

Sunday Afternoon

The Suffering Messiah¹

By Lyman Abbott

Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?—Luke xxiv., 25, 26.

Christ had died; and with his death hope had died out of the heart of his disciples. They had grown gradually to believe that he was the Messiah who had come to redeem the nation; but to the very last they had expected some miraculous deliverance of this Messiah: even while the scribes and Pharisees tauntingly cried out, "He has saved others, himself he cannot save: let him descend from the cross, and we will believe in him," they expected that he would save himself, that he would descend from the cross and by some great miracle attest his divinity. They had heard the cry, It is finished; they had seen the head droop down upon the breast and the long hair fall over and veil it, and they thought that indeed all was finished; and all they could say afterward was, "We trusted this had been he who should have redeemed Israel." And so, with hope dead and love crucified, two of them walked in tears and darkness to Emmaus, when a stranger met and fell into conversation with them, and they told him this their despair, and this was his answer: You have not pondered well the Old Testament, your heart has not been quick to receive its lesson, you have been unpondering readers and slow in vision, else you would have known that the Messiah cannot deliver the world except through suffering, else you would know that it is necessary that the Messiah should suffer that he might enter into his glory. If they were indeed unpondering men and slow of heart, what shall we think of ourselves if, after all these centuries of Christ's revelation, we imagine that the suffering of Christ was a mere incident, a mere accident, a mere chance; that he came to teach the truth and set an example, and we are saved by the lesson of this teacher and by following in his footsteps, but that the suffering was merely an incident, that he happened on a wicked epoch, happened to stand face to face with designing men, and so died a cruel death, as other men have died cruel deaths, and that is all?

It was necessary that the Messiah should suffer: for the world is redeemed, not by teaching, though that helps, not by outward living, though that is valuable, but by life-giving; and life-giving always means suffering.

He could not have come into the world and not suffered, for the world is a world of suffering. The bird that flies far above the battle-scene and looks down upon the carnage does not enter into the battle-field. And if this Man had come and walked the earth, divinely sent, and no sorrow had entered his heart, and no tears had come to his eyes, he would not have known life at all. For we are born to sorrow, as the sparks fly upward, and no man enters into life that does not enter into sorrow. A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief! He would not have known man if he had not been a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. For sin and suffering combine to present to us the problem of our lives. How to meet them, sin assailing us with strong temptation or with cruel malice, suffering wounding us in our hopes and loves, by life and by death, at home and abroad—this is the chief problem of our lives. And an Exemplar would leave us without an example in that in which we need an example most if he were not a Sufferer. No one can say to the children of men, Follow me, if he always rests in green pastures and leads beside the still waters. He must also walk with us through the valley of the shadow of death.

Christ would have won no victory over sin if he had not suffered from sin. There can be no victory without battle, and no battle without pain. By submitting to the afflictions of sin he conquered sin. Sin is not truly conquered until it is driven out of the heart and out of the

life, and a new life put into the life and a new heart put into the heart. There is no conquering of sin except by saving the sinner from his sins. Christ did more to vanquish treachery by submitting to the treachery of Judas Iscariot than he ever could have done by averting or conquering it; and from that day to this not only has the name of Judas Iscariot been a hissing and a by-word, but the treachery that was in the heart of Judas Iscariot, whenever it has shown itself in friend against friend, in patriot against nation, in man against his fellow-man, has been the mark that Christ put upon it, by his quiet endurance of that treachery. He could not have been a Saviour from sin if he had not been a suffering Saviour. Sin lies in the will, and there is no conquering of sin until the will itself is changed.

