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→ SERMONS ←

MIGHTY IN THE SCRIPTURES.*

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Mighty in the Scriptures.—ACTS xviii., 24.

THE Scriptures are for the weak as well as for the strong. They contain milk for babes as well as strong meat for them of maturer years. It would be difficult to say how small an amount of Scriptural knowledge might be effectual to the generation of a true religious life and a holy walk with God.

One word of saving truth may be blessed to the renewal of a soul. He who has learned but to say with the publican, God be merciful to me a sinner; or whose ears have heard that priceless declaration that God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life, has caught the kernel of the Gospel. And if he has faith to trust it, the promise is his, and it shall be fulfilled to him in all its gracious meaning. However narrow his conceptions however weak his understanding, he shall experience what the wise and the learned and the great of this world fail to attain.

But though a single spark of heavenly truth may thus shine with a divine light, which shall savingly illumine and guide him whose eyes have been opened to behold it, there is given us in this blessed volume not a spark

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The fireside is the place for freedom and sociability. So get rid, as far as possible, of all stiffness and formality. Let part, at least, of the sociability come before the benediction.

7. *Be prayerful.* Come from prayer. Come in the spirit of prayer. Come to pray. Let it be understood that the "pauses," if any there be, shall be filled with silent prayers ascending to the throne of God. Why should not a *prayer-meeting* be full of prayer? — *Congregationalist.*

The Annual Week of Prayer.

The Evangelical Alliance has issued from the London office the invitation for the Week of United and Universal Prayer, for 1888. The following are the topics suggested: Sunday, January 1st, Sermon, Luke xxi., 28; I. Peter iv., 7; Monday, 2d, Thanksgiving; Tuesday, 3d, Confession; Wednesday, 4th, Prayer for Families; Thursday, 5th, Prayer for the Church of God; Friday, 6th, Intercession for Missions; Saturday, 7th, Intercessions for Nations; Sunday, 8th, Sermons, I. Cor. xv., 58

PREACHERS AND THEIR SUBJECT.

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

Before speaking particularly of the matter to be preached, let us inquire who are, or who may be, the preachers? Answering for myself I will say they are to be all men and women who have a positive standing in the Church. The active and practical aid of laymen is indispensable to the aggressive propagation of the Gospel. It was so in the apostolic age, and has been ever since, and in their own way women have been equally in the service of the Master. It was a woman who first preached Christ to the Samaritans, and a woman who first made proclamation of the resurrection of Christ. Stephen, a layman, expounded the word and preached Christ with such ability and powers as to secure to himself a martyr's crown. But to a regularly authorized ministry I now particularly address my remarks. The preacher should be a man, not only a noble, manly man, but he should be a very human man, as only in meekness, humility, in trials and temptations can he come near the people and be one of them. To be dignified, and at the same time accessible is a matter of prime importance.

But what shall the preacher preach? I answer: What is given him to preach? To the disobedient Jonah it was reprovingly said "Go preach the preaching I command you." Suppose the Viceroy of India should receive a royal message to be delivered to the people; a message written

by the empress herself. He being an educated man and given to fine writing, decides to reconstruct this official document, giving to it all the graces of rhetoric, and delivering it in that way. What would you think of him and his performance? and how much more acceptable to the people would the language of the sovereign be than any the viceroy could substitute. So the Gospel as we have it contains such elements of power that our ingenuity, our own eloquence and our science can make no sensible additions.

Natural religion is recognized by St. Paul as revealing the external power and Godhead of the Almighty so clearly that for their idolatries and abominable crimes the heathen are without excuse, and truths wisely drawn from nature may be used now as then. Christ the great Teacher was frequent in His reference to nature for both principles and illustrations of spiritual truth. But in general the preacher may take all these truths as understood by the people and feel himself free to lay out all his strength in unfolding and proclaiming revealed religion.

The unity and symmetry of truth are matters of prime importance. Errors and destructive heresies result from the pushing of some truth entirely beyond its province, for then it becomes distorted in meaning and all the more injurious because it is truth. St. Paul as a master of

Greek history and Greek literature found there much truth and to some extent he made use of it; but in the main it was so mixed with error and was so out of place that often it proved to be a damage to the people rather than a blessing. The Jew was placed in about the same position through false interpretations of his own scriptures. The great Apostle I have referred to understood well both parties, but conformed to the wishes of neither, nor respected their methods. His work was to bring all to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ—not as it is in science or philosophy.

Social and labor problems are elements of Christian life, and at present as much as ever they call for fresh solution.

The feeling is abroad and the charge is sometimes made that the Church and science are enemies. Well, if that is so it may be replied that the Church fulfils the command: "Love your enemies," for nearly all the literary and scientific institutions of the country are of Christian origin.

But the great object of ministerial toil and care is the salvation of souls. In the presence of this work science and all collateral interests must take a secondary place.

