

Pastor and People.

"A GREAT WORK."

Nehemiah vi. 3.

MISSIONARY SERMON BY REV. J. C. BAXTER,
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[The following sermon was not prepared with a view to publication. It was delivered to his own congregation in the ordinary course of Mr. Baxter's ministry on Sabbath 4th February. At the close of the service Mr. Baxter yielded to the urgent request of a hearer; and handed the M.S. for publication in the BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN. With pleasure we give it a place in our columns believing it well calculated to increase the missionary zeal of our readers.—ED. B. A. P.]

Nehemiah had been cup-bearer in the palace of Shushan; he is now governor in the city of Jerusalem. Deputed by the Persian king to rule the returned exiles, he adopts firm measures of defence against foes. The enemies, unable to gain the authority with which he is invested, would defeat his plans for rebuilding the capital by proposing a conference to adjust their claims. The watchful patriot sees through the wicked plot. Snares laid for his ruin are broken by blunt answers to his rivals: and aware that he has a great work on hand, he persists in raising the ramparts of Zion, till when the whole wall is reared he may defy the adversaries to trouble the peace of Judah.

Such is the narrative. Like most Scripture records, its lessons are rich in instruction for modern times. For example: does it not indicate our duty to obey God more than man, under all circumstances? Again, does it not inculcate our obligation to push forward the welfare of the church rather than delay effort for proscribed progress at the call of a hostile world? But, meanwhile, we take it to teach this special point—that every man who has been brought back from the bondage of sin and restored to spiritual freedom should promote the prosperity of the Gospel by grateful, zealous consecration to its missionary enterprise. *That is a Great Work.* The very name, *missionary*, when coupled with the spread of evangelism, has value. And here trying to realise the thought of greatness in our mission, may prayer habitually rise for success from Heaven's Lord on our practice—"Establish Thou the work of our hands, yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it."

The missionary enterprise is a great work when we consider

I. THE VICTORIES IT HAS TO ACHIEVE.

We do not magnify its worth by lessening other works. Every work which helps human happiness deserves commendation; and when neighbours seek, in earnest form, to assist the physical vigour or intellectual culture of the race, we are not churlish of praise. To charge us with indifference to the bodily health or mental growth of our kindred is unfair; and despite common notions about our object in well-doing, we challenge on behalf of genuine Christian workers a credit to be the broadest benefactors of a community. For the relief of the distressed, or the recovery of the outcast, or the education of the ignorant among fellow citizens, who are the leaders? As a rule, those who lend their aid to schemes of spiritual philanthropy. And were it not for their labours, perhaps the varied societies organized for temporal succour might never have been started, or be soon drained of their life-blood.

But our work goes far beyond. We covet the radical conversion, not the superficial improvement of humanity. If this be our chief end who will question the grandeur of a cause which toils for the salvation of souls? One soul saved! Its rescue from error to truth, from unrest to calm, from fatal apathy to vital anxiety, from crushing despair to cheering prospect—all sanctioned by a Father's smile and sustained by His paternal grace. One soul saved! Its gradual meetness for the land of light unclouded, of law unbroken; where hallowed joys await the pious, and where the trail of transgression never can intrude. One soul saved! Its unchecked pursuit of the course which entrance into the celestial country opens, and as each new stage brings fresh bliss, eternity alone shall declare the excellence of the work that crowns the righteous with immortal honour.

Yet, not one soul only: not even one clime or age: the wide world is the field from which the triumphs of redemption are to be drawn. What a field! Multiply the worth of a single soul by the worth of the multitudes in the world. Then we approach to an estimate of what missionary work contemplates. How runs the measure at present? The population of the globe is rated at upwards of a thousand millions. Two-thirds are heathens, Jews, and Mohammedans. Of the remainder, two hundred millions are Romanists; fifty millions adhere to the Greek fellowship; while of Protestant persuasions, how many professors show that purity of belief may leave them unaffected by sanctity of conduct. Survey the vast sphere with its diversified features. What crowds lie amid the dismal death-swamps of idolatry.

