

FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NASHVILLE

One Hundred Years of Service

The Centenary⁴
OF
The First Presbyterian Church
OF
Nashville, Tennessee



THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE.
The Corner Stone Was Laid April 28, 1849, and the Building Dedicated on
Easter Sunday, April 20, 1851.

THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

The Addresses Delivered in Connection
with the Observance of the
One Hundredth Anniversary,
November 8-15, 1914.



1915
Foster & Parkes Company
Nashville, Tenn.



CHAPTER II.

OUR WORLD OBLIGATION.

By REV. EGBERT W. SMITH, D.D.

I esteem it a privilege to take part in the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of this historic church. It is fitting that foreign missions should have a voice in this celebration, because for a quarter of a century this church has been a larger factor than any other church in the membership of our Foreign Mission Committee and in the conduct of its great work. Your gifted pastor is Chairman of our committee; for eight years one of your good elders has been Chairman of our most important sub-committee; your church is furnishing us our mission rooms rent free, and your contribution to this cause now amounts to between five and six thousand dollars per annum. In the name of our whole committee, therefore, I bring you our most grateful greetings and the assurance of our prayers that your future may not dim but diadem your past.

It is always interesting to trace the course of a mighty river back and up to its fountain-head, to stand beside some crystal spring as it wells up from the earth's deep heart and say, "Here starts the stream whose waters fertilize and bless a continent."

To find the fountain-head of foreign missions, whose waters centuries ago brought life and healing to our people and are yet to overspread and bless the world, we must go back and up till we reach—the heart of God.

Across the seas of ether God the Father looked and beheld our little far-away foreign planet in its sin and misery and want. His great heart responded to our needs, and the first ship that ever bore a missionary away from the love and light of home to carry the Gospel to a foreign shore sailed from the port of Heaven. It bore Jesus Christ. It was sent by God the Father. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."

It is this world-love of God that inspires, pervades and shapes the entire plan of redemption. The individual or the church that has only a personal outlook or a parish outlook or a national outlook, has yet to learn the true aim and glory of our Christianity.

Away back in the early chapters of Genesis we hear God saying to Abraham, "In thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." David understood it, "That Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations." Isaiah understood it, "Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth." The angel at Bethlehem understood it, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people." Jesus Christ understood it, "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." In that pattern prayer which He taught us, before we ask for the daily bread on which our bodily lives depend, before we ask for the forgiveness on which our spiritual lives depend, we are to pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth, as it is in heaven." That amazing sacrifice of His on Calvary, for whom did He mean it? Let scripture answer, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

And you remember that final scene on Mount Olivet. The Saviour has finished His atoning work. He is on the resurrection side of the grave. He is about to return to His Father's house. Around Him are grouped His Jew-

ish disciples. They are thinking only of their own land and their own race. They are asking only about "the restoration of the Kingdom unto Israel." But the Saviour's great heart took in heathen America as well as sacred Judea. He was thinking of pagan Europe, in whose forests our ancestors were roaming about in half-naked savagery, as well as of favored Galilee. So to those Jewish disciples He said, as His final and supreme command, "Go ye into all the world; make disciples of all the nations; preach the gospel to every creature."

So we see that the world-wide missionary enterprise is no incident or afterthought of Christianity. It is the original purpose of Christianity. It is that for which God gave His Son to die. It is that around which cluster the most thrilling scenes, the most solemn sanctions, the most glorious promises, the most binding commandments, of our holy religion.

If we believe that in Christ alone is found the truth that satisfies the intellect, the power that regenerates the life, and the hope that illumines the future; if we believe that to men's need of Christ there is no exception, and to His power to save them there is no limit; if we believe that He is the gift of the Father to all, that He died to make atonement for the sins of all, that He has been lifted up to draw all men unto Him, then we must believe that the church's first duty, the church's chief business, is to give the knowledge of this Saviour to all mankind.

