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"Signs of the Times."

ANNUAL SERMON
BEFORE THE
FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY
OF
NEW-YORK AND BROOKLYN,
1850.

BY
ERSKINE MASON, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE BLEECKER ST. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, N. Y.

New-York :

PUBLISHED BY ALMON MERWIN,
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—
1850.

“SIGNS OF THE TIMES.”

A

SERMON

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY

OF

NEW-YORK AND BROOKLYN,

IN THE

MERCER STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, N. Y.,

APRIL 7, 1850,

AND REPEATED IN THE

CHURCH OF THE PILGRIMS, BROOKLYN,

APRIL 14, 1850.

BY

ERSKINE MASON, D. D.,

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1850.

S E R M O N .



ZECHARIAH X. 1 (FIRST CLAUSE) :

“ASK YE OF THE LORD RAIN IN THE TIME OF THE LATTER RAIN.”

IN order to bring out before you, distinctly, the thought which is to be the basis of this discourse, the emphasis of our text must be laid upon the latter part of it. It was at the time of the latter rain, and *because* it was the time of the latter rain, that they were to ask for it. There were two seasons when the rain was accustomed to fall in the land of Judea. The one was the seeding time, and this was the season of the “former rain”; the other was the time when the ear was filling, and this was the season of the “latter rain.” At these two seasons, except when God in judgment suspended his own laws, the rain fell with uniform regularity; and as it had been so from year to year, they might look upon it as a matter of course, brought about by the fixed mechanism of nature, that the rain would fall in the time of the latter rain: and this is the peculiarity of the text, that the fixed certainty of the event should be a strong motive to pray for it. And herein you perceive the contrast between the reasonings of Scripture, and those of a paralyzing fatalism on the one hand, and of a proud and boastful philosophy on the other. When the time arrives at which the rains fall, according to the regular course of nature, they will fall; natural causes will work out their invariable effects, whatever we may do, or refrain from doing. An event, certain in itself, whatever may be the ground of its certainty, will take place wholly irrespective of our praying or doing. So reasons fatalism—so reasons infi-

delity ; but so reasons not the Bible. Here we have an argument to enforce prayer for rain, taken from the fact that it was the time when, according to God's appointment, the rain might be expected ; thus making the certainty of an end growing out of the Divine arrangements, the grand motive to labor and pray for the accomplishment of that end. We do not stop here to enter into the philosophy of the Scriptures upon this point, but content ourselves with the mere statement of the principle itself, the illustrations of which you can find upon almost every page of the Bible. Thus, wherever a purpose of God is made known, or a promise revealed, that purpose or promise becomes the reason for prayer and effort, only as it renders certain to the mind the end which it contemplates. When we read in the Old Testament Scriptures those glowing prophecies of coming joy and triumph to the house of Israel, in which God seems to speak of his fixed, irreversible purpose, we find appended to them this language : “ Yet for all this I will be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.” The reason for the prayer grows out of the certainty which the Divine purpose establishes of the event, as though no one would enter heartily into the work of supplication, who did not regard the end prayed for as fixed beyond all peradventure.

Now, I take this simple Scriptural principle and set it before you, as suggesting an interesting train of thought to the Christian mind, concerning the object, and our duty in reference to it, which specially demands our attention this evening. And I do it the more readily, because whatever may have been the primary application of the text, its ultimate reference is probably to those large measures of influence from on high, and those grand results, which should mark the latter days, when God was to pour out his Spirit upon all flesh. Looking upon ourselves, therefore, as living at the time of the “latter rain,” we intend to infer from this fact our duty, and in view of it, not simply to estimate the character, but also to determine the weight of our responsibilities.

