

THE CALL OF PETER AND JOHN.

BY REV. PHILIP A. NORDELL, D. D.

An Exposition of Lesson one in *The Bible Study Union Sunday School Lessons* on "The Three Great Apostles." (Mark i. 16-20; iii. 13-19; Luke v. 1-11; John i. 20-42.)

Jesus Christ came not only as a great religious teacher, but as the source of spiritual life. This teaching and life must of necessity be imparted in the first place to choice men who were capable of receiving it because deeply in sympathy with it. Jesus therefore surrounded Himself, as all great teachers have done, with a group of disciples whom He could train and qualify for the most momentous enterprise ever committed to human hands.

THE THREE GREAT APOSTLES.

Of the life and activity of the greater number of men whom our Lord chose as His personal followers practically nothing is known. Only two are prominent during His ministry, and in connection with the establishment of the primitive church in Judea. And these two, Peter and John, are soon eclipsed by the magnificent achievements of Paul, the new Apostle to the Gentiles. The greater part of the apostolic history revolves about these three, or rather two; for John, aside from his writings, is little more than a shadow at the side of Peter after the ascension of Christ. These three apostles not only represented the most potential factors in the establishment and extension of the early church, but the largest and most permanent influence, aside from the work and words of their Master, that has come down to later ages. The writings of Paul have been the inexhaustible source of Christian theology, while the writings of John have borne the spiritual life of believers into mystical attitudes of intuition beyond the reach of logic. Peter wrote but little, yet by a singular fate, his fame has acquired colossal proportions in connection with the prelatical assumptions of the Church of Rome. The lives of these three pillars of the Christian Church will engage the attention of the students of this series of lessons during the coming year.

THE EARLY LIFE OF PETER AND JOHN.

Very few allusions to the early life of Peter and John occur in the Gospels, and none at all in their writings. They were Galilean fishermen who seem to have been in fairly good circumstances, and to have received at least the degree of instruction commonly imparted to Jewish boys. Peter was married, and occupied a house at Capernaum. That this fact of his marriage should be explicitly noticed in regard to Peter alone of all the apostles is a little singular, since it is he who is lifted by later traditions into the ecclesiastical headship of that portion of Christendom which insists with unrelenting firmness upon the celibacy of the clergy. That Peter and John belong to that God-fearing class who constituted Isaiah's "holy seed," an Israel within Israel, may safely be assumed. They too, like many other devout souls, waited for the consolation of Israel. Such expectation would lead them to cultivate familiarity with the ancient oracles which embodied and stimulated their national hopes. This eager expectancy would also prepare them to view with profound interest the work of the great Judean prophet whose thunder-tones were then arousing the degenerate nation to a preparation for the Messiah's coming. With the boldness and fire of a new Elijah he exposed and denounced the sins of his people. In view of the judgments with which the Messiah was certain to begin the establishment of His kingdom he called them to immediate repentance. His appearance and ministry shook the land like an earthquake. So deeply were these Galilean fishermen moved by his burning words that they were baptized by him and joined the company of his followers or disciples. This discipleship became a preparation for their subsequent discipleship to Him whose impending advent at this "voice in the desert" proclaimed.

THREE STAGES OF CONSECRATION.

Three steps or stages are to be noted in their consecration to the service of Christ. First, the acceptance of Him as the promised Messiah at that memorable meeting by the Jordan where Jesus, having "fulfilled all righteousness," was pointed out by His baptizer as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Secondly, in the call to become "fishers of men," which involved a complete renunciation of home and business, and a close attendance upon Jesus during the remainder of His ministry; and, thirdly, the appointment to become apostles upon whom would rest the establishment and organization of the Redeemer's kingdom when His local earthly ministry would be replaced by His universal spiritual presence. In this consecration of themselves to His service, Peter and John learned the lesson of prompt and unquestioning obedience, and in the miraculous draught of fishes they were taught the additional lesson that such obedience in the face of even the most unpromising circumstances is the condition of certain and amazing success. Though the vision of

an earthly kingdom and material rewards long floated before their fancy, they learned little by little to count all worldly good as insignificant in comparison with the joy and blessedness of doing their Master's will.

MISSION FIELD.

THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA—A HOLY ALLIANCE.

The following appeal has been issued by a Committee representing Foreign Mission Boards in the United States and Canada and is signed by twenty representative men whose names we do not print for want of space. This Epistle to the Churches speaks for itself, and deserves prayerful attention. We like the proposal:—The United States and Canada joining hands for the conquest of the world for Christ.

New York, Dec. 1, 1896.

To the Pastors of United States and Canada:—

Beloved Brethren:—The Twentieth Century of the Christian era is upon us, and yet millions have never heard the name of Christ. The darkness of heathenism still enwraps nearly two-thirds of the population of the globe.

The "marching orders" of the Church are explicit and imperative. "Go." There is no suggestion of limitation. "Into all the world." The terms are universal. "Preach the Gospel to the whole creation." Any narrower conception of the Mission of the Church is a belittling of our faith. Any smaller endeavor is unworthy of the Christian name.

The opportunity for world-wide evangelization was never so great as at present. Ability has kept pace with enlarging opportunity. The Christian Church has the men and the means. Her responsibility has, therefore, proportionately increased. Yet, on fields long occupied and white unto harvest, the supply of laborers is utterly inadequate. The established work is crippled. Reinforcements are needed. Advance is impossible until gifts are enlarged, while the Church at home is suffering from the very "Heresy of inaction."

In the hope of quickening the Church to a due conception of its blessed privilege and solemn responsibility in the sacred enterprise of missions, we issue this appeal, and as the representatives of the Foreign Mission Boards in the United States and Canada, we suggest the enclosed Plan of Campaign.

The appeal is first to pastors. It has long been an axiom with our Mission Boards that where there is a Missionary pastor there will be a Missionary Church. The plan contemplates united action. It seeks a concentration of Christian thought in the theme of paramount importance. It aims to secure the cumulative force of a series of meetings. To ensure the attainment of these ends, we ask your prayerful and hearty co-operation.

Yours in fellowship of service,
(Signed.) E. D. CHIVERS,
Secretary.

PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

1. A sermon on Missions from every evangelical pulpit on Sabbath, January 10th, 1897.

The Evangelical Alliance has designated this day on its programme for the Week of Prayer for preaching upon the Great Commission. Matthew xxviii. 18-20.

2. A Mid-Week Prayer Meeting for Missions. It is earnestly desired that the prayer meeting following the Sabbath sermon be devoted to prayer for enlargement and blessing in the work of Foreign Missions.

3. District Missionary Rallies, in the larger cities on Thursday evening, January 14th. For this meeting let the city be divided into districts, and a Local Committee appointed in each district to make all necessary arrangements.

4. An Inter-denominational Mass Meeting in the interest of Missions. We suggest that on Friday evening, January 15th, unless some other evening be better suited to local convenience, an Inter-denominational Mass Meeting be held in the largest hall or church in every town in the United States and Canada. In arranging for this meeting, do not wait for some one else to move, but confer at once with brother pastors, and select the most efficient laymen in your city or town to serve with you on a Committee of arrangements. Be sure also to enlist your Young People's Societies in this movement, placing as much responsibility upon them as you think advisable.

We suggest that you make announcement of the campaign at once through the local press, and thus insure that no other meetings shall be fixed for that week which will interfere with this plan. Your own denominational board will gladly respond to your call for literature to aid you in preparation for the work.