Look for one moment how we treat sin, then how Christ did. We laugh at it. The little child raises its tiny fist and strikes at the mother, and the mother laughs. The drunkard goes reeling down the street, and the boys flock after him and laugh at him. We think sin funny. Oh, if we could realize the blackness of it! Fools and blind, that we ever see anything to laugh at in sin! Or we shut our eyes to it and go our way, seeking to banish it from our regions. The sins that are perpetrated in our circles we palliate, excuse, justify, entitle with mild names; and the sin we really count sinful we banish to the East Side, and we live on Fifth Avenue; and we think we have gotten rid of sin. Or we veil it with our careless optimism. We own that it exists, but we say that evil is but good in the making; we sleep our sleep, and say, Growth and time will cure all things; this slavery will die as the country grows larger and stronger: but it grows with our growth and strengthens with our strength, until at last it costs us blood. We look on corruption at the polls and say, It will die as the country grows larger and stronger; but it grows worse as the country grows larger and stronger. By and by sin rises up and strikes at us; we feel its blow, and then we laugh no longer, and we shut our eyes no longer, and we veil it no longer with a pleasing optimism. We are angry with it, we will punish it, and so we think to cure it by wrath and penalty. As though an angry punishing ever cured wrong or banished it from the world, or did aught but make it worse! Or perhaps we get far enough in our spiritual development to see that sin is sin, and try to cure it, but without suffering for it. The minister sits down in his comfortable study with pen in hand, to write a splendid sermon on the sinfulness of sin, and comes into the pulpit and reads his essay, and he expects that it will have some influence in banishing sin from the world. O fools and blind! Or a congregation of Christian people gather together in a luxurious church, with a beautiful choir to lead in their music, and eloquent speakers to fascinate with their words, and expect to overcome sin in the world by conventions and conferences and platforms and resolutions. O fools and blind! Hoping to cure sin without suffering for it! No! not by laughter, not by ignorance, not by optimism, not by wrath and punishment, not by unsuffering teaching, is the world ever to be redeemed. This missionary who looks across the ocean and sees ignorance and superstition, child-murder and wife-beating and all cruelty, and longs to do something to help, something to relieve, something to take the burden off from these people, and goes and plants himself in the midst of that population and takes the evil and burden upon his own soul—he has done something. This man who goes to the East Side, leaves his pleasant home and plants himself in the midst of an ignorant and unkempt population, chooses them for his guests, takes them into his life, receives them as his companions, makes of them his society, and bears the burden of their sin—he is doing something for the world's redemption. The mother who has tried talking, and talking has not done any good, who has tried serene living, and serene living has not done much, until at last the evil of her son enters like the iron into her soul, and she, alone and in her closet, agonizes and weeps and prays, and thinks she is not doing anything, now first is beginning to do something. For, though her boy never sees the tear glistening on her cheek, and never hears the

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prayer that goes up from her agonized heart, he knows the difference, and he begins to feel only when she has begun to suffer with him and for him and in him.

Let me borrow an illustration from our recent life. A man grows up, boy and man, in a civilized and cultured community, and begins to manipulate the ballot-boxes; and we shrug our shoulders, and laugh over his tricks by which he runs the vote up from hundreds to thousands, and casts it first for this party and then for that party; and then we shrug our shoulders and say, All this will pass away; it is one of the incidents of democracy in the early times. At last the vice that has been winked at and smiled at gets so strong and so resolute that it strikes a blow at us with flagrant fraud and open violence, and we rise in our wrath and put our hand upon McKane, and we put him in State's Prison; and then we say, Now we have done great things: we have conquered corruption. And one newspaper gets up here, and another gets up there, and they clap their wings and crow and cry, We have done it. Done it! We have hardly taken the first step. Not until we say, This McKane is a product of our own American civilization; we have helped to make him; our own indifference and carelessness were the sins in him and in his deeds; not until we bear the shame and the sin and the disgrace of him on our brow and in our own heart; aye, not until the men that have not sinned, not until the men that have lifted up warning voice day after day, and month after month, against this corruption, not until they see in this man their brother man, and therefore in his shame their shame, his disgrace their disgrace, his stripes their stripes; not until, by penalty justly deserved and redemptive love sorely needed, he and such as he are made good, pure, honest, and true, using all the strength that is in them to make for a government that shall be honest and right and pure and true—not until then shall we have begun to cure the corruption that we now think we have escaped because we have put it behind prison doors.