We believe, or profess to believe, that this world is to be converted unto God ; that as a result of the Divine purpose, fixed and irreversible, the “grace which reigns through right-

eousness ” is to triumph over the ruins of the apostasy ; that however many and great are to be the strugglings between the conflicting elements of good and evil, between light and darkness, the former shall eventually secure the ascendancy ; truth shall achieve its victories, as “ all shall know the Lord, from the least even unto the greatest,” and holiness shall prevail, as “ the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.” We look at this matter with a Christian eye, and find our warrant for this faith in the Word of truth. There are, I will admit, aside from the express statements of the Word of God, many considerations which throw an aspect of great probability upon this grand result which our faith contemplates. The gospel of Jesus Christ has an air of universality about it which seems to indicate that it was never destined to be limited in its influence, and confined to particular sections of the human family. We see that it is the very thing which human nature everywhere needs,—if not the only thing, yet the only thing of which we have any knowledge, which can lift humanity up from its deep degradations ; and everywhere almost throughout the world we see, or think we see, the working of influences which must disenthral the human mind from bondage of every kind, and bring it into “ the liberty wherewith the gospel makes men free.” Such considerations, however, are valuable, not as constituting a warrant for faith, but as cumulative testimony coming in afterward, to strengthen a faith which the word and promise of the living God have already inspired. There is no evidence, aside from the declarations of the inspired oracles, that we know of, to originate, however much there may be to deepen and confirm, a conviction of the regeneration of the world. There may be speculations and surmises, very rational in their nature ; there may be a collation of facts, which seem to indicate as very probable a great change coming over the face of the earth ; but there is nothing to put the nature of that change past all doubt, to bring the mind to that fixed confidence in its certainty, which, as it awakens a sense of responsibility, leads to corresponding exertion. The element of all active, untiring Christian industry, the source of that prayer which has power

with God, the mainspring of that effort which alone secures a blessing from on high, is found in a simple faith in the Divine promise,—nowhere else. In such faith, though it be but as a grain of mustard-seed, there is more of that power which the Church of God needs, and must have to accomplish her purposes, than in all the convictions however intelligent which the human mind has ever reached, as a result of mere philosophical speculations, or of inquiries into the tendencies of all the causes, physical, social, or political, which are now at work in the world.

If I do not greatly mistake the aspect of things, we need to be brought back to the simplicity of faith. In these latter days, when throughout the world nothing is certain but change ; when the human mind almost everywhere seems to be waking up from the slumber of centuries ; when the spirit of enterprise is putting itself forth and making itself felt in every direction ; when distant lands are brought together in a manner which appears almost to annihilate time and space ; when the Christian mind of the world leads in all these enterprises, and by means of them extends its influence ; when it is perfectly plain to every observer that Christian sentiment is working its way, and that lying back of all occasions and proximate causes, it is producing the restlessness and change which is everywhere observable ;—there is great danger that we shall look entirely to these signs of the times, as constituting the reasons of our faith in the speedy triumph of Christianity, and lose sight, in a great measure, of the promise of God, which alone can inspire the confidence which wakens to prayer and nerves for effort.

I begin, then, all my reasonings upon this subject, with the promise of God. I believe that the religion of the gospel shall triumph, because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it ; and having fixed my faith here, then I look abroad upon the world, and study "the signs of the times," not for the purpose of speculating upon or judging of the probabilities of the event itself, but only to strengthen a faith already existing and watch the movements of Providence as they may seem to indicate the approach of the time when the promises my faith contemplates shall receive their fulfilment. If I saw no light

breaking upon the dark places of the earth ; if I saw nothing but the prevalence of a debasing sensuality ; if there were no evidences of the upward working of the human mind in any direction ; if the atheistic spirit were rife in the world, rising and assuming vigor and boldness, while its opposite was languishing and putting forth unequivocal evidences of imbecility ; if, in addition to this, Christian faith had but little manly courage about it, and distracting influences pervaded the household of God, paralyzing its energies and exhausting its strength ;—still I should believe in the certain final triumph of Christianity, because still I should find it written here upon this page of undoubted truth, “ the kingdoms of this world shall be the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.” But if, when I cast my eye over the scene of this earth, I can see light breaking upon the mountains, the intellectual sluggishness of centuries disturbed, the human mind everywhere waking up and searching for truth ; if, moreover, the spirit of Christian faith was vigorous, and the spirit of atheism and sensuality was overpowered, distracted, and divided in its counsels, while the Church of God was of one mind and one heart, and that a mind and heart set upon the work before it ; then I would bring in sense and reason to assist my faith and strengthen my hope, as they seemed to indicate that the redemption of the world was drawing nigh.