What throngs sleep under the soporific spell of superstition. What hosts appear stiffened into torpor by the wintry wind of barren orthodoxy. Sad spectacle on every side; and gazing on it with an eye which discerns in the word of divine mercy through Jesus the balm of human misery—with a heart which would send the gift of cure wherever the wail of woe is heard—let us brace ourselves for work as we walk worthy of our high vocation. Faithful to our trust, we are workers together with God who worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Staunch at our post, we are above harm from craft or threat of antagonists. And when victory is attained for the One name given under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved, the result will be proportioned to our striving to do a great work in the frame of the Hebrew hero who fought triumphantly, because with vigilance added to vigour he desired to offer all conquests as tribute to the Guardian of His people's rights, and Rewarder of their loyal service. Therefore, brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

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II. THE OBSTACLES IT HAS TO SURMOUNT.

We are not blind to barriers that oppose our work. It were folly to expect that by stretching out the hand we shall grasp the prize. At home and abroad, there are huge hindrances; and never unless by ceaseless energy, may we hope for the consummation which levels the most formidable impediments.

What are the obstacles? Some centre in the various scenes we design to benefit. In foreign lands, how mighty are the bulwarks of evil that require to be reduced! Customs which centuries have strengthened, or which depraved natures have rooted among pagan devotees, erect a stumbling-block to the acceptance of Scripture in the power of its humbling, yet elevating conditions. Again in nearer fields, how stout are the bands of iniquity that require to be scattered. The world in every unrenowned breast is averse to bend beneath the hammer of the truth, and Satan, the prince of this world, would perpetuate its thralldom. If, then, we would drive him from the throne he usurps—or wrench from him the sceptre he wields, our policy is not to depreciate the force that withstands the Gospel, but so to recognize its weight as to resolve with our grace-guided resources to battle against sin of every shape, in every sphere, till the last vestige of its ascendancy vanishes, or the least danger of its revival flees away.

Once more, what are the obstacles? Some centre in the obvious faults stamped on the manners of disciples. Funds are necessary, but how empty is the Lord's treasury when the recipients of His love might store it with abundance. The ardour kindled at the start of a mission cools off after a season on the excuse that progress seems so discouraging, as if the outlay of cents were to be commercially squared by the income of souls, or every service pronounced a failure which cannot count a list of converts equal to the expenditure of coin. Besides, the glaring blemishes in the behaviour of professors exercise damage on the minds who gauge the good of the Gospel by the action of its adherents and who hold aloof from the faith because the lives of its avowed friends are not marked by signs to make it worthy of all acceptance.

Other obstacles could be specified. These, however, already named may suffice to convince us that if the evangelization of our race is destined to be an accomplished fact, the issue regarded instrumentally cannot be reached without a clear conception of the opponents against whom we struggle. Nor should the great work be left to great men in Zion's ranks. The church has work for even the feeblest member; and none on the Lord's side should shirk the Lord's call for boldness in the allotted station, if the entire army would stay the enemy from coming in like a flood, or would sweep from our path whatever retards the world-wide reign of Christ, the blessed Potentate. Oh, for each to gird up for the good fight of faith! Not attendance on annual meetings which aim at the triumph of the truth is enough. Not acquiescence in expressed opinions by speakers there, is enough. No; more devolves on us than any such child's play. We must play the man by sharing the work given us to do; and were we, in person, not by proxy, to take a proper part, who need fear the fiercest of our foes?

Suppose a case. A saint begins now to work at some mission, and at the close of this year he has the joy of leading one sinner to repentance. Then the two commence a new effort with the recompense in another year of drawing other two souls to the Saviour. Follow up the calculation of increasing labor in the same ratio; and long ere the earliest laborer may be taken home, the harvest would be ripe for the gathering of humanity. That is the labour we would render. In the name of our God we go forth to work a great work: and since no

obstacles can resist His will, through whose grace we toil, let us be strong to do exploits; praying while we strive—"Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered; let them also that hate Him flee before Him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God; yea, let them exceedingly rejoice."

