

THE WORLD'S OUTLOOK. FROM A METHODIST BISHOP'S STANDPOINT.

Bishop R. S. Foster, who is at present the central light of the Methodist Episcopal Church, is certainly getting his eyes open in some directions, though he is still in gross darkness. His utterances of late are calculated to startle Methodism, if not too sound asleep. In our January issue we noted his utterances relative to Roman Catholicism, in which, in an endeavor to show up as favorably as possible the progress of Christianity in converting the world, he closely hugged the Church of Rome, whose numbers are almost double those of the five hundred sects of Protestantism, and claimed that to make any showing at all, the Church of Rome must be counted in, because larger than all her daughters combined.

After counting in as many as possible, the bishop reckons that there are in all 350,000,000 of nominal Christians, and 1,100,000,000 heathen in the world: and of these Christians he says: – "And this number of their strength includes also all the thieves, ex-convicts, the debased, besotted, the speckled, and streaked in Christendom." And now his awakening mind goes out after the condition of the masses, and in the following words, clipped from his recent articles in the *Independent*, he tells us what their outlook seems to be from his standpoint. He says: –

"The problem I deal with relates to this world. Have you ever visited heathen lands? Have you ever formed in your mind an idea of their actual condition? Any idea you may have formed will be inadequate, I am sure. It will take an effort if you have no experience to guide you, and even to reproduce it would be almost impossible.

"Call to your aid all the images of poverty and degradation you have ever seen in solitary places of the extremest wretchedness – those

sad cases which haunted you with horror after you passed from them, those dreary abodes of filth and gaunt squalor – crowd them into one picture, unrelieved by a single shade of tempered darkness or colored light, and hang it over one-half the globe; it will still fail to equal the reality. You must put into it the dreary prospect of hopeless continuance; you must take out of it all hope, all aspiration even. The conspicuous feature of heathenism is poverty. You have never seen poverty. It is a word the meaning of which you do not know. What you call poverty is wealth, luxury. Think of it not as occasional, not as in purlieus, not as exceptional in places of deeper misery, but as universal, continent-wide. Put in it hunger, nakedness, bestiality; take out of it expectation of something better to-morrow; fill Africa with it, fill Asia with it; crowd the vision with men, women and children in multitude more than twenty times the population of all your great cities, towns, villages and rural districts, twenty for every one in all your states and territories – the picture then fails to reach the reality.

"Put now into the picture the moral shading of no God, no hope; these miserable millions, living like beasts in this world and anticipating nothing better for the world to come. Put into the picture the remembrance that they are beings who have the same humanity that we have, that are in this case; that there are no hearts among all these millions that do not have human cravings, and that might not be purified and ennobled; that these lands, under the doom of such wretchedness, might equal, and many of them even surpass, the land in which we dwell, had they what we could give them. Paint a starless sky, hang your picture with night, drape the mountains with long, far-reaching vistas of darkness, hang the curtains deep along every shore and landscape, darken all the past, let the future be draped in deeper and yet deeper night, fill the awful gloom with hungry, sad-faced and sorrow-driven women and hopeless children – it is the heathen world – the people seen in vision by the ancient prophet, who sit in the region and shadow of death, to whom no light has yet come, sitting there still, through the long, long night, waiting and watching for the *morning*."

As he looks back at the fruitage of the past eighteen hundred years, the Bishop sees little hope for the dying millions, and finally seems to catch the thought expressed in the closing sentence above, that their hope lies not in the bringing to them of the Lamp of God's Word, but in the dawn of the morning. Would that the Bishop and others, could realize the logical force of his own admission. They would not then be forced into counting the "speckled and streaked" to make up a respectable showing of power to convert the heathen, but would realize that the present age is only designed to select a "little flock" to whom the Father will give the dominion and power to bless the world; and that when this little flock is selected, they with their Lord shall be the Sun of Righteousness, as it is written, "Then (after this age and after its harvest) shall the righteous shine forth as the Sun in the kingdom of their Father." Matt. 13:43.

