

The Atlantic Messenger.

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THE HOLLY AND THE CHRIST.

A CHRISTMAS-TREE TALK TO CHILDREN.

Christmas is the most popular holiday in the world. No other approaches it in joy, renown or significance. We love to celebrate the fourth of July, because on that day our independence was declared. We love the tenth of May, because then we strew flowers upon the graves of our dead heroes. We love the twenty-second of February, because then was born George Washington, who became the "Father of his country" and was justly styled, "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." These holidays are only national, and beyond our borders they are not observed. But Christmas is celebrated throughout Christendom; its recognition is worldwide, world-embracing, world-encircling.

This occasion is fraught with the keenest pleasures. Your little vessels have been riding the rough sea of time for the past year, and now you touch again at this verdant isle and gather its luscious sweets. The traveller on the sandy desert loves to stop at the oases, with their grass, flowers, shrubs, trees, and sparkling fountains of pure water. Thus you enjoy this fertile spot in the year's barrenness. You stop at this beautiful oasis in the dry history of the year and get invigorating refreshments.

But it is not my purpose to talk about the popularity or the pleasures of this holiday. It has a deeper significance; it has a wider meaning. We are told that Christ was born on the twenty-fifth of December. How true that is we cannot tell; we may never know, and it makes no material difference. Only grasp its true intent, and it will foster your love for Christ and deepen your spirituality. Christmas bears with it the name of Christ. This beautiful tree, thus clothed with splendid attractions, also has the name of Christ. Let us, then, learn from the holly some lessons in regard to the Christ.

1. That tree came from the forest. It did not grow here. It was born years ago in the woods. It put forth its tender bud, grew year after year, became a bush, stood the wintry weather, and became a tree. But the time came for it to leave its associates of the forest; it was cut down, brought here, and is before you this evening.

Christ was not a native of this earth. The sands of this world could never yield a flower of such purity; no earthly mine could furnish a diamond of such lustre; no human being could lay sole claim to such progeny. Heaven was his home. His presence there shed radiance over the hills and valleys of bliss. But the time came for him to leave glory, and down, down to this lonely, sinful world he came and lived and died and rose again that we might follow him into heaven.

2. That tree possesses medicinal properties. Its bark, leaves and berries are used to heal numerous diseases. It is said many ailments of the human family can be cured by these remedies.

Christ is the "Balm of Gilead"; he healeth all our diseases. He is the Fountain open for cleansing. We can wash and be whiter than snow. He is the best Physician; the eating cancer of vice, beyond the reach of man, can be checked by him; the leprosy of sin, incurable by human agency, is within his power. All our wounds and putrefying sores can be cured by him.

"The great Physician now is near,
The sympathizing Jesus;
He speaks the drooping heart to cheer—
Oh! hear the voice of Jesus."

3. That tree is evergreen. Many trees drop their verdant foliage in autumn and look dry and dead during the winter months. Not so with the holly. It stands the storms and tempests of the coldest days. Little birds fly to its leafy branches for refuge and feed upon its nutritious berries.

Christ is evergreen: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." In the sunshine of prosperity and in the shadow of adversity he is the same. On the summit of exultant victory or in the vale of temporary defeat, he is the same. To us he is ever kind, true, loving, sympathetic. From the wintry blasts of this world we can find refuge in him. The howling tempests may rage and the wild billows roll on, but when our lives are "hid with Christ in God," we are safe, we are secure. There we can eat the bread of life and drink the "sincere milk of the word," and find nourishment for our souls.

4. That tree is illuminating. It sends forth, from its candles fastened here and there to its branches, light throughout the entire building. It enables us to see each other; it enables us to see itself.

Christ is the "Sun of Righteousness arising with healing in his wings." His life-giving rays are rapidly covering the entire globe, inspiring the race with faith, hope and love. He is the Light of the world. He beams into our souls, and we are made glad. He shines on our pathway and we rejoice. Before him the nightly shades of gloomy doubt and dark dejection flee away. His kindly influences are melting into pure spirituality the frozen hearts of the nations who are unacquainted with the Saviour of men. "The true light now shineth."

5. That tree is beautiful. You admire it. Taste was displayed in its decoration. It is worth beholding. The sight of it will not soon be forgotten.

