



*Age 32*

***REV. ROBERT WRIGHT CARPENTER***

***1831 - 1871***

***CONGREGATIONAL MINISTER***

## *TRANSCRIBER'S FORWARD*

Of our great grandfather Carpenter we have precious little – of his writings and who he really was. He was only privileged to sojourn 40 years on this earth. However, through these three small written pieces, we see a man of great moral rectitude and integrity, a man who is deeply devoted to his Lord and Savior, and a man of rich education. The first piece is his first sermon written at college and which was delivered at Essex on October 8, 1854. This sermon was titled *The Secure Refuge*. The second piece is a rough sketch of *The Secure Refuge*, and is titled *Christ, the Only Hiding Place*. The third work is a *Lecture on Early Christian Life in the Second Century*, delivered at a social tea on January 26, 1865.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century English style of handwriting was different than that to which we in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America are accustomed, and although great grandfather's penmanship was beautiful to look at, deciphering some words was a challenge, as various letters, for instance the T's and the L's, though different letters, were so similarly written as to be hardly distinguishable, for he hardly ever crossed his T's; and some words were broken in the middle to look like two separate words.

My background and high interest in early Christian and Roman history and Greek philosophy facilitated the transcription of the above third work significantly, as some words could only be deciphered through a knowledge in these areas. And having personally experienced the difficulty attached to the reading of his works in their original form, it became clear to me that hardly any one in the family would be willing to expend the necessary effort to fully decipher his writings without at least the assistance of a reasonably accurate computer-printed transcription. I feel a sense of gratitude and satisfaction to be in a position to provide this kind of service to anyone among his posterity who may desire to retain a personal copy of these few writings.

And finally, after reading these lecture-sermons one may be inclined to judge his dear widow of 43 years, our great grandmother Elizabeth Link Hatten, a little less harshly for having disowned her son for leaving England and joining up with "the Mormons". This would be somewhat similar to the son of an LDS bishop among us settling in England, joining some sect of infamous reputation, and later serving as a missionary, raising a family, and holding important offices in the same.

- G. Arthur Carpenter

## *Lecture on Early Christian Life in the Second Century*

(Delivered at social tea on Thursday eve, January 26, 1865)

NOTE: Several of the words in his handwriting are very difficult to decipher. A (?) is used in place of a single word or words together that, after much painstaking attention, are found to be utterly unintelligible. A few words were written in Latin, and a couple also in Greek. This writing tells us two wonderful things about our great grandfather, the intensity of his Christian passion, and the richness of his education.

- G.A. Carpenter, transcriber

Had I, when I decided on the subject of the lecture announced, but considered the difficulties attending the attempt to give you anything like a faithful and satisfactory idea of "Early Christian Life in the Second Century" in the short space necessarily allotted to this part of the evening's engagement, I should have hesitated ever choosing such a theme whereon to address you. The preparation necessary has discovered so many interesting facts and principles recorded in ecclesiastical history that I feel justice cannot be done to the subject in a brief half hour, the time I must occupy in this exercise. I must therefore be content with a bare outline, just sketching the picture, and leave you to fill in the lights and shadows according to your own natural habit and cast of thought.

Connection with the Second Century in relation to Christianity may be styled the age of Transitional Innovation. Christianity was experiencing a modified change in itself whilst it was the instrument of change wherever its doctrines were taught. Slight innovations began to appear in Christian faith and worship, whilst this faith, wherever any of its adherents resided, was an innovation upon old heathen customs and forms of belief. I shall not refer to the former aspect of the subject regarding the changes which at the close of the Second Century became apparent in the simplicity of Christianity by the introduction of Gnosticism and other dreaded errors (the forms of Docetism) which were evident to the beloved Apostle as we have unmistakable evidences from his epistles.

My object is to give you a few pictures of Christian life as it then was and also to show how this Christianity operated upon the institutions and character of the heathen world. And at the onset we must bear in mind the essential nature of this divine religion as expressed in the teaching of its divine founder and his apostles. It was, as I have often reminded you, a spiritual religion; it assumed itself as a power aiming at the renovation of the world. It claimed universal reception. It demanded universal acceptance. It sought to make the world what it ought to be and what God would have it be. But the world willed to maintain its old ungodly ways. Hence, a collision with the prevailing modes of thinking and acting was inevitable.

