

The Glory of the Cross.

BY REV. FRANK M. BRETOL, D. D.

God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.—Gal. vi. 14.

This is the vigorous and courageous language of a man who was too logical for credulity, too rational for fanaticism, too learned for deception, and too conscientious for hypocrisy. It is not an empty boast. There was not in his day a man of greater intellectuality than St. Paul. There was not in the schools of Greece a philosopher living who was capable of writing the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, that sublime treatise on the future state of the dead, a production in the presence of whose splendor pale the brightest thoughts of Plato. We may safely challenge any historian to name the rhetorician then living capable of writing the sixth chapter of Ephesians, a description of the Christian soldier and his armor. The orator can not be mentioned who could have delivered, at that time, the extempore address which Paul made to the Athenians on Mars' Hill, or the ingenious defense which he made before king Agrippa.

The ethical writer did not exist, in that day, who could have produced the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, that incomparable, almost angelic strain on Charity. Nay, there was not another son of the Hebrew race living at the time, with learning, logic, scriptural knowledge and spiritual-mindedness to write Paul's letter to the Hebrews, that clear, yet profound commentary on the exposition of the Levitical ceremonialism.

Paul was trained to a knowledge of the Greek, the language of philosophy, science and poetry, had mastered the Latin, the language of jurisprudence, politics and war, and was bred to an understanding of the Hebrew, the language of psalmody, prophecy, and religion. To all of his acquirements were added a natural conscientiousness, a loyalty to conviction, an abhorrence of error and imposition, a conservative spirit, and an activity and spirit of interest and inquiry into all that concerned human welfare. By natural endowment and by educational attainment he was a great man, built on a magnificent intellectual and moral scale.

The infant church found this giant its antagonist, bent on the overthrow of the church and the annihilation of the gospel. But the very power of that gospel was demonstrated, the very authority and saving grace of Jesus Christ was made manifest in the glorious conversion of this formidable enemy and persecutor. He who had been a foe to Christ became his disciple, the persecutor became the apostle, the challenger of the gospel became its champion, and he who had been breathing out threatening and slaughter against the defenders of the cross, at last cried with a voice that has thrilled and inspired the centuries: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

Wherever man sobs his griefs and sings his joys, wherever man toils and battles, mourns and prays, there gleams the cross, diffusing the light of heaven, illuminating an earth of ignorance and sin and fear with the promise of salvation and the hope of immortality. The power of Christianity is in its cross. Not in its profound philosophy, not in its beautiful and pure ethics, not in the moral character and humane life of its founder, but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the self-sacrifice of the Son of God, in the atoning and redemptive work achieved by His death, the power, the saving, transforming, progressive, all-conquering, eternal power of Christianity consists. No other Christianity but that of the cross has ever saved a soul or converted a nation. A Christianity without a cross, without an atonement, without the cleansing blood, is a sham and a fraud. To preach it is an imposition.

And the cross of Christ is more than the cross of martyrdom or it is infinitely less. The most illogical doctrine ever taught is that which holds Jesus up simply as a martyr to truth. He was a martyr to His divinity and Messiahship. If He was not divine, if He was not the Son of God, if He was not Messiah and Savior, then He was simply a martyr to a lie, and a Christianity which robs the crucifixion of its atoning power and Jesus Christ of His divinity and Saviorhood invites the world not to admire a martyr to truth, but a martyr to error. What the cross represented on Calvary, that it represents to us, that it has represented to all peoples, the vicarious death of the Son of God, the power of God unto salvation, the wisdom of God unto all spiritual enlightenment, the love of God unto all grace and comfort and hope. Therein is its power. The cross makes living beautiful, the cross makes dying sublime.

As the cross is this to mankind and makes no false claims, men and nations have not trusted it in vain. It has sustained, strengthened and exalted them. Nearly every ruin of man or nation has been but the logical outcome, the inevitable consequence of building on false hopes and wrong principles. How sad and frightful to see a man sink into the darkness while despairingly clutching an error which he has mistaken for truth!

