

Debnay, R. L.

THE
WORLD WHITE TO HARVEST.—
REAP; OR, IT PERISHES.

The World White to Harvest:—Reap; or it Perishes.

A SERMON

PREACHED FOR

THE BOARD OF FOREIGN MISSIONS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH,

IN NEW YORK, MAY 2, 1858.

BY

REV. ROBERT L. DABNEY, D.D.,

PROFESSOR OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY AND POLITY, IN THE UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, VIRGINIA.

NEW YORK :
PRINTED FOR THE BOARD OF FOREIGN MISSIONS,
By EDWARD O. JENEKINS, 26 FRANKFORT STREET.
1858.

A SERMON.

“BEHOLD, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.”
—JOHN IV. 35.

THE most familiar truths are the most influential. This is a fact which our ambition to be novel often causes us to overlook. Much that is ingenious, and at the same time correct, has been said upon the commercial, civil, and social results of missions and of Christianity. There is some danger of our prosecuting the evangelical work from these considerations, to the exclusion of the more sacred motives drawn from eternity. In them must ever be the main spring of the Church's zeal. The same vast, old, familiar truths, which made Paul, Peter, Jesus Christ missionaries, that the whole human race are children of wrath, and in the highway to everlasting ruin; these must move our missionary efforts also. Our faith should constantly recur to these great facts, to receive from them fresh impulses of their might. This is just the method of our Saviour in the text, when he introduces the enforcement of gospel effort by saying: “Lift up your eyes and look on the fields.” And the preacher of the gospel ought to be far more ambitious to be able to re-state these trite, but potent doctrines, with a seriousness, fervor, and palpable faith appropriate to their awful importance, than to win the applause of his brethren by an eloquent or ingenious novelty. There is the more reason that we should recur to our principles, now that Infidelity so boldly charges, that the church is no longer impelled in her evangelical toils, by a vital and actual faith in the threatenings of sacred Scripture against “the nations that forget God.” They have found, alas; but too much pretext for the taunt, in the biting contrast between the tremendous urgency of our creed, and the sluggishness of our endeavors.

You recognize the text as a part of the discourse uttered by our Saviour after his interview with the Samaritan woman at the well. She had gone for a moment to the town, to call her friends to hear the gracious Teacher. Meantime the disciples returned with supplies for our Saviour's weariness

which had arrested him first at that spot. But now, they find the claims of hunger and fatigue silenced in him by his more consuming zeal for souls; his meat, his solace for toil, his cordial for fainting nature, is to fulfil his great mission as Teacher and Redeemer of the perishing. He proceeds to assign the reason for his self-denying diligence in this work, in the words; "The fields are white already to harvest." This illustration is a favorite one with our Saviour.* Its propriety is evidently in this fact; that when the pale yellow of maturity colours the fields of wheat, the precious grain must be gathered at once; or else it will fall to the ground and perish. The harvest labour of the husbandman is peculiarly one which admits no delay. When the golden crop beckons him with its nodding plumes, he must bestir himself, disregarding of scorching heat and panting fatigue: next month it will be too late; for mildew and rot will have reaped his fields before him. So, the labour of the spiritual husbandman is also harvest-toil. The harvest of souls awaits no man's sluggishness—Death is a field with his flashing scythe mowing down the nations, and gathering his sheaves for hell fire; so that the work of redeeming love for them must be done at once, or never. In this is the point of our Saviour's reasoning. This is obviously true of each generation of sinners, as to its own generation of Christian labourers; on the supposition that the whole world is indeed subject to condemnation. Our Saviour evidently extends the application of the fact to all his servants in the harvest, as well as to himself. But I am persuaded that his words include a meaning more extensive and profound. Not only is the short lifetime of each generation the harvest time of its souls: some eras of the world are harvest-seasons as to many preceding and subsequent generations. There is then a conjunction of rare influences and circumstances, rendering evangelical labours practicable and successful, so that a hundred fold as much may be done, as afterward, when that conjunction is dissolved. Such a season the sacred Scriptures clearly describe the era of Christ and his apostles to have been—Then "the fullness of time had come,"† chosen by God to bring his first begotten into the world. Then was fulfilled the gracious and golden hour, foreseen by Isaiah,‡ for Christ to call to the isles and the people from afar, "in an acceptable time, and in a day of salvation." So deemed Paul, when he said,§ to the men of his age: "Behold, now is the accepted time: behold now is the day of salvation."

