

## The Pulpit.

## LAODICEA.

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D. D.

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot... be zealous therefore and repent."—Rev. iii. 15-19.

We learn from Paul's Epistle to the Colossians that there was a very close connection between that church and this at Laodicea. It is a probable conjecture that a certain Archippus, who is spoken of in the former Epistle, was the bishop or pastor of the Laodicean church. And if, as seems not unlikely, the "angels" of these Asiatic churches were the presiding officers of the same, then it is at least within the limits of possibility that the "angel of the church at Laodicea," who received the letter was Archippus.

The message that was sent to Archippus by Paul was this: "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received of the Lord, that thou fulfil it." And if thirty years had passed, and then Archippus got this message: "Thou art neither cold nor hot," you have an example of how a little negligence in manifest duty on the part of a Christian man may gradually grow and spread, like a malignant cancer, until it has eaten all the life out of him, and left him a mere shell. The lesson is for us all.

But whether we see an individual application in these words or no, certainly the "angel of the church" is spoken of in his character of a representative of the whole church. So then, this Laodicean community had no works. So far had declension gone that even Christ's eye could see no sign of the operation of the religious principle in it; and all that he could say about it was, "thou art neither cold nor hot."

It is very remarkable that the first and the last of letters to the seven churches deal with the same phase of religious declension, only that the one is the germ and the other is fully developed. The church of Ephesus had still works abundant, receiving and deserving the warm-hearted commendation of the Master, but they had left their first love. The church at Laodicea had no works, and in it the disease had sadly, and all but universally, spread.

Now then, dear friends, I intend this morning, not in the way of rebuke, God knows, but in the way of earnest remonstrance and appeal to you professing Christians, to draw some lessons from these solemn words.

I pray you to look at the loving rebuke of the faithful witness. "Thou art neither cold nor hot."

We are manifestly there in the region of emotion. The metaphor applies to feeling. We talk, for instance, about warmth of feeling, ardour of affection, fervour of love, and the like. And the opposite, cold, expresses obviously the absence of any glow of a true living emotion.

So, then, the persons thus described are Christian people (for their Christianity is pre-supposed), with very little, though a little warmth of affection and glow of Christian love and consecration.

Further, this defectiveness of Christian feeling is accompanied with a large amount of self-complacency: "Thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Of course it is so. A numbed limb feels no pain. As cold increases, the sensation of cold, and of everything else goes away. And a sure mark of defective religious emotion is absolute unconsciousness on the man's part that there is anything the matter with him. All of you that have no sense that the indictment applies to you, by the very fact show that it applies most especially and most tragically to you. Self-complacency diagnoses spiritual cold, and is an inevitable and a constantly accompanying symptom of a deficiency of religious emotion.

Then again, this deficiency of warmth is worse than absolute zero. "I would thou wert hot or cold." That is no spur of impatience on the part of the true witness. It is for their sake that he would they were cold or hot. And why? Because there is no man more hopeless than a man to whom the power of Christianity has been brought to bear, and has failed in warming and quickening him. If you were cold, at absolute zero, there would be at least a possibility that when you were brought in contact with the warmth, you might kindle. But you have been brought in contact with the warmth, and this is the effect. Then what is to be done with you? There is nothing more that can be brought to bear on your consciousness to make you anything higher or better than you are, than what you have already had in operation in your spiritual life. And if it has failed, all God's armory is empty, and he has shot his last bolt, and there is nothing more left. "I would thou wert cold or hot."

Now, my dear friends, is that our condition? I am obliged sadly to say that I believe it is to a fearful extent the condition of professing Christendom to-day. "Neither cold nor hot!" Look at the standard of Christian life round about us. Let us look into our own hearts. Let us mark how wavering the line is between the church and the world; how little upon our side of the line there is of conspicuous consecration and unworldliness: how entirely in regard of an enormous mass of professing Christians, the maxims that are common in the world are their maxims; and the sort of life that the world lives is the sort of life that they live. "Oh! thou who art named the house of Israel," as one of the old prophets wailed out, "is the spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these his doings?" And so I would say, look at your churches and mark their feebleness, the slow progress of the Gospel among them, the low lives that the bulk of us professing Christians are living, and answer the question, is that the operation of a divine Spirit that comes to transform and to quicken everything into his own vivid and flaming life. Or is it the operation of our own selfishness and worldliness crushing down and hemming in the power that ought to away! Brethren, it is not for me to cast condemnation, but it is for each of us to ask ourselves the question: Do we not hear the voice of the "faithful and true Witness" saying to us, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot."