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III. THE AGENCIES IT HAS TO EMPLOY.

The agencies are those of the Gospel. It is the power and the wisdom of God unto salvation. We are assured of success; for the weapons of our warfare are incontrovertibly divine, universally adapted, and gloriously effectual.

Observe, the Gospel is incontrovertibly divine. It gives trust insight into man's condition before God, telling that there is no soundness in us, including all under sin. The sentence is just, verified by the records of history, confirmed by the facts of experience. This faithful picture of our sad state attests the origin of unerring Scripture; and reading its lines, may we not accommodate the verdict of the Samaritan woman to our circumstances.—"Come, see a book that told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the truth? Again; it gives truest knowledge of God's relation towards man, unfolding the mercy linked with the majesty of Jehovah, disclosing the divine Fatherhood through the mirror of the only Begotten Son—that Son whose life and death for the world are the brightest manifestations of Heaven's love. Certainly, the love of God in Christ should attract us to cast our burdens at the foot of the cross; and satisfied with the matchless favor thence proclaimed, we cherish a valid hope that the divine remedy cannot fall short of the human malady.

Observe still; the Gospel is universally adapted. It extends help to all classes on earth. Not an item of their case is overlooked. Not a member of the race is omitted. The sluggard, it would arouse that they may feel concern for solid peace. The vicious, it would correct that they may march henceforth in the paths of virtue. The darkened, it would reclaim from gloom; the indigent from want; the moody from despair, and the condemned from death. It bears glad tidings of great joy for all people. God, who speaks by it, would have all men to repent and come to a knowledge of the truth. Christ, who shines in it, was lifted up that he might draw all men unto Him. The Spirit, who breathes from it, waits to quicken into new existence all men that open their hearts to his reviving touch. There is no limit to its scope. Whosoever will, may partake of its stores; and recognizing in its breadth and length and depth and height an element of superiority to other systems, we hail the Gospel as the alone plan suited to regenerate mankind.

Observe lastly; the Gospel is gloriously effective. What has it performed? The annals of nations are witnesses; linking with golden chain the past to the present, and foreshadowing with prophetic sureness the changes of the future. Before it, heathen temples fell, vain oblations ceased, gross delusions fled. Because of it, arose sanctuaries of pure worship, with all the influences which flow from the fountains of spiritual devotion. In these streams of good our country has shared; for if we hold a place of privilege, we owe such to the religion of Jesus. The same agencies that hitherto have prevailed are inexhaustible in their resources to bless the earth with Pentecostal power—never abating, always enlarging, till over a reformed creation without any discord or drawback, the anthem shall resound of "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift." Let gratitude of the apostolic type animate our hearts and stimulate our lives. For the primitive ambassadors, to live was Christ. Devoted to Him, they consecrated themselves for men, and at the risk of being charged with turning the world upside down, they pursued a road which led to turning the world downside up. In such a sense they were revolutionists; yet love was their motive, wisdom their guide, peace their weapon, salvation their end; and from their holy sacrifices have sprung all the benefits that make time a boon as well as eternity an incomparable gain. Have we them for examples? Why should we not tread in their footsteps? If we will, we may; if we do, the great day shall declare that somehow a great work fulfilled cannot be unproductive of blessed fruits. I am doing, shouted Nehemiah. This one thing I do, reckoned Paul. And having the same mind in us, we each should say—I must work the work given me to do; conscious that one of the best proofs of acknowledging my debt to the God of mercy is in distributing mercy to my fellow-men.

