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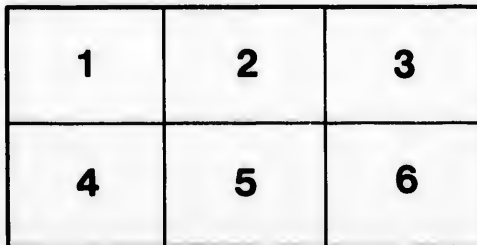
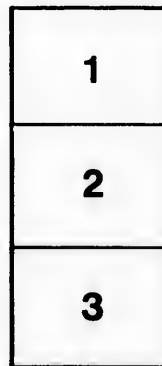
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Nehemiah vi. 3.

And I sent messengers unto them saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it and come down to you? Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort, and I answered them after the same manner.

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**N**EHEMIAH was making great efforts to build the wall of the city, so that the people might be protected from their enemies. He was hindered in his work by certain of his own countrymen, and by the open enemies of the Jewish people.

He met with the experience which all men who work for the public good must be prepared for. He had to submit, like the Canadian politician, to have his motives misrepresented and his character traduced. His patriotism was set down to selfishness. His beneficent work for his countrymen was ascribed to the basest motives.

This is the kind of opposition you must be prepared for if you seek to serve your country, or your town, or your township, in any public capacity, and the effect of this state of things is, in many places, that the men best fitted to serve the people keep entirely aloof from all public affairs. Nehemiah, however, vindicated himself. But when he had repelled his enemies in one direction they renewed the attack upon him from another quarter.

They could not bear to witness his success. His success in defending his poor fellow countrymen, would mean loss to them. So always the building up of the Church is the breaking down of the powers of evil. The church that does no harm to the cause of Satan will meet with no opposition from him.

He will allow it to enjoy peace and what it thinks is prosperity.

But this man was too active and too successful to be left alone. Therefore they devised means to get him out of the way.



This brings us to our subject, which is :—The greatness of the work in which the Church and servants of Christ are engaged.

It is of the greatest importance to have a high idea of the work in which we are engaged, whatever it may be. This is essential to our success in any calling.

The want of success, which men sometimes complain of, arises in not a few cases from the fact, that they do not give that attention to the work which they are engaged in, that its importance demands. They think lightly of it and neglect it. They do not try to do it in the best manner possible, so that it may give satisfaction to those for whom it is done.

A man's good or bad qualities reveal themselves in his work. His character is seen in it. His conscience or lack of conscience appears in it. There are few instances in which, when a man does his work well, that he does not secure a measure of success. Emergencies arise which baffle the wisdom of the wisest, and the diligence

of the most careful. There are crises in which no amount of diligence can prevent the incurring of loss. But the rule is, that an important element in a man's success in life is to regard the work in which he is engaged, if it is an honourable occupation, as worthy of his most diligent attention.

Superficial, unreliable work will discredit any one, and is never profitable.

This holds good in all labour. In the work of any profession, as truly as in the commonest mechanical toil.

The dignity and importance of honest work is taught us by the Gospel. And there is no more satisfactory test of a man's religion than the thoroughness and reliability of the work which goes out of his hands. Not only the poet in writing a poem, which confers immortal fame on its author ; not only the artist in his picture, which hands down to future ages noble ideas ; not only the pastor, however gifted and however successful, is doing a great work ; but the most

ordinary duty, the commonest task, which shows in its completeness and thoroughness an honest spirit, is a work which has an element of greatness in it. What we should aim at is to show our religion in our work, whatever it may be. That is a far better testimony to our religion than any mere testifying with the lips to the faith that is in us. It is in this spirit we find business men regarding their business. They put aside, without hesitation, any engagement which interferes with it.

And if this is true in the common affairs of life, it is equally true in the sphere of religion.

When you lay down the business of the world and take up this, the building of the walls of Zion, you are entering on another kind of work.

All our tasks should be done in a religious spirit, but I speak now of engaging directly in some department of religious duty, as an officer or servant of Jesus Christ. When you can say, "I am about to deal now with the affairs of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, let me there-

fore, bring to it, not only my best business ability, but my warmest sympathies and my earnest prayers. For while my other duties are important, this, as it bears on my own spiritual life and that of my fellow man, is of far greater importance."

It is a great work, then, because it has to do with the spiritual life of man, my own and others. And just as *every part* of the work in your own house has a bearing upon the health and comfort of every member of your family, so *every part* of the work in the house of God has an effect upon the spiritual health and comfort of His family. The building of the wall had an influence on all who lived inside of it. There was not a child in the city, even the weakest, but would feel the benefit of a well built wall. And this is the point I wish to call attention to. The spiritual bearing of every part of our work in God's house.