With regard to faith in the promise of God itself, into which all the reasons for the certainty of this world’s conversion must be resolved, let me remark that in our day we have the most decided advantage over all the generations which have preceded us. I do not mean by this to say, that faith in God’s promise is any more rational now than it ever was, but that it is far more easy of exercise. We occupy a position in the history of providential developments far in advance of our ancestors,—a position which, if it does not furnish stronger reasons for faith, furnishes at least reasons for a stronger faith. A series of successful experiments in any department of science or the arts, will render confidence in the skill and knowledge of their author, which they illustrate, far more easy than it should have been had those experiments never been made, or, if made, been unsuc-

cessful ; and precisely so, what has already been done in the way of the fulfilment of God's purpose, will render it comparatively easy to believe in the fulfilment of what as yet remains unexecuted.

The great end which faith contemplates, the conversion of this world to God, is to be regarded not as an isolated event, unconnected with anything which has preceded it, but as a result towards which everything has been tending,—as the full development of a plan,—the final grand consummation of a system of arrangements under which this world has been placed. It was wrapped up in the first intimation as to the triumph of the seed of the woman over the seed of the serpent ; and as we now look back upon the past, we can see that every successive step which God has taken in the conduct of human affairs, has been but unfolding more distinctly the grand idea of that intimation, and bearing upon the result which is to turn it into a reality. Each of these successive steps, moreover, was the subject matter of a distinct promise, which received in it its perfect fulfilment ; and now we occupy a point in the world's history, a stage in providential development, where we can with great effect bring the memories of the past to shed light upon and give certainty to the anticipations of the future. For if all the promises which God has made, and all the purposes he has revealed, subordinate to the grand promise and purpose of the conversion of the world, have been, the former fulfilled, and the latter executed to the very letter, the inference is one not easily to be set aside, that the end which they all contemplate shall be secured likewise. If God has moved forward steadily to the accomplishment of his purpose, and we can see that every one of his movements has been in strict accordance with his previous declarations ; if, so far as experience sheds any light upon the subject, his faithfulness as well as his power has been tested, and put past all doubt by the event, which in every case has verified his words ; then I can believe that he will continue to move steadily forward toward the result which all past dispensations have contemplated, and this grand promise, which has given meaning to all subordinate promises, will be fulfilled likewise. The Christian man who turns to his own history, and finds amid

his recorded experiences the evidence of the truthfulness of this written testimony, and the faithfulness of God who speaks therein, is perfectly satisfied that he is not in his Christianity following "a cunningly devised fable," and has a confidence, than which none can be more rational or strong, that every good word upon which his hope fastens shall be verified by the event. And the Church, as she looks back upon the way by which her Lord has led her, and sees how every word thus far has been made good, and how all the dealings of God have been preparing for, and converging toward one grand consummation, and that the subject of a distinct and intelligible promise, may be perfectly confident that in looking forward to the final triumph of Christianity, as an event absolutely certain, she is not indulging in the rhapsodies of an over-excited, over-tasked imagination, not in the reveries of a visionary, but in an expectation commended to the mind by its soberness, as it is warranted by truth which centuries have illustrated.