If this apprehension is correct, the text will be found to carry for us a twofold meaning. The first of the two important truths which it teaches

* Matt. ix, 37, 38. Mark iv. 20. Luke x. 12.

† Gal. iv. 4.

‡ Isaiah xlix. 8.

§ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

is this : that the souls of this generation of mankind will quickly perish, unless they be saved by the gospel efforts of Christ's church. You will perceive, my brethren, that we are confronted here, with that solemn question, on which professed followers of Christ are by no means agreed: *Whether the souls of the heathen will certainly perish without the gospel.* Let us look briefly for the answer the sacred Scripture gives it. For if the present ignorance of the heathen exempts them from the curse of a broken law and a fallen nature, while their instruction in revealed truth would subject them to it, like ourselves ; and if we may anticipate the probable success of that instruction in turning them to Christ, by the obduracy of sinners at home ; then the result of our misplaced zeal may mainly be to scatter broadcast the gratuitous seeds of an aggravated damnation. It were better to centre all our energies on the rescue of sinners at home, who have certainly made themselves subject to the curse, by their neglect of Christian light. But if the heathen are also destined to perish inevitably unless the church thrusts forth its labourers into the harvest ; then here is the great, the dreadful motive, next to God's glory, which should strain every nerve of every redeemed soul, to rescue all he can.

I. It has been urged that a just God cannot punish the breach of a law, or neglect of a gospel, which the heathen could not know. I answer: He will punish no one unjustly. But hath He left himself without witness among them ?* “The heavens declare the glory of God ; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.” Idolatry and its crimes are not all sins of ignorance.† “For the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead ; so that they are without excuse.” They who have no Bible may still look up to the moon walking in brightness and the stars watching in obedient order : they may see in the joyous sunbeams the smile of the Universal Father, and in the fruitful shower the droppings of his bounty ; they hear the rending thunder utter his wrath, and the matin jubilee of the birds sing his praise ; the green hills are swelled with His goodness ; the trees of the wood rejoice before Him with every quiver of their foliage in the summer air ; and the floods clap their hands in praise, as their multitudinous waves leap up flashing the laughing sunlight from their crests. Are they then, without blame, who turn aside from all this, to worship abominations ? Nature, by her universal anthem, says, No ; ‡ “because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God.”

* Ps. xix.

† Rom. i. 20.

‡ Rom. i. 21.

Or shall we suppose that, while every nominal Christian sometimes disobeys his own conscience, heathens are so much purer, that they never do? To many moral distinctions they may be blind; but among them, as everywhere else among our fallen race, men's light is better than their walk. When the pagans bow down to vile stoeks, or defile themselves with universal fraud and lies, infanticide, murder of parents, and all abominations, shall we be told that natural conscience utters no protest? Be it as besotted as it may, it cannot wholly tolerate these things. It were a libel on Him who made man in his own image, to say that even heathen idolatries and crimes could so crush out the moral sense, the noblest trait of His handiwork in us. No; there is not a rational heathen in the world who, however blind his conscience, does not sometimes violate that conscience. There, at least, is sin: there is ground for the righteous judgment of God against him.* "For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law. Nor need we tarry long for that other objection: That a merciful God will surely smile upon that man who sincerely desires to do his duty; and who lives honestly up to the best creed which it was possible for him to know, erroneous though that creed be. The short answer is, that among Adam's sons, there is no such man.† "For we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." Every man comes short of his own creed, whatever it may be.

These objections lie too near the surface of the question to detain us long. We are compelled to admit the sorrowful truth by reasons far more profound; and one of these is suggested by the pleas which have just been set aside. It is this: 1. That while all are guilty, no pagan, no infidel scheme provides an adequate atonement. The necessity of this full atonement for pardoned sin is declared by every attribute of God, by every interest of his universal government, and by all the teachings of his word and works. Do not these attributes and principles direct his government of pagans, as well as of nominal Christians? Is not God everywhere the same? He "will render to every man according to his deeds, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God."‡ Yea, the heathen conscience has itself written this necessity for atonement all over their superstitions, in horrid characters of torment and blood. Their ablutions, their penances and self-tortures, their costly and ceaseless oblations, the sweat and dust of their pilgrimages, the abhorrent offerings of the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul, confess at once a sense of guilt, and a conscious need of satisfac-

* Rom. ii. 12.

† Rom. iii. 9.