The men engaged in building the wall might have felt that it was simply a piece of masonry

they were working at. They might say "that the architect had more to do with making it a good wall than any prayers they might offer to God. That the main work for them was to procure good stone and lime, rather than to trouble themselves with the purpose for which the wall was being built. That this was not a spiritual work. There were no prayers needed here. Only let us build right."

But this would have been a narrow view and a wrong view. There may be great spiritual meanings in stone and lime. There may be very direct spiritual bearings in the ordinary affairs of a congregation. There is no work in the house of God that is mere human business. You cannot draw a line in the work of the Church and say that all beyond that line is business, mere business, and all inside of that line is spiritual. You cannot, in this way, shut God out from any room in His own house. Every officer or servant in the house is a spiritual officer. A manager is as much a spiritual officer as an elder. The

manager deals with the financial affairs. But these are not his affairs, they are the affairs of the house and family of God, and it is said, "Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth." I know a distinction is made in the church. Men do draw a line in church work and virtually say this part of the work is business. Spiritual considerations have no place here.

This is done all over our church. It is said, the spiritual business is in the next room. We need no direction from Heaven to do this. God has no part in this. It is only business and nothing more. And so we find the result of such a view to be that the affairs of the Church of Jesus Christ are done as the work of any human club would be done: correctly, diligently, but not as work for Christ.

We have reason to be thankful that they are so well managed in many cases, that so many men of ability are giving their time and labour to the affairs of His house. So far as the

business view of the matter is concerned the work is skilfully done, and done also with cordial and kind spirit ; yet I think that there is room for calling attention to the point, that all this may be true of what we do, and yet that we may not keep sufficiently before our minds the act, that all this is the work of Christ and that in it all we should seek His guidance.

Now in thus separating one part of the Church's business from the other part, and saying that one part is not spiritual and the other part is spiritual, we leave out of view the true nature of church work and of the Church itself.

Is not the financial work of the Church most important and difficult ? Does not the success of the Church largely depend on it ? Do we not then need the blessing of God in it ? Is it not true here also, " The blessing of God it maketh rich ? " Should we not then ask it on all our financial schemes ? Again does not the comfort of the worshippers and the success of the service depend largely on the atmosphere of the church,

on the heat, on the air of the place, on the light ? These are material things, but toward these, men should not only direct their business talent, but they should be inspired to do so by zeal for their Master, by desire to make His work a success.

This is what all our church work needs, a higher inspiration.

We contribute our money, and money is a very worldly element. But it is the measure of my sincerity, the test of my faith, the gauge of my spiritual life. It is sent abroad to carry the Gospel to my fellow-men in all parts of the world. It sustains the Gospel at home.

So spiritual issues reaching out to eternity are linked with the "collection."

Thus we see how all that work of the Church which is sometimes put on one side as mere business, as if no spiritual meanings entered into it, is wrongly put aside in this way.

And that everything connected with the house of God, the heating, the lighting, the furnishing, the ventilating, the taking up the collec-



tion and the expending of it, are all essential to the health and comfort of the house, and should all be done from the same spiritual motive from which the preaching is done, namely, to promote the cause of our Lord and Master, to build up His Church, to advance His glory.

This truth which I am trying to state, is taught very fully in Scripture, and in the Old Testament particularly. (Exodus 35, 30.) We find that "Bezaleel was filled with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise curious works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in the cutting of stones to set them, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work." And again we are told, "that every wise-hearted man in whom the Lord put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, wrought at it." And we find that always when God wanted men or women to do any kind of work for Him, He wanted those who had the

Spirit of God in them, and who regarded the work which they were doing as done for Him, whatever it might be.

And, therefore, we see that those who had His Spirit in them, sought to do any work in which they were engaged in the very best manner possible, and that it is the Spirit of God who makes us skilful in all spiritual undertakings.

But lifting our eyes from our little family circle and our congregations, when we look abroad over the world-wide field, at the work which the Church of Christ is doing, it must appear to us a "great work." No enterprise that men boast of in these modern days is to be compared with this. A world's fair is a mere temporary wonder. But this into which Christ has sent us, is the building of a kingdom that is everlasting. The glory of it illumines all lands. The blessings which it confers, enrich all lands. And we here, all unknown outside our own door, are enlisted in it. We cannot separate ourselves

from the great army. We cannot say that we will stand aloof and build our part of the wall by ourselves. No, we also are "fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God." We are doing our share. A small share, yet it may not be small in His eyes, who sitteth "over against the treasury." A hundred men among the thousands of the great army is a small company, but their stroke in the conflict tells also. Such a view of our position should help us to realize the dignity of our work, as the servants of Jesus Christ. Whether it be guiding the steps of a child into the Kingdom, or making our Master's house comfortable for His children, or spending the talent entrusted to us with wisdom "that at His coming He may receive His own with usury," it is a great work.