Upon the promise of God then, thus clearly revealed upon the sacred page, thus fully illustrated in its nature, thus proved so far as anything future can be certain of fulfilment, I fasten my faith; and now I can cast my eye over the world, and look at the appearances of things, and examine the developments of Providence, because in this promise upon which my faith fastens I have a key to unlock the mysteries of God's dispensations, and the means of discovering and explaining the nature and bearings of influences which are seen to be at work, and events which are occurring, so perplexing and mysterious to the man who never studies them in their relation to the promise and purpose of God.

We cannot, I apprehend, look with any degree of attention at "the signs of the times," in the light of revealed truth, without having the conviction forced upon us, that we are occupying an interesting point in the history of those providential developments which are to secure the fulfilment of the Divine promise. I wish to be distinctly understood as placing this conviction in connection not with any mathematical calculations of dates, or years, or cycles of prophecy; for in these, for one, I have very little faith, and regard a de-

pendence upon them not only as delusive, but as dangerous in its tendency. The man who trusts to such arithmetical processes, and has found out, beyond all question, the exact time of our Lord's coming, may be very sincere in his convictions; but the result he has reached, together with his process of reaching it, have an air of doubtfulness thrown over them by the fact, that their tendency has been to paralyze all his Christian energies, and convert the practical disciple into the mere theoretical speculator, wholly unfit for, as he is wholly unconcerned about, the great work which his Master has given him to do, of preaching the gospel to every creature.

The conviction of which I speak has an origin altogether different. It springs not from figures, but from facts,—facts totally different from any which have yet occurred in this world's history, and yet strikingly significant in view of the past,—facts, the tendency of which is not to paralyze but to rouse the energies, not to repress but to animate the spirit of prayer, and which, carefully studied in their varied relations and bearings, while they bring us to the conclusion that we are upon the eve of great changes, bring us also to that state of mind which those changes demand of the followers of Christ, that they may meet the responsibilities which are thus thrown upon them. In adverting to these facts, which furnish materials for Christian thought, and incentives to Christian action, we cannot overlook the political aspects of things, which no observing mind can regard but as fraught with the most momentous results. The little cloud which, in certain states of the atmosphere, appears in the horizon, does not more surely to the practised eye indicate approaching rain, than do certain national movements, certain signs in the political hemisphere, indicate coming changes. The "kingdom of Christ is not" indeed "of this world;" but through human management the things of that kingdom have been so interwoven in systems of earthly government, and religion has become to such an extent entangled with the policy of human courts and the stratagems of earthly cabinets, and consequently so fettered, that it cannot accomplish its purposes without changes which, as they break up these alliances, the

growth of centuries, must produce overturnings which seem, at least for the time, to throw everything into confusion.

To a superficial observer, the political phenomena which everywhere arrest the attention may seem to be but the evidence of a spirit of misrule which, long kept down by the strong hand of power, is essaying to break loose from all restraints, and assume the absolute supremacy. But one who looks beneath the surface of things, and going beyond the proximate motives of individual action, inquires into the ultimate reasons of human conduct, will discover in all these movements which excite astonishment and awaken expectation some grand Christian ideas, indistinctly perceived in many cases, yet ideas of truth struggling for development, and endeavoring to shake off the influences which have kept them down, and prevented the human mind from perceiving their beauty or feeling their power. One such idea, fairly brought out to light, puts a people in advance of the position which they formerly occupied ; not indeed that it makes them any more Christian than they were before, but that it renders them more accessible to Christian influence, as it breaks down barriers and removes obstacles which before seemed insurmountable.

All great changes in the world's past history have been preceded by similar indications. We think, if time permitted us to do so, we might show, from the most authentic records, that not only has every advance of the human mind been preceded by distinct intimations, but has been secured by means of some Christian idea, which, gaining the ascendancy, has wrought the change. The worth of individual man, when fully brought out and distinctly apprehended, did not more certainly put an end to the feudal system, with its appendages of serfdom and vassalage, than did another idea, connected with this and springing from it,—personal responsibility, and of course the right of private judgment,—work out those results which astonished the world at the time of the Reformation; and in all these cases of change and revolutions, there were those who never lived to see them, by whom they were nevertheless most distinctly anticipated.