Christianity could find an entrance everywhere because it was the religion of God's sovereignty in the heart and excluded from itself every political element, but it was the fundamental position of that old world which Christianity was to overthrow, that religion was a part of the state. The pagan religion as such, was so closely interwoven with the state, with the whole of civil and social life, that whatever attacked the one must also soon be brought into hostile conflict with the other. This conflict might in many cases at least have been avoided had the early church like that of later times been inclined to accommodate itself to the world more than the believers of Christianity allowed and to become worldly itself in order to gain the world

as a mass. But this the first Christians would not do. They were far more inclined to overstep the (?) by a stern antagonism to whatever was alien to the spirit of Christianity than to a lax accommodation to it, and of the two extremes the former was assuredly for those times the better adopted to maintain the purity of Christian doctrine and Christian life.

The position Christianity thus assumed placed it among what the Roman Senate called *religiones illicitae* (unlawful religions). It was expressly forbidden by the Roman laws. Cicero, in his work *De Legibus*, says "No man shall have particular gods of his own; no man shall worship by himself any new or foreign gods unless they have been publicly recognized by law". Another Roman jurist, Julius Paulus, cites the following as one of the ruling principles of civil law in the Roman state: "Whoever introduces new religions whose tendency and character are unknown whereby the minds of men might be disturbed were, if belonging to the higher ranks, to be banished, if to the lower to be punished with death". Here, we discover the cause of the early persecutions to which the Christians were subjected under the Roman Emperors. Christianity not only denounced the abominations of paganism under the polytheism and obscene rites but also appeared as an adverse power to the existing order of things (non-conformist in the true sense of the word). The Roman government thought they harbored in it and its followers the design to overthrow the imperial rule and hence on civil as well as religious grounds sought to extirpate it by fire and sword, the dungeon and the wild beasts, it not being recognized as one of *religione licitae* (legal religion) and therefore of necessity an insurrection against a venerable national faith.

And in this respect Christianity occupied a different position from Judaism even in the eyes of the pagan Roman. One of the early traducers of the Christians, Celuss, writing against them says: "The Jews are a peculiar people and they observe a national worship whatever may be its character, and in so doing they act like other men. But you Christians are neither one thing nor another, neither Jews nor pagans but a (?)". It is recorded by Tertullian who lived and wrote at (the) close of this period that the Emperor Tiberius was so moved by Pilate's report of the crucifixion and miracles of Christ that he sent a message to the Senate that Christ was to be received among the gods at Rome, and as such was to have a place in the native Pantheon, but the Senate rejected the proposal as an infringement of their ancient prerogative of determining all matters concerning new religions upon their own movement. The proposition must come from their body first.

It is interesting to speculate as to the future of Christianity in the world if this wish of the Roman Emperor had been acceded to by the Senate. Such a step would have been to have legalized Christianity as one of the religions of the state at its earliest development age, at its very commencement. But God's thoughts are not as man's thoughts, and the divine and heaven born religion was to assert its power and extend its progress by the might of its unworldly and spiritual nature. "My kingdom is not of this world" said Christ. It could have no association with such sensual and devilish faiths as were professed by the old world, for it came to renovate society, to renew the moral and spiritual nature of man, and as such must stand alone in the pureness of its (?), and in the (?) of its claims.

This was the secret of the cruel persecutions to which the Christians were exposed from Nero

to Diocletian . Christianity was interdicted by the Roman laws, and as such it became the duty of the civil power to destroy it, if possible, in the persons of its professors. But it was not always that the state originated the persecutions which the Christians suffered. They were often the victims of popular fury. The populace saw in them the enemies of the gods, and with them this was the same as having no religion at all. (?) was the name they gave them.

