

but none the less real in your life's work, all these should first be laid at the Master's feet, to be consecrated and purified by Him.

Let your studies and pursuits be fertile in His cause.

Let your fellows learn from you not only the beauty of the Christian faith, but its inherent

reasonableness. Everywhere men are to-day seeking, feeling after God if haply they may find Him. Let it be your part to help these with any gift or power you may have. Noble as is the pursuit of knowledge, it is only when it is crowned by love that it is really fruitful in consequences, both now and in the great hereafter.

## The Great Text Commentary.

### THE GREAT TEXTS OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

ACTS XXVI. 28, 29.

'And Agrippa said unto Paul, With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that whether with little or with much, not thou only, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am, except these bonds'—R. V.

#### EXPOSITION.

'And Agrippa said unto Paul, With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian.'—St. Paul's last words to Agrippa had been 'King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.' But Agrippa had no intention of exposing himself to the astonishment of the Roman governor and the distinguished audience by confessing his belief in Judaism or in this new faith. His courtly breeding was equal to the occasion, and he passed it off by a piece of raillery. A little more persuasion and you will make me too a Christian. Though its general sense is quite clear, this saying of Agrippa's is a well-known crux. It is certainly not to be taken in a serious sense, as in the A.V.; for nowhere else is *almost* the equivalent of the Greek words used here—*in a little*. This phrase usually means *in a little time*; but if it is so taken here, the correspondence in St. Paul's answer—*in little and in great* (which cannot apply to time)—will be less exact. Probably it takes its complexion from the verb, as in the R. V.—*with but little persuasion or effort*.—RACKHAM.

'Christian.'—The name Christian grew up among the Gentiles of Antioch as a designation for the believers; it was of course not adopted by the Jews, who themselves believed in a Christ, nor until a later time by Christians themselves. Agrippa's use of the term is an evidence of his Roman education and familiarity with Gentile terms.—RENDALL.

'And Paul said, I would to God, that whether with little or with much, not thou only, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am.'—With noble dignity Paul meets Agrippa's sally about the 'short cut' to Christianity, turning it so as to have the last word, and that one of singular weight and pathos.—BARTLET.

'Except these bonds.'—The exquisite courtesy of the great missionary perhaps is nowhere made more manifest than in this concluding sentence. He would have Agrippa a fellow-citizen with him in the city of God, a brother heir in

his glorious hopes, but without the chain, and the sorrow, and the persecution which in his case had accompanied his profession of Christianity. 'Such as he,' beautifully writes Plumptre, 'pardoned, at peace with God and man, with a hope stretching beyond the grave, and an actual present participation in the power of the eternal world—this is what he was desiring for them. If that could be effected, he would be content to remain in his bonds, and to leave them upon their thrones.'—HOWSON.

#### THE SERMON.

##### Paul's Witness for Christ before Agrippa.

By the Rev. John Cairns, D.D., LL.D.

It has never been possible to keep Christianity long at the bottom of the social scale. Christ began His work in the obscure synagogues of Galilee, but before He died He had stood before Pontius Pilate and Herod and the rulers of the Jews. So also it was with Paul. He began his ministry in Damascus and in the deserts of Arabia, but before its close he had appeared before Roman procurators and Jewish kings, and had even been called before the tribunal of Cæsar. The similarity between Christ and the Apostle Paul did not end here, for He who had witnessed a good confession Himself strengthened His servant to walk honourably in His steps. Towards Agrippa Paul brought all the force of his eloquence to bear, appealing to his belief in the prophets. In the A.V. Agrippa seems touched by this appeal and is almost persuaded, but according to the R.V. he turns it off by the good-tempered sally which, in colloquial language is, 'You are taking a short cut to make me a Christian.' Whichever view we accept, the lofty and generous answer of Paul remains the same. Let us consider Paul's answer then as an example to all Christians of the

right way of arguing for Christianity. He showed *Christian faith in its repose, and Christian love in its struggle.*

i. He was an example of the *repose of Christian faith.* He had rest in his faith, first, because of its evidences. The greatest of these evidences was the vision which he saw on the way to Damascus and which left him blind. But there were many others. One was that in Christ he had found the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophets. He had also seen the effect that the gospel had on the lives of men. To-day every Christian is just as satisfied as Paul was that the gospel is true, though the evidences may not be the same. We have not seen the outward wonders, but they are unaltered by time, and as they convinced Paul so they convince us.