There has been always something very remarkable in these

preparatives or indications of changes to which we have alluded. Naturally we should suppose that if any Christian truth is to make new advances in the world, we must search for the indications of its coming triumphs among those by whom that truth has already been received, and by whom it is best understood. And unquestionably this supposition is correct when we look at the subject in detail, at revival and progress in particular spheres or places, where we necessarily build our hope on the proximate causes of progress, in the piety and effort of Christians themselves; but when we look at things on a larger scale, and consider the general scheme of Providence in reference to the final triumph of Christianity, it is very different. If we do not wholly overlook these proximate causes, we expect to see indications of movement and change in other directions. When a dark storm-cloud broods over the earth, we fix our eye not upon the spot where it seems to be the least heavy, but where it seems to be blackest, for the first streak of light which indicates a clearing. When the Spirit of God brooded over the dark face of the waters, there came life, and light, and order; and over the ruins of this moral creation must the same Spirit move in his work of reformation, and in the darkest places of the earth we shall see some of the first breakings of that light which is to go on, constantly increasing, until the perfect day of the Son of man.

This is one of the striking characteristics of the present times, that the signs of hope and omens of promise for the Church of God are seen in the darkest places, in the breaking up of systems which have stood in the way of the triumphs of truth, and in those changes which put the human mind in a posture to receive that truth. Nor do we discern these signs of the times solely in the political horizon,—the moral firmament is likewise full of them. It is the peculiarity of our age, as it has not been of any age which has preceded it, that every existing form of idolatry and superstition and false religion seems to be worn out, and there appears to be no new form of general error rising up to take their place. It has never been so before. Casting our minds back over the history of centuries, superstitious systems of idolatry have

had fast hold upon the human mind ; or, if any of them have been shaken, it has been by the power of some new and more vigorous superstition, which has been ready to take its place and assume its relinquished dominion. But it is so no longer. The nations of the earth are now brought fully and distinctly into view. We know them all,—what they are, what is their position, their circumstances, their customs and habits, and their religion. Our knowledge of this kind is not only extensive in its range, but intimate and particular in its character ; and justifies the remark already made, that every form of superstition and false religion has passed its zenith, and rapidly hastens to its setting. I do not know of any reasonable or plausible exception to this general statement. If there is one, it must be in reference to Hindooism, which at the present time shows more strength than any other form of idolatrous superstition ; and yet this system, which holds enslaved about half of the population of the globe, presents to the careful observer the most unequivocal evidences of the infirmities of age. No religion can maintain an ascendancy any farther or any longer than it maintains its hold upon the passions of the mind. The moment it ceases to be a matter of feeling, and becomes one of custom, its days are numbered. Where is the life and fire and spirit of Hindooism, as it now presents itself to the attention ? What is there remaining to sustain the power and support the authority of the Brahmin, but the law of caste and the prevalence of a false philosophy, which are every day losing their influence, as they yield gradually but surely to the superior light and influence of Christian civilization ?

So far as China is concerned, it has not now, it has not had for centuries, any religion, as a matter of the heart ; it is a thing of state, or a mere customary appendage to the general economy of society. It lies like a corpse reduced to ashes, which, because undisturbed, may retain the original form of the body ; but which, when once touched by the breath of heaven, is scattered. Break up the civil institutions of this wonderful empire, change its customs and usages,—and the signs of this breaking up and change are every year becom-

ing more numerous and striking,—and there will be no religion left.

There was a time too when the false prophet of Mecca subsidized to the advancement of his system the power and intelligence of the Asiatic nations. To his superior wisdom and that of his successors, Arabia, and Persia, and Asia yielded, and Islamism triumphed over the religion of the worshipers of the sun and moon and stars; but it has passed its manhood, and is fast verging to the close of life. In its every aspect, civil, political, and religious, Mohammedanism seems to be a worn-out thing, requiring external supports to sustain it, and ready at any shock to give up the ghost.