‡ Rom. ii. 6, 10, 11.

tion for it. And in the more refined creeds of Islam and Deism, we read the same confession, in their proposal to compensate for their guilt by alms, good works, reformations, or repentings.

But all these atonements are inadequate:* "for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." Least of all would those speculative persons, with whom Bible assertions are of little weight, admit that these spurious virtues or senseless abominations can atone for guilt, they only add to it. The only atonement is that which God has provided for us in the sufferings of his divine Son. And the only way by which any one can share this atonement is the exercise of evangelical faith. Our argument then, is this: that all pagans are self-convicted of some sins, at least against the light of nature; no sin can be pardoned without atonement: but the gospel is the only proposal of atonement to man.

2. Paganism is also fatally defective with regard to the other great want of the human soul, moral renovation. Here we take our stand upon the great doctrine of our confession:† that all the race are "dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body." However men may differ in degrees of wickedness, the best, equally with the worst, are wholly prone to worldliness instead of spirituality; and the hearts of all are fully set in them to disobey some of God's known commands. The natural will of every man dislikes and rejects the holiness, the communion, and the service of God; and this by the perpetual and certain force of those innate dispositions which determine rational volitions. No power but one from without and above can renew that will; because all within it is of course determined by those controlling dispositions. I shall not affront you by supposing it necessary to offer proof of these statements. Such is the inheritance which our own eyes see all in Christian lands deriving from their first father. But we have the testimony of God, that all the heathens bear to Adam the same relation. "He hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth."‡ And if our smaller vices mournfully substantiate this view of man's moral state here, how much more may we assert it of the heathen, from the general and loathsome corruption of their lives?

Now, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."§ Here is a prohibition, not pronounced only by the divine justice, but made inexorable by a natural necessity. The carnal mind cannot enjoy a holy and spiritual heaven; but this is the only state of real and everlasting welfare which a holy God can appoint for moral beings.

* Heb. x. 4. † Conf. chap. vi. sec. 2, 3. ‡ Acts xvii. 26. § John iii. 3.

To be unholy is to be unhappy. Were the justice of God dethroned, and the very throne of judgment demolished, were all his holy attributes repudiated, and all the interests of his kingdom disregarded, still the truth, "ye must be born again," would remain a flaming sword, turning every way to keep the path to paradise. But no pagan creed provides means or agency for the new birth. The very conception is strange to them. Their languages lack the very terms for expressing the holiness which it produces. So far are their theologies from any sanctifying influence, their morals are immoral, the deities which they invite man to adore and imitate are often impersonations of monstrous crime, and the heaven which is to reward their zeal is a *pandemonium* of wickedness triumphant and immortalized.

Where now are the claims of those virtuous heathens, a Confucius, a Numa, an Aristides, who are supposed to have walked uprightly according to that scanty light of nature vouchsafed by Providence? We might waive the considerations that every earthly child of Man is condemned by his own standard, and that justice must be satisfied for these shortcomings. Where is the upright heathen who has shown true spirituality of heart; whose gratitude and love towards a holy God, whose hungerings for sanctification, whose delight in communion with heaven, have proved him "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light"? Have travellers or missionaries found such hearts, formed under the tutelage of paganism? Now if we decide (as we must), that the most magnanimous gentleman in this Christian land, the most amiable wife, mother, or sister, whose understanding approves the Bible, and whose social life is regulated by higher ethics than ever Aristides dreamed, that he also must be new created unto holiness, before he can see God; it is simple absurdity to talk of heathen men admitted to heaven for the uprightness of their intentions. But let us speak of the common grade of pagans; of those whose whole life was brutal vice, whose hearts were all uncleanness, whose very worship was a carnival of lasciviousness and blood. What would that heaven be to them, which we awfully recognize as too pure to admit the most ingenuous of our sons, the loveliest of our daughters, whose social graces are the perfume of our homes and hearts, while they are unregenerate? Let us suppose that the whole sentence of God against the gentiles were: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still."* Then look at that earthly hell of destitution, domestic tyranny, public barbarity, revenge, and unbridled passion, which heathen society often makes in this life; and

* Rev. xxii. 11.

judge what these elements will evolve, when let loose in the world of spirits, without social restraints or the illusions of hope, and deprived of those animal enjoyments which now form their chief happiness. In fine, the heathen, like us, are depraved; they need a new birth. Therefore they cannot be saved without the gospel, which is the only instrument of regeneration.

