



PHILLIPS BROOKS IN HIS STUDY

PHILLIPS BROOKS



PHILLIPS BROOKS, D. D., a distinguished American clergyman, eloquent preacher, and bishop of the Episcopal diocese of Massachusetts, was born at Boston, Mass., Dec. 13, 1835, and died there Jan. 23, 1893. He was educated at Harvard University, and studied for the ministry at the Episcopal Theological Seminary at Alexandria, Va. He was ordained deacon in the Episcopal Church in 1859 and was advanced to the priesthood a year or two later. From 1859 to 1862, he was rector of the Church of the Advent, and from 1862 to 1869, rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity at Philadelphia. In 1869, he was called to the rectorship of Trinity Church, Boston, where he continued until 1891. In 1886, he declined the office of assistant-bishop of Pennsylvania, but accepted that of bishop of Massachusetts in 1891, and was consecrated in October of that year. He was a man of large and comprehensive views, perhaps the most widely popular preacher of his day in the United States, and had a large following of admirers in England. No American clergyman of his day exerted a greater or more spiritual influence than he, or was regarded with more sincere reverence by men of all ranks and creeds. For a number of years he was one of the preachers to Harvard University, and in 1899, the Phillips Brooks House there was erected as the University memorial of him. He was a man of commanding presence and wholly free from self-consciousness. His writings include his Yale "Lectures on Preaching" (1877); "Influence of Jesus" (1879); "The Candle of the Lord, and Other Sermons" (1881); "Sermons Preached in English Churches" (1885); "Twenty Sermons" (1886); "The Light of the World" (1890); "The Spiritual Man" (1891); "The Symmetry of Life" (1892); "Letters of Travel" (1893); "Essays and Addresses" (1894); "The Life Here, and the Life Hereafter" (1895). Bishop Brooks spoke always with ready ease, and even with fluency, and while his preaching was impressive, there was no straining at oratorical effect.

THE BEAUTY OF A LIFE OF SERVICE

I SHOULD like to read to you again the words of Jesus from the eighth chapter of the Gospel of St. John: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man; how sayest thou, Ye shall be

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made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house forever, but the Son abideth ever. If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

I want to speak to you to-day about the purpose and the result of the freedom which Christ gives to his disciples, and the freedom into which man enters when he fulfils his life. The purpose and result of freedom is service.

It sounds to us at first like a contradiction, like a paradox. Great truths very often present themselves to us in the first place as paradoxes, and it is only when we come to combine the two different terms of which they are composed, and see how it is only by their meeting that the truth does reveal itself to us, that the truth does become known. It is by this same truth that God frees our souls, not from service, not from duty, but into service and into duty, and he who makes mistakes the purpose of his freedom mistakes the character of his freedom.

He who thinks that he is being released from the work, and not set free in order that he may accomplish that work, mistakes the Christ from whom the freedom comes, mistakes the condition into which his soul is invited to enter.

For if I was right in saying what I said the other day, that the freedom of a man simply consists in the larger opportunity to be and to do all that God makes him in His creation capable of being and doing, then certainly, if man has been capable of service, it is only by the entrance into service, by the acceptance of that life of service for which God has given man the capacity, that he enters into the fulness of his freedom and becomes the liberated child of God.

You remember what I said with regard to the manifesta-

tions of freedom and the figures and the illustrations, perhaps some of them which we used, of the way in which the bit of iron, taken out of its uselessness, its helplessness, and set in the midst of the great machine, thereby recognizes the purpose of its existence and does the work for which it was appointed, for it immediately becomes the servant of the machine into which it was placed. Every part of its impulse flows through all of its substance, and it does the thing which it was made to do.

When the ice has melted upon the plain, it is only when it finds its way into the river and flows forth freely to do the work which the live water has to do that it really attains to its freedom. Only then is it really liberated from the bondage in which it was held while it was fastened in the chains of winter. The same freed ice waits until it so finds its freedom, and when man is set free simply into the enjoyment of his own life, simply into the realization of his own existence, he has not attained the purposes of his freedom, he has not come to the purposes of his life.

