

BACK TO THE FORSAKEN ALTARS

It has become quite popular to assert that something is vitally wrong with the Cause we religionists represent. Which isn't true of course; the trouble is with us, since we forsook the Cause of vital Christian living when we became too listless and indifferent and wayward to be controlled by its influence.

The great need of a revival of religion among professed Christian people has been recognized by religious leaders and is emphasized in the recent country-wide "preaching mission." Fears are felt that there is something lacking in Church life; that its adherents are drifting away into a spiritual "far country."

May not this condition come from lack of spiritual nourishment? Are we not left heart-hungry for the very simple and understandable truths of the Saviour's redeeming love and of the sustaining presence of the Holy Spirit?

Frowned upon as "undignified" and "embarrassing" is any emotional expression of the soul's longing for God, which down through the ages since creation has prostrated sinners in sincere repentance, and has peopled heaven with Blood-washed hosts.

We Christians miss the warming, melting presentation of the love of Jesus that will make us rend our hearts in yearning for the saving companionship of our Master.

For some years the "altar call" has not been popular. Only here and there, such as the Salvation Army, do we find a religious body still stressing its penitent-form as the most important of all its functions. And what miracles of conversion are constantly performed at this blessed shrine, where sinners sob out their pleas for forgiveness and a new life at the feet of Jesus! Almost a million of them knelt at the Army's altar during the two years just passed.

Public grief for and confession of sin may not be dignified today; but it is still effective. Surely it must mean much when "emotional sorrow" for sin can impel men and women to make an altar out of a drumhead in the public thoroughfare, and, prostrated there, unmindful of the gaze of the curious and the skeptical, tearfully but joyfully hear a loving Saviour's blessed assurance: "Thy sins be forgiven thee."

The contrite sinner naturally turns to the altar of his God, which the blessed penitent-form of the Salvation Army, or the altar rail of the Church typifies to his weeping soul. He wants to kneel there before His Master. He looks at it as the one thing Jesus wants him to do. He won't feel satisfied until this is done.

Doesn't it seem in the present dilemma, that the old time religion should have another trial?

It takes something greater and warmer than science; something deeper and more moving than religious education; something more soul-stirring than a fixed ritual, to bring a hardened sinner to God.

Personally I am starved for the age-old heart-searching appeal from the pulpit that will send me home feeling more than ever my very deep need of God in complete surrender. I go expecting to be fed with spiritual food and am given a stone in the form of a dissertation on the news headlines of the week.

The biggest news of time is still Jesus Christ and His amazing power to change our

lives. It can well fill all the time allotted for a sermon.

John Wesley established the "altar call" and the "mourner's bench." From them millions of souls have joined the army of God.

William Booth was consecrated and sanctified at the penitent-form. As tears flowed there for his own sin, an Army of Salvation was commissioned of God that is combing the byways and slums of almost a hundred countries for the vilest of sinners—and what monuments of redeeming grace have been restored to an exemplary life through this agency!

Cartwright and Finney, Moody and Chapman, Sunday and Gypsy Smith and others like them, gathered at the altar rail countless thousands who are now among God's workers here or with the heavenly hosts.

Charles I. Scofield, a drunken lawyer, found his way to the altar rail, and while sorrow for sin flooded his face the peace of Christ overflowed his soul. Out of this converted drunkard came a wonderful new edition of the Bible, millions of copies of which are in use the world around; an outstanding Bible school in Philadelphia; and many years of pure Gospel preaching to great congregations, at whose altars innumerable souls were brought into the Kingdom.

Why discard something now that has so wondrously proved its worth through the years?

More than half of my life I was a drunken, unconscionable, offensive sinner, finally an outcast, repudiated by every one with any sense of decency, a hopeless, bestial habitue of the pest-holes of New York City.

Through the pleading of Salvationists—who, thank God, believed in and still believe in tearful sorrow for sin and prostration before the Saviour at the altar—I was born again to a life of sincere devotion to Him and to whole-souled gratuitous effort during twenty-six years to win others, who like myself, will never be won unless we, in love, lead them back to the altar of their God.

Dare I call for less "learned" preaching and more soulful pleading; less studied dignity and more melting intercession; less fear of human criticism or "embarrassment" and more sincere heed of Christ's commission to bring sinners back to Him?

Let us get back to the altars of our God—to the altar rails of His dedicated shrines, there to pour out our sorrow and penitence before Him, and cry with rejoicing—

"O my bleeding, loving Lord,
Thou breakest my heart of stone!"

—H. F. Milans in the War Cry

JESUS CHRIST AND AFRICANER

Lowell, Mass.

(E. Wayne Stahl)

"Who are you?"

These words were addressed one day years ago by a farmer in South Africa to a strange man walking toward the former's house.

"I am Robert Moffatt, the missionary," was the response.

The paleness of fear was on the farmer's face as he said:

"You are his ghost; you can't be Moffatt; he was murdered by Africaner some time ago. Don't you come a step nearer. Keep away!"

And the speaker moved backward in genu-

ine terror. He wanted to have no dealings with unearthly visitors.

"But I am Robert Moffatt. I couldn't be a ghost, and have hands with flesh and bones like these," and the stranger felt of his own hands.

Behind the frightened farmer, in the door of the house, stood his wife and children, wonder-stricken. The attempted demonstration with the hands was a failure, for he still gazed with alarm at the newcomer while he declared:

"Everybody says you were killed."

Finally forced by the witness of his eyes and ears to believe that it was no caller from the land of spirits before him, he compromised by saying:

"When did you arise from the dead?"

"Come down the hill with me to my wagon, and I will tell you about myself," replied the other.

As the two walked together to the great vehicle they talked together about Africaner, who, as the tiller of the soil had thought, was the missionary's murderer.

"Who was Africaner?" I hear you ask.

I would call him the negro Nero.

Nero, as some of you probably know, was the Roman emperor centuries ago so very wicked that his name has become another word for cruelty and crime. Fearfully he persecuted the people of God, and made himself a name at which even today the world shudders.

Africaner was not the head of an empire, but the chief of certain black folks in the Dark Continent. He has been called "The Hottentot Terror." He continually waged war, in inhuman fashion, with natives of Africa, in the region of the Orange River. "He was a terrible foe, feared by everybody, deaf to remonstrance and appeal. He stole cattle, he burned kraals, he took captives only to enslave those whom he did not destroy." He revelled in murder.

And like Nero he was a persecutor of Christians. He seemed the incarnation of evil and blood thirstiness. Governmental authorities would have set a price on his head, but they knew that it would be useless to do this, as there could be no one brave enough to encounter such a monster.

So Africaner continued on his way of assassination and torture. Into that part of Africa where he ruled with such ferocious sway had come a missionary from Scotland, Robert Moffatt. He heard of the awful chief, and thought, "Jesus Christ came to transform just such folks. I will go and tell him the story of Calvary."

When Moffatt's friends learned of this purpose they were astounded; mingled with their astonishment was alarm for the missionary. They felt it would mean nothing but death for him at the hands of the merciless man. They tried to persuade him not to carry out his plan, saying:

"Africaner will use your skin for making a drum; he will make a drinking cup of your skull."

Did Woflatt decide not to go? His heart was formed of more courageous stuff. He was armed so strongly with faith that these warnings passed by him as the idle wind, which he respected not. As quickly as possible he arrived in Africaner's country, the terrorized land.

(Continued next issue)