Angels deem it an honour to have a part in it. The noblest men and women in the world, like His great servant of old, confess—"the latchet of His shoes, I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose." So high is the honour of

-serving Jesus Christ. So great the work of building the wall of Zion.

Coming back again to ourselves, when we reflect that we also are working for eternity, does not this elevate all that we do far above the atmosphere of earth? And would we but take this view of what we are doing, would it not make our church quite a different institution to us?

Shall it be said of us, "This man and that man was born there?" Shall it be said of us, that in our midst young lives were trained up for Christ, and hearts once enslaved to Satan were set free by the truth proclaimed here? Is it not for this we are working? Should we not look on it in this light, in its true dignity, in its spiritual meanings, in its eternal import, and regard it as an honour to have a part in it.

We see, then, that because of the spiritual bearing of every part of the church's work, we may say, whatever part of it is ours, "I am doing a great work so that I cannot come down."

This is the point I wish particularly to emphasize. Because this invests all that is done for the sanctuary with its true importance. We feel that this which we are doing is a contribution to the Kingdom.

It is a help towards the great result we are all labouring for, and thus when every part is well done and lovingly done, we can sing and pray :

And let the beauty of the Lord  
Our God be us upon,  
Our handy-works establish Thou,  
Establish them each one.

But while I have stated the point which I wish to emphasize, I have not demonstrated or illustrated it at length. I leave it thus for your own reflection, preferring to be brief.

I would like also to have dwelt upon other considerations which should make us regard this work as great. As that the work of the church is in a special sense the work of God, only ours as He has called us into it. It is when men and women forget this, that strife enters. They think that is their work, forgetting their Master. We are the servants of the church for Christ's sake.

The electing of us by men does not deprive Jesus Christ of His Lordship. It is in the church He unfolds His love, His purpose of salvation. It is there He carries out His gracious designs and reveals His glory and His power. We think too meanly of the church and of the honour of a place upon her role.

From Heaven He came and sought her,  
To be His holy bride ;  
With His own blood He bought her  
And for her life He died.

Then I would like to have shown how great this work is, because it is like the wall of Jerusalem, for the defence and protection of human society. But my space forbids.

Let me, however, point you to the motive which should inspire us in all that we do. Our Lord in writing to the Church at Ephesus says : " I know Thy works and Thy labour and Thy patience . . . . . and Thou hast borne and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast laboured and hast not fainted," or, as the R. V., " And Thou hast patience and didst bear for My name sake, and hast not grown weary."

This is the motive in it all, whether it be our preaching, our teaching, our contributing, our collecting, our Christian endeavour, in whatever direction. When we get away from this, we grow cold and careless and heed not what we do or how we do it. Therefore, we must ever come back to the Cross and remember the great work which Jesus Christ has there done for us. He loved us and gave Himself for us. Let us reflect on this when we grow weary and cold in our service, and when we realize what He has done for us in dying for us on the cross, what He has done for us in revealing to us the knowledge of salvation, when we recall all the blessings which He has bestowed upon us, and the glorious hopes which He has implanted within us, then we will be moved with gratitude which will not be satisfied with any service for Him, short of the very best which it is in our power to render.

If, then, this work of the church and the part of it which I am doing is so great, because of its

spiritual bearing upon the salvation of men, and because it is the work of God, and because it is for the protection of human society from evil in every form, and if it is done for the sake of my Saviour who has redeemed me, why should I be drawn away from it by the seducements of the evil one? Rather say, "this is my share in the work and it shall be done. I will neither be driven from it nor postpone it for any worldly invitation. I will answer as Nehemiah did, why should the work cease, whilst I leave it and come down to you? Who are you who call me away from the enjoyments of my church and of my Master? Is what you invite me to, more important than what He has given me to do. To whom do you belong? Are you interested in the Church of Christ?"

Let us then have this word of this loyal, sensible, practical man ready for the tempter and his temptations. For it is an unanswerable word. What can Satan or the world have to say to this, "Why should the work cease, whilst I leave it and come down to you?"