It is not much different with the gigantic superstition of the West. The thunders of the Vatican are scarcely heard, certainly they have lost their power to terrify. She who once put her foot upon the necks of kings, now moves at the bidding of those she once enslaved, and flies for help to those who once laid their crowns at her feet. It is indeed maintained in some quarters, that the power of Romanism to accomplish its purposes is as great as ever; but where is the evidence? A strong and athletic constitution will generally in the hour of dissolution exhibit violent muscular spasms; and we may cheerfully concede that there is that about Romanism which predicts a by no means easy death,—which seems to indicate that it will not give up life without the most desperate struggles and throes, world-wide in their influence; and there are now these very marks of dissolution about her, signs of the ebbing out of life. Where is now the living energy of Romanism, as a religious system? Not in the heart! The region of the Tiber, the immediate vicinity of the Vatican, is not the seat of its life and energy. The heart beats but feebly; and surely you will not find its resources amid the Italian skepticism of the north, the mysticism of German philosophy, the farcical acting of France, or the licentiousness of more southern Europe! Where are its sources of vigor and the elements of its strength? And what is Romanism now, as a political system, but a creature kept in being by surrounding powers, for purposes of state, to

be certainly dropped and cast aside the moment any change occurs which will render her existence useless?

And while all these false religions and superstitions are fast wearing out, giving evidences of the infirmities of age and omens of approaching dissolution, where is there any one commanding form of error which appears ready to rise and take their place? The only religion at the present moment in our world which has any signs of life and vigor about it, any of the elements of progress, is the simple religion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. If all other systems depart, this must take their place; for the human mind must have a religion of some kind, and nothing but this remains. I am aware that there are those who, in view of the facts upon which we have been dwelling, reach very different conclusions. They seem to consider the apparent decay of all existing superstitions as an evidence of a general tendency to universal skepticism, and they predict a turbulent, horrid reign of some grand atheistic system, which will sweep away with one breath, not only all that is false, but all that is true likewise. Such a system however is manifestly impossible, because man can never get rid of the constitution which God has given him. There is a secret witness for God in every breast which never can be destroyed, however for a time its testimony may be suppressed; and no system of Atheism or bald Infidelity has ever yet in this world secured anything more than a very brief ascendancy. While man remains man, he must have a religion of some kind to meet the demands of his spiritual nature, as he must have nourishment of some kind to sustain his physical system. Atheism can no more meet the wants of the mind than air can sustain animal life. There can be therefore no such thing as a general reign of Atheistic terror.

In throwing out these views, we do not wish to make the impression that the conversion of the world to God is a very easy enterprise. We do not mean to say that the nations of the world are beginning to show signs of a preparation to embrace Christianity. But, if we may look upon it as a fixed fact that this world is to be converted, if the promise of God's Word puts this matter past all doubt, then to the believer in this prom-

ise the present state of the world is full of interest, as tending to strengthen faith, give vigor to hope, and energy to effort. If the gospel is certainly to triumph, the likelihood of its triumph is greater now than it ever has been, because opposing influences are becoming weaker, and every effort we put forth must tell with greater effect, because the resisting force is so much less. Who doubts that there is more hope of the triumph of the gospel in China now than there was a century since,—more hope for Turkey now than in the days of Mahomet's immediate successors,—more hope for Italy than in the days of Leo X.,—more hope for our Southern continent than in the days of Torquemada ?