The *Moniteur de Rome*, referring to the many converts gained to the Roman Catholic Church in England, declares that if the work of conversion continues at the rate maintained for the last half century, Catholicism will be dominant in England a century hence.

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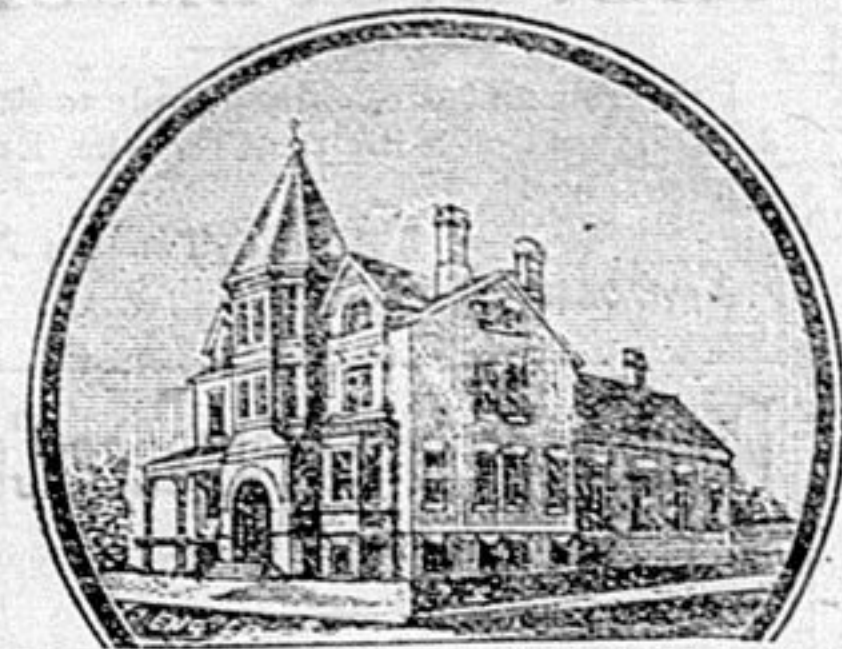
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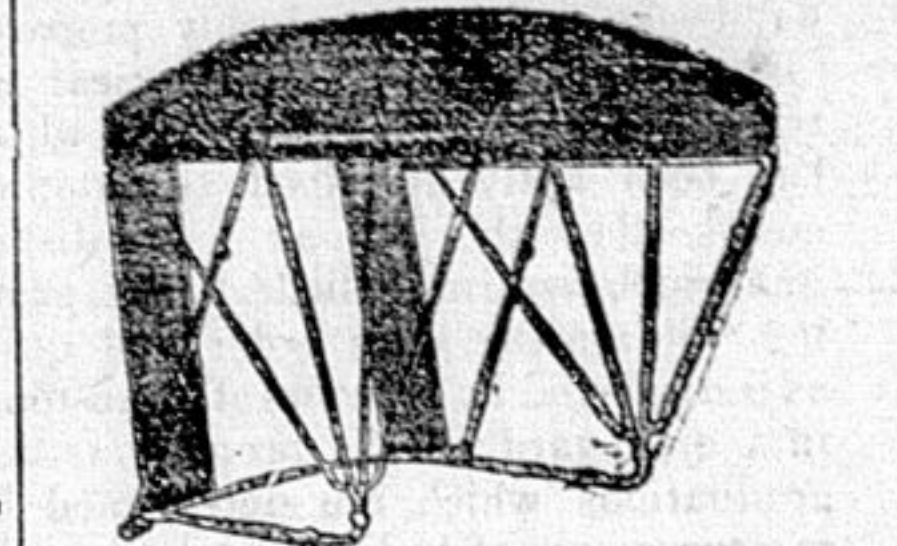
