

A FASCINATING FIGHT

"Fight the good fight of faith." I Timothy 6:12.

It is a curious fact that most people seem to be interested in a fight. It is a simple fact that if a fight starts, a few will go in the opposite direction, but many will gather around and watch the performance. Apparently, they enjoy it. Some like to participate in a fight. A few husbands and wives indulge in fighting as a pastime.

In the Scripture the Christian life is set forth to us under the figure of a race. The Christian resembles a silver rill, singing along its dark bed and leaving the darkness ever behind it. He resembles the morning star, moving through the darkness of night, till overtaken and swallowed up in the splendors of day. The Christian life moreover is sublimely exhibited to us under the figure of a battle.

It is an inspiring conception of life to view it as a fascination fight. This was a favorite conception of Paul. Such a conception makes life interesting, worthwhile, and always hopeful. It makes all the difference in the world how we look at things, the point of view we take, even the words and language we use. Some people regard life as "a hard warfare" or "a terrible struggle." Others look upon life as "a splendid struggle, a fascinating fight, a glorious battle." If we could only get God's viewpoint, we would be glad that the present life is a struggle, a fight, a warfare. This is God's wonderful plan to make us true, strong, virile, efficient men and women. He intended for the Christian life to be a warfare and not a picnic. There are battles to be fought, enemies to be conquered, victories to be won. Of course, there are wonderful feasts to be enjoyed all along the way, but fighting and not feasting is our special business. Therefore, the Christian life is a fascinating fight because: --

1. It is intensely real.

A real person has scant interest in the unreal; the shams of life; the make-believe things. He has a passion for the real, the true, the abiding. Life is not a sham battle, a mock trial, a mere farce, an idle tale, or a fitful dream. Life is something very real and fascinating. Longfellow said: --

"Life is real! life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul."

Life should be intensely fascinating to each of us because of its reality. Its happy days of childhood are real; its hopeful youth is real; its temptations are real; its trials are real; its burdens are real; its joys are real; its friendships are real; and its victories are real.

God pity those who regard life merely as an opportunity to have a so-called good time; who stress the unreal things rather than the real; who fritter away the golden hours; who merely eat, drink and are merry -- forgetting that they are to die tomorrow. Life was a very real thing to John Wesley; so real that his favorite maxim was, "Live today!" Longfellow declared that "Life is the gift of God." Coleridge said, "O God, how glorious it is to live!" Such conceptions of life make it really worth while.

2. It has an urgent appeal.

The Christian life appeals to the very best there is in one. There is a picture of a rugged farmer standing by a plow while the horses were resting. Another horse was nearby from which a messenger had dismounted and was addressing the farmer. He

was telling him about the recent battle of Lexington. This appealed powerfully to the plowman. His patriotic blood was stirred and, turning away from the plow, he seized his trusty rifle and joined the Revolutionary forces. That man was Israel Putnam.

But the appeal which God makes to every Christian is mightier than the appeal which came to Putnam in the Revolutionary days. God appeals to a man's: --

- (1) Heart -- "Son, daughter, give me thine heart."
- (2) Mind ---- "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus."
- (3) Heroism -- "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."
- (4) Spirit of sacrifice -- "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."
- (5) Moral courage -- "War a good warfare." Text.
- (6) Faithfulness -- "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

Life will indeed be a fascinating fight if we are wise enough to listen to and respond to the appeals of the Almighty. Paul responded to the appeal and asked his Lord, "What wilt thou have me to do?" Isaiah responded to the appeal and exclaimed, "Here am I; send me." Knox responded to the appeal and shook Scotland; Wesley responded to the appeal and shook England; Luther responded to the appeal and shook Germany; and Moody responded to the appeal and shook the United States. Blessed is the man who responds to the divine appeal and becomes God's ambassador in this sinful world. He will make his humble contribution to the world's salvation and the world's work.

3. It has important issues.

Tremendous issues have been involved in various wars in history. But, even greater issues are involved in the problem of living for God. At least Christ so taught when He placed a human soul in one scale and the world in the other and taught that the soul outweighed the world. The issues involved may make life a curse or a blessing, a failure or a success, a meaningless farce or an inspiring warfare, an ignominious defeat or a glorious victory. The principal fight of the Christian is with:--

(1) The flesh.

Even after conversion one's nature is prone to evil. The battle begins in the heart and life. The nearest foes are those within and we must deal with them first. No one is able to do much good fighting until he has first of all conquered himself.

(2) The world.

The world has its ideas, its ambitions, its usages, its disposition, its aims. They are contrary to the mind and will of God. The subtle influence of this mighty enemy must be fairly resisted, and without a daily battle it can never be overcome. The love of the world's good things, the fear of the world's laughter or blame, the secret desire to stand in with the world, the wish to do so others in the world do, all these are spiritual foes which beset the Christian continually and must be conquered.

(3) The devil.

