buddhists head the list, with 500,000,000; the Mohammedans next, with 200,000,000; the heathen for 126,000,000; and the Jews come last, with 8,000,000. These figures, however are only, of course, approximations.

In 1876 the St. James Episcopal church was founded in Denver and the parishioners scraped together \$7,000, of which \$2,500 was spent in buying a lot and the other \$4,500 on the church building. The lot was then far from the business part of the city and was 400 feet square. Two years ago the St. James parishioners, most of whom have become wealthy since they first met for worship in the little \$4,500 church, sold the original church lot for \$475,000, built a \$150,000 church on another lot, paid \$275,000 for the lot and now have \$50,000 clear profit in bank for mission work.

Sunday is the clergyman's working day and Monday is his day of rest. In New England cities it is common for the ministers of the town and its neighborhood to assemble at convenient points, usually the publishing houses or mission centres of their respective denominations, and to spend some hours in the discussion of topics not always religious. They dine in little groups at a good restaurant, and, in concert or a theatre in the evening. This pleasant custom had its origin in Boston, and probably no performance has been given at the Boston Museum on Monday night in forty years when clergymen did not form a part of the audience.

"IF THINE ENEMY THIRST."

The Story of the Christ-Like Act of a Brave Young Hero.

The "Well-Spring" tells the following story of a real hero who wore the gray of the Secessionists during the United States civil war:

The day after the battle of Fredericksburg, Kershaw's brigade occupied Mary's Hill, and Sykes' division lay 150 yards ahead, with a stone wall between the two forces. The intervening space between Sykes' men and the stone wall was strewn with dead, dying, and wounded Union soldiers, victims of the battle of the day before. The air was rent with their groans and agonizing cries of "Water! water!"

"General," said a boy-sergeant in gray, "I can't stand this."

"What is the matter, sergeant?" asked the General.

"I can't stand hearing those wounded Yankees crying for water; may I go and give them some?"

"Kirkland," said the General, "the moment you step over the wall, you'll get a bullet through your head; the skirmishing has been murderous all day."

"If you'll let me, I'll try it."

"My boy, I ought not to let you run such a risk, but I cannot refuse. God protect you! You may go."

"Thank you, sir," and with a smile on his bright handsome face, the boy-sergeant sprang away over the wall, down among the sufferers, pouring the blessed water down their parched throats. After the first few bullets, his Christ-like errand became understood, and shouts instead of bullets rent the air.

He came back at night to his bivouac, untouched.

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Representations of the Crucifixion.

Besides the Psalter of St. John's College, Cambridge, there are two other Irish MSS. of the Gospels containing miniatures of the crucifixion abroad—one at St. Gall, in Switzerland, and the other at Wurtzburg, in Bavaria, both belonging to that glorious period of the eighth and ninth centuries. The number of figures and general treatment of the crucifixion in the St. Gall Gospels correspond very nearly with that in the St. John's College Psalter, except that there is no winged creature above the head of the Saviour, and the two angels carry books. The most interesting feature in the picture is a wavy line of red ink proceeding from the wound in our Lord's side, and entering the eye of the soldier with the spear. The meaning of this is explained by the legend which identifies the soldier with the spear with the Centurion who bore witness to the Divinity of our Saviour, and relates that he struck him through inadvertence, being blind, his sight being afterwards miraculously restored by the blood from the wound falling upon his eye. The name of the soldier with the spear is given in the Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus as Longinus, and the name of the soldier with the sponge is traditionally known to have been Stephanaton. Upon an ivory plaque of the crucifixion of the tenth century in the Kunst Kammer at Berlin both names are inscribed above the heads of the soldiers.—Magazine of Art.

Be Truthful.

When required of you to speak, The truth, you always seek; That it you may unfold, And thus integrity uphold.

Then you will more perfect grow And unto the world will show The way of truth is best, For by it man is blessed.

God's the source of all truth, And those who begin in youth On it truly to depend, God will them ever defend.

Those who speak the truth, From early days of youth, Will make a foundation sure, Which will success secure—

And be in high positions placed When the untruthful are debased; The ways of truth are ever sure, And will from age to age endure.

At all times truthful be, Then soon the world will see You seek to do the right, Being noble in their sight—

Their confidence in you will place As the worthy of our race; People will you reverence show, Respected be wher'er you go.

Shediac, N. B., Feb. 1893.

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