We know there are Christians who reject this conclusion, thinking God cannot justly condemn any man who is not endowed with all such means and ability for knowing and loving him, as put his destiny in every sense within his own choice. These means the heathen do not fully possess where their ignorance is invincible. The principle asserted is, that God cannot justly hold any one responsible who is not blessed with both natural and moral ability. I answer, that our doctrine concerning the heathen places them in precisely equal condition with those unhappy men in Christian lands, who have the outward word, but experience no effectual calling of the Spirit. God requires of the latter to obey that law and gospel of which they enjoy the clearer lights; and the obstacle which ensures their failure to comply, not indeed with any physical constraint, but with a moral certainty, is a depraved heart which is unwilling to submit. Of the heathen, God would require no more than full obedience to that limited light of nature which his providence has granted them; and the obstacle which ensures their failure also is the same—a depraved will. When God holds the heathen responsible for their light therefore, he deals with them no more unfairly than with the finally impenitent under the gospel.

This is too obvious to be denied; and hence it has been found necessary, in order to maintain the moral ability of sinners, to assert that every human being, Christian and pagan, enjoys a common sufficient grace, consisting of various influences alluring him to the right, which restores the depraved will to its *equilibrium*. And it is said, where any heart yields to this common grace, God's mercy and fidelity stand pledged to second those movements of the yielding soul, and bestow all the helps necessary to redemption. And if a poor pagan, guided by this universal light, begins to feel after God if haply he may find him, surely the Father of Mercies will not leave unrewarded the strivings which his own grace has awakened; but will find some way to give saving knowledge and the Holy Spirit.

The fatal answer is, that the Scriptures, properly understood, are silent concerning such universal sufficient grace. Our experience contradicts

it; for we usually see the actual operations of God's grace far less extensive than the means. How then can it be plausibly said that, in other cases, the grace is extended so far beyond its outward means? So far is God from extending a universal gracious influence sufficient to restore *equilibrium* to a perverted will; Paul tells us that "whom he will he hardeneth."* And of the pagans, especially, it is said; "Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind."† Once more: if this grace is sufficient, why does it not bring all alike to God? If it is successful in some cases only because He adds something to its influences, then, in the other cases, it was not sufficient grace. If he added nothing, then the different result would show that the common grace found in those cases less perversity of heart to overcome. All men would not be in the same spiritual condition towards God: as the Bible most distinctly asserts they are. "They are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable."‡ "Who maketh thee to differ from another; and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?"§

We find then that the foundation-truths of redemption forbid us to hope for the escape of the heathen — we can only indulge the thought at the expense of those prime axioms on which our whole theology and our own salvation depends; while the customary palliations of their danger do but touch the surface of the terrible case. Every child of Adam, Christian or pagan, must have justifying righteousness; and he must have a new heart. We know not that adult and rational men can obtain these gifts, save by the intelligent reception of the Gospel: I say not the reception of the full details of the New Testament, but of that rudimental gospel and those great primal conceptions of God, holiness, sin, gratuitous justification, and sanctification, embraced by a living faith and hope, which pervade the patriarchal as well as the evangelical revelations. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."||

But admitting all this, may we not still hope that there are elect Gentiles, objects of God's sovereign and omnipotent grace, and that they receive from Him those gospel rudiments in some way extraordinary and unknown to the Church? Would God that we had abundant grounds to hope this; but alas, experience and revelation, while they may not absolutely denounce its possibility, command us to act just as though all

* Rom. ix. 18.

† Rom. i. 28. See also, 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.

‡ Rom. iii. 12.

§ 1 Cor. iv. 7.

|| Acts iv. 12.

depended upon the agency of the Church. Have our missionaries found among the heathen hitherto untaught of man, the fruits of such divine teachings? Have they told us of men, who, while they may not have learned to worship Jehovah by the names we use, yet know and love a Being of true godhead and holiness; who hate sin, trust in free grace, strive after righteousness and triumph over death by hope? We fear the instances are few and doubtful; if there are cases which relieve the common picture of selfishness, fraud and lust, they are but instances of worldly uprightness. The heathens, like the unredeemed of our own land, are found to live in bondage to evil desires and a guilty conscience, and to die in superstitious delusion, or beastly apathy, or despair.