It is one of the signs to me of how human words are constantly becoming perverted that it surprises us when we think of freedom as a condition in which a man is called upon to do, and is enabled to do, the duty that God has laid upon him. Duty has become to us such a hard word, service has become to us a word so full of the spirit of bondage, that it surprises us at the first moment when we are called upon to realize that it is in itself a word of freedom. And yet we constantly are lowering the whole thought of our being, we are bringing down the greatness and richness of that with which we have to deal, until we recognize that God does not call us to our fullest life simply for ourselves.

The spirit of selfishness is continually creeping in. I think

it may almost be said that there has been no selfishness in the history of man like that which has exhibited itself in man's religious life, showing itself in the way in which man has seized upon spiritual privileges and rejoiced in the good things that are to come to him in the hereafter, because he had made himself the servant of God. The whole subject of selfishness, and the way in which it loses itself and finds itself again, is a very interesting one, and I wish that we had time to dwell upon it.

It comes into a sort of general law which we are recognizing everywhere—the way in which a man very often, in his pursuit of the higher form of a condition in which he has been living, seems to lose that condition for a little while and only to reach it a little farther on. He seems to be abandoned by that power only that he may meet it by and by and enter more deeply into its heart and come more completely into its service. So it is, I think, with the self-devotion, consecration, and self-forgetfulness in which men realize their life. Very often in the lower stages of man's life he forgets himself, with a slightly emphasized individual existence, not thinking very much of the purpose of his life, till he easily forgets himself among the things that are around him and forgets himself simply because there is so little of himself for him to forget; but do not you know perfectly well how very often when a man's life becomes intensified and earnest, when he becomes completely possessed with some great passion and desire, it seems for the time to intensify his selfishness?

It does intensify his selfishness. He is thinking so much in regard to himself that the thought of other persons and their interests is shut out of his life. And so very often when a man has set before him the great passion of the divine life, when he is called by God to live the life of God,

and to enter into the rewards of God, very often there seems to close around his life a certain bondage of selfishness, and he who gave himself freely to his fellow men before now seems, by the very intensity, eagerness, and earnestness with which his mind is set upon the prize of the new life which is presented to him—it seems as if everything became concentrated upon himself, the saving of his soul, the winning of his salvation.

That seat in heaven seems to burn so before his eyes that he cannot be satisfied for a moment with any thought that draws him away from it, and he presses forward that he may be saved.

But by and by, as he enters more deeply into that life, the self-forgetfulness comes to him again and as a diviner thing. By and by, as the man walks up the mountain, he seems to pass out of the cloud which hangs about the lower slopes of the mountain, until at last he stands upon the pinnacle at the top, and there is in the perfect light.

Is it not exactly like the mountain at whose foot there seems to be the open sunshine where men see everything, and on whose summit there is the sunshine, but on whose sides and half-way up there seems to linger a long cloud in which man has to struggle until he comes to the full result of his life?

So it is with self-consecration, with service. You easily do it in some small ways in the lower life. Life becomes intensified and earnest with a serious purpose, and it seems as if it gathered itself together into selfishness. Only then it opens by and by into the largest and noblest works of men, in which they most manifest the richness of their human nature and appropriate the strength of God. Those are great and unselfish acts. We know it at once if we turn

to him who represents the fulness of the nature of our humanity.

When I turn to Jesus and think of him as the manifestation of his own Christianity—and if men would only look at the life of Jesus to see what Christianity is, and not at the life of the poor representatives of Jesus whom they see around them, there would be so much more clearness, they would be of rid so many difficulties and doubts, when I look at the life of Jesus I see that the purpose of consecration, of emancipation, is service of his fellow men.

I cannot think for a moment of Jesus as doing that which so many religious people think they are doing when they serve Christ, when they give their lives to him. I cannot think of him as simply saving his own soul, living his own life, and completing his own nature in the sight of God.

It is a life of service from beginning to end. He gives himself to man because he is absolutely the Child of God, and he sets up service, and nothing but service, to be the ultimate purpose, the one great desire, on which the souls of his followers should be set, as his own soul is set, upon it continually.

What is it that Christ has left to be his symbol in the world, that we put upon our churches, that we wear upon our hearts, that stands forth so perpetually as the symbol of Christ's life? Is it a throne from which a ruler utters his decrees? Is it a mountain-top upon which some rapt seer sits, communing with himself and with the voices around him, and gathering great truth into his soul and delighting in it? No, not the throne and not the mountain-top. It is the cross.