Listen to this incident with its appeal told by the late Thomas Guthrie; and while his mode of recital lent a pathos to the tale, which other lips scarcely dream of imitating; still the story from almost any mouth need not fail of impressiveness. During a storm off the Spanish coast, a

dismasted merchant ship was observed by a British frigate drifting before the gale. Every eye was directed to the driven wreck, and a canvass sheet on a deck nearly level with the sea, hinted the thought of life yet aboard. At once the order rang to launch the boat and bear down on the floating hulk. Away went a gallant crew through the swell of the roaring deep. They reached the vessel. They asked whether any sailors survived. Soon a stranger form crawled to the lee-side. It was a mariner, shrivelled, wasted, almost lifeless. Gently they lifted him into the skiff. For a while motionless, at length he muttered; and gradually the words came forth—"another man." Saved himself, the first use of recovered speech was to save his fellow. Another man! Ah; receive the lesson. Daily practice it. And so long as in this wreck of a world, which left to itself is rushing to ruin, there lingers an unconverted soul, another man, who needs salvation—let us go to that man pleading with him for Christ—go to Christ pleading with Him for that man—till we who have had our own cry answered, "Lord, save us, we perish," shall change the petition to a prayer for men, as acceptable in the Master's ear: Lord, save them, they perish. Then we stand as workers worthy of the name. He whom we serve permits no labor for the cause to pass unrequited. Our award is the "Well Done," the glorious greeting reserved for those that promote the period when every knee shall bow in homage at Emmanuel's throne. In the light of such accredited facts, let us never question the fitness of the Gospel to accomplish that which God has promised, or mourn as if for its efficacy the former days were better than these. We recall the years of its youth when it did prove mighty for the pulling down of strong-holds—when it was active to aid the wounded wayfarer on dangerous tracks, and pour the oil of health into his bleeding sores—when it was like the vivifying breath to turn the dry bones into quickened forms, and raise them into an army for spiritual battle—and, looking back on early ages, we lament that there appears faint hope of seeing things again after a similar fashion. But were our souls only retouched with the fire which still burns at the altar, we should find the Gospel able to do exceedingly above all we can ask or think. Give it fair freedom to carry out its purpose; give it sure support in accordance with its deserts; give it the countenance of practical resources joined with the continuance of prayerful entreaties. Then our hope of progress even to perfection shall not be confounded—for the Lord will give that which is good, till He arise and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

For the Presbyterian.

THE HOUSEHOLD ANGEL.

A TRUE STORY.

It was an angel, certainly, in disguise. A poor little starved neglected girl-baby, diseased from want of care, and clad in an old cast-off garment a great deal too large for it. It had been left motherless, and its drunken father used to leave it all day long sitting in a basket of shavings, locked in his room, with a little brother for its only nurse; till at last, his cruelty reached a climax in kicking the helpless infant out upon the door-step, to perish if no one would care for it.

But a kind heart, beating in the breast of an Irish Bible-woman in London, did take pity on the poor little outcast, and although the owner of the heart was the mother of eleven children, she only said to herself, "We'll never miss the bite and sup of one more!" She washed it at a neighbour's house, and having fed and dressed it in clean clothes, she carried it home, anticipating any objections that her husband might be disposed to offer, by assuring him that her own children would never miss what this little creature got. The wan, sorrowful little face pleaded for the babe, and it was received ungrudgingly, to become the household pet and darling, an "angel in the house" in which the remaining six years of its life were lived, a messenger of God to the hearts around it, or as they themselves expressed it, "the little sunbeam and gospel of the house."

We know not how early God's grace can sanctify, and it almost seemed as if the sufferings which this tender babe had undergone—in neglect and starvation—had been sanctified to purify the infant heart, though in its physical system, they had sown the seeds of weakness an incurable disease, manifesting itself in frequently recurring illness. As soon as the child could speak, her loving words and winning gentle ways won the hearts of all around her. She was fitly named *Amy*, and became the centre around which the home affections of her adopted family most twined, as well as a link to draw their hearts more firmly together. Always on the watch to welcome the father or mother home from the round of daily toil, she was the loving companion and often the unconscious monitor of each in their otherwise solitary hours. Before she was able to

read, she would beg her "father," as she called him, to teach her her lesson or her hymn, and as soon as she could read, a little daily text book and Mrs. Sewell's "Mother's Last Words" became her special treasures and constant study. In the former she was very fond of finding everyone's birthday, and reading to them "the texts they were born under," as she expressed it. In her wakeful nights she was often heard saying, in her crib: "Oh my God, I give you my heart," and it seemed truly that the child's simple gift had been accepted, as who could doubt it had, and that the Holy Spirit taught her the words of wisdom and truth which never offended, but often came to the heart of the hearer as a heaven-sent monition.