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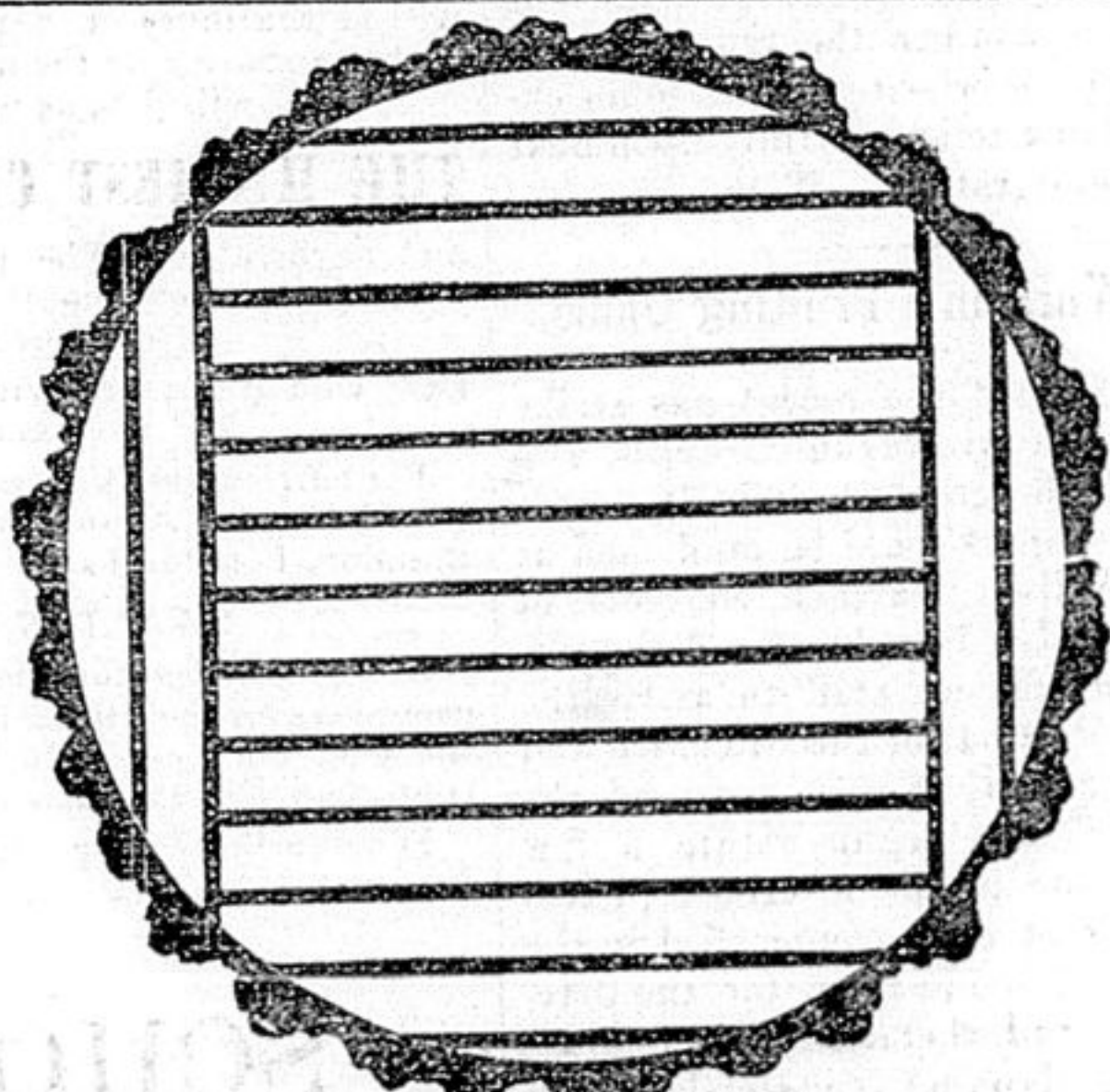
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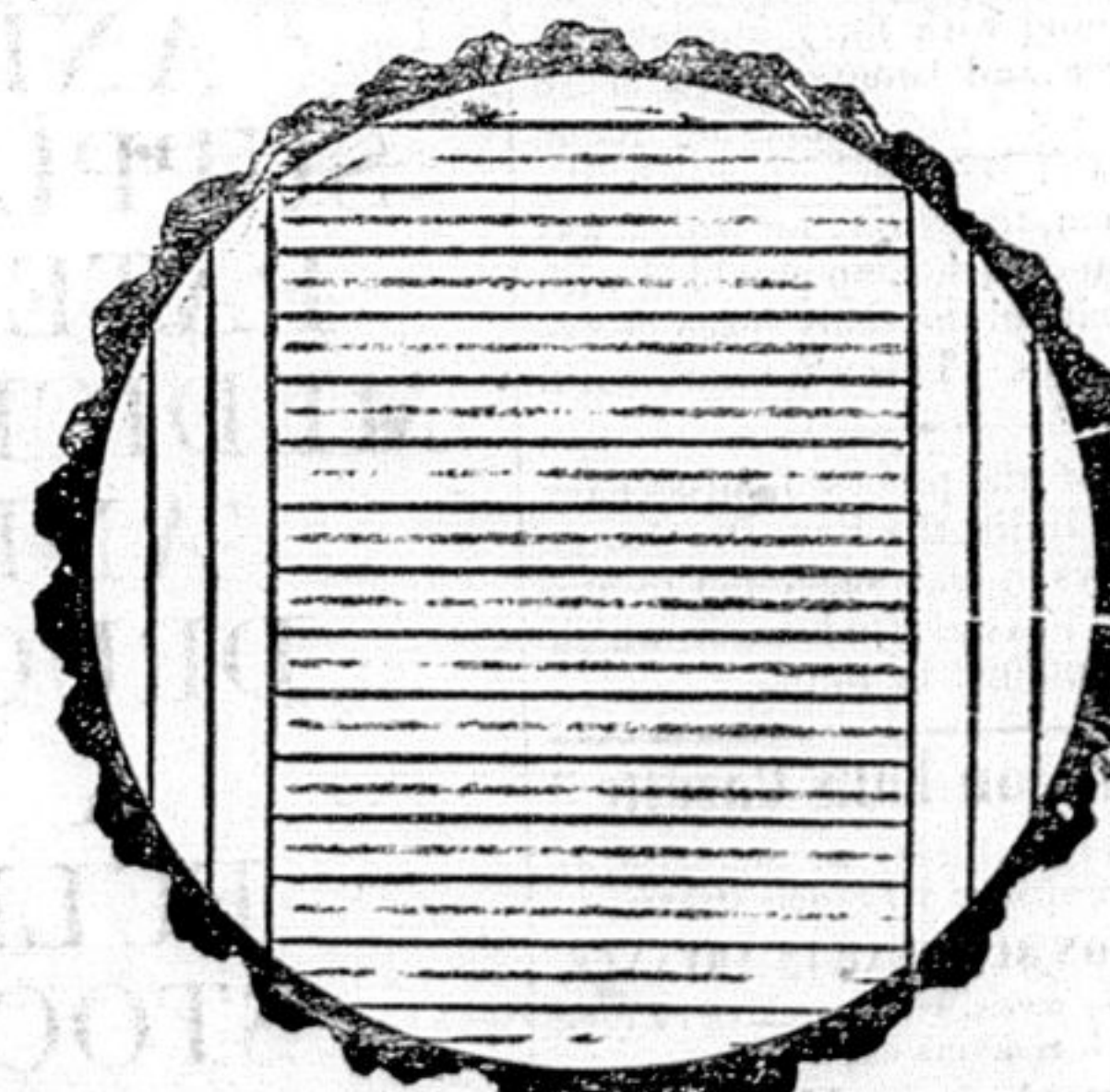
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