Paul was also satisfied with his faith on account of his experience. He had not embraced the gospel without making trial of another system. His experience was not of yesterday. The first excitement was long over and his zeal had stood the test of time. He was a prisoner, but Christ was with him, and he rejoiced in his bonds. Such is the experience of all Christians; other men are restless, though they may be powerful and wealthy; they are content and joyful in the midst of misfortune.

ii. Paul exhibits in this answer *Christian love in its struggle.* First, he struggled for complete Christian brotherhood. Hence his pointed apostrophe to Agrippa, when that to Festus seems to have failed. Even after Agrippa's sarcastic reply Paul persevered. 'Still I long for it,' he says, 'whether it come quickly or slowly.' He longed also for universal Christian happiness. He appealed not only to Agrippa but also to 'all that hear me this day.' He wished them to share the brighter part of his experiences, but to escape his trials and afflictions, 'such as I am, except these bonds.' Then, thirdly, Christian love struggles for divine help to fulfil its wishes. Paul lifted up his manacled hands to heaven and cried, 'I would to God.' This is not a strong formula of asseveration, it is a prayer, 'Oh may God Himself grant it!' Without this prayer Paul knew well that nothing could be effected. But it was not by this consideration that Paul was roused to prayer, but rather by an irresistible impulse of Christian love which could only express itself in prayer. Had we but this spirit of the apostle in our dealings

with unconverted men, if our whole life was a continual prayer, then, indeed, Christ would grant us, as He granted His servant Paul, exceeding abundantly above all that our poor mortal love could ask or think.

### Agrippa.

By Archbishop Trench, D.D.

'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,' so near the prize and yet missing it after all. It was Herod Agrippa II. who uttered these memorable words, which we take as they stand in the Authorized Version. He was the son of that other Herod Agrippa, the murderer of James the Apostle, the would-be murderer of Peter also, and who at length perished in such a loathsome manner. He was the grandson of the first Herod, the most hardened criminal of them all, who slew the young children of Bethlehem. But Herod Agrippa II. had no desire to shed blood, or to curry favour with the Jews by delivering Paul to them. Had he been a cruel persecutor like his father and grandfather, his story would not have contained a hundredth part of the warning for us which it does contain. It would hardly have touched us at all.

Festus, the new Roman deputy, had just arrived at Cæsarea and had found there a prisoner, by name Paul, whose case he could not understand. The Jews protested that a man was dead—a certain Jesus, and Paul protested that he was alive. And, furthermore, Paul had appealed to Cæsar, and Festus must send an account of the crime with which he was charged, with him. So he summoned Agrippa, the petty Jewish king, to his help, and Paul preached before Festus and Agrippa, and so impressed the latter that he exclaimed 'almost . . . a Christian.'

Why did Agrippa stop at *almost*? The answer is only too apparent. It would have cost him too much to be *altogether* persuaded. He could not face the scorn, the loss of power and honour. He could not give up his sin. Looking at the question from this distance of time, did he choose amiss? For a few more years he played his part of king on the world's stage, and men paid him lip-homage, and then he died and he took none of his pomp or honour with him—nothing but his sins. And what did he lose? He lost himself. Suppose now that Agrippa had found strength, and had been altogether persuaded, how would it have

been for him then? A few years of self-denial and of toil; a few buffetings from evil men; it might have been a painful passage into life, but all sweetened by the sense of God's love and of a clear conscience, and then at the last the gates of Paradise thrown open and the great 'well done' would have sounded in his ears.

We are ready to admit now that Agrippa chose wrongly. But will we stop here. What about ourselves? Are there no Agrippa's now? do we not hesitate? Perhaps we are held by some sinful passion, or perhaps it is just a vague reluctance to yield our wills to God, or we may be held back by a desire for popularity or a fear of ridicule. Whatever may be the bonds which hold us from Christ, let us break them. In a few years it will be with us as it was with Agrippa not long after he uttered these memorable words. Then how little will it matter whether we were powerful or lowly, rich or poor, whether we had companions or were lonely in our life. One thing only will matter, were we *almost* Christ's or *altogether*, in other words, were we Christ's or were we not? Let us fix our wavering hearts on God and pray earnestly to Him that He will draw us to Himself, and compel us by the discipline of love to be not almost, but altogether His.

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

'THREE things would I have desired,' exclaims Augustine, 'to behold with my own eyes: Rome in its glory, Christ in the flesh, and Paul in his eloquence.' The last of these, indeed, we feel impelled to desire on a glance at a passage like that which to-day lies before us, and in which we can calmly declare that Christian eloquence has obtained a glorious triumph. What a preacher, before such an audience! What a reply to the ambiguous, half-jesting, half-serious exclamation of Agrippa.—OOSTERZEE'S *Year of Salvation*, vol. ii. p. 75.

**Almost persuaded.**—Then, in the next place, what will become of them that are grown weary, before they are got half-way thither? Why, man, it is he that holdeth out to the end that must be saved; it is he that overcometh that shall inherit all things; 'tis not every one that begins. Agrippa gave a fair step for a sudden, he stept almost into the Bosom of Christ in less than half an hour. Thou (saith he to Paul) hast almost persuaded me to be a Christian. Ah! But it was but almost, and so he had as good have been never a whit. He stept fair indeed; but yet he stept short; he was hot while he was at it, but he was quickly out of wind. Oh this but almost! I tell you, this but almost, it lost his Soul. Methinks I have seen sometimes, how these poor Wretches that get but almost to Heaven, how fearfully their almost, and their but almost will torment

them in Hell. When they shall cry out in the bitterness of their Souls, saying, I was almost a Christian, I was almost got into the Kingdom, almost out of the Hands of the Devil, almost out of my Sins, almost from under the Curse of God, almost, and that was all, almost, but not all together. Oh that I should be almost at Heaven, and should not go quite thorow! Friend, it is a sad thing to sit down before we are in Heaven, and to grow weary before we come to the place of rest. And if it should be thy case, I am sure thou dost not so Run, as to obtain.—BUNYAN'S *Heavenly Footman*, p. 293 (Clar. Press ed.).

