

# THE DAY AT HAND.

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## An Address

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BY THE

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# ADDRESS.

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FATHERS AND BRETHREN:

Standing as we do in the midst of commotions and agitations that are stirring our souls to the very depths, and surrounded as we are by the great sea of public and political strife whose angry surges follow us even to the closet and the sanctuary, it is a grateful work to turn our hearts and thoughts away from the dreadful picture of carnage and strife to those holier scenes of joy that await the Church of God, and to those wondrous promises, hastening to their fulfilment, which assure us that all these vast up-heavings are but the necessary preliminaries to the coming of the Prince of Peace, and will eventuate in the enlargement and stability and glory of the Church.

The promises of God to his people are designed for them not alone when all is calm and peaceful, when the sea is smooth and the winds are hushed; but they meet them when the tempest rages, when the ocean is convulsed, and the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. They assure us that Christ our King is walking upon the waters, that he rides upon the whirlwind, and that his voice even the winds and the sea obey. And they point us forward to the ultimate triumphs of his Church, against which, no weapon shall prosper, nor even the gates of hell prevail. While then, as watchmen upon the walls, we look out upon a dark night, and through thick mists, and see the play of the lightnings, and hear the mutterings of the tempest and the crash of the thunder, we may here and

there through the rifting clouds see the precursors of coming day, and rejoice to know that its dawning is at hand. Hitherto, for wise reasons, God has permitted sin to enter into the grand experiment which has been going on in the great laboratory of the moral world, that its influence and power may be fully tested. But we have the assurance that eventually he will change the ingredients, and show to the universe what Holiness can do, when by his Grace, all shall know the Lord, and his Church shall everywhere triumph, and infidelity, and superstition, and error, and oppression, and darkness shall have fled away before his coming, whose light is the glory of the upper temple, and whose Kingdom shall stretch from sea to sea, and from the river to the end of the earth. To this great event the eyes of God's people have been turned in every age. They have been taught to pray "Thy Kingdom come," and the wondrous prophecies becoming more and more luminous in the lapse of ages, and the developments of Divine Providence have encouraged them to hope for the dawns of a day of glory upon this long night of sin, when Christ shall reign over all the earth, and this world, long groaning beneath its load of sin and sorrow, shall rejoice in his supremacy. Daniel in his glorious visions beheld that day, and heard the promise that "the kingdom and dominion and greatness of the kingdom under the whole Heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." And when our faith languishes and grows dim as it looks forth upon the elements of evil and anarchy everywhere prevalent, and beholds the nations still hostile to God, and sees the evil apparently triumphing over the good, it is re-assured by God's own promise, "I will overturn, overturn; overturn it, until he shall come whose right it is." Here, on these promises, we may confidently rest and know that the Church is safe, that God is on the throne, and that Christ in all his divine power and wisdom is King as well as Prophet and Priest, and that

he is Head over all things to his Church which he has purchased with his blood.

Nor are we left to walk alone by faith, but here and there the glimmerings of a blessed light appear like the precursors of the dawn of day, and wondrous changes seem to re-echo the words of the Apostle, "the night is far spent, and the day is at hand."

Amid much that is dark, and surrounded by scenes of peril and trial, we may yet look out upon the great field of Christian labour, and feel that the signs of the times are giving promise of good. In all the history of the past, the Church has never had so much to encourage her. God's people have never seen so much to strengthen their faith, and to call forth their full and united efforts for the extension of the Kingdom of Christ. The Bible is now translated into every tongue, and is waiting to be sent to every creature with all its precious messages of mercy. More than forty-eight millions of copies of the holy Scriptures have been published during the present century, which are being circulated, not alone by all the varied agencies in Christian lands, but by more than sixteen hundred missionaries, and more than sixteen thousand native preachers and teachers, who have been converted to God and educated for his service from the midst of heathen degradation. Divine Providence has in the most wonderful, and often in the most unlooked-for manner, removed out of the way obstacles which seemed to be insurmountable in the progress of Christian missions, so that there is now free access to every part of the heathen world. The silence of the remotest sea is now broken by the plash of the steamer, the herald of civilization, and the agent of Christian nations in bearing their influence to every land and nation. Commerce and the intrepid zeal of science have broken in upon African wilds and Asiatic solitudes, and opened to the world vast regions, peopled with teeming millions which have been hitherto unvisited and unknown. The walls of China are broken down, Japan is opening to the

