

## SYNOPSIS OF A SERMON.

J. H. M'NEIL.

Last Lord's day we stood amidst the lingering shadows of the dying year, and, with faces turned backward, selected as our motto, "Thou shalt remember all the way by which the Lord thy God led thee." To-day, we stand in the grey dawn of the opening year, and as its first beams gild the hills with the light of gladness and hope, we turn our faces to the future, and adopt as our motto, "Forgetting the things which are behind." You will notice that these words are a part of a brief autobiography of the Apostle Paul, which occupies the most of this chapter. In the first few verses he described for us his old Jewish life under the law, when he thought himself at the goal of spiritual ambition. He was of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is of the law, blameless. What could he be more? He has attained! He is already made perfect! But one day Jesus of Nazareth passes by. He lays his hand upon Saul. He reveals Himself to him. And now what a transformation! He is no longer a racer who may, with complacency, sit down at the goal and rest until the coronation day arrives. He is all imperfection. He is "less than the least of all saints." He is the "chief of sinners." And here, after thirty years of heroic service and unparalleled suffering, he has "not yet attained," is not yet perfect. He is still a runner in the race of perfection, with his eye upon the distant goal.

Notice then what is Paul's ideal of the Christian life. A little further along in the chapter he says: "Brethren, be followers together of me." Now, what is he? What does he consider himself? Look at you athlete in the Isthmian or Olympic arena, stripped for the contest, running under the burning sun and over the hot sands, beady drops of perspiration on his brow, the look of all consuming earnestness in his face, his eye upon the distant goal, bending forward, pressing onward, every muscle at its fullest strain, every nerve at its utmost tension—forgetting everything else, losing sight of everything else, intent upon outstripping his competitors and reaching the goal. This is Paul's ideal of a Christian—a man who has a single aim, an aim in Christ, and who subordinates every interest and concentrates every effort to the achievement of this end. Viewed in this connection, it is easy to understand what the Apostle means by "forgetting those things which are behind." We are to sustain to them the same relation that the athlete sustains to the portion of the course over which he has already run. He ceases to think of it. It is to him as if it was not. Practically the point where he now is, is his starting point. The distance between him and the goal is his only course. He does not stop to look back and congratulate himself on the success or upbraid himself for the mistakes of the past. He presses forward to new successes, to make amends for past failures by higher endeavor. He forgets what is behind. He presses forward to that which is before. This is Paul's picture of the Christian life, as exemplified by himself, and to be imitated by us. Let us consider some of the things which are behind,

and which, in this sense, are to be forgotten.

1. The toils and sacrifices we have already undergone for Christ.

For thirty years Paul's life had been one of daily toil, daily hardship, daily peril. He had been "in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths, oft." Turn to II Corinthians and read the eleventh chapter, that long catalogue of his sufferings. He is an old man now. He has borne the heat of the burden of the day. He has fought with wild beasts at Ephesus. May he not rest? May he not pause, sit down in the shade a little and contemplate his heroic past? Nay, brethren, he says, this present moment is but the starting point. I am ready for harder toil. I gird myself for nobler sacrifice. I am ready in the future, even more than in the past, to "die daily." If any of us think we have done our share of work, or borne our part of sacrifice, let us learn, with Paul, to "forget the things which are behind."

2. The attainments we have already made in piety and Christian knowledge. We are to understand that the young convert is to consider himself but a babe in Christ, and that he is to grow in grace, and to continue to grow until he comes up to the stature of a full man in Christ Jesus. With a few years of religious life we are too prone to regard ourselves as full-grown men. As the tree of the forest adds every year a belt to its circuit, strikes its roots deeper, spreads its branches wider, lifts its head higher toward heaven, so the law of the Christian life is that of increasing progress, "forgetting the things that are behind."

