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→*SERMONS*←

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MISSIONS.

BY EDWARD P. GOODWIN, D.D., FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, CHICAGO.

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. — ACTS xiii., 2.

THE door swings here upon a new era in the history of the Church. The day of the Jew was ended, the day of the Gentile begun. Prior to this, Paul had preached in Cilicia and Peter had been sent to the house of Cornelius, where the Spirit sealed the testimony to the Gentiles with great power. Some of those, also, who "were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen" had gone as far as Antioch, preaching unto the Grecians the Lord Jesus, and "a great number had believed and turned to the Lord." But this was exceptional and anticipatory. In the main the Gospel had been preached to "none but unto the Jews only." (Acts ix., 30; x., 44; xi., 19-21.)

The text is the pivotal point of the new departure. Now the work of spreading the Gospel among the Gentiles is taken in hand and formally inaugurated. Henceforth the Church appears as a missionary Church. The map of her future campaigns is no longer bounded by the narrow rim that embraces Palestine, but pushes its border east, west, north, south, to the utmost horizon—a boundary line that takes in the world.

Note how the work is undertaken and carried on. Not Barnabas, nor Peter, nor John, nor even Paul, advises, projects, shapes the enterprise. It is altogether the purpose, the plan, the work of the Holy Spirit. He originates

While he has admirable gifts as a platform speaker, a moderator, and as a participator in public assemblies, his heart delights most in the duties of pastor and preacher. He loves to minister to the sick, the needy, the sorrowing. None who deserve sympathy leave him uncomforted and unblest. He is in great request at weddings and funerals, as one who knows how to enter into the needs of all occasions.

He loves to preach. His sermons are not elaborate, there are no studied effects, although he is a diligent student, but feeling the truth intensely himself in every fiber, he moves the people, including the children and youth, of whom he has large numbers in his congregation, and often rises to a high degree of eloquence, as may be seen in his published sermon on "Christianity and Infidelity tested by their Fruits." It is certain, however, that his power is rather in the man behind the sermon than in the sermon itself.

Naturally he has left much of his im-

press upon his church, which before he came was already the mother of Union Park, Tabernacle, and Bethany, and which now has three large branches connected with it that give promise of soon becoming independent churches, not to speak of two missions, three industrial schools and other forms of work.

The total number of accessions to the First Congregational Church when he first came to it had been 1,056. They now aggregate over 4,000 and the total membership is above 1,480. But mere figures cannot tell the story of his labors. There are larger churches which have not had such an influence upon the community as the one of which he is pastor. This Church is an illustration of the wonderful work which has been accomplished on a western prairie in the lifetime of one man, Deacon Philo Carpenter, its founder, who came to Chicago in 1832, with the purpose not so much to make money as to build up Christian institutions.

❖ Leading Thoughts of Sermons ❖

The World's Best: Vanity.

BY JOHN HALL, D.D., LL.D. (PRESBYTERIAN), NEW YORK.

And I turned myself to behold wisdom and madness and folly; for what can the man do that cometh after the king?—ECCLES. II., 12.

My theme is more particularly found in the latter part of the verse, "for what can the man do that cometh after the king?" I have heard this phrase quoted scores of times but never in its true meaning as used in this connection, namely, "Who after me shall be able to make this experiment, or test this question of happiness to more advantage!" Solomon was undoubtedly the author of this book of Ecclesiastes. This is clear from internal evidence. The uncertainties of the higher criticism are becoming proverbial. Knobel, an eminent German scholar, claimed to have found ninety words and phrases in this book that could not possibly have been used among the

Jews earlier than two or three hundred years after Solomon's time. Herzfeldt, however, reduced this number to twenty-five, and finally Dr. Pusey settled, to the satisfaction of all scholars, that every one of these words could be explained as being in possession of a man of Solomon's breadth of culture in that age. Not a little of similar biblical criticism could be shown to be equally superficial and unfounded.

The means which Solomon took to secure both culture and pleasure were exhausted: palaces, grounds and gardens, lakes and fountains, stables and stock-farms and aviaries, throngs of costumed and accomplished retainers from every nation, music and art, "great works"—everything on a grand, luxurious, picturesque, artistic and scientific scale, so that he astonished his royal contemporaries, who came from the ends of the earth to see for themselves. Was he happy? All

through, and at each experiment, the melancholy refrain is heard, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

But might not the experiment be made under more favorable circumstances and with a different result? Solomon provides for this objection when he says, "What can the man do who cometh after the king?" No one ever had a better opportunity of working out this problem, nor ever will.

This is an intensely practical question. Solomon's ideal and quest were those of most minds and lives—how to make life a success. The search for success on the line of culture is more sensible than one on the line of folly or pleasure. But neither paid. We are constantly hearing now about optimism and pessimism. The former views the world as the best possible and all-sufficient in itself; the latter regards it as a failure and a despair. But the truth is with neither. The world is full of good, but not the best, because it has not been left as God made it. It is a scene of conflict between truth and error, light and darkness, God and Satan. Our business is to see that we identify ourselves with the right and winning side, and then we shall attain to a life and world where the mournful strain shall never be re-echoed, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

This subject is well worthy the consideration of those especially who are endowed with large means and deep craving. I charge all such to take God's way to success and happiness. Remember Solomon, live as pilgrims on the earth, set your affection on things above, aim not to please the world but the Father of Lights. Thus you will not only get the best out of the present world, and have its evils turned to good, but you will attain to a state at God's right hand where there are fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.

There is an especial appeal to young men in this subject. It is impossible to read this book without seeing that these are contemplated and singled out. Young men should study this book, that they may avoid the mistakes and temptations of the writer, and not waste their talents, time and freshness of soul,

nor enact the unutterable folly of "sowing wild oats."

The Gradualness of God's Work.

BY REV. OSSIAN DAVIES (INDEPENDENT),
LONDON.

Whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us.—LUKE I., 78.

The eternal God is never in a hurry. He works gradually in all His kingdoms. The daybreak, the advancing sun, and the full meridian. The rude altar, the superb temple, and God manifest in the flesh. Revelation is not a Jonah's gourd, the child of a night, but a slow-growing oak, the child of ages. Our subject, then, is the gradual development of the plan of redemption. God did not make the world complete in a day or two. In the first day's work we see power, in the second day wisdom, the third goodness, and then we advance step by step until man is made. A flower does not grow in a day. In the intellectual and moral spheres there is gradualness—our consciousness develops. All around us, all above us, all within us bears the divine stamp of gradualness. God is never in a hurry, for He sees the end from the beginning. He works slowly—His ponderous wheels move slowly. He makes history by slow steps. Short-lived men are flurried, but God is not. A complete revelation all of a sudden would dazzle and destroy us. God holds Himself back because of our weakness. Let us not be in too great a hurry to withdraw the curtain, for we cannot bear the divine fulgence. Oh God, how merciful Thou art to reveal Thyself gradually to us according to our capacity. We thank Thee for dividing the rain-cloud into such tiny drops that they fall upon the tender lily without destroying it. Besides, we would not be satisfied with a little Christ that could be understood all at once. We are great sinners, and we require a great Christ to save us. The plan of redemption is greater than all our creeds. Let us not make fallible creeds the infallible standards of truth. There is a Bible lying buried in this printed Bible before me, and it will yet rise. Some theologians fix up boundaries and say *ne plus ultra*—no more truth