On one occasion, when she had seen one of the family retire to rest without prayer, she said, the next time they were alone, "you know only pigs and horses lie down and say no prayers!" "And, do you never do so yourself Amy?" was asked in reply. "No, never!" was the decided answer. Another whom she loved grieved her by a habit of swearing, "Oh! dear D—," she said one day, putting her arms around his neck; "I cannot bear you to take God's name in vain. The Bible says you must not. You know it's the commandment." The loving reproof effected its object. Not long before her death Amy met on the stairs a confirmed drunkard who lived in the same house. "Do you know," said the brave child, "what is said in the Bible, that no drunken man shall go to heaven; God says so."

"Well, I can't go to church, I have got no clothes," he replied. "No," said Amy, "for you put your clothes on the public house; you've none left for yourself at all." Very soon after, this man stood by the lifeless form of his little monitor, and looking on the cold white face—smiling sweetly even in death, he said with much feeling: "I'll never forget what she said to me. I've got my coat out of pawn this week, and I'll never put it on the public-house again!"

All that love and care and tender nursing could do, was done by Amy's kind friends to keep their little household angel with them, but it was plain that the message had come to call her to the home for which she had so early been prepared. To procure medicine, wine, nourishment, even the family watch was pawned, and her adopted father, as well as her mother, was her loving nurse. But all was in vain, Amy was going home, and she was not afraid to go. Her trust was on "Jesus," who "washes all the sins off our souls;" as she said. She often repeated the verse beginning—

"I need Thee, precious Jesus
And hope to see Thee soon!"

and on the day before she died, she said, after taking a little food, "Now I shall want no more, for to-morrow I begin a new life; only think, mother, a new life!"

Next morning she sent for a little playmate and said to her, "Becky, I sent for you to say good bye, I'm going to Jesus; I can't talk to you, but I wanted to say that." As it grew dusk she asked her "mother" to pray for her, and being asked "What shall I pray for, Amy?" said, "Say my dear verse—

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child,
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to Thee."

Then, looking up she said: "Don't you see Him, mother? there He is with His arms open, waiting for me; to-morrow I begin my new life. Oh dear Jesus, I am a poor little child, and you know I can't lie down for my cough; so let me come to you soon."

The simple prayer was answered. A few minutes later she had gone to Him, her last look on her beloved adopted father, who mourned deeply for her loss. "She used to talk to me so much of God, and no one can tell how I shall miss her," he said.

Those who loved her will never need any stronger enforcement of the exhortation: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

A TALKING man makes himself artificially deaf, being like the man in the steeple when the bell rings.—*Jeremy Taylor.*

"IMPROVE your opportunities," said Bonaparte to a school of young men; "every hour lost now is a chance of future misfortune."

A SENSE of forgiveness does not proceed from marks seen in yourself, but from a discovery of the beauty, work and freeness of Christ.

RELIGION MISREPRESENTED.—Do not measure religion by the follies of some who profess it, nor by the ill opinion which its adversaries have of it, or the ill name which they endeavor to put on it who neither know it or love it, and who therefore care not what unjust things they say to justify themselves in their contempt of it, and to hinder others from embracing it.—*Matthew Henry.*

LET the new year be marked by the thoughtfulness and devotion which become Christians, that it may thus be consecrated in advance to God and duty. It is the opening up of a period of great opportunity, but also of vast responsibility, and in eternity we shall be called to give an account of the way in which we use it.—*United Presbyterian.*