3. So with the failures, the discouragements, the disappointments, the trials of the past. These are all among the "things that are behind." With brave hearts and willing hands, with faith in God and courage in Christ; with wisdom gained from the experience of the past, and a discipline of the soul from reverses that turns the baser metal of failure into pure gold, we stretch forward toward that which is before. Thankful to God for his marvelous blessings upon us as a church and congregation during the year that is gone, we lift an anthem of thanksgiving, while we gird our loins afresh to do more, to give more, to be more, if necessary, to suffer more for the Master this year. Our motto is "Onward! Upward! Higher! Higher! Higher!" More light, more love, more service! Christ more precious to faith; heaven nearer to hope. The things behind forgotten. Before us the goal, the crown, the eternal reward.

## THE BIBLE versus INFIDELITY.

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IV.

My subject is the fulfilment of prophecy, as it proves the truth of the Bible. My main sources of information (to which the reader is referred for fuller details) are "The Inspired Word," "Horne's Introduction," Rawlinson's and Rollin's "Ancient Histories," "Christian Baptist," "Smith's Dictionary of the Bible," "Clarke's" and the "Pulpit" commentaries.

I. In the utterance of their predictions, were the prophets supernaturally inspired? Did they use the words God intended them to use?

The question is: Did the prophets really predict hidden things of the future? If they did they must have been moved by God, for

he alone can foretell events and circumstances of a distant future. This leads up to another question. How are we to ascertain whether the prophets really did foretell future events or not? We answer that there are five rules whereby we can test the reality of their utterances. 1st. The alleged prediction must have been made known prior to the event; 2nd, The event claimed to have been foretold must be such as is wholly remote from human view; 3rd, The language of the prediction must be plain and unequivocal; 4th, The genuine prophet must utter his prediction as being expressly from God; 5th, There must be at the proper time a clear, plain fulfilment of the prediction.

Let us apply these five rules to the prophets of the Old Testament. If these five rules or conditions meet in application to a prophetic utterance, then we have a conclusive demonstration that such utterance is of supernatural origin. If the prediction preceded the event, if the event was remote from human view, if the prediction was unambiguous, if it were uttered in the name of God, then the realization of it in the event is the crowning of it as a genuine prophecy, and the glory of that crown is God's miraculous inspiration of the prophet.

Let us take, for examination, certain predictions concerning Nineveh, Babylon, Egypt and the four great monarchies. The prophets are Nahum, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Ezekiel and Daniel. What are some of the things claimed to have been foretold of these cities and kingdoms? That the great cities of Nineveh and Babylon should be captured. (Jer. i. 3; Nahum iii. 1-3); that each of the two cities should be taken while in a state of revelry and intoxication (Jeremiah 1st and 2nd Chaps., Nahum i. 10); that the rivers on which the cities respectively stood, Nineveh on the Tigris and Babylon on the Euphrates, should be instrumental in their capture, that the two rivers should perform their parts in opposite ways, the Tigris by an inundation (Nahum ii. 6-8), the Euphrates by drying up (Isaiah xlv. 1; Jer. i. 38, ii. 36); that the cities are to pass under an exterminating desolation and become the abode of wild beasts:

"And Babylon the glory of kingdoms;  
The beauty of the Chaldee's excellency  
Shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and  
Gomorrhah.  
It shall never be inhabited,  
Neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to  
generation:  
Neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there,  
Neither shall the shepherds make their fold  
there.  
But wild beasts of the desert shall be there;  
And their houses shall be full of doleful crea-  
tures;  
And owls shall dwell there,  
And satyrs shall dance there.  
And dragons in their pleasant places."

Isaiah xiii. 19-22.

Concerning Egypt we learn that it should become the basest of kingdoms—that God would so diminish it that it would never more have rule over the nations nor have a prince of its own. That while Nineveh and Babylon should be depopulated, Egypt, still retaining its population, should become degraded and helpless. (Ezekiel xxx.) The prophet Daniel claims that the Babylonian empire during whose splendour he lived, should come to an end, that it would be succeeded by the Medo-Persian, the latter by the Grecian, and this by the Roman, that with the fourth (the Roman), the succession of universal empires should cease.