The vilest and most improbable stories were circulated and believed such as that in their meetings for prayer and worship they gave themselves up to the most unnatural lusts. They devoured children, etc. If the Tiber overflowed its banks, if in Egypt the Nile failed to irrigate the fields, if a contagious disease was raging, if an earthquake or famine or any other public calamity occurred, the popular rage was easily turned against the Christians. We may ascribe all this was the cry to the anger of the gods against Christianity. Thus you will remember the first persecution under Nero (in) 64 was ostensibly to punish the Christians for the burning of Rome, the suspicion of which act clung to the Emperor himself. He was only too willing to make the Christians the victims of the popular fury in order to exculpate himself from the dreadful charge. Thus, those who were arrested by his orders were executed in the most cruel manner. Some were crucified, others sown up in the skins of wild beasts, exposed to be torn in pieces by dogs. Others had their garments smeared over with some combustible materials and were then tied to stakes to illuminate the public gardens by night.

Nero was succeeded by Domitian who even paid informers and spies by whose testimony many who professed Christianity were either banished or put to death by the sword. Under the reign of Nerva, his successor, the Christians enjoyed more tranquil times. He was a man of justice and philanthropy and treated them with tolerance so that they were not exposed to the dangers of the preceding reign, as Nerva was an enemy of all sycophancy and deceit and would not countenance the system established by Domitian of the slaves betraying their Christian masters to the government and then conspiring their destruction. But still Christianity was among the religions unrecognized by the state. There was no security that this calm would continue in the next reign.

So it (?) Trajan, who succeeded Nero, was a statesman in every sense of the word. He could not bear to see the ancient faith of the country being undermined by this new sect. He therefore issued a rescript expressly condemning Christianity as a *religio illicita* (unlawful religion) by an express law. The Christians must deny their faith, invoke the gods, offer incense, and pour out libations before the image of the Emperor as well as those of the gods, and curse Christ. If they refused to do so, and after having been thrice called upon by the governor (of the province) to abjure their faith, still firmly avowed themselves Christians, and would remain so, they were condemned to death as obstinate confessors of a *religio illicita* who dared publicly defy the laws of the Empire. Those who complied were pardoned.

This state of things continued to prevail more or less under succeeding emperors. Sometimes the law was relaxed, and at others enforced with all vigor. Many suffered martyrdom, especially under the emperor Marcus Aurelius. The governors of the Roman provinces were enjoined to put the imperial edicts into force on pain of the Emperor's displeasure. True, they were not to follow

the impulse of blind passion but to act in strict accordance with the law. But such a caution was often insufficient to restrain them from cruel and arbitrary measures.

I might give you several instances of the constancy of the early Christians to their faith, how they chose death rather to sacrifice their allegiance to their God. One or two must suffice. In the year 117, the town of Smyrna, seat over seven churches of Asia, was the scene of the martyrdom of the venerable Polycarp, the Christian bishop of the little flock of believers which had been first gathered, as is generally supposed, by the Apostle Paul. Polycarp was his disciple, and Thaditius says he was one of the little children whom the mothers of Salem brought to the loving Savior and to whom Jesus said, "Suffer (etc.)". Excited by the heathen populace, the proconsul had him arrested and condemned to death, betrayed by two slaves in whom he (?) confidence. After having (?) his pursuers on two occasions, he voluntarily gave himself up to the officers saying, "The will of God be done". Coming down from the roof of his home where he had been engaged in prayer, prayer for all the churches thereabout the (?), he ordered whatever they chose to eat to be set before them requesting only that they would give him one hour for quiet prayer before he set out with them. At the close of that time they led him to the city on an ass when they were met by the (?) or chief officer of justice coming from the town in his chariot. He took up Polycarp in his chariot, and addressing him kindly said, "What harm could be where he is saying Our God, The Emperor, and sacrificing in his honor?" At first he was silent, but on their continuing to urge him he said mildly, "I will such do as you advise me". They thereupon grew angry and violently thrust him out of the carriage. Without looking round, he went on his way as if nothing had happened. When he appeared before the proconsul, the latter urged him to have respect at least to his own old age (90 years) to swear by the genius of the Emperor and give proof of his penitence by joining in the shouts of the people, "Away with the godless". Polycarp looked up with a firm eye at the assembled crowd; then with a sigh and his eyes uplifted to heaven, pointing to them with his finger, "Away with the godless". But when the proconsul urged him further, "Swear, curse Christ, and I release thee", he made this memorable reply: "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and he has done me nothing but good, and how could I curse him, my God and Savior?" The proconsul, having once more but to no purpose threatened him with the wild beast and the stake, caused the herald to proclaim in the (?): "Polycarp has confessed himself a Christian." This was equivalent to the sentence of death. Jews and pagans hastened to bring wood from the warships and baths. As they were about to fasten him with nails to the stake of the pile, he said: "Leave me thus; He who has suffered me to encounter the flames will also enable me to stand firm at the stake". Before the fire was lighted, he prayed: "Oh Lord, Almighty God, Father of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the (?) of (?) God of the angels and the whole creation of the human race and the saints that live in thy presence, I praise thee that thou hast judged me worthy this day and this hour to take part among thy witnesses in the cup of thy Christ". And thus in a chariot of fire his spirit was lifted to heaven.

