

SERMON BY REV. JOHN McNEIL.

DELIVERED IN EXETER HALL, LONDON, ON
SATURDAY EVENING, JAN. 5th, 1890.

How God's Election Works.

TEXT.—1 SAM. xvi. 6-13.

Our subject is the choosing of a king from among the sons of Jesse the Bethlehemite. The royal seat, just like my chair, was vacant, or was soon going to be. The Lord had rejected Saul from being king over Israel and He sent His servant Samuel to choose Him a king to fill the vacancy out of the family named. This narrative shows how the choosing was done. In the same way, I like to think that I am here to-night, and great things—although it does not look like it—are in my gift. I magnify my office, I have a situation to offer. There is no doubt about the offer or about the gift; the only doubt lies with yourself, as of old the difficulty lay among the sons of Jesse. For what is the office of the preacher, but always to be on the errand on which Samuel went to that glen in Bethlehem of Judæa?

We are ambassadors for Christ; we are here to offer to men a crown, a Kingdom that never fades away. We offer you this, that you shall be believers in God's dear Son, which means co-workers with Him down here, and co-heirs with Him in the eternal splendour of the great hereafter. That is the Gospel as I understand it. A mighty programme, is it not? and a programme the reality of which is absolutely impossible to exaggerate—impossible. I am not drawing the long bow; I am not exaggerating nor straining things when I say that, from the temporal and human side, which Samuel brought to David that afternoon was a small and temporary thing compared with that which the preacher brings to every young fellow, who has eyes to see and ears to hear of the great largess that is brought to him in the Gospel offer.

Let us bring the whole scene before us. I think I see Samuel going to the house of Jesse, and he tells his errand. He called the sons of Jesse before him; in they came, and then wonderful things happened, rather upsetting individual calculations. And all through the story gets increasingly thrilling with intense dramatic interest, right on to the very end; and let me say that that same thrill, that same throb, that same interest, that same sensation should be wherever the Gospel is preached—the same kind of breathlessness. If you could see a gathering like this with angels you would have the same breathlessness to see how near the kingdom comes to one man—and, God help him! he

goes past it, while it lights on another sitting beside him—one young fellow here to-night saved, as the eternal day shall show, saved with an everlasting salvation; redeemed, crowned, sealed, baptized into Christ; all done by the Word of God and the Spirit of God, and his consenting faith, on the spot; and the young fellow sitting next him as blind as a bat to it all.

Ah, wake up and listen! "The King has come in the cadger's gate," if you understand that phrase: the King has come very near to people who could have had no expectation that He would come so near, when the preacher stands before an audience in London or anywhere else.

In came the sons of Jesse, and first Eliab. He was the biggest, the "brawest," as they would say over the Tweed; a big, broad, buirdly chiel was Eliab, and he came in all his inches, feeling "the situation is for me. I have only to show myself, and whatever Samuel has to give, I will get it." In he came; and Samuel came near to be misled. I believe: for even prophets, if left to their own spirit, will go wrong like other men. Samuel was going to yield to the dictates of his own spirit. You see the need of inspiration, don't you?—a real inspiration, a miraculous interposition and assistance of the human mind by the Divine mind. He was about to yield to his own inspiration and to the look of things, when he was pulled by the sleeve, and the Lord said to him, "Samuel, look not upon his height, look not upon his countenance, seeing I have refused him." Samuel, the Lord sees not as man sees; man can only see face deep and skin deep and looks deep, but the Lord looks in upon the heart. Exit Eliab—the Lord hath not chosen him. I think I hear Samuel say to himself, "Ah yes, what a foolish old greybeard I had nearly made of myself. Is not this precisely the mistake that the whole nation made, when they chose Saul who has turned out so badly." What was the outstanding thing? It was his dimensions; a great, big, strapping fellow, seven by four, is Eliab. Now, this is very taking, very fetching, especially when a king is wanted, and in those old days a king did not spend all his time sleeping on a big chair you call a throne, with all manner of flunkies around him telling him what a great man he was, and hoping he would live for ever, and so on. No, a king had to justify his selection. He had to go out at the head of the army: he had to fight, to show some extra fighting power. It was very natural, was it not, that Samuel should choose Eliab? And when the Lord whispered to him, or made him conscious in some way or other of His mind and His deeper insight, "I have refused him," I