To this conclusion of scripture and reason our own beloved church says Amen. When our Southern Presbyterian Church was organized in December, 1861, in the city of Augusta, Georgia, that first historic Assembly adopted the following declaration: "The General Assembly desires distinctly and deliberately to inscribe on our church's banner, as it now first unfurls it to the world, in immediate

connection with the headship of our Lord, His last command, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,' regarding this as the great end of her organization."

Any church whose congregational life is not adjusted to this missionary end is like a ship whose prow is placed at the side or rear of the vessel. A scriptural church puts first things first.

Some years ago in Michigan a missionary speaker noticed in his audience a woman whose whole appearance spoke of deepest poverty; but there was a light in her faded face which fascinated him. He took occasion to speak to her. "Two years ago," she told him, "I learned for the first time of this foreign missionary work, and each month since I have been able to put something in the treasury." Her bent form straightened and her eyes shone as she continued, "When I have made my offering I am conscious that I am no longer simply a part of this little town, or even of this great Commonwealth; I am a part of the forces which God is using for the uplifting of the nations." There we have God's own antidote to that spiritual littleness and narrowness which is the chief temptation of the Christian life.

There is nothing that so develops, broadens, elevates and ennobles a church or an individual as identification with a great cause. Many a church is like a steamship trying to navigate in a mill pond. No great port to reach, no wide sea to sail in, no vast horizon for the eye, no large responsibility for the mind, nothing but a dull routine of little things to occupy the passengers and crew—no wonder they become narrow and selfish, and their mission and possibilities as a church are left tragically unrealized. Let us never forget that every church, however small, and every

Christian, however humble, is a ship built by Christ for a world voyage. Its home is to be the great ocean, its horizon the earth's rim, and its port the discipling of all nations.

But our world obligation involves more than a supreme task; it involves also a sacred trust.

The Bible declares over and over again that we are put in trust with the gospel for the world. The unsearchable riches of Christ we do not hold as a piece of private property, but as a trust fund for the benefit of all nations. The Bible calls us not owners, but trustees, stewards, of the grace of God. To neglect a task is one thing, to betray a trust is a far darker thing, whose punishment is that of the unfaithful steward whom his lord put out of the stewardship.

Why did the Christian churches of the early centuries lapse into what are known as the Dark Ages? Because the church turned its God-given candle into a dark lantern. Because it said, "So long as I see the light I care not who is in the dark." North Africa and Syria and other lands, to which missionaries are now sent, thirteen centuries ago were starred with Christian churches. But they became self-absorbed. They forgot their missionary character. And God removed their candlestick out of its place.

But we need not go outside the Bible for illustrations. In His own Book God has given the modern church a vivid warning.

What was it that exalted the Jews above all the other peoples of the earth? It was the fact that to them was given the knowledge of God. The long effort of God with that people was to train and fit them for certain offices which they were to render to mankind. As God said to Abraham, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

We believe in election, but we do not interpret it as

God's taking one nation or individual to his heart to be petted and pampered and made a favorite of to the exclusion of all others. We rather think of it as God's choosing one of His nations and molding it, training it, fusing its life into transparency, that it might be capable of transmitting him and His blessing to all the rest. That is what divine privilege means. If God elected you to spiritual life and light, be sure He was thinking of you not as a terminal but as a channel, not as an absorbent but as a radiator, not as a favorite but as a steward.

The tragedy of Jewish history is that the distinguishing privilege granted this favored people bred in them such a spirit of selfishness that when Jonah found that God was about to have mercy on people who were not Jews, he fell into a rage; and when the Jews at Jerusalem heard Paul say that God had commanded him to go unto the Gentiles, they cast dust into the air and cried, "Away with such a fellow from the earth!"

The supreme sin of the Jews, the sin of which the rejection of Christ was but the effect and the expression, was this: The most sacred trust ever committed to human keeping, the knowledge of God, they held as a piece of private property, they used as a personal luxury. And the history of the Jews ever since, the most awful history of blood and tears of which the race holds record, is simply the judgment of God, writ large for all the world to read, on the sin of the unfaithful steward.