And while God has not said that he sends his saving truth as the medium of his saving grace by no hand but that of Christian effort, every example and precept of the Scriptures bid us act as though this were true. The Great Commission is, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,"* as though every human being under heaven were dependent on this loving ministry of the church. The inspired preachers by their consuming zeal in the missionary work, implied the same truth. Why did Paul, for instance, submit to dangers of deaths oft; † to receive of the Jews forty stripes save one, five times; to be beaten thrice with rods; to be stoned; to spend a night and a day in the deep; to endure varied perils, weariness, watchings, hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness? Like his Divine Master, he believed that a harvest of precious souls was perishing for lack of Christian reapers. And when the charge of insanity was provoked by his gigantic labours, from men too dead in unbelief to comprehend him, his simple solution was, "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead." ‡ And in one word, God gives us the rule of our hopes and duties as the unevangelized world, in the Epistle to the Romans. "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?" §

We conclude then, that the church should feel and act towards the human race substantially as though all without the gospel were perishing forever. Do any murmur at our earnest, yea, vehement zeal, to drive the dread conviction home upon you? I answer; it is not because we

* Mark xvi. 15. † 2 Cor. xi. 23—27. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 14. § Rom. x. 12—15.

are glad to have it so; but because we sadly know it is so. We think our true compassion is to face the dire reality, and thus rouse ourselves and you to that burning activity which alone can mitigate it. That is but a false and puling tenderness, which professes not to see it, in order that its indolence may evade the toils of the rescue. Should I discover one of these dwellings burning over its sleeping inmates, while you, their neighbors, were skeptical of their danger, my cry of fire would be no argument of my delight in the catastrophe, but of my zeal to arrest it. And now that I see a world threatened by the devouring fire of hell, while the church slumbers that ought to stay the destruction, must I not lift up my voice like a trumpet? Oh, if we could but relieve the danger of the heathen by arguing that it was slight, how joyfully would we plead the glowing theme?

But this cannot be. Here then is the vast yet simple case; at least four fifths of the thousand millions of our race are without the Bible; and must therefore sink into hell as fast as death can mow them down. In about one third of a century, the generation of our contemporaries will be forever beyond the reach of our love. We seem often to imagine that India, that China, that Africa, will still remain a century hence, awaiting our tardy zeal; but it is a terrible delusion. Unless we bestir ourselves now, the India, the China of to-day will be gone; and another India, another China, inheritors of their crimes and miseries, will be there, to wait a little time upon the succour of another Christian generation, and then, unless our successors be more prompt than we have been, to plunge into perdition in their turn.

Now, have we thought what a plunge this is? Have we followed with our minds the ruin of one poorest, darkest, weakest pagan soul, through its progressive depravity and despair, through its increasing capacities for sinning and suffering, and through the never ending, ever widening vistas of its immortality, till the woe is vaster than the wreck of a world? And do we remember how frequently this ruin occurs? Every blast of war, or pestilence, or famine, which shakes the human crop, strews hell with precious seed of lost souls, as thickly as when the November wind sweeps the sere leaves of some trackless wood into its silent lake. If the deaths of this generation of sinners were perfectly regular in series, it would furnish well nigh sixty for every minute; so that while we sit here deliberating in cold debate, somewhere in this field of death, every second of time marks the dying gasp of a human being! Hark to the fatal beat! Each stroke of the pendulum tolls the knell of another soul

that drops ; each stroke is another plunge into the pit, and a new burst of another everlasting wail joining the many-voiced threnody of despair. Oh terrible world, in which to live ; oh dread responsibility of this living harvest ; in the reaping of which we must race with death ! How can our sluggish feet overtake the swift angel, to snatch the prey from his grasp ; when the baleful shade of his wings is seen flitting over isle and continent, even as the gathering gloom of night would appear to some watcher from the skies, to sweep around the revolving globe ? Should we not shrink in shuddering horror from the tremendous competition, till we recur to our Divine Master, to infuse us with his strength, and to wash out the sin of our sluggishness with his blood ? Yet let us not be cast down ; we remember that so swiftly as the dark edge of night devours the surface of our world from sight, even so swiftly does the advancing flush of day revolve behind it, and reconquer it to light and joy. Thus will the light of the Sun of Righteousness follow and outrun the shadows of death, until they darken the earth no more.

II. There are eras in the world's progress, which, compare with other ages as harvest seasons for Christ : and such an era our Saviour evidently considered his own generation to be. I cannot suppose that when he pronounced "the fields white to harvest," his all-seeing eye, which declared "the field is the world," embraced only the approaching clusters of Samaritans summoned by the startled woman to the well ; or only the teeming villages of Galilee and Judea. Doubtless he meant to include that general preparation for the gospel, pervading the civilized world at that day, which had brought in "the fulness of time," and "the acceptable year of the Lord."