Oh, my-brethren, that the cross should be the great symbol of our highest measure, that that which stands for consecra-

tion, that that which stands for the divine statement that a man does not live for himself, and that a man loses himself when he does live for himself,—that that should be the symbol of our religion and the great sign and token of our faith?

What sort of Christians are we that go about asking for the things of this life first, thinking that it shall make us prosperous to be Christians, and then a little higher asking for the things that pertain to the eternal prosperity, when the Great Master, who leaves us the great law, in whom our Christian life is spiritually set forth, has as his great symbol the cross,—the cross, the sign of consecration and obedience?

It is not simply suffering too. Christ does not stand primarily for suffering. Suffering is an accident. It does not matter whether you and I suffer. "Not enjoyment and not sorrow" is our life, not sorrow any more than enjoyment, but obedience and duty. If duty brings sorrow, let it bring sorrow.

It did bring sorrow to the Christ, because it was impossible for a man to serve the absolute righteousness in this world and not to sorrow. If it had brought joy, and glory, and triumph, if it had been greeted at its entrance and applauded on the way, he would have been as truly the consecrated soul that he was in the days when, over a road that was marked with the blood of his footprints, he found his way up at last to the torturing cross. It is not suffering; it is obedience.

It is not pain; it is consecration of life. It is the joy of service that makes the life of Christ, and for us to serve him, serving fellow man and God—as he served fellow man and God—whether it bring pain or joy, if we can only get out of our souls the thought that it matters not if we are

happy or sorrowful, if only we are dutiful and faithful, and brave and strong, then we should be in the atmosphere, we should be in the great company of the Christ.

It surprises me very often when I hear good Christian people talk about Christ's entrance into this world, Christ's coming to save this world. They say it was so marvellous that Jesus should be willing to come down from his throne in heaven and undertake all the strange sorrow and distress that belonged to him when he came to save the world from its sins.

Wonderful? There was no wonder in it; no wonder if we enter up into the region where Jesus lives and think of life as he must have thought of life.

It is the same wonder that people feel about the miracles of Jesus. Is it a wonder that, when a divine life is among men, nature should have a response to make to him, and he should do things that you and I, in our little humanity, find it impossible to do? No, indeed, there is no wonder that God loved the world. There is no wonder that Christ, the Son of God, at any sacrifice undertook to save the world. The wonder would have been if God, sitting in his heaven,—the wonder would have been if Jesus, ready to come here to the earth and seeing how it was possible to save man from sin by suffering,—had not suffered.

Do you wonder at the mother when she gives her life without a hesitation or a cry, when she gives her life with joy, with thankfulness, for her child, counting it her privilege? Do you wonder at the patriot, the hero, when he rushes into the battle to do the good deed which it is possible for him to do?

No; read your own nature deeper, and you will understand your Christ. It is no wonder that he should have died upon

the cross; the wonder would have been if, with the inestimable privilege of saving man, he had shrunk from that cross and turned away.

It sets before us that it is not the glories of suffering, it is not the necessity of suffering, it is simply the beauty of obedience and the fulfillment of a man's life in doing his duty and rendering the service which it is possible for him to render to his fellow man.

I said that a man, when he did that, left behind him all the thought of the life which he was willing to live within himself, even all the highest thought. It is not your business and mine to study whether we shall get to heaven, even to study whether we shall be good men; it is our business to study how we shall come into the midst of the purposes of God and have the unspeakable privilege in these few years of doing something of his work.

And yet so is our life all one, so is the kingdom of God which surrounds us and enfolds us one bright and blessed unity, that when a man has devoted himself to the service of God and his fellow man, immediately he is thrown back upon his own nature, and he sees now—it is the right place for him to see—that he must be the brave, strong, faithful man, because it is impossible for him to do his duty and to render his service, except it is rendered out of a heart that is full of faithfulness, that is brave and true.

There is one word of Jesus that always comes back to me as about the noblest thing that human lips have ever said upon our earth, and the most comprehensive thing, that seems to sweep into itself all the common-place experience of mankind. Do you remember when he was sitting with his disciples at the last supper, how he lifted up his voice and prayed, and in the midst of his prayer there came these