But that is ancient history, you say. Not at all. All about us at this moment are Judaisms of intellectual culture, Judaisms of social privilege, and, worst and commonest of all, Judaisms of religious light.

Here is a man excellent and indeed admirable in many respects, a good neighbor, a kind father, a reputable church member. He is a highly privileged man. His lot is cast in a land of Bibles and churches. His home is bright with

Christian faith and love and purity. His future is glorified with an immortal hope. The graves of his loved ones are rainbowed with the prospect of reunion in the Father's house. Thrice happy man! But when you tell him of the nations that still sit in darkness, waiting, dumbly waiting, while the slow centuries pass, for "that Light whose dawning maketh all things new," he listens with a deadly apathy. Poor little Jew! The most sacred trust on earth, the trust of religious light, he has turned into a personal luxury. "Provided I have the light," he says, "and my little circle, I care not who is in the dark."

What that little Jew needs above all else is what that other Jew, of Tarsus, needed—a vision of Christ. When Paul caught a view of Him who loved and who died for all men, in the blaze of that ineffable, all-embracing love, the old Jewish selfishness in his heart withered and vanished away and in its place was born a new sense which became the motive power of Paul's life, the sense of a trust, the divine principle of stewardship. Because God had entrusted him with the precious knowledge of Christ, he owed that knowledge to the whole world. "I am debtor," he cries, "both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise."

Not till we have learned the spirit of stewardship, which is the Spirit of Christ; not till we can say with Paul, "I am debtor," have we passed from Judaism into Christianity.

You have read of the awful Irish famine of 1845. Men and women were lying dead on their cabin floors. Babies were starving on the withered breasts of their dead mothers. Many lay dead in the fields, often with blades of grass between their white teeth. When the cry of famishing Ireland reached America, instantly a great ship was filled with provisions and sent speeding across the Atlantic. Suppose the crew of that ship, instead of going to Ireland, had gone off on a pleasure cruise, visiting distant and delightful coun-

tries, feasting for weeks and months on the provisions in the ship, while the poor Irish stretched out their fast-thinning fingers and prayed and pined and starved for the bread that never came—what would have been the sin of that crew? Simply this, the sin of turning a sacred trust into a personal luxury, of all sins the most prevalent in the church today and the most paralyzing to the progress of Christ's Kingdom.

And this is no fancy picture. In China today our mission schools are turning away applicants for lack of room; our churches are crowded to suffocation, while the surrounding villages are begging, and begging in vain, for teachers and preachers. "How can we know?" said an old man recently to one of our missionaries. "We live in a village where no one ever comes to teach us. How can we know?"

Our Congo Mission is receiving delegations, often seven or eight a week, from native tribes, sometimes hundreds of miles distant, begging for a man of God to be sent to them. But each of our workers is already doing two or three men's work. When these messengers are told this they often refuse to be refused. They sit down on the ground sometimes for twenty-four hours, hoping against hope, before taking up their long journey home. One distant village, in expectation of a teacher, built a church, which has long since rotted down unused.

That famine scene is no fancy picture. The non-Christian world is stretching out its hands to us for that Bread of Life which Christ has given us in trust for them, commanding with His last breath, "Take it into all the world and give it to every creature." We have multiplied ministers and churches for ourselves till in this Southland we have one Protestant minister to every four hundred and seventy people, and one Protestant church to every three hundred

and nineteen, while over yonder millions are yet groping in utter darkness. Are we turning a trust into a luxury?

“Through midnight gloom from Macedon
The cry of myriads as of one,
The voiceful silence of despair
Is eloquent in awful prayer,
The soul’s exceeding bitter cry,
‘Come o’er and help us, lest we die!’

How mournfully it echoes on!
For half the earth is Macedon.
These brethren to their brethren call,
And by the Love that loves them all,
And by the whole world’s Life they cry,
‘O ye that live, behold we die!’

Jesus, for men of man the Son—
Yea, thine the cry from Macedon—
O, by Thy Kingdom and Thy power
And glory of thine advent hour,
Wake heart and will to hear their cry,
Help us to help them, lest we die!”