I do not think that any man who loves his Saviour, and the great object for which his Saviour died, can take a general survey of the world, from any elevated and commanding position, without being deeply affected, as he observes the striking contrast between the past and the present. Let him take the fact that but little more than a third of a century since, there was scarcely a spot in heathen lands where a Christian missionary could set his foot, and place it beside this fact, that there is now scarcely a spot where he may not plant the standard of the cross ; let him see how the strong intrenchments of heathenism and idolatry and false religion have been giving way with a rapidity almost incredible ; let him see the world, not in the light of prophecy merely, but in the light of fact also, converted into a field for Christian effort, and he cannot avoid the conviction that Providence has been busy in the sphere assigned to it, doing its peculiar and appointed work, in subserviency to the great purpose of the cross of Christ, and that some grand crisis is near at hand, as the result of the wonderful changes which are so rapidly taking place, and the events, so remarkable, which are crowding upon each other in such quick succession.

I am greatly mistaken, moreover, if there are not within the Church of Christ itself, certainly within the range of her immediate action and influence, signs perfectly correspondent to those beyond her immediate sphere, upon which we have been dwelling. It is a common maxim that every particular conjuncture of circumstances has a class

of men suited to itself,—men who are drawn out and whose characters are developed by the emergencies of the times. I believe it to be true. God usually accomplishes his purposes through human agency, and when he has a work to do, he raises up instruments fit for that work. In accordance with his revealed arrangements, his Church is to be the great instrument for the conversion of the world; and where there are marked providential developments, we look for a corresponding spirit and line of action in the Church. We should have very little confidence in any surmises drawn from external appearances, if there were no manifestations of an internal according spirit and movement. Now we utter nothing but what every man and woman in Christendom feels, when we say that the present is a time not only of very general but of very sanguine expectation in the Church of God. Even the dreams of visionaries, and theorizers, and speculators, are not without their meaning. As constituting good grounds or rules of action, they may be utterly worthless, and dangerous in their influence; but as evincing the state of the public mind, they are invaluable. The increased attention to the study of the prophecies, the many plans of interpretation which have been given to the world, and the different results which have been reached, some of them I admit very wild and fanciful, all mean something,—they indicate at least a posture of expectation. In this respect the state of things is precisely such as we should look for when any great changes are to take place.

And then if we come within the circle of sober thought and rational movement, we discover indications no less striking. The same Providence which has been and is preparing the way for the triumphs of the gospel, is also preparing his Church for the part she is to act in achieving those triumphs. The change which has passed over the face of the world is no greater than the change which has passed over the face of the Church. A missionary spirit, unknown before, has come to be characteristic of the age in which we live; not indeed that the spirit of Christ's people in this respect corresponds in earnestness, or the means they expend in amount, or the efforts they put forth in energy, to the obligations which their

Master in his providence has imposed upon them,—but I am speaking of the present as contrasted with the past. I take as a general illustration the missionary institution with which most of us are connected. If forty years since there was scarcely an opening for missionary effort, there was at the same time not an American missionary, nor the means to sustain one; but now we can point you to some hundred and fifty ordained missionaries, five hundred laborers, nearly one hundred missionary stations, some seventy Christian churches, and nearly thirty thousand professed converts in heathen lands, the results of the missionary spirit in one department or branch of the Christian Church. Nor do we believe that this spirit is becoming weaker, but rather stronger. At this very moment there are more hearts than ever to send up to the throne with increasing earnestness the prayer, "Thy kingdom come;" there are more hands engaged in the work, more men to devote themselves personally to the enterprise of spreading the gospel through the world, more means to sustain them within our reach. The influence which in a short time has raised the resources of the Board from one thousand to a quarter of a million of dollars annually has not become inoperative. There are indications, by no means equivocal, of a new spirit of benevolence rising in the Church, a spirit of self-devotement, a spirit which leads men to shape their course and use their means in reference to the great work which God has given his people to do. Even in reference to our own sphere, the circle of our own Christian relationships, the region covered by the Society whose anniversary we celebrate to-night, a comparison of the present with the past will justify all the remarks we have made.