II. And now will you let me say a word next as to some of the plain causes of this lukewarmness of spiritual life.

Of course the tendency to it is in us all. Take a bar of iron out of the furnace on a winter day, and lay it down in the air, and there is nothing more wanted. Leave it there, and very soon the white heat will change into livid dullness, and then there will come a scale over it, and in a short time it will be as cold as the frosty atmosphere around it. And so there is always a refrigerating process acting upon us, which needs to be counteracted by continual contact with the fiery furnace of spiritual warmth, or else we are cooled down to the degree of cold around us. But besides this universal operating cause there are many others which affect us.

Laodicea was a great commercial city, an emporium of trade, which gives especial point and appropriateness to the loving counsel of the context. "I advise thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire." And Manchester life, with its anxieties, with its perplexities for many of you to day, with its diminished profits, and apparently diminishing trade, is a fearful foe to the warmth and reality of your Christian life. "The cares of this world, and the riches of this world are both amongst the thorns which choke the word and make it unfruitful. I find fault with no man for the earnestness which he flings into his business, but I ask you to contrast this entire absorption of spirit, and the willing devotion of hours and strength to it, with the grudging and the partial, and the transient devotion of ourselves to the religious life; and say whether the relative importance of the things seen and unseen is fairly represented by the amount of earnestness with which you and I pursue these respectively.

Then, again, the existence among us, or around us, of a certain widely diffused doubt as to the truths of Christianity is, illogically enough, a cause far diminished fervor on the part of the men that do not doubt them. That is foolish, and it is strange, but it is true. It is very hard for us, when so many people round about us are denying, or at least are questioning, the verities which we have been taught to believe, to keep the freshness and the fervour of our devotion to these; just as it is very difficult for a man to keep up the warmth of his body in the midst of some creeping mist that enwraps everything. So with us, the presence, in the atmosphere of doubt, depresses the vitality and the vigor of the Christian church where it does not intensify its faith, and make it cleave more desperately to the things that are questioned. Beware, then, of unreasonably yielding so far to the influence of prevailing unbelief as to make you grasp with a slacker hand the thing which you do not say that you doubt.

And there is another case, which I name with some hesitation, but which yet seems to me to be worthy of notice; and that is, the increasing degree to which Christian men are occupied with what we call, for want of a better name, secular things. The leaders in the political world, on both sides, in our great commercial cities, are usually professing Christians. I am the last man to find fault with any Christian man for casting himself, so far as his opportunities allow, into the current of political life, if he will take his Christianity with him, and if he will take care that he does not become

a great deal more interested in elections, and in pulling the strings of a party, and in working for the cause, than he is in working for his Master. I grudge the political world nothing that it gets of your strength, but I do grudge, for your sakes as well as for the church's sake, that so often the two forms of activity are supposed by professing Christians to be incompatible, and that therefore the more important is neglected, and the less in portance done. Suffer the word of exhortation.

And, in like manner, literature and art, and the ordinary objects of interest on the part of men who have no religion, are coming to absorb a great deal of our earnestness and our energy. I would not withdraw one iota of the culture that now prevails largely in the Christian Church. All that I plead for, dear brethren, is this, "Ye are the salt of the earth." Go where you like, and fling yourselves into all manner of interests and occupations, only carry your Master with you. And remember that if you are not salting the world, the world is putrefying you.

There I think you have some, though it be an imperfect, account of the cause which operates to lower the temperature of the Christian church in general, and of this Christian church, and of you as individual members of it.

III. Now, further note the loving call here to deepened earnestness.

"Be zealous, therefore." The word translated, and rightly translated, zealous means literally boiling with heat. It is an exhortation to fervor. Now, there is no worse thing in all this world than for a man to try to work up emotion, nothing which is so sure, sooner or later, to come to mischief, sure to breed hypocrisy and all manner of evil. If there be anything that is worse than trying to work up emotion, it is attempting to pretend it. So when our Master here says to us, "Be zealous, therefore," we must remember that zeal in a man ought to be a consequence of knowledge; and that, seeing that we are reasonable creatures, intended to be guided by our understandings, it is an upsetting of the whole constitution of a man's nature if his heart works independently of his head. And the only way in which we can safely and wholesomely increase our zeal is by increasing our grasp of the truths which feed it.