Many important elements concurred in this preparation. Both Jews and Gentiles were aroused by a general hope of a divine intervention, and the clear announcements by which Hebrew prophets had heralded the coming of the Messiah, were repeated in the fainter echoes of eastern Magi and Latin poets. It was also the Augustan age of mental activity, when the languages of antiquity had received the finishing touch of their cultivation ; and human speculation had borne its maturest fruits. The Greek tongue, fittest of all for expressing moral distinctions, and already, in virtue of the Septuagint version, a sacred language to God's people, was diffused throughout the civilized world, as the language of polite intercourse and traffic. The Macedonian arms had carried it from Ionia to the jungles of Hindostan and the cataracts of the Nile ; and even after Greece herself fell before the Roman, the rough conqueror, by adopting his captive as his tutoress, had spread it throughout the West. More

than this; in "every nation under heaven" were found the Jews of the dispersion, nursing the great spiritual doctrines and worship of the Old Testament, and that most often in the Greek scriptures; so that to whatever place of note in any land, the evangelist might go, he found in the bosom of paganism a place and audience, familiar with at least the rudiments of his system. Yet, more; the civilized world was at length at peace. The empire of the Cæsars, so vast, that it proudly styled itself by a name synonymous with the habitable globe, had consolidated the nations under its iron rule, and stilled their jars with a force too mighty to be even assailed. From the Atlantic to the Euphrates, her armed police protected the freedom of travel and traffic, so that the stranger of every tongue was safe in every other land, whatever the lawful purpose of his journey. The barriers of danger and prejudice which fenced people from people were levelled, and mankind were mingled in a fermenting, inquiring mass. Once more; the pagan mind had outgrown the swaddling bands of its mythologies. Understandings, sharpened by the dialectics of Athens, Tarsus, Alexandria, rejected the puerile theogonies which impressed the awe-struck fancies of their rude fathers. And while human depravity, thus educated, disdained the fears of a fabled Rhadamanthus and Tartarus, and rushed to every excess of crime; thoughtful minds felt the instinctive craving for a creed and a resting-place, and recoiled from the blank unbelief and chaos of moral corruption, which threatened to absorb every hope of humanity. The race had now fully wrought out the long experiment, whether "man by his wisdom could know God," and stood aghast at its disastrous failure; when Christ prepared "by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believed."

Such were the features of this harvest time. The apostles and their fellow-reapers thrust forth into the field, with the vigour inculcated by the example and injunctions of their Master, to gather fruit unto life eternal. Divine wisdom taught them to comprehend the emergency; and the result was, that they carried the gospel in one century from the Indus to the Pillars of Hercules. The energy and speed of the heralds of the cross was not unworthy of the symbol by which prophecy impersonated them; "an angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."*

These favourable circumstances continued but a few generations. Let us suppose that the primitive Christians, instead of toiling with the urgency of harvest labourers, had contented themselves with a few

* Rev. xiv. 6.

decent exertions, resigning themselves, for the rest to a snug and selfish religious epicurism. After the first generation came fiery and bloody persecutions, which seemed for a time almost to drown the churches in their own slaughter. Next came the decay, the internal convulsions, the world-resounding fall of the Empire, whose arts and arms had all concurred to make a highway for the Prince of Peace. Barbarian and pagan hordes ravaged and dismembered the mighty fabric. The language of the gospel, of science, of civilization, became a dead one, except to one people, the rare accomplishment of the learned few, and the curse of Babel again separated nation from nation. Literature was banished by the din of wars and rapine; order, commerce, travel were almost at an end; and at last there remained only the chaotic sea of the middle ages, strewn with the eddying wrecks of the ancient world, and tossed with perpetual storms, from which a new order was slowly and painfully to emerge.