"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Let us behold the Christian soldier in full uniform. He is clothed

with the white robe of his Redeemer's righteousness. On his head is the helmet of salvation. In his right hand is the sword of the Spirit, bright as a stream of light. In his left hand is the shield of faith, beautiful as the rising moon. On his breast is the breastplate of righteousness. Round his loins is the girdle of truth. On his feet are the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace. In his mouth is prayer. His sword has no scabbard, his back has no armour, for it needs none and his Captain is ever by his side. Surely the armour is good.

This old enemy of mankind, Satan, is not dead. He never tires nor rests. He is strong. We must not underestimate his ability. One of the wisest generals who ever lived in England said, "In time of war it is the worst mistake to underestimate your enemy, and try to make a little war." This Christian warfare is not a light matter. The object of the conflict is to destroy the works of the devil, the world and the flesh. It is to undermine the kingdom of darkness; that kingdom which is founded on temptation, built up in delusion, and finished in destruction. It is to establish the kingdom of light; that kingdom which is founded in faith, built up in hope, and finished in love. This world is covered with the darkness of ignorance, the darkness of guilt, the darkness of pollution, and the darkness of misery. The object of our contest is to dispel the darkness, and fill the world with the light of knowledge, the light of pardon, the light of purity, and the light of joy. Surely this object is good.

4. It has a superb Leader.

Men have been inspired and moved to valiant achievements under the masterful leadership of Caesar, Alexander, Napoleon, Cromwell, Washington, Grant, Foch, MacArthur, and other great leaders. But no leadership has ever inspired and moved men and women to the extent that Christ's has. The leader and commander of all believers is Jesus Christ. The fact that He is a good Commander will appear when we consider His person, His power, His wisdom, and His love. He is a Saviour of perfect wisdom, infinite love, and almighty power. Under the inspiration of His leadership consecrated people have voyaged across all seas, have scaled mountains, have penetrated jungles and swamps, have crossed deserts, have cheerfully endured all hardships, have braved all dangers, have overcome all obstacles, have feared no enemies, have hesitated at no sacrifice, but have passed with songs of triumph to a martyr's death.

When we turn to the pages of early church history, we see how the primitive Christians were not shaken by the fiercest persecution inflicted by emperors but held fast their religion even unto death. For centuries there were never wanting men like Polycarp and Ignatius who were ready to die rather than deny Christ. Fines, prisons, torture, fire and sword were unable to crush the spirit of the noble army of martyrs. And then let us remember that believing in an unseen Jesus was the strength of the churches. They won their victories by faith. The Captain of our salvation never fails to lead His soldiers to victory. On the same day that Ulm, with 40,000 troops surrendered to Napoleon his navy was virtually destroyed by Nelson at Trafalgar. Hearing of this disaster, Napoleon sadly exclaimed, "I cannot be present everywhere at once!" How different was he from our great Leader, who declared, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end." He is present on every moral battlefield of earth to inspire every soldier in the Christian army. His presence always makes victory certain. Under His superb leadership life is indeed a fascinating fight.

"Lead on, O King Eternal,
We follow, not with fears;
For gladness breaks like morning
Where'er thy face appears."

5. It results in good.

When a Christian throws his undivided energies and warmest enthusiasm into this fight for God and truth and against evil, the very best results will be obtained. Good is a strange word to apply to any warfare. All worldly war is more or less evil. But the Bible does not call the Christian conflict "a good fight" without an adequate reason.

It is good because: --

- (1) It is in a good cause. God and truth and duty.
- (2) It is under the best general. Jesus Christ.
- (3) It is with the best of helps. Holy Spirit dwells within.
- (4) It does good to the soul of him who fights.
All other wars have a bad, lowering and demoralizing tendency. They harden the consciences, and sap the foundation of morality and religion. The Christian warfare alone tends to call forth the best things for man. It promotes humility and charity. It lessens selfishness and worldliness. It gets men to set their affections on things that are above. It brings joy and fruitfulness in life. It calls forth the heroic qualities of courage and devotion.
- (5) It does good to the world.
All other wars have a damaging, devastating, ravaging and injurious effect. But go where you please, you will find that the presence of a few true Christians is a great blessing.
- (6) It pleases and honors the Lord.
Christ teaches us that to fight this battle with and for Him is the finest and most glorious thing in the world.
- (7) It brings a glorious reward to all who fight it.
Christ says, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne." Behold the Christian soldier, then, after the battle is over. His enemies are all vanquished and his wounds are all healed. He is no longer a soldier, he is a king. He is no longer in the field of conflict, he is now seated upon a throne. He no longer holds in his right hand a sword, he grasps a palm glittering with the dews of immortality. He has no longer in his left hand a shield, he has now a golden key that will open the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in the everlasting kingdoms of joy. He has no longer upon his head the helmet of salvation, he has now a crown, the express image of that crown which encircles the brow of Christ. Surely such a reward is sufficient!