While we are taking this view of our subject, let us not overlook this important thought, that the spirit of the Church of Christ, in this respect, is impressing itself upon the public mind, and giving tone to its sentiment. In evidence, we point you to a rising spirit of antagonism in the very quarters where we should look for its manifestation when the power of Christian influence is decidedly felt. We point you to the fact that missionary movements, which but a few years since were regarded as matters of very little moment, are now

watched with intensest interest ; and the plans of the Church of God, as well as the results they are developing, find their way into courts and cabinets and council chambers, to shape political plannings, and give form to political movements. It is so in our own land, it is so in the land of our ancestors ; and when we see the power of British and American influence everywhere at work, reaching all nations, inspiring them with new ideas—when we see the probability that the present language of evangetic faith is to be the language of the world, we cannot but hail it as an omen of brightest promise, that these nations, which now confessedly take the lead in the world, are the nations where a pure faith and a missionary spirit prevail, and which themselves feel, in all their deliberations and plans and movements, the influence of this aggressive characteristic of the Church of Christ.

I cannot but think, my brethren, that in reference to the triumphs of the cause of the Redeemer, the day in which we live is one of intensest interest and brightest promise. It seems to be the time of the latter rain, when we are called to an unusual spirit of prayer and devotion, and more than ordinary effort. The providence of God enforces duty no less strongly than the Word of God clearly reveals it. If at all times there is a pressure of responsibility upon the Christian, now in an especial manner ought it to be felt, because in fact it is increasing. It is strictly conformable to all the analogies of things, that now a deeper interest should be taken in the work of Christian missions, leading to the most importunate prayer, the greatest painstaking, and even to sacrifices. Every object of hope or fear increases its influence upon us as we approach it. The racer on the course, as he draws near to the goal upon which his eye has been fixed, and as the prize for which he is contending becomes brighter as well as more distinct, is roused and nerved for almost convulsive effort. All the energies of the human soul are then stirred most effectually, when the plans to which they have been devoted are upon the eve of their successful accomplishment. And so now, when everything indicates the coming triumphs of the gospel, when the gathering clouds seem to portend the latter rain, when everywhere movement is visible among opposing

agencies, but they are movements of retreat, and sounds are heard, but they are sounds of dismay,—now should the Church of Christ, now should every individual Christian feel the weighty responsibility which Providence throws upon the conscience, and be prepared in a spirit of Christian faith, and Christian courage, and Christian fortitude, to meet and discharge it.

A prize which, when fairly within the reach, is not seized, is not usually a second time presented as an object of hopeful effort. Every man has his particular work, and his opportunity for doing it, which, once lost, never returns. Every age has its appropriate object, and an appropriate season for gaining it: failing then, it fails always. I apprehend the analogy holds good in spiritual things, and in reference to the Church of Christ.

When God had brought the children of Israel to the borders of the promised land, and commanded them to go up and possess it, and when, alarmed on account of the dangers before them, and unmoved by the exhortations of Caleb and Joshua, who would have urged them forward, they refused to advance, they had been put upon their trial and failed,—the door was closed against them, and they were driven back into the wilderness, there to wander till that entire generation had passed away, and men of another spirit had arisen to take their places. We do not believe that the promise of God will fail: this world will be brought to the knowledge of the truth, the Church will take possession of the earth in the name of her Master; and it would seem from providential developments as though Christians of the present age were now put upon their trial, and called to go up and take possession of their inheritance. We may fail in the trial, not because we have not sufficient strength and sufficient resources, but because we have not sufficient faith and courage. The Christians of the present day may give an impulse to the cause of missions, which will settle the question of the speedy triumph of the gospel. If they fail, what can we look for but that the purposes of God will to human view be rolled back, every door of usefulness now open be closed, and kept closed till we shall have passed from the stage,

and other Christians, of more faith, more prayer, more self-denying, self-sacrificing effort, shall rise up to carry on the work of God? And when the opportunity shall have passed away, and our unfaithfulness shall re-act upon ourselves in the spiritual mildew and blight which shall rest upon everything around us, we shall have the fulfilment of the prophetic malediction: "Curse ye Meroz, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not up to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."