Thus the exhortation, "Be zealous," if we come to analyze it, and to look into its basis, is this—Lay hold upon, and meditate upon, the great truths that will make your heart glow. Notice that this exhortation is a consequence, "Be zealous, therefore," and repent. Therefore, and what precedes? A whole series of considerations—such as these, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire... and white raiment... and anoint thine eyes with eye salve." That is to say, Lay hold of the truth that Christ possesses a full store of all that you can want. Meditate on that great truth and it will kindle a flame of desire and of fruition in your hearts. "Be zealous, therefore." And again, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." "Be zealous, therefore." That is to say, grasp the great thought of the loving Christ, all Whose dealings, even when His voice assumes severity, and His hand comes armed with a rod, are the outcome and manifestation of His love; and sink into that love, and that will make your heart glow. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." "Be zealous, therefore." Think of the earnest, patient, long-suffering appeal which the Master makes, bearing with all our weaknesses and our short comings, and not suffering his gentle hand to be turned away, though the door has been so long barred and bolted in his face. And let these sweet thoughts of a Christ all Whose dealings are love, of a Christ Who pleads with us through the barred door, and tries to get us through the obstacles which ourselves have fastened against him, let them draw us to him, and kindle and keep alight a brighter flame of consecration and of devotion in our hearts to him. "Be zealous." Feed upon the great truths of the Gospel which kindles zeal.

Brethren, the utmost warmth is reasonable in religion. If Christianity be true, there is no measure of ardour or of consecration which is beyond the reasonable requirements of the case. We are told that a "sober standard of feeling in matters of religion" is the great thing to aim at. So I say. But I would differ, perhaps, with the people that are fond of saying so, in my definition of sobriety. A sober standard is a standard of feeling in which the feeling does not outrun the facts on which it is built. Enthusiasm is disproportionate or ignorant feeling; warmth without light. A sober, reasonable feeling is the emotion which is correspondent to the truths that evoke it. And will any man tell me that any amount of earnestness, of flaming consecration, of fiery

zeal, is in advance of the great truths that Christ loves me, and has given himself for me?

IV. And now, lastly, observe the merciful call to a new beginning: "Repent."

There must be a lowly consciousness of sin, a clear vision of my past shortcomings, an abhorrence of these, and, joined with that, a resolute act of mind and heart beginning a new course, a change of purpose and of the current of my being.

Repentance is sorrow for the past, blended with a resolve to paste down the old leaf and begin a new writing on a new page. Christian men have need of these fresh beginnings, and of new repentance, even as the patriarch when he came up from Egypt went to the place where "he built the altar at the first," and there offered sacrifice. Do not you be ashamed, Christian men and women, if you have been living low and inconsistent Christian lives in the past, to make a new beginning and to break with that past. There was never any great outburst of life in a Christian church which was not preceded by a lowly penitence. And there is never any penitence worth naming which is not preceded by a recognition, glad, rapturous, confident as self-consciousness, of Christ's great and infinite love to me.

Oh! if there is one thing that we want more than another to-day, it is that the fiery Spirit shall come and baptize all the churches, and us as individual members of it. What was it that finished the infidelity of the last century? Was it Paley and Butler, with their demonstrations and their books? No! it was John Wesley and Whitfield. Here is a solution, full of microscopic germs that will putrefy. Expose it to heat, raise the temperature, and you will kill all the germs, so that you may keep it for a hundred years, and there will be no putrefaction in it. Get the temperature of the church up, and all the evils that are eating out its life will shrivel and drop to the bottom dead. They cannot live in the heat; cold is their region.

So, dear brethren, let us get near to Christ's love until the light of it shines in our own faces. Let us get near to Christ's love until, like coal laid upon the fire, its fervors penetrate into our substance and change even our blackness into ruddy flame. Let us get nearer to the love, and then, though the world may laugh and say, "He hath a devil and is mad," they that see more clearly will say of us: "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten him up," and the Father will say even concerning us: "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."

## A WORD TO THE WEARY.

In times of social agitation, when unrest of soul is clearly depicted in many an anxious countenance, a single word of tender interest may afford unspeakable comfort. To speak such a word costs but little—rather it ensures a holy reaction of love to the soul that thus delivers Christ's message. And this comfort that accrues to ourselves is usually enhanced whenever the effort is made in behalf of those who are uncongenial in their natural tastes, or who have little in common with us in their ordinary modes of thinking and acting—such effort as we must believe Jesus made when He gave himself without reserve to the welfare of others. He entered upon His incarnate life, not to find the fellowships of congenial hearts, but to seek and save them that were lost. His chosen alliances were made with those who were poor, needy, and despised. Not many mighty were called by Him. The words which He spoke carried in every syllable tenderness and sympathy for the weak and bearing soul.