But in preaching the truth why make the preaching of Christ a specialty? Why not make equally emphatic all the persons of the Trinity? By some means not easily explained we feel that creation is a revelation of the first distinction in the Godhead—the Father—and any further revelation that may be needed may be found in Christ, the God incarnate. To find the Father in Christ, Christ must be preached. The power of natural religion reaches more or less all men and all men associate with it the name of the Father of all. Paul was not sent to preach the Father to either Jew or Greek, but Christ and Him crucified. For the same reason we do not lay the greatest stress upon the preaching of the Holy Ghost. By fully preaching Christ, we preach the Trinity—the entire Godhead.

But why harp upon one theme all the time and on all occasions? Christ is the central idea of a vast system of truth, taking in a wide range of interests bearing

upon both time and eternity. What a world of sin is this and Christ is its only Saviour; how terribly deserving of punishment is the disobedience and ingratitude of men, and pardon and deliverance can be found only in Christ. These wide realms of truth can be traversed intelligently and effectually only as the stem from the root of Jesus is carried before us as an ensign. We may preach ethics, but ethics without a present Christ as our strength and inspiration will be unavailing and powerless to save from sin.

How shall Christ be proclaimed?

1. As the Son of Man—as the seed of Abraham, capable of sympathizing with the feeling of our infirmities.

2. The legal, moral and spiritual elements embraced in His incarnation and death are to be fully set forth to the people.

How am I to become good? is a question which every one sometimes asks. The only practical answer that can be given is: In Christ. In Him is power. He as the ideal of all goodness can reach us. We are exposed to temptation—He can shield us. Fear and love are mighty motives to action. The tendency of the one is to enslavement, to narrowness, to degradation; of the other to freedom, expansion, and elevation.

But some will say: I am not a preacher, and these things are not spoken to me. Yet you stand by the preacher's side, you are near to him, he lives in your sympathies and prayers, and your strength is the help he needs. Had it not been for you he might have ere this yielded in the conflict. But is he not sure to grow weary in preaching this one theme? Are you weary of your daily bread, of the sun's light, and of the air you breathe? St. Paul, after thirty years of preaching Christ counted not himself perfect, but counted all things less that he might know Christ and the power of His resurrection. The little he knew of Christ was a mighty inspiration to know more of Him, and the largest lessons he expected to learn when he should see Him as He is. All great truths—such truths as move the world—are connected with Christ. You have all seen electric light. Should at any time the wire

snap which connects the generator of the electric force with the burners, on the instant the lights would go out. They could be restored only by uniting the parts of the

severed wire. So every agency for moral and spiritual good in this world must be connected with Christ, who has all power in Heaven and earth.

PLAN GREAT THINGS.

BY GEORGE R. LEAVITT, D.D., CLEVELAND, OHIO.

It is a postulate in the evangelistic work of the churches that the tendency of all true spiritual movements is toward culminations, spiritual crises. It is so in a man; it is so in a community. The kingdom of Heaven, it is true, comes without observation. This is a constructive principle of which none of us is sufficiently convicted, or we should be less anxious to get into the newspapers, and startle the town with social and religious novelties. But after the hidden process has wrought, the ground breaks, the hidden work appears. The kingdom of God is revealed; coming up as a field of grain that shakes like Lebanon, coming down like the New Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God.

It is often said after a series of special meetings: "We have failed of the blessing we sought. There have been few conversions, or none at all. The best we can say is that the church has been quickened, or, more truly, some members in it. We may have been mistaken in attempting something out of the usual order. We may have set our expectation too high when we looked forward to a general awakening." No! Not so! Surely never so! We were right. The process of the Spirit is to produce, through well-defined spiritual methods, culminations, the state of spiritual white heat, the visible coming of the kingdom of God out of obscurity into light and power; when men who have said, "Where is your God?" are startled into the confession of His mighty presence, and the mouth of the Church is filled with laughter, and her tongue with singing. Of this great principle of periodic culminations in the development of Christianity there can be no question. We have a right to count

upon them. To be successful we must do so.

But there is another principle in spiritual processes, especially in *large* movements. This principle is that great crises are apt to be delayed. The awakening comes, but it stays. What then? If it tarry, wait for it. How long? Until it comes. The wise pastor, the wise church, understands this principle of delay, and works by it. There is a time when all things at length are ready. Until this is reached, the blessing is delayed. We plan for an awakening this season. Are all things ready? How long will one continue an evangelistic work, on a special line? A month? Three months? A year? This is a momentous series of questions. A month is a considerable time. A year is a long time. But suppose the culmination requires more than a month, and more than a year, while, as a result, at the *end* of a movement initiated, it is certain! There are obstructive conditions in many communities which require time to adjust. The breaking up cannot come until these adjustments are made.

In many communities the conditions are so favorable that awakenings of power will result from well directed efforts during the Week of Prayer, or the month of January, or the season upon which we have entered. But in other fields patience is of critical importance, for in these fields, with labor just as devoted, the reaping may not come for a twelvemonth, or even for years. Why did the Pentecost come so late, instead of when Mary of Nazareth seems to have looked for a great spiritual manifestation, at the opening of our Saviour's ministry? We are able to answer: That crisis was the culmination