

FORWARD.

BY REV. J. R. BLACK, B.A., ST. CHARLES.

First, when God commands, it is the duty of Christians to move forward. The children of Israel standing with the hosts of Pharaoh in rear of them, and the billowy sea in front of them, were commanded by God to go on; they went, and with what success every Bible reader knows. Abraham, "when he was called to go out into a place which he should afterwards receive as an inheritance, obeyed; not knowing whither he went." David had no sooner ascended the throne, than the Philistines came up threatening him and his kingdom with destruction. The king consulted his God and received the answer, "Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand. And David came to Baal-Perazim, and smote them there, and said, the Lord hath broken forth upon mine enemies as the breach of many waters." And it was to a few poor fishermen that the mandate of the Master first came, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." There were many difficulties in the way, yet they started—started on the strength of that little Divine "go."

Has God given you, my reader, a command to move on: He has if you are His child. Hear Him speak, "go on unto perfection." Hear Him again, "go work in my vineyard." Happy, thrice happy, is the soul that conditions all its movements on the Divine command.

Again, Christians should move onward, where God, by his providence, opens the way. The rod of Moses lifted over the waters caused a separation, and a highway for his people was opened through the sea. Here was a providential event, pointing out that their course lay before them. The indication was so clear that no Israelite could for a moment doubt that the Lord wanted them to go to the other side of the sea. And thus God is now providentially pointing out to His people the way He would have them walk. Perhaps the best illustration of this, in modern times, is to be found in connection with the establishment of missions in the kingdom of China. A century ago, and Christianity was not tolerated within the boundaries of that "Celestial" land; nor would its missionaries be protected by the laws of the country. The people had such a high estimate of themselves, their country, and their religion, that it was regarded as a piece of impertinence on the part of one from the Western World to attempt their enlightenment. This national pride presented an effectual barrier to missionary enterprise. It must, therefore, be crushed before God's servants could carry successfully the news of salvation among them. And it was crushed, partly in the war of 1842, and still more in that of 1860, and eighteen ports were opened to trade, the empire made free to foreign travel and teaching, a definite pledge of toleration to Christianity was given, and due protection to its missionaries granted.

And that which is seen on a large scale may be seen on a small one. Then watch the movements of Providence about you for 1879, and when the way opens go forward.

In all advances, however, there should be complete trust in God. In this world where there is so much to oppose the Christian in his putting off the old man, and putting on the new man which after Christ Jesus is created in holiness, and his attempts to further the kingdom of God in the world outside, no real progress can be made in the absence of abiding confidence in God. We must lean on God at the start, and keep leaning on Him all the way.

OUR WORK FOR GOD.

The errand on which God sends is always a practicable errand, provided there be a sincere desire on our part to accomplish the errand—to do the work; and in proportion to the effort demanded, to the self-denial required, His authorship of the message concerning the work becomes more evident to the thoughtful and reflective Christian mind. We usually judge in exactly the opposite way. We say, "That is a good work, and I can do it in a minute; therefore,

I will do it, that is God's errand for me. It is a good work, and I can help it by a little gift which I never shall miss. That is evidently God's plan for me." Thus we reason; ah! but God's plan exactly reverses that. He makes duty the more obligatory the more difficult it is, because for the development of Christian energy in us, Christian generosity, Christian patience, He gives us the work to be done by us. God can do His own work without us, and when one by one the great teachers of the Church have passed away, and the Christian Church tarrying behind has felt that the horsemen and chariots of Israel had gone from its sight forever, and there was no more guardianship and no more inspiration, God has raised up others to take their places, or has carried on His work without such signal and illustrious spirits to be leaders in it, to show that He never depended upon any one human soul, upon any twenty, upon any million human souls for the accomplishment of His plan. He carries them forward by His own might, as the ocean carries the log—because of its own majesty and buoyancy. God does not need our help. Why, then, does He ask for it? Why put us to the trouble of working for Him, why put us to the strain of giving for Him, why put us to the long endurance of patiently planning and waiting that we may accomplish His design? Because thus He develops us. This is His spiritual university in the world. Thus He applies not tests merely, but incitements, stimulants, means of instruction, to whatever is best in us. The man who has given himself to his country loves it better, the man who has fought for his friend honors him more, the man who has labored for his community values more highly the interests he has sought to conserve. The man who has wrought and planned and endured for the accomplishment of God's plan in the world sees the greatness of it, the divinity and glory of it, and is himself more perfectly assimilated to it.—From a sermon by Dr. Storrs in "The Complete Preacher."

HOW BELIEF TRANSFORMS MEN.