Christ was the "chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely." There was no stain across his life; no sin dwelt in his soul; no pollution corrupted his heart; no impurities infested his mind. In him was no guile. He was absolutely pure. His character was supremely beautiful. His life was the quintessence of love, the most heavenly principle in all the earth.

6. That tree is gift-bearing. Here is the most striking resemblance. Your hearts will be gladdened by what you receive from this tree. That is its noblest characteristic, its chief attraction. Take away its burden of presents and it loses its interest.

Christ is the greatest gift ever received by man. He is the brightest gem of heaven, the most precious jewel in glory. He is the "pearl of great price." He is more costly than ten million worlds. Yet God gave him to us. He gave himself. The blessings of that gift we are realizing to-day throughout the world.

Then, as you look upon this tree, think of Calvary. As you behold its presents, consider the supreme gift to man. As you receive the gifts of the holly, I trust you will also receive the Saviour of men, the greatest gift that heaven can bestow upon you. And God grant that we may have

Christ before us and in us during these holidays as we have never had him before! May each of us truly adopt the language of the poet:

"In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime."

WHAT IS CONVERSION?

"Turn ye unto Him from whom ye have deeply revolted, O children of Israel,"—Isa 31:6 (R. V.)

The question I have raised finds answer in the text I have chosen. *Conversion* means, at bottom, just simply "a turning." Our text informs us as to the nature of the turning. It is two fold: First—turning from a state of revolt; Second—turning unto Him from whom they had revolted.

These are the rock-bottom principles of conversion. Here it is inculcated back in the old dispensation—long before the radiant coming the Son of Man. It is a universal duty—demanded of all people in all ages.

In a sense, we may say that every transgressing Christian is converted when he returns to the path of duty. Thus, in our Authorized Version, Jesus says to Peter "When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren." This refers to his turning again with bitter tears from his disgraceful denial of the Lord.

But conversion, in its strict and proper sense, refers only to "that first and radical change by which the soul enters upon its state of salvation." It is the human side of the new birth; the divine side is regeneration. Thus on the very threshold of the new life we find God and man working together, each voluntarily, both for the same end.

And right here is a gross misconception concerning the plan of redemption. Two extreme views are held: on the one hand there are those who think that this change of heart is all of man—a mere conversion; on the other, there are those who maintain that it is all of God absolutely—a regeneration without the consent of the one regenerated. By these errors thousands have been deceived and lost.

The truth lies between these two extremes. In the salvation of a soul both divine and human agencies must be employed. "A fair breeze does not propel the vessel unless man spread the sails." "Sunshine on the sand produces nothing unless man sow the seed." So the Spirit of God unfailingly operates through and with human instrumentality in saving man.

So, then, if man is ever born again, he must do his part toward turning the current of his life. "If he is ever regenerated, it must be in and through a movement of his own will." So often is the will of man appealed to in the Scriptures that it seems hardly necessary to cite any of the numerous passages here.

This human part of the soul's salvation is conversion. Now, let us notice it in its two relations—turning from sin and turning to God. In other words, Conversion includes repentance and faith—familiar words, but alas! too little understood.

The powers of the whole man must be exercised in order that these two duties may be performed. The psychologists tell us that we are endowed with the three-fold faculties of intellect, feeling and will. We shall see that each of these faculties has a distinct part to play in both repentance and faith.

I.—INTELLECT.

The right use of the intellect insures clear, keen perceptions. It lays the ground-work for the

graces. Of itself, it is not all-im-

portant, but it paves the way for that which is. The office of the intellect in repentance is merely to recognize one's true condition. Thus the sinner sees himself a sinner—a sinner guilty before God, corrupted by his iniquities, and helpless in all his defilements. It is readily seen that this is not full repentance, but it is an unfailing pre-requisite or part of repentance.

Similarly, the intellect prepares the way for saving faith by recognizing the Bible as a true Book. This embraces mental assent to the truth of Biblical history, doctrine and prophecy.

Religion is more than recognition, but we must recognize before we can receive. Still, it is not to be denied that even this intellectual element, single-handed, has done the world a vast moral good. But more remains to be done.

II.—FEELING.

Here the emotions are stirred. The work of the intellect is following by a moving within the heart—the seat of affection.

In this stage repentance assumes the form of genuine sorrow for sin. The sinner sees not only that he is guilty but that he has sinned against a loving and just God, done that which is hateful to God and in itself corrupting to the last degree. Out of this perception springs the sorrow of heart. Now, the sinner is "near the kingdom" but still he is without. If he goes no further, a gloomy remorse and despair will be his sad lot.