(In) A.D. 177, a terrible persecution fell upon the churches of Lyons and Vienne. Neither sex, kindred, or age was spared. Old men and maiden mothers with children at their hearts, and others expecting the pangs of maternity, and even boys and girls were either burned and their ashes

thrown into the Rhine that they might not pollute the earth, or cast to the wild beasts, or strangled. Two of these, Ponticus, a youth of fifteen, and his sister Blandina, whom they endeavored to intimidate by first of all making them witness the sufferings of their companions, and then to (?) their constancy by exhausting upon them all the arts of torture, excited universal astonishment at what God's power could do for such young and tender souls. Their firmness and serenity showed, to use the words of the churches in their report of these proceedings, "how they were (?) and (?) by the spring of living water that flows from the heart of Christ, that nothing can be dreadful where the love of the Father dwells, nothing painful where the glory of Christ prevails".

One cannot read the accounts of the sufferings of the Christians at this period and mark the firmness and patience they evinced under tortures the most dreadful without feeling that their religion must have been of divine origin, for no other could have sustained them under such terrible trials. And the blood of martyrs was not only in figure but in fact "the seed of the Church". They died the martyr's death but they lived in the increased piety and devotedness of those who survived. They are among the first fruits unto God and the Lord. The noble army of martyrs, each with his blood stained banner and glittering crown, stands before the throne praising their Lord and singing: "A noble army, men and boys, the matron and the maid; around the Savior's throne rejoice in (?) of light arrayed; they climbed the steep ascent of heaven, this peril, toil, and pain; O God, may peace to us be given to follow in their train."

Let us here briefly glance at the more private side of early Christian life. Let us hear the testimony of a pagan writer. I refer to the younger Pliny whose noble susceptibility to all that is pure in humanity shines forth in those celebrated letters of his which he wrote to Emperor Trajan whilst proconsul at Bithynia and Paul's countries in which the Christians were very numerous. Many of them were brought to his tribunal. All that he could learn against them was: "The Christians were accustomed to meet together on a certain day (Sunday). They sang together a hymn in praise of their god, Christ. They bound one another not to the commission of crimes, but to abstain from theft and from adultery, never to break their word, to withhold from none the property inherent to their keeping, and after this they separated and met again in the evening at a simple repast."