The Bishop in the above has drawn a dark picture of the present life of the heathen, but when he comes to contemplate the teachings of his own school of theology with reference to these miserable creatures, which claims that their future will be one of unutterable anguish and pain, to last not for a few years like their present troubles, but to be perpetuated throughout eternity by the special arrangement of their Creator, he allows his sense of right to overleap many of the barriers of his theology, and says: –

"If the awful thought could once take possession of my mind, that the whole heathen world must of necessity be *lost* forever, simply because they are heathen, I would not send them a Gospel which reveals such a God. That grim thought alone would shut out all hope for the world, and make eternity itself a dungeon, no difference who might be saved. For how could any rational creature enjoy even a heaven with a God whose government would permit such a stain of shame and dishonor, of cruelty and injustice? It is dreadful enough to be compelled to accept the thought that an immortal being can by his own free guilt, work out a destiny of changeless evil. Convince men that there is a God at the head of the universe who, without fault of

theirs or any chance of escape, will *damn* the dead, the living and the yet-to-live millions of heathenism, and you will make it forever impossible that he should be worshipped by any but devils, (and by them only because he becomes their chief,) and at the same time turn earth into a gigantic terror, whose ghastly horrors will admit of no relief."

The Bishop is in a very dangerous condition. Mankind is always in danger of error in thinking unless their impaired reasoning powers and lack of knowledge are guided and assisted by divine revelation. The Bishop, in holding tenaciously to the traditions of Methodism (not the Scripture), and endeavoring to use his reason at the same time, is in great danger of infidelity. This very course has made all the great infidels – [R857 : page 5] they held to certain preconceived but erroneous theories as the teachings of Scripture, and then used their reason as the Bishop does above. But it is unsafe to reason except in the light from God's Word.

The Bishop above evidently attaches to the words lost and damn, not the Bible definition but that of the nominal church. In his use, these words mean – endless pain and woe, awful beyond description. Here is the Bishop's danger: some one will sooner or later point out to him the fact that the Bible does teach that all men were lost and damned [condemned] back in Eden, because of the transgression of their representative Adam. Or he may of himself sometime lay down the standards of Methodism for a moment and open his Bible to some such texts as these, which teach that all men are lost until found or recovered – "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10.), "If our gospel be hid it is hid to them that ARE *lost*" [not yet found] (2 Cor. 4:3.); or he might learn that *condemn* in the following texts is from the same Greek word as *damn* and hence that all men were damned through Adam's disobedience and all must stay damned [condemned], unless they escape from the condemnation that is upon the world, by faith in Christ's ransom (Rom. 8:1). This he might see from any of the following texts: – "By the offense of one [Adam]

judgment came upon all men to condemnation [damnation];" "for the judgment was through one to condemnation [damnation]" (Rom. 5:16,18.) "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn [damn] the world [they were already condemned] but that the world through him might be saved" [from the damnation or condemnation under which they already were through Adam's sin]; "He that believeth on him is not [longer] condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned [damned] already." (John 3:17,18.)

If Brother Foster should find out that this (which he has long believed) is true, and really taught in the Bible, without first finding out in what way they were lost, and to what they were condemned [or damned] in Adam, with his old erroneous ideas of the significance of lost and damned and his new reasonings begotten of reflection, he would surely be in great danger of making total shipwreck of his faith, and of throwing aside the Bible and its teachings totally. As he himself says, above, he would find it "impossible" to worship God. And what is true of the Bishop is true of all who can and will think.

Our hope and desire is, that finding his reason and his theology out of harmony, he may give his theology a thorough examination in the light of the Bible only. He has reached a crisis in his career, and by his bold utterance he has brought all that are awake in Methodism to the same crisis. Would to God that we might help them and keep them **[R858 : page 5]** from falling into the ditch of Infidelity, by calling their attention to the real facts with reference to the loss and condemnation entailed upon all through Adam, and to the full recovery of all from it by the ransom which Jesus gave for all.

Existence, with its every privilege, was forfeited – *lost*, through Adam's sin. Death, extinction, passed as God's sentence [his condemnation or damnation] upon ALL. This extinction would have been the everlasting punishment of all, had God not come to man's relief, and because of his love provided that his Son should be our *ransom* [corresponding price or substitute], that whosoever

believeth on him might not perish [be hopelessly lost in death], but have everlasting life, being thus recovered and released from the condemnation. If the loss be not rightly seen, the salvation from the loss cannot be rightly appreciated; neither can the price of our redemption – the substitution – be clearly seen and rightly appreciated.

But we quote again from the Bishop: "I raise no question about whether these countless millions can be saved in the world to come." We wish that he would raise the question, and never rest until he finds what the Scriptures teach with reference to it, and then declare to the world his findings on so important a subject. As one whose life is professedly consecrated to this very object, he should speedily raise and Scripturally solve this question, and then not shun to declare the whole counsel of God, which is able to make him and all wise on the very question before us. – 2 Tim. 3:15.