A MAN who strives earnestly and perseveringly to convince others, at least convinces us that he is convinced himself.—*Guesses at Truth*, p. 15.

'BELIEVEST thou,' the Apostle cried,  
'O King Agrippa, yea, thou dost,  
The ancient word?' The king replied,  
'Almost in Christ thou mak'st me trust.'  
'Oh, were ye all and wholly His,'  
Said Paul, his fervour shook his chain.  
'Not bound as I, but with me free;  
'Almost' is altogether vain.'

THOMAS TOKE LYNCH.

THE Roman lictors were provided with a bundle of rods bound with cord, and in its centre an axe, the head of which rose up above the rods. When a criminal was found guilty and sentenced to be beaten, he was allowed the time which the lictors used in untying the cords, in which to plead for mercy; but if stubbornly refusing to do this, he was beaten for his offences. Though our sin has brought condemnation upon us, God has given us space for repentance, but if we spurn this opportunity there remains only the 'fearful looking for of judgment.'—H. O. MACKEV.

**Such as I am.**—Paul the prisoner had much more than the brilliant assemblage before him. (1) They had worldly wealth; he had treasures in heaven, spiritual riches. (2) They had honour and applause from men; he had the approval of God. (3) They had luxury and sensual delights; he had joys, and peace and delights beyond their highest dreams. (4) They had worldly crowns; he had a crown of glory in the heavens. (5) They had hearts of unrest, and consciences ill at ease; he was abiding in perfect peace as a child of God. (6) They had a Roman tyrant for their master, whom they feared; he had the blessed Jesus, whom he loved. (7) Their possessions would last but a little time; his forever and ever.—PELOUBET'S *Acts*, p. 348.

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## At the Literary Table.

### SYDNEY SMITH.

ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS: SYDNEY SMITH.  
 By George W. E. Russell. (Macmillan.  
 2s. net.)

THE man who got Sydney Smith for the 'English Men of Letters' was not to be envied. The task was too easy. The temptation to fill the book with Sydney Smith's clever sayings was too strong. Mr. Russell has not been able to resist it. He honestly acknowledges that he has not tried. He writes well, but he knew that he could not write so well as Sydney Smith. He knew that nothing which he could say would give us half the enjoyment which we should obtain from the transcription of a letter of Sydney Smith's, or even a page from an early number of the *Edinburgh Review*. Accordingly we have very little of Mr. G. W. E. Russell and much of Sydney Smith; and, if Mr. Russell is content, so are we.

Do not think, however, if you have not read the book, that it is a mere collection of smart sayings. It is the biography of a man. We see Sydney Smith as well as hear him. When we have read the book through, we are glad to have read it, not for the fun we have had, but for the friend we have made. We have made a friend whom we shall hold to the end now, large-hearted, liberal-minded, true.

Sydney Smith was born in 1771. In 1800 he was a clergyman of the Church of England, penniless, unknown, and of liberal principles. But, in spite of her brother, a Tory member of Parliament and a placeman under Pitt, Catharine Amelia Pybus married him. The bride had a small fortune of her own, and this was just as well, for her husband's total wealth consisted of six small silver teaspoons, which he flung into her lap saying, 'There Kate, you lucky girl, I give you all my fortune.'

They never made him a bishop. Some people professed to have a grudge against him all his life

for the things he wrote in the early numbers of the *Edinburgh Review*. They were not all wise things, but to the Whigs at least he made up for them. Lord Houghton wrote, in 1873: 'I heard Lord Melbourne say, "Sydney Smith has done more for the Whigs than all the clergy put together, and our not making him a bishop was mere cowardice."' They did not make him a bishop, but they made him a Canon of St. Paul's, and he was presented at Court. 'I went to Court,' he says, 'and, horrible to relate, with strings to my shoes instead of buckles—not from Jacobinism, but ignorance. I saw two or three Tory lords looking at me with dismay, was informed by the Clerk of the Closet of my sin, and, gathering my sacerdotal petticoats about me (like a lady conscious of thick ankles), I escaped further observation.'

His supreme gift was an absolute mastery of the English tongue. But he knew some music also, and could sing. His daughter says, with filial piety, that when he had once learned a song, he sang it very correctly, and, having a really fine voice, often encored himself. 'If I were to begin life again,' he said (he was near the end of it now), 'I would devote much time to music. All musical people seem to me happy; it is the most engrossing pursuit; almost the only innocent and unpunished passion.'

### CONSTANTINE THE GREAT.

CONSTANTINE THE GREAT. By John B. Firth. (G. P. Putnam's Sons. 5s.)

He was a good Churchman but not a good Christian. Such is the judgment which is now usually passed upon Constantine the Great. Is it a just judgment? The latest biographer of Constantine says it is not just. The latest biographer is Mr. John B. Firth. Mr. Firth has written the volume on *Constantine* for Messrs. Putnam's 'Heroes of the Nations.' He does not believe that any man