O, that we all may in this respect follow our blessed Lord. This method cost Him suffering. His perfect humanity must have felt the loss of congenial intimacies. "It behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren," in His preference for society whose elevated tendencies corresponded with His own immaculate nature. But all this He could forego that He might accomplish His mission.

Viewed in the true light, to speak a word to the weary costs but little, and is sure to have its reward—though, like our Master it may subject us to self-denial, even suffering. Who can hesitate to take up his cross and follow Christ? He who, for the joy that was set before him, endured His cross, beckons forward to like suffering, ending in certain reward.

## THE TONIC OF TRUST.

When our Divine Master says to us, "Cast your care on me," he does not release us from legitimate duty or the joy of doing it. He aims to take the needless tire out of us by taking sinful anxiety out of our hearts, and putting the tonic of trust into its place. This glorious doctrine of trust is a wonderfully restful one to the overloaded. For let

us remind ourselves again that it is not honest work that usually breaks God's children down. Workstrengthens sinew, promotes appetite and induces wholesome sleep. The ague fit of worry consumes strength, disorders the nerves, and banishes sweet, refreshing slumber.

A life consecrated to Christ, that oils all its joints with cheerful faith and tones its blood with the iron of its promises, never grows pale in the cheek or crippled in its gait. Look at that glorious old giant of Jesus Christ who drew the gospel chariot from Jerusalem to Rome, and had the "care of all the churches" on his big heart. He never complained of being tired. He never chafed his limbs with the shackles of doubt, or loaded one extra ounce of godless anxiety on his brawny shoulders, and so he marched on to glory shouting. Knowing whom he believed, he was only solicitous to do his Master's will and finish his Master's work; he knew that his strength would be equal to his day, until he had won the everlasting crown.

Lean on Jesus, and he will rest you. Labor for Jesus, and he will bless you. Live for Jesus, and your soul shall mount up as on an eagle's wing; you shall run and never weary, you shall walk arm in arm with him and never fail.

"Tired? No, not tired! While leaning on his breast My soul hath full enjoyment Of his eternal rest."

## A POSE.

The Rev. Mr. Osborn, in a speech in England, said: "Allusion has been made to the progress of infidelity in these times. Some of the lecturers occasionally meet with their match. Some time since I heard of a man who went down to Lancashire or Yorkshire, and delivered a lecture on evolution or development. He endeavored to show that every form of excellence was developed from some inferior species of the same genus, and to account for the existence of man in the same way. He said: 'You go and stand by the side of a pool of water perfectly bright, pure, and clear; go a little while after, and you will find it getting thick; go again and it will be green and putrid; go again, and there will be a number of little creatures popping about in the form of tadpoles; go again, and you will see these tadpoles cutting their capers in shape of frogs.' By this time he had got as far as he could, and he did as persons sometimes do when they do not know what else to do; he said, 'And so on.' Whereupon a man in the audience got up and said: 'Yes, I think I see what you mean; but can you tell us how long we should have to stand by the pond before we should see a man pop up?'

## A MATTER OF HEART FIRST.

Though we cannot enter into the metaphysics of redemption, we can enter into the experience of it. It passes the understanding, but it satisfies the heart, and in experimental religion gives the zeal and assurance intellect could never give. If you wait till dialectics make it clear, you may wait till eternity. The poorest understanding may be the first to get peace; that is why high and low, learned and simple, are all the same in Christ's Kingdom. Some of you may be thankful for quiet understandings that do not trouble you: pride of intellect keeps many a man from living in peace. Nevertheless, the understanding is not kept idle; it has work enough to do yet. It has to tell us whence we have this peace, who brings it, what endangers it and what work it must do. That gives it ample work for a lifetime; let us have none of the arguments to defend religion from the pulpit, let us have less apologetic preaching so long as the hearers remain what they are, poor wretches torn to the earth by evil tempers, bad passions and unhappy homes. If you remember that, you will have a fruitful ministry.

## AGAINST THREE HAVE I SINNED.

It is to be regretted that sin is so seldom regarded as something against God. Not thus was it with David. "Against thee, and thee only, have I sinned," was his penitential cry. This is the view of sin, and the only view, that will lead to salvation. Our misdeeds may result in discomfort to others; they may bring bitter penalties upon ourselves in the loss of self-respect or in forfeiting the confidence of our friends. But sorrow from such considerations is not sufficient. It is only when we see how we have sinned our best friend, our most loving Father, that we come to any just measurement of the turpitude of our transgressions.—Bap. Weekly.

All this magnificent engineering of modern civilization is, when taken by itself, as impotent to rescue man from sin and guilt as the rudest barbarism that ever degraded humanity.—Dr. P. S. Henson.

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