Now, need we state the contrast between the probable success of missionary effort in this dreary and turbulent winter, and in the glorious summer of the Christian era? True, it was still the duty of the Church to endeavour to obey the perpetual injunction, regardless of gigantic obstacles; for with her almighty Head all things are possible. True, it was still her privilege to hope that faithful toil would not be wholly fruitless, even in the most untoward seasons. But still, Christ does not wholly abrogate the force of natural causes in his providence over his kingdom. It was also true that the Church was now bereft, not only of her golden opportunity, but also of her gifts, (miracles, tongues, prophecy,) and of much of her primitive purity. But the possession of these, as well as of the opportunity to employ them fortunately, was among the things whose concurrence made the harvest season; and their lack will account only in part for the failures of the Church. She was not forgetful of the work of missions in the dark ages; but how scanty and difficult were the conquests! The first century sufficed for her to run the circuit of that Mediterranean Sea, around which were then grouped the civilized races of man; but now she consumed four hundred years in creeping doubtfully from the Rhine to the Vistula; and in most of the new ground which she essayed to tread, her footprints were obliterated as she passed, as though they had been made in the shifting sands.

Consider next, how long this impassive reign of darkness continued. Only in the fourteenth century did the twilight begin slowly and dimly to emerge, which at length in the sixteenth broke into the new dayspring of the Reformation. From that day to this there has been a steady progress

in the rearrangement of all the influences which can facilitate the world's redemption; "And now behold, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white again to harvest." Never since the era when Christ sent forth apostles and evangelists into the whitened crop, has the world seen a second season so propitious as our age for the ingathering of the people to him. Let us see how many of the elements of favourable preparation have been reproduced.

One of these was the mental activity of the Augustan age. But ever since the triumphant insurrection of the human mind against Popery, thought has been increasingly free and active, until this age claims it as its peculiar glory. The whole realm of science known to the ancients has been reoccupied, and other domains have been added, as unknown to them and as magnificent by comparison with theirs, as the new world which Columbus opened to our industry. Everywhere the human mind ferments, inquires, and discusses. The printing press, though four hundred years old, still develops new magic in its powers: an agency for which Paul would probably have gladly exchanged his gift of tongues. We even see the strange fact that Papists and Brahmins eagerly employ this engine of light, and with judicial blindness accustom their people to its use, only to destroy their own empire of darkness.

Second; no universal monarchy now dominates over the world, compelling the nations to a temporary and enforced brotherhood. But in its room we have the benignant sway of imperial Peace, with her handmaid Commerce, more potent over human passions by the blessings she confers, than was ever Assyrian or Median, Greek or Roman conqueror, by the devastations which he threatened. For even where the short and partial wars of our day prevail, Christianity has so narrowed their operation to actual combatants, and legislated for their atrocity, that the peaceful labours of traffic, letters, and religion are scarcely suspended in their presence. And under the wings of this peace and commerce, the Christian may go to more peoples and tongues than were ever dreamed of by the fabulous geography of the ancients, with a safety as great as was invoked by the proud challenge, "I am a Roman citizen!" Need I refer to those wonders of modern science by which distance is abridged, and we may almost say, with prophecy, "there is no more sea" to divide the nations?

Third; in place of the common language of antiquity, we have now the English, a tongue yet nobler, and spoken in more different tribes, and in more of the hives of men, than was the Greek in the days of Paul. And with this language goes the *prestige* and fear of the British people,

protecting us almost equally with them. For such is the community of tongue, race, character, religion, and interests, between Britain and America, that in the pagan world men fortunately almost forget to distinguish between us. What silent sea or ancient river is not vexed by their prows, and visited by their enterprise? In what mart do not their flags inspire fear and respect? So that—to omit their vast dependencies, more ample than the empire of Augustus—there is scarcely a province in the pagan world where Protestant power and enterprise have not so preceded, that the Protestant teacher may enter securely, and perform his mission under the shield of their protection. For even China and Japan, the last strongholds of exclusive jealousy, will doubtless before long disclose their mysteries before the inevitable forces of the age.

When we turn to the lands of the Beast and the False Prophet, we see there also a rapid relaxation of hinderances. Moslem fanaticism burns but feebly in our day, for decrepitude and dependence now compel those powers, once so terrible to Christianity, to purchase the protection of the most Protestant nation at the price of a tolerance of Christians which they were little wont to exercise. How wondrously hath God wrought here! Even Popery, enemy of the gospel more inexorable than Islam, is compelled by triumphant moral influences to relax its exclusiveness. In Sardinia, France, Belgium, in Brazil and the other states of Central and Southern America, soon to be seats of teeming empires, a partial liberty is yielded to the gospel. And as though it were not enough to open every door to us abroad, Providence has precipitated a part of the destitute into our arms at home, by directing the emigration of Popish Europe to our Atlantic, and of Pagan Asia to our Pacific border.