Notice also what the feelings have to do in our progress towards saving faith. While the intellect declares the Bible to be true, the stirred emotions agree to its message of grace and power as applicable to present spiritual necessities. A great advance has been made, but the summit has not quite been attained.

We may say that while a great many people have religion intellectually there is perhaps an equal number who have it extended no further than their emotions. Oh, that all who start would go on to the end!

III.—WILL.

This commands resolute action—the last and all-important phase of repentance and faith to which the other stages, important as they are, are only preparatory.

Thus, on the basis of recognition of sin and sorrow for it, the will rises and manifests itself in a deep inward turning away from sin. The feelings revolt at its disgusting nature and terrible consequences, and the will demands severance from it.

And in the search for pardon and cleansing, the will turns to Christ and implicitly trusts in Him. All the faculties of the man are given over to Christ and Christ is taken within as the life-principle of the soul.

Ah, here, on this holy ground where the intellect recognizes and the feelings are stirred and the will acts—here, I say, God meets the struggling soul and crowns it with saving joy.

TEMPERANCE LEGISLATION PROPOSED.

The following are the features of the temperance legislation proposed by the Anti-Saloon League:

1. Prohibition of sale or manufacture of intoxicating liquors outside of incorporated towns. Prohibition of sale of liquor in towns of less than 500 population, whether incorporated or not. Prohibition of manufacture of liquors in towns of less than 1,000 population, whether incorporated or not.

The distinction is made between incorporated towns and unincorporated communities because incorporated towns are organized and policed. It is made also to protect the rural districts from the

saloon. It is made also to protect the towns and cities from being surrounded by saloons. The distinction is made in respect to population mainly to prevent the evasion of the law by the incorporation of saloon or distillery settlements.

2. Local Option elections in incorporated towns of more than 500 inhabitants at any time upon 30 days notice and upon petition of one-third of the qualified voters; provided elections shall not take place oftener than once in 2 years.

In such elections the question of saloons or prohibition, or saloons or dispensary, or dispensary or prohibition, may be submitted as petitioners may request; only one question at an election, however.

3. Prohibition of the importation of liquors by any means into prohibited or dispensary territory.

4. After July 1, 1903, all applicants for license to sell or manufacture liquors shall present with their application petitions in their behalf signed by a majority of the qualified voters, save in those towns and cities in which between the date of the enactment of this bill and July 1, 1903, an election shall have been held and carried for saloons.

These propositions are clear, and need no exposition. They look to the suppression of the saloon and distillery in the rural districts, and to local option elections in the towns and cities in the near future on a fair and reasonable basis. There should not be a saloon in any town or city unless the majority of the people expressly call for it.

The people of North Carolina are entitled to this. They have long been opposed to the saloon. They have never had a fair chance in a struggle with it. They have been hampered by the ignorant vote. They have stood in fear of division. But these things are now passed. And now that they are passed, the General Assembly should freely grant the people's petition for a fair opportunity to grapple with the evil that in their long affliction fastened itself upon them.

Especial attention is directed to paragraph four. That calls for the recognition on the part of the General Assembly that the people of North Carolina are moral people. The saloons now exist not with the consent of the people of North Carolina, but solely because conditions have prevented the moral forces of the State from asserting themselves in elections against the saloons. Every intelligent public man in the State knows that this is true. It is but reasonable to ask now that the patience of the people be rewarded, and that the true attitude of the majority be recognized. Is it unreasonable to presume that the saloons should not be opened unless it is expressly voted by the majority to open them? Is it more reasonable to presume that the people of North Carolina desire the saloons—recognized as ruinous, as the sources of all manner of crime—to go on with their work unless they vote to the contrary? To be sure, he does violence to the character of the people who holds that they favor saloons and that saloons must exist until they have been voted out. One does not ask a good man if he loves virtue. His character is answer. One who believes in the people of North Carolina will say that the people desire the saloons closed, and he will not ask the people to prove this, but will bid the saloon men to disprove it. This is just what paragraph four calls for. It is fair; it is representative; it is reasonable; it is only a just recognition of the patience of the moral forces of North Carolina; it presents them with the opportunity that they have long waited for.

J. W. BAILEY.