We are glad to note that the Bishop recognizes "a world [aion or age] to come" – an age to follow the present one; and while thinking of whether the countless millions can be saved in that age to come, we suggest the Master's words and Paul's (Matt. 12:31,32; Rev. 2:26, and 3:21; Rom. 6:3). Jesus says that all manner of sins shall be forgiven men except one kind [anytime], but that one can neither be forgiven in this world [age] nor in that which is to come; and that the little flock of faithful followers in this age shall, in the world to come, sit upon thrones judging. And Paul tells us that the world will be on trial during that age, saying, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?"

Brother Foster continues: "I do not affirm that giving them [the heathen] the gospel will improve their prospects [of salvation in the world to come], or at all increase their chances in that direction." Here we see the brother's unsettled mind on the subject. From his standpoint, the prospects of the 1,100,000,000 heathen of to-day, and the billions of the past, hangs on the thread of "chances." Would that he, and all, could see the firm foundation laid for our faith in God's excellent word – that as surely as Jesus Christ by the grace of God "tasted death for

every man," so surely it shall "be testified in due time" to every man whom he thus redeemed, purchased, with his own precious blood. Thus all must be brought to a knowledge of the truth, and be enabled to fully appropriate everlasting life.

And now for our last quotation from this wonderful acknowledgment by the Bishop of his doubts and fears, hopes and uncertainties. He says: "Possibly as many of them [the heathen] will be saved *without* the gospel as with it." This is a dangerous statement. It indicates that the Bishop is cutting loose from whatever anchorage he has had in the word of God, and letting himself adrift on the sea of uncertainty, driven before the winds of his unruddered reason, which would surely wreck him upon the rocks of No Ransom and Evolution. When Brother Foster penned those words he surely forgot Peter's statement, "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" than the name of Jesus. (Acts 4:12.) He surely forgot Paul's statement of the necessity of faith, saying that by the seemingly peculiar means of preaching it has pleased God "to save them which believe." (1 Cor. 1:21.) He surely forgot the apostle's argument on what constitutes hearing and faith (Rom. 10:13,14), saying, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How, then, shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" etc. It is not only unscriptural, but unreasonable, to say that ignorance is a ground of salvation; if so, why do we preach the gospel to any? why not leave all in ignorance, that all might be saved thus? If this view be correct, the gospel is the power of God unto damnation, instead of unto salvation – if without it, and in ignorance of it, all may be saved, while with its light the more will be lost.

But here is the brother's mistake, he fails to see that the gospel belongs to the "world [age] to come" as truly as to the present dispensation. Gospel signifies good tidings, and consists of two main facts (though there are conjunctive ones), namely: **I.** Christ died for our sins; **II.** In him, through the merit of his death, all may have forgiveness

– remission of sins, and full return to the lost favor of God, including life. During this age the gospel selects the bride of Christ and witnesses to the world. It selects the faithful from among those who have "an ear to hear." The gospel in this age is foolishness to many whom the god of this world hath blinded by error, etc. (2 Cor. 4:4.) But this same gospel is to do a great work for the poor blinded world in "the world [age] to come;" for it must yet be testified to ALL. It will then be proclaimed in power. Satan, who now blinds those that believe not, will be bound, that he may deceive the people no more, and the blind eyes and deaf ears shall see and hear, and the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth as the waters cover the sea. Then it will not be as now true, that three-fourths of the race are ignorant of the "only name," and the other fourth "speckled and streaked;" for it is written, all shall know him from the least to the greatest. And none shall need to say unto his neighbor, Know the Lord – for all shall know him. Jer. 31:34.

Ah! yes; the world is full of misery and suffering, groaning for the morning, and thank God the light now due and shining from God's Word points us to the fact that the night in which the Christ head and body is developed is about past, and the Sun-rise at hand – the manifestation of the sons of God for the deliverance of the groaning creation. Rom. 8:19,21,22.

The precious blood will never lose its power till all whom it purchased – all the ransomed of the Lord, shall have heard the voice of their Redeemer calling them to everlasting life. All that are alive, and all that are in their graves, shall thus hear the voice of the Son of Man, and they that hear [obey] shall live – attain perfect and everlasting life. – John 5:25,28.

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