While God has thus prepared the field for us, he has also prepared us for the field. In those Protestant nations to whom he has virtually given the empire of the world, he has given to his churches the numbers, the wealth, the education, the moral influence, requisite to enable them to go up and occupy the ground. Never since the Christian era has there been a second concurrence, such as this, of everything which promotes the facile and successful spread of Christianity. "The fields are white to harvest."

But now, let us solemnly remember, that a harvest season is from its very nature short. Let us review these advantages, not in the spirit of pompous self-gratulation too often seen, but with a trembling sense of the duties which they imply. For, be assured, this fortunate juncture cannot be permanent. *It is too good to last*, unless it be improved. As reasonably might we hope that two planets, which had been wheeling

their long cycles in devious opposition around the remoter verge of Saturn, when at length they meet one instant in our field of view, would arrest their ceaseless courses to remain in conjunction. It is the attribute of human affairs to revolve. And when this great living wheel of Providence, which "is so high that it is dreadful,"* shall have once more turned away its auspicious segment from the Church, who can tell how many ages may elapse before its stately revolution will restore it to us? Let us take a probable warning from the past. The harvest time enjoyed by the primitive Church was spent, and it returned not again till a mighty year had rolled around, of which the months were ages, and winter the tedious centuries of barbarism and the frosts of spiritual death. So, if we waste this summer which seems at length returning, after so long a winter, so tedious a spring, and so many capricious frosts blighting the rising promise of the Church, when will the third harvest for the world return? By what second series of dark ages, by how many national convulsions and retributive woes, may not God chastise the Church for its neglect; and then, by how many throes of great, struggling souls, by what strifes and toils, by what streams of martyr blood, may she not be required to earn for mankind another season as propitious as the one we now waste?

And should this picture be realized by the shortcoming of the Church, history suggests another probable warning, of special significance to us as Americans. It is not likely that our land will be one of those which will be honoured to send forth that third day-spring of gospel light to the race of man. When once the soil of a country hath been polluted by the failures and apostasies of God's church, he removes his special favours from it, to return no more for long and disastrous ages. Look at those lands on which the Hebrew and the primitive churches enjoyed, and misused, and sinned away their splendid opportunities: how blighted, how benighted, how accursed have they lain ever since! God sought out other lands, which had lain in reserve in virgin wilderness, untainted by the Church's treason to his cause, or else which had undergone the lustration of centuries of chastisement, in which to relume the light of the gospel. So, if we waste this golden season, it is probable that America will not be the land to which the Gentiles will come for the Church's light, and kings to the brightness of her rising. While this fair domain will lie blasted by the guilt of its inhabitants, some new church on some soil now pagan, will enjoy the privilege of sending forth to a benighted world, and to our degenerate posterity, the dayspring of the millennium.

And what, my brethren, is the catastrophe of a series of human gene-

* Ezek. i. 18.

rations, mainly lost through the betrayal of that critical one on which Providence thus partly stakes the fate of many of its successors? We have endeavoured to grasp the evil implied in the death of one pagan soul, but found it too great for imagination. We have endeavoured to represent to ourselves the immense interests of the generation of our pagan cotemporaries, who are directly dependent on us for their rescue from perdition, but the mind staggered under the vastness and the frightfulness of the thought. We must now add this further truth: that the destiny of our critical age may largely determine that of many coming after it; and then we begin to see the weight of our responsibilities. Take this great and dreadful fact home to your meditations, and let it grow upon your comprehension in the hours of silent thought and of communion with God. Had I the tongues of men and of angels, it would still be mere mockery for me to seek words by which to exalt your conception of it; for words cannot utter the unutterable.

And now we doubtless all feel that the discussion of such themes as these should have but one conclusion, the enforcement upon our own hearts of the duty of most intense exertion in this awful yet blessed work of the world's redemption. But who shall dare to define and paint that energy, or to fix the standard of that zeal which is commensurate with the vast exigency? Who, that had not, like Isaiah, received the touch of a live coal from off the altar upon his lips, or, like Paul, been caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, would be sufficient for the task? Let me not attempt it. But there is a picture of the love, the effort, the liberality which the occasion should inspire; a picture accurate, and equal to the case. It is the living image of the Saviour's own example, when he came as the Missionary of Heaven. See, then, in Him, and not in the stammering words of man, the application of his truth. Let us learn to describe our labours for the lost in his words: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work."* And when we give of the abundance with which God hath blessed us, let us consider "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich."†

* John iv. 34.

† 2 Cor. viii. 9.