Oh, my friends, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is not that God was angry and was going to punish the world, and because he was angry and Christ stopped him. The father that gets angry with his son and punishes his son because he is angry is a brute, and the stronger the father the worse the brutality. Nor is it that God was bound and helpless, manacled by his own laws, and Jesus Christ came into the world to loose his manacled wrists and satisfy his law and set him free to pardon. He was always free to pardon. Jesus Christ came into the world to save the world from sin, and there is no way in which the virtuous soul can save the sinful soul from sin without taking that sin upon itself and knowing the shame and anguish of it. And that he did. He came to show the love of a Father that always loved his children with a cleansing and reforming love; he came to show to us that the Eternal Father always suffers with our suffering, and always is shamed by our shame and sin. He could not come to manifest God and not teach, for God is a teaching God; he could not come and not live a godly life, for God is a living God; he could not come and not suffer for your sake and mine, because God is a God of suffering love. Why do I say suffering love? There is no love that does not suffer so long as the loved one suffers. No father can pretend to love his son and be unsuffering while his son is in the throes of anguish; no mother can pretend to love her child and not suffer while her son is in sin. Suffering love!—there is no love that does not suffer, and God is love. God comes into the world, not that he may put sin behind prison bars and go his way and leave his children caged and sinful: he comes that he may pour out his life into the life of his children by his suffering, and may redeem them and bring them to himself.

New York City pours out its filth into the rivers on either side of it, and the great ocean sweeps in its tides up the North River and the East River and takes the sewage and bears it out to the sea and buries it therein, and it is seen no more. Jesus Christ is the inlet through which the infinite love of God pulsates, taking upon himself all the vice and iniquity of humanity and bearing it out and burying it in the depths of the ocean forever.

The Religious World

Church Union Again

The subject of the organic unity of the Church seems to be fast assuming far more importance than even the most sanguine could have expected a few years ago. The Episcopal Church has issued its famous Chicago-Lambeth Articles, and the Church of the Disciples has issued its three articles looking toward the unification of Christendom—namely, "the Primitive Faith, the Primitive Sacraments, and the Primitive Life." These were attracting comparatively little attention, except in select circles, until Professor Shields, of Princeton University, prepared his remarkable paper on "The Historic Episcopate." The reading of that in various centers started discussion anew, and now our religious papers are full of the subject. It must not be forgotten that this question is far more prominent in England than in this country. The Reunion Conferences at Grindelwald and Lucerne and the influence of the "Review of the Churches" have helped much to bring it into prominence. Then the Free Church Congress, in which most of the Nonconformist bodies are represented, is a distinct step toward Church union, since it furnishes a common ground on which the various Dissenting denominations co-operate. This subject is very conspicuous in the religious publications of the present month. The "Examiner," one of the most prominent of the Baptist papers, has an editorial entitled "The Baptist Ultimatum," in which it says that the Baptists regard what they call "believers' baptism," namely, baptism by immersion on confession of faith only, as a *sine qua non*. Unless that be distinctly recognized, there could, it holds, be no step taken by consistent Baptists toward Church union. And now two symposiums on the same topic are presented to the public. One is in the columns of the "Independent," in which a large number of Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States express their thought concerning "ministerial reciprocity," the particular question being whether the cause of Church union would not be materially advanced if there were interchange of pulpits between the Episcopalians and other denominations. Almost without exception the Bishops declare that this would be impossible. They recognize that the question is a fair one, but "reciprocity" with those who do not accept the episcopate to them seems out of the question. They claim that "the Historic Episcopate is an institution of divine authority," and as such is embedded in the constitution of the Church. "It is a trust from God, and must not be betrayed." We quote now from the "Independent." They say:

3. To give it up would be to surrender a central ground of unity. Unity had its beginning in the College of the Apostles; it is to be regained and restored by the College of the Episcopate.

4. Such a change would break the unity which exists between the Episcopal Church and the other branches of the Anglican communion.

5. It would put the Episcopal Church out of harmony with four-fifths of all who profess the Christian faith.

6. In the language of Bishop Clark, "If this fence comes down, all the fences must go."

These letters will help much to clear the air. The Bishops regard the Historic Episcopate in the same way that the Baptists regard Believers' Baptism. If, then, there is any organic Church union including these two sects, it is clear that it must be on the basis of the Historic Episcopate and Believers' Baptism. Whether the acceptance of those two articles is desirable is a question which will be differently answered, but until there is a marked change there can be no union without the acceptance of those two conditions. The Episcopalians must become Baptists, and the Baptists must become Episcopalians. We do not see that this would involve any sacrifice of principle on either side if it were judged expedient. It is much to get the ultimatum of two prominent denominations on this subject. If other denominations in some way would give to the Christian world their ultimatum, we might hope soon to discover what it really is that divides the Church.

More Voices on the Historic Episcopate

We have said above that there were two specially significant utterances on the Historic Episcopate as a basis of Christian union which have appeared during the present