

SOMETHING NEW IN THE OLD WORLD

The International Sunday School Lesson for December 2nd is: "The Power of the Early Church."—Acts 2:1—3:1.

By WILLIAM T. ELLIS.

"Once upon a time," when the world had come to a crisis; and great empires were falling to pieces of their own wicked weight; and greed and ambition and jealousy and fear and oppressions were rampant. Something New happened that changed the face of the centuries. The stream of civilization had become sluggish, stale and stinking. This Something sweetened and set it to flowing again. All the visible power of earth soon dipped its flags to this Something that had come to make the old world new.

That ancient Something was, of course, the birth of the Christian Church, and the spread of the Gospel of Jesus. It is a timely topic to consider; because our own era has many striking resemblances to that in which Christ was born. We are in the midst of clashing Imperialisms; of disintegrating social systems; of universal discontent, and of a general consciousness of crisis. Even the cracker-box philosophers to-day know that the world is sick, dangerously sick. Within ten years, every conceivable remedy has been tried by the "statesmen," who are now seriously suffering in their professional reputations. Perhaps the hour has struck for a genuine effort to apply the same healing that made over the ancient world; and wrote a new day of beginnings upon the calendar.

"Jazzing" History.

It is well that the twenty million members of the Sunday schools of North America are to give this week to an earnest facing of the outstanding facts of the beginning of Christian history such as is entailed by the present Lesson upon "the Power of the Early Church." We are badly in need, at the present time of this corrective. For of late it has been the fashion to "jazz up" history, as well as everything else. H. G. Wells started it, with his brilliant "Outlines," which contain overmuch of the author's speculations and too little of definite data. Trailing along after the "Outlines" came Van Loon's pernicious "Story of Mankind," with its glaring inaccuracies and inadequacies, which made real students of history smash their teeth. Just now, so financially successful was Van Loon's "jazzing" of history, there appears his sacrilegious "jazzing" of the Bible which is earning the condemnation of every reverent person, as well as of case-hardened book reviewers and, needless to add, of all real scholars. It is time that all persons concerned for the intellectual integrity and the spiritual reverence of the new generation call a halt on this sort of thing. As Tom Masson, the former editor of "Life," whom nobody would call a squeamish conventionalist, wrote the other day, it is better for anybody to read the Bible itself than to read such a book as Van Loon's "Story of the Bible." Nobody can read and accept both.

Mr. Masson's point is a word for the hour. There are too many men and women airing theories about the Bible who have not read the Bible itself. In the present vogue of "liberal" opinion and theories, a calm observer is struck by the glaring absence of knowledge of what the Bible really says. I once heard a preacher give a "modern" interpretation of the Resurrection that simply ignored the clear and explicit and unanimous testimony of all the New Testament records. That man like Van Loon should disregard the statements of the Book about which they write is not remarkable; but that Christian teachers and preachers should do so is one of the amazing phases of present religious discussion.

So the first and best commentary upon the present Lesson is a careful reading, at one sitting, of the first eight chapters of the Book of the Acts. If this week sees a general reading of the story, which is more intrinsically readable and interesting than anything that ever came from the pens of the reckless "jazz" historians, it will have done all that the Sunday school need desire. And it will surely start clear thinking about the state of the world; which is the Lesson application most needed.

The Book of Boldness.
What were the factors in this Something New which came into the world with the Child of Bethlehem; and has since spread in world-wide influence? In other words, what was the secret of the power of the Early Church?

Every newspaper man pricks up his attention when he notes that it was the narration of a set of facts that seemed to work the wonders. Facts first and always. Both the Church and the world need to develop a new respect for the ascertained facts of any given proposition. In all the long life of the known centuries, the most awesome testimony to the power of facts is the cause of the Christian conquest by the simple-telling of a Story. Less theorizing and more actual data will enrich every speech, sermon, article and discussion. Here is a tremendous truth for every public speaker; and for every Christian worker.

One does not get far into these early chapters of the history of the revolutionizing Christian Church before he finds looming large the realization that this is the Book of Boldness. One key verse to Acts is: "When they beheld the boldness of

Peter and John . . . they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." The first concerted record prayer of the infant Church was a prayer for boldness; and the answer was as explicit as the petition. Note the use of the word "boldness" throughout this book; and the examples that are more frequent than the word. How terrifically the apostles arraigned to their face the murderers of Christ! The Early Church had conquest because it had courage. Spineless, uncertain Christians simply cannot have power.

Romance of Religion.

Stale and stupid are the imaginings of the novelists alongside of the romance of religion, as that best of journalists and historians, Dr. Luke, recorded it in the Book of the Acts. He opens with a climax, the ascension of the Risen Christ; and then rises higher by the story of Christ's return, in the person of the mysterious Holy Spirit, on the Day of Pentecost. The touch of cosmopolitanism and internationalism in that bewildering baptism of fire is not without meaning to-day. The marvel of the gift of tongues is likely to obscure the other up-to-date record that to-day the Gospel is being preached in twenty times the number of languages heard at Pentecost.

Our modern theories of socialism are mild and impractical alongside of the experiment in Christian fellowship undertaken by the zealous Early Church. While that simple form of community of interest and property was manifestly not intended to be universal, yet it is worthy of note that to-day in the City of Jerusalem, the American Colony is in the third generation of an experiment in Christian socialism. The "family" numbers nearly a hundred persons, all busy, all happy and all seeking to work out Christ's teachings.

It was also a healing Church that conquered the world. It had no goods, but it had limitless goodness. As I have recently inspected the priceless treasures of certain orthodox monasteries of the Greek Orthodox Church, I have recalled the familiar story of the proud ecclesiastic who said, when displaying the riches of his organization, "No longer can the Church say, like Peter and John to the lame man at the Beautiful Gate, 'silver and gold have I none.'" "No," came the cynical reply; "neither can she say, 'In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk!'"

The power of the Early Church was spiritual power. She richly enjoyed the presence and enabling of Christ's Other Self, the Holy Spirit. And the stupendous conclusion of the Lesson—a word for the world and a word for the Church—is that, if she will, the Church of to-day may exercise the same power in the world that she did in the first century. Now, as then, she may be the Something New to save our imperilled world.

YOUR HEALTH.

By Raymond S. Copeland, M.D., Commissioner of Health New York City.

There is a popular idea that out-of-doors is the one thing necessary to give you good health.

Of course this is not the fact. Fresh air and out-of-door life are essential to health, but in and of themselves they are not sufficient to keep you well.

The other day I spoke to an audience of ten or fifteen hundred persons, almost all of them mountaineers who spend most of their time in the open. I think I never spoke to a group, even in the slums of a great city, where there were so many showing evidence of under-nourishment and ill-health.

There are many factors contributing to poor health, but one of the chief of them is found in bad teeth. In the rich cities where public health education has become almost an obsession—a good one—there is so much emphasis placed on the importance of good teeth and dental care that the young folks, certainly, and most of the older ones have well-cared-for-teeth. In the country and smaller towns this is not the case.

In certain foreign lands I have observed the all too common neglect of the teeth. It has become so bad in many cases as to ruin the beauty of the face. Uncared-for teeth mar the appearance almost more than

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question of time when a diseased heart or kidney will carry the victim to an untimely death. Another time I will tell you more about these things, but I hope you have become convinced that your welfare depends on having clean and good teeth.