

far and wide, so that the nations of the earth might be sheltered beneath its ample foliage and be nourished by its perennial fruit. And well might these apostles be likened to twelve little streams, deepening and broadening as they advanced and not inundating the earth, as of old, with the waters of destruction, but refreshing it with the rivers of eternal life.

Apostles Had Implicit Faith.

The apostles had implicit faith in their Divine Master when He commanded them to preach the Gospel to all nations. They knew He was God. They knew that His word was truth, that His word was power and omnipotence. They had been witnesses of His miracles. They knew that He Who said in the beginning, 'Let there be light, and there was light'; 'Let the earth bring forth fruit,' and it came forth—they knew that He would now, through their instrumentality, cause the light of faith to shine on the darkened intellects of men and the fruits of sanctification to grow abundantly in their hearts. And therefore they go forth, nothing hesitating and resolved to communicate the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ to every portion of the Roman dominions. They parcel out the Roman Empire among themselves. Their only weapon is the Cross, their only credential the Gospel of Christ. St. Peter commences his apostolic ministry in Jerusalem, where his first sermon is followed by the conversion of three thousand souls, some of whom had, no doubt, witnessed the crucifixion of our Saviour, and perhaps even had a hand in His death. He afterwards establishes his see in Antioch, and finally suffers martyrdom in Rome.

Undertook Herculean Task.

St. Paul, the indefatigable teacher of the Gentiles, traverses parts of Europe and Asia, everywhere bearing the torch of faith. St. Andrew preaches in Syria and Greece. St. John evangelises Ephesus and Asia Minor. St. James announces the glad tidings in Judea and Galilee. St. Thomas carries the light of the Gospel to the remote Indies, and traces of the Christianity that he there established were discovered by St. Francis Xavier when he visited that country in the sixteenth century. And so on with the other apostles. In the words of the prophet, as applied by St. Paul, 'their sound hath gone forth to all the earth, and their words to the end of the whole world.'

But if we are amazed at what I might call the pious audacity of the apostles and their immediate successors in undertaking the herculean task of converting the nations, we are still more astonished when we contemplate the result of their labors. St. Paul, about thirty years after our Lord's crucifixion, writes these words to the Romans: 'I give thanks to my God, through Jesus Christ, because your faith is spoken throughout the whole world,' and, of course, spoken of by men who were in sympathy and communion with the faith of Rome. The religion of Christ had not only spread among the people of Rome, but neophytes were found even in the palace of Nero.

Gospel to Every Race.

St. Justin, whose martyrdom occurred sixty-six years after the death of St. John the Evangelist, says: 'There is no race of people, whether Greeks or barbarians, among whom prayers and the Eucharist are not offered to God, the Father and Maker of all things, in the name of Jesus Christ, crucified.' Tertullian, who was born about the year 160 of the Christian era, does not hesitate to address these words to the Roman Emperor: 'We are but of yesterday, and we have filled your empire. Your cities, your towns, your islands, your forts, your army, your Senate, your palace and forum swarm with Christians. We have left nothing to you except your empty temples.' St. Irenaeus, who lived in the same century, bears witness also to the marvellous growth of the Gospel in his day, and he is careful to tell us that the faith of those times was everywhere identical. 'As the light,' he says, 'which illumines this world, is everywhere the same, because it proceeds from the same great luminary of day, so is the light of faith that shines on the intellects of men everywhere identical, because it proceeds from Jesus Christ, the eternal sun of justice.'

Conquered by Peace.

What a contrast presents itself to our minds between the peaceful conquests of the apostles and their successors on the one hand and the bloody victories achieved by the great generals of antiquity on the other, whether we consider the weapons with which they fought, the battles which they won, or the duration of their victories. Alexander the Great, who may be considered one of the greatest generals of ancient times, subdued nations by wading through the blood of his fellow-beings. By the sword he conquered, and by the sword he kept his subjects in bondage. But scarcely was he consigned to the grave when his empire was dismembered and his subjects shook off the yoke that had been imposed upon them. The apostles conquered kingdoms to their Divine Master not by force, but by persuasion; not by the material sword, but by 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God'; not by shedding the blood of others, but by the voluntary shedding of their own blood; not by enslaving the bodies of men, but by rescuing their souls from the slavery of sin. And the spiritual republic which they founded exists unto this day, is constantly extending its lines, and is consolidated not by frowning fortifications and standing armies, but by the divine influence of religious and moral sanctions.

What does this prove? It proves that the pen and the voice are mightier than the sword. It proves that 'peace hath her victories no less renowned than war'; aye, victories more substantial and more enduring. It proves that all schemes conceived in passion and fomented by lawless ambition are doomed, like the mountain torrent, to carry before them and to leave ruin and desolation after them, while the mission of men laboring in the name and under the inspiration of heaven is destined, like the gentle dew of heaven, to shed silent blessings around them and to bring forth abundant fruit in due season.

Stamp of Divinity.

No rational or dispassionate mind can review the history of the infant Church without discerning the stamp of divinity impressed upon her brow. When we consider the rapid growth of the Christian religion and the feeble instruments that were employed to produce such results, when we consider the hostility the apostles encountered in the whole course of their ministry, when we contemplate the opposition they met with from the learned and from the populace, from the priests of the pagan superstition and from the established government itself—above all, when we reflect on the sublime and austere moral code which they proclaimed to a people whose religion tolerated and even sanctioned the most dissolute morals, we are forced to admit that Christianity is divine and miraculous in its origin. Well did St. Paul sound this keynote when he exclaimed: 'The foolish things of the world hath God chosen that He might confound the wise, and the weak things of the world hath God chosen that He might confound the strong, and the things that are contemptible and the things that are not that He might bring to naught the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His sight.'

Not the Work of Man.

And indeed the wisdom of God is specially manifested in the adoption of means utterly disproportioned to the end to be attained, so that the world might be convinced that Christianity is the work not of man, but of God, and that all the glory should redound to Him. For if Christ had appeared in all the pomp and splendor of a temporal sovereign, if He had associated with Him the power of Caesar, if He had impressed into His service the armies of imperial Rome, the world would justly exclaim: 'There is no miracle here, for Christianity was propagated not by the finger of God, but by the arms of the flesh.' Or if our Lord had employed in the service of His religion the poets and orators, the historians and literary men of His age; if He had inspired a Virgil and an Ovid, a Cicero and a Tacitus to wield their pen and raise their voice in attestation of the new religion, then the world would cry out: 'There is no miracle here, for the Christian religion was propagated not by the folly of the Cross, but by the persuasive words of human wisdom.'

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