Such a contrast was the life of the Christians to that of the age that it passed into a proverb: "See how these Christians love one another." They were always ready to help and befriend each other, so different to the custom of the pagans that they could not understand the reason of this to them strange thing. And then as to their outward life it may be interesting to give you a description of this from one of themselves. Clement of Alexandria, in one of his books thus describes it: "He (Christian disciple) is plain in his habits, indeed very abstemious, eating fish rather than flesh, satisfied with one meal a day, at the most with two, eating dry bread for breakfast without drinking. His clothing is (?) strong but not fine. He wears a ring on his little finger with device of a dove, a fish, a ship, a lyre, an altar, all emblems of holy things. His hair is thin, his beard thick. He never shaves either and never puts on a wig. He eschews garlands, flowers, and perfumes as well as luxury in furniture, also musical instruments and profane songs. But he wrestles, plays at ball, walks, digs, draws water, chops wood, dresses himself, puts on his

own shoes, washes his own feet, in that is self-helpful. He sleeps on a bed neither rich nor soft. He rises at night to pray, gets up early and reads. The Christian lady is moderate in all things. She does not use dyes or ointments, wears no flowers, no purple robe, no embroidered slippers, no gold chains. She performs domestic duties, spins, cooks, and makes the bed. She is particular in her actions and in gestures, gaits, looks, and tones, and avoids the appearance of evil”.

But these things are in a measure non-essential. They were, it is true, the characteristics of the Christian, the outward signs of office between him and the heathen world, but we must not suppose that the essence of Christianity was expressed in such a material form as this. It was rather manifested in what it was doing for the instruction and benefit of the world. For, to quote from an eloquent living writer, “As one gives a broad glance at the history of this period (Second Century), the eye is ever and anon arrested by indubitable signs of a great moral power, new in its character, vigorously at work in many forms of blessing on society. Yonder we catch the appearance of men (?) engaged in extending the outposts of Christendom, toiling in earnestness and in silence to subjugate heathen souls to the government of Him whose spirit and purpose might well strike the Greek as a strange contrast to Alexander’s ambition, and the Roman to Caesar’s. And at home in the heart of the Church we find ourselves surrounded by instances innumerable of pledged attachment, of self-sacrifice for a brother’s or the common good, all this union with the Elder Brother in Heaven, and faith in His one sacrifice.”

Ah, this was the secret of this power. This was the talisman by which the early Christian life was kept from dying out, from being destroyed by the many deaths to which it was exposed. Faith in Christ was the root of this religious life. It was faith in Him as a person, as a divine, glorious, ever-living person, present with his people. These early Christians looked not at propositions logically expressed as the object of their belief, not at any abstract system of truth at all but at a collection of facts having a personal center, even the incarnation and the sacrificial life and death of Christ. And this, dear friends, is the only thing that can give religious life in any age or under any circumstances of its development, its style, its beauty, and its power, Christ the head over all things to His church; in spiritual matters no law but His, no rule but His, no authority but His. He is our King and must ever be enthroned in our hearts and our Christian societies. Let us exalt Him to the highest place in our midst as a church and people. Our ecclesiastical organization recognizes this (?) as a fundamental doctrine of our creed, but we must not rest satisfied with the bare acknowledgment. Let us as a Christian church strive to bring our church life, our home life, and our own individual life into more beautiful conformity with Christ. Let us each one ask himself as a disciple of Jesus: Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?

There is, as I have reminded this eve, work for each and all of us. Oh brethren, that we could catch some of the spirit which animated the lives of the early Christians of whom we have been speaking! Oh, that we could rise to the sublime attitude of our duty and destiny as Christ’s disciples, His witnesses, His representatives! Let us pray God to help us in our endeavors. He will, and He can, as one who watches for your souls, as one whom God has placed over you as your spiritual teacher and guide, as one who loves you for the Master’s sake, as one who has devoted his time and whatever of talents God may have given him for your Christian progress and



instruction, as one whose heart yearns over you with a pastor's affection.

I beseech you, my friends, thus seek to realize the power and the preciousness of this union with the Christ we preach and in whom you believe. So shall your light shine before men, so shall we be a people whom the Lord will bless! So shall the influence we exert in this town being increasingly beneficial, many will be led to cast in their lot with us, seeing that God is with us of a truth. Our numbers will be increased and our prosperity likewise. And it shall be said as in old time: "Thou shalt no more be termed forsaken, neither shall thy land any more be termed desolate. Thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at that side. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree and the pine tree and the (?) together to beautify the place of my sanctuary, and I will make the place of my feet glorious. There shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. The little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation. I the Lord will hasten it in his time."