Abraham was the head of a wandering tribe, with probably only such small ambitions as were common to his station: a man of purer life, of higher purposes, perhaps, than his neighbour chiefs, and yet with nothing very marked to distinguish him from them. God calls this man, instructs him, leads him, and as he hears, believes, obeys, he becomes quite another man.

In this is the whole source of Abraham's greatness. It was not in his natural gifts that he was distinguished above all other men of his day; others may have been as intelligent and as forceful as he. Nor was it in his great opportunities that he excelled. There is nothing very wonderful in his history, if you take away from it his faith and its influence on his life. He wandered farther than many of the men of his day; but they were all wanderers. He fought his petty battles; so did they. But the one thing which raised him above them all, the thing which makes us know that there was such a man at all, is only this, that he believed God.

Now, his journeyings with family and flock are no mere vulgar wanderings after fat feeding-places for his sheep and cows, but a sacred pilgrimage from the land of the Chaldees to the land of Canaan; a march of faith, with the Lord for his leader, and the land of promise for his destination, and an unknown generation for his sure successors. So he goes on, this friend of God, and He who spake to him is ever in his thoughts. Life has a new meaning to him; daily duty a new dignity. There is nothing small in such a life, for its whole business is to follow God's call.

The same transformation is wrought to-day over the man who, like Abraham, believes God. It does not come from believing that God is, or believing in God, or on God, but by simply, lovingly, believing God; believing what He says, and all He says, and because He says it. It makes a man a saint, if you look at him from the side of personal purity of character and life. It puts him under the holiest influence which can move a mortal man. God has said: "Without holiness no man can see the Lord," and he believes God; and having "this hope in him, purifieth himself,

even as He is pure." It makes a man a hero, if you look at him from the side of his daring or endurance. He believes God. It makes no difference to him what any man, what all men, say. What are men's words against the Word of God? What is mere human breath against the inspiration of the Almighty, which hath given him understanding?

Perhaps men mock him openly or covertly. They did Noah, but he believed God and toiled on under the clear sky, year after year, and decade after decade, preparing for the flood. Doubtless they did at Abraham. Even his wife laughed at the promise as absurd, on which depended all the rest. But he believed, he journeyed, he made covenants, he was ready even to slay the child of promise if God said so. They laugh at any one to-day who says that God answers prayers, says it as though he meant it. "The prayer of faith shall cure the sick." Nonsense! "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." Preposterous! But he who believes God is not moved. He only remembers with a sigh, a shudder, as he sees their unbelief, "I will laugh in the day of their calamity," saith the Lord.

There is nothing which can make this life so sacred as to have it thus penetrated with the voice of God. How it gives life to the Bible to believe God in it absolutely; not unreasoningly, but using reason to see what God says, not to question it, to weigh its meaning, not to rend it out of the record. In this light these are real men, and this is a living God. Now we are come to the secret of these lives; the patience of Noah, the faith of Abraham, the daring of Daniel, the endurance of his companions in the fiery furnace, the dying prayer of Stephen, the missionary work of Paul, the strength and sweetness of John. They believed God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, with the heart. His words were "Yea and Amen" to them, and the life which they lived in the flesh they lived by the faith of the Son of God.

Is your life dull and purposeless and unsatisfying? Believe God. That will transform and glorify it.—Rev. Geo. M. Boynton, in "Ill. Christian Weekly."

PAUL AS A MINISTER.

Think of the early Christians and the noble line of martyrs, and your sufferings will sink into insignificance. Look at the apostle to the Gentiles; see him arrested and imprisoned, see his back bared to the lash. Five times he received forty stripes save one. See him gathering his garments about his lacerated shoulders when he whispers, "None of these things move me." See him taken to the edge of yonder city, stoned and left for dead. As his friends raise him up they say: "Better abandon the Gospel; they will kill you if you preach"—but he says, "None of these things move me." I see him yonder upon the shore; he has been drawn out of the water; he has been a day and a night struggling in the deep, he is overboard and lies fainting on the earth, the water dripping from his hair. His friends think, surely he will never preach again. But as the pulse beats and the strength returns, I hear him say, "None of these things move me." He is on his way to Jerusalem. The prophets tell him he is to be bound and imprisoned, and the people weep at the thought of seeing him no more. The elders at Ephesus go down to meet him. He tells them that he is going to Jerusalem, and he knows not what shall befall him, but the Spirit tells in every place that bonds and imprisonment awaits him, but he grandly declares, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."

Bonds and imprisonment did await him. He stood before Nero. He was condemned to die, and out of the dungeon of his prison he sends through Timothy this heroic and joyous message, "I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness," etc.

Such a grand hero was the apostle living and dying. One work he did unmoved and unmovable, and to us he speaks, "Follow me as I follow Christ."