

Pittsfield, Mass. June 10, 1910.

Subject, Theodore Parker, The man of conviction.

~~xxxx~~ The general interest in Theodore Parker, and his life work is not merely due to the historical fact that the 24th Day of August marks the hundredth anniversary of his birth but also to the fact that Parker and his teachings are coming to their own. We are doing to day what all people have done we are garnishing the toomb of the ~~xxxxx~~ prophet whom we stoned. Most people do not realize, as they speak with glowing pride of Theodore Parker, and especially most Unitarians do not realize just what kind of a man they are praising, and just what attitude they would take towards him were he alive and attending to the problems of our time as he attended to the problems of ~~xxxxxx~~ his times. Indeed he lived in times of great intellectual, religious and social unrest. German thought

so common now as to be orthodox, was just being introduced into this country by its kinsmen the transcendentalists, and was causing no end of discussion and alarm among the pious, and select guardians of the public intelligence and morals. Parker was one of the first, one of the best, and one of the bravest of the men who husbanded these young plants of the intellectual life of the modern world in the cold and backward garden of New England Hunkerdom. It was one of Parkers friends who first brought a copy of Straus' Life of Jesus to this ~~xx~~ country, and that alone was sufficient to to class a man as Infidel and atheist. Then for years was Parkers mind developing the direction of that type of thought which found its challenging expression in the famous sermon of 1841 on the permanent and transient in Christianity. It is commonplace to day, almost trite, and platitudinous to say the things that



was saying from the point of view of theology, but in those days before science and the doctrine of evolution, and the leaven of modern thought has eaten ~~xxx~~ away the underpinning of soft wood upon which the ancient structure of supernatural religion stood, it was indeed the rankest form of infidelity that Parker was preasging. To day we hear it in almost every pulpit, although not quite so openly as one might wish. For example one of the cheif points against Parker was his ideas concerning Jesus and Christianity. It is expressed in this form. " Jesus fo Nazareth was the greatest soul ever swathed in the flesh ; to redeem man, he took his stand on righteousness and religion ; on no form, no tradition, no creed. He demanded not belief, but a life, -- a life of love to God and love to man. We must come back to this ; the sooner the better." But the times in which Parker was growing to Maturity were disturbed

by the seething unrest growing up out of the slave situation. Here as elsewhere , parker was no compomiser. His share in th agitation and fight for slavery was excelled by no one, and equalled by but few. His bold proclamation of the the anti-slavery cause, his wide influence as a lecturer and writer, and his still more bold action in the under ground slavery railroad work, and the assistance of John Brown in his undertak ing at Harpers Ferry, and his bold defiance of the President of the United States in his famous letter to Pres. Filmore defying him to enforce the Antislaver laws, give one some suggestion of the kind of a man he was. Certainly not the convent-ional Parish priest, safe, and sound on all disputed doctrines The mirror of public opinioj is not always good, but it ~~shows~~ ~~some~~ throws some light on human sociaty if not upon the char-acter of the man judged. He was called "disturber of the peace"



" an Infidel" , an atheist, an enemy to mankind, and special prayer meetings were held in the churches of Boston, asking God to confuse the mind of Theodore Parker so that he could not write his sermons , and to put a hook in his jaws so that he could not preach, and when worn and dieing he went to Europe to regain his health if possible, there was great rejoicing among the saints of the Lord in Boston and elsewhere becuae God had answered their prayers and Theodore Parker was at last to be removed from the midst of their Garden of Eden, in which commerce and the churches of commerce lived upon the fruits of slavery.

What are the landmarks of the life of this man, than whom not a greater has been produced in this country. He was boen in the twon of Lexington, famous for radicals, and his grandfather was none other than the Captain Parker who met the Brittish Army on its march from Boston mre than a hundred

before. He was the youngest of a large family of Children. His father was a stolid , free thinking father, and his mother was a devoted motherlove companion of her children, and most of all of the family baby , Theodore. His greast~~est~~ tribute to her and to woman kind shows itself in the oft repeated form of address that a ppears in his prayers, Oh Father God and Mother God.

Here he grew up through the years of childhood on the farm going to school as opportunity offered, and reading every book that he could get his hands on. He did the work at Harvard college, but did not get a degree. He tought school, and finally entered Harvard Divinity school where he made a name for ~~hixx~~ ~~hæms~~ himself as a scholar and a thinker. Graduated from the divinity school in 1836, and became minister of the Unitrian Church at West Roxbury. In 1841 preached the famous sermon on the perm-



anent and transient in Christianity. In 1843 and 4 he traveled in Europe. Returned to Boston and the 28th Congregational society was organized over which he was placed as minister in order that Theodore Parker might be heard in Boston. From the platform in Music hall he was heard by thousands and in that place were held many of the most remarkable of the meetings of the anti-slavery days. In 1854 he was indicted in the U.S. Court for evading the Fugitive Slave laws, but he never was tried. In 1859 he was overcome by a hemorrhage of the lungs, went to Italy for relief, and died in Florence in 1860, the 10th of May, at the age of fifty. He was the same heroic, unconquerable Theodore Parker on his death bed, as in his life work. Almost the last words were, - There are two Theodore Parkers now : one is dying here in Italy; ~~and~~ the other I have planted in America. He will live there and finish my work."

Born of a family stronger in ethical and intellectual capacity than in body, Parker was never very robust, but his ceaseless, and almost superhuman work conspired to nourish the possibility of his untimely end. Intellectually he was a giant. He was master of ~~fifty~~ 16 to 20 languages, and in a dozen of them he could read and write with ease. He was an omnivorous reader, and had a phenomenal memory. His house was stacked with books from garret to kitchen. Not only was he a student, but he was a free and independent thinker. It takes power and faith to travail alone in the unfamiliar seas of thought. This Theodore Parker did. Here is his resolution concerning his preaching, - At the beginning I resolved to preach the natural laws of man as they are writ in his constitution, no less and no more. After preaching a few months in various places, and feeling my way into the consciousness of man, I



determined to preach nothing as religion which I had not experienced inwardly and made my own--knowing it by heart."

Morally he was keyed to mush the same note as I imagine Jesus must have been. There was neither variableness nor shadow of turning. The fact of his personal integrity, in thought in speech and in action, was the most sacred thing in the world to him. Once having seen his way clear to a line of thought, or action, not question of expediency or personal ease could make him side-step in the least. His standards of his own personal life were rigerously high, and he never deviated from them, so it cannot be said that his ethical principles were to be applied aonly to others. In hsi 28th Congregational society he had many members who were fugitive slaves, and he spoke of them as the crown of his apostleship. Because he believed in the integrity of his won ~~own~~ personality , he believed in that of

the other man, including the negro. When two fugitive slaves came to him to be married it was perfectly consistant and natural for him to give the man a bible and a ~~revolver~~<sup>sword</sup>, telling the groom to protect the body of his wife with the one, and her soul with the other. There was a ring about his preaching that smakes of the old Jewish Prphets, who took for the authority of their assertions, none other than their GoD . They were his spokes man. Thus was Parker. In his letter to Pres Filmore denouncing the fugitive slave law he closes with these words? " Ther hangs beside me in my library, as I write, the gun my grnadfather fought with at the battle of Lexington-- he was a captain on that occasion-- and also the musket he captured from a Brittish soãdier on that day, the first taken in the war for Independance. If I would not peril my property, my liberty, nay,my life, to keep my own parishoners out of slavery, then I would throw away those trophies, and should think that I wa



the son of some coward, and not a brave man's child.....

I only write to remind you of the difficulties in our way; if need is, we will suffer any penalties you may put upon us, BUT WE MUST KEEP THE LAW OF God."

Such was the conception that Parker had of the integrity of his personality. One would hardly imagine that a man who suffered so much severe and cruel criticism and was at times so merciless in his criticism of others could be other than a hard cold mechanical man. Yet ~~xx~~ he was a very sensitive and shrinking man. He did not become the public character that he was because he took delight in the publicity of his life and work, but on the contrary he accepted all that as a necessary evil involved in the work that he felt called upon to do. This other side of his nature appears in his deep and richly ~~xxxx~~ human feelings about the common and familiar things of





other, but each felt the tremendous lacking in the fact that no children were born to them. Parker once said when his sensitive soul was smarting under the sting of criticism, -" I am the most hated man in Boston and I have no children." This gives a glimpse of the other side of his life. As Browning says every man has ~~x~~ two soul sides, ~~xxxx~~ one to face the world ~~xxx~~ with and one to show a woman when he loves her.

Among men he was ever the same gentle, tender, friend and companion, abounding in sympathy, and able to read and ~~xx~~ understand, and see things ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ as the other man saw them, and withal a just friend, as he was a just foe. He was the friend to all his parish and in a wide circle beyond. Perhaps he valued this the more because he was so cordially despised and so completely isolated from all the conventional social circles of his time. But I must not go far afield in

this side of his life for it takes us into his religious and social work to which I hope to refer at another time.

Finally, atheist though he was called, he was one of the most devoutly religious men of ~~xxxxxx~~ all times. His prayers are the outpouring of a living vital soul. God was a reality of the spirit to him. He saw God every where, and honored and loved him everywhere. He was a man intoxicated with the spirit of life, and the spirit of life was his God. and he was equally intoxicated with the spirit of God, not a God made by the fathers handed down to him moth eaten , and corroded, but a very living companionable God who was speaking to him in the and beneath the hursh tumultious life of his time. It was just because of this consciousness of the great spiritual presense of life that his work was what it was, and David A Wasson in a letter written at the time of Parkers death gives a pithy



characterization of his character and work.

" He was capable of a mighty wrath, but it was born of his love, and was never expended on account of his private wrongs ; he was angry and he sinned not, for it was the anger of the prophet; indignation of wrongs done to humanity; an grand/anoble, a sacred passion."

I have not wished to give you a complete picture, indeed I could not do that, of Theodore Parker, but I wanted to give some suggestion of his spirit, the dynamic and the motive of his life, and with al I have hoped that you may be stimulated to read something of his work, and his contribution to our common life. He would be the last to wish empty words of praise heaped upon him as a means of recognizing the contribution to the common good, he would be the first to say, Honor and support the work not of the prophets who are dead, but of those

who are living, and are carrying the burdens of the day. He is tremendously interesting for the romance of his own life, but he is not less so for the work that he is doing today. Many true and noble things he said, some daring and challenging, but not one seems to me truer, or more prophetic than the words said on his death bed. "There are two Theodore Parkers now: one is dying here in Florence ; the other I have planted in America. He will live there and finish my work." No small part of the seed , which is causing the great unrest of our time in religious, in political, in social life was sown here by that Theodore Parker that was planted here in America. ~~His~~ That Theodore Parker , planted here in America, is preaching from all the pulpits that have any vital message to-day. His principles and his purposes still are working. And one day



we shall see the Parker was still the prophet in adopting as his motto, "No slavery anywhere in America."