Gospel, Africa is already feeling the influence of commerce in elevating her people, and is opening vast mines of wealth hitherto unknown, which will attract to her shores not the ships of the slave-trader, but merchant fleets, engaged in honorable and civilizing traffic, under whose influence that mighty continent may regain her ancient prestige, when Carthage was the empire of commerce, and Egypt the mother of science. Mahomedan prejudices against Christian nations are fast giving way before the influence of national intercommunion and the fierce fanaticism with which the Turkish, and Persian, and Moorish nations have met the advances of Christian kindness and courtesy, is yielding before the advance of light and truth, while amid the millions of the Papal world there is going on a wondrous change which is rapidly opening their minds to the blessings of civil and religious liberty.

And when we turn from these evident indications for good, as found in the wonderful openings which God's providence is making for the advance of Christian missions, we find that while the Church by no means comes up to the full measure of its strength and duty, yet the last fifty years have witnessed a most wonderful and gratifying progress in this direction.

Much as men who are disposed to look at the dark side may declare that the world is only growing worse—who would be willing to blot out what has been done, and return to the position which the Church was in at the commencement of the present century? Who can trace the progress of modern missions from the hour when the little band of youths at Williams' College began to pray for the conversion of the world, and consecrated themselves to the work of preaching the Gospel to the Heathen until the present hour, and not feel that the Lord hath done great things for his Church? Long before that time, indeed, had the seeds been planted, and were already germinating and shooting upward and giving signs of a coming harvest.

We may trace the great work back to the glorious revivals

which crowned the last century, and which marked the beginning of the present. From that time it was evident that the spirit of missions was awakening throughout the Church. Early in the history of our own beloved Zion we find the principle taking deep hold of the minds of her ministers, that the work of preaching the Gospel to the Heathen was the work of the Church, and although in those days of small things it was evident for a time that there must be a union of all evangelical Christians for the furtherance of the cause—yet that great principle was never lost sight of, and is now manifest, as we see every great division of the Church assuming this work for itself and identifying it with its most cherished movements and operations. And as we go back to the early history of the missionary work, and follow down these few and feeble streams as they enlarge and multiply, and widen and deepen, until they have become a mighty flood, bearing on its bosom the blessings of the Gospel to almost every land, who shall either despise the day of small things, or doubt that the Church has made encouraging progress since it first entered in earnest upon the fulfilment of Christ's command, "Go preach my Gospel to every creature!"

It is not alone upon the arrangements which are made to send out Christian ministers and teachers to the heathen that we are to look, when we would make an estimate of what is now doing for the conversion of the world. This is but a part of the vast system of agencies which God is using for the accomplishment of his purposes and the fulfilment of his gracious promises.

His armory is full of weapons for the destruction of his enemies. His providence has most ample resources for the enlargement and upbuilding of his kingdom. We are not to expect that the institutions of religion will be planted in any nation simply by a few isolated missionaries. God did not so build up his Church in Canaan, but sent there a whole colony that had been fitted for their work amid the discipline of

Egypt and the wilderness. He did not so plant his Church here, but brought hither his people from the shores of the old world where he had prepared them for their work by trials and persecutions. And do we not see this same process going on, by which our Pacific coast has been filled with churches and Christian institutions, and Australia is becoming the home of a vast Christian population, and parts of Africa are already rising to the dignity of a free and enlightened country with all the institutions of our holy religion diffusing their influence far and wide. And it may be that the multitudes which God has been bringing to our own shores are, in his time, to be sent forth with all the institutions of the Gospel that they may make some other lands, now sitting in darkness, the home of the Church and the dwelling place of the Most High.

And then again, God is evidently intending to make the great machinery of commercial enterprise tributary to the up-building of his kingdom. It cannot have escaped the student of prophecy how, that many of the exceeding great and precious promises which refer to the latter day glory, connect with it the sea and its inhabitants. As the Church is pointed to her future greatness and glory, she sees the wealth of the nations poured at her feet, and lending her their aid.

But with the multitude of the camels of Midian and Ephah, she beholds the abundance of the sea converted unto God, while the ships of Tarshish come first to bring her sons from far, her silver and her gold with them. And as the providences of God are unrolling his plans, it is evident that he intends to use the sailor as one of the foremost agencies in extending his kingdom. More than three millions of men, chiefly the representatives of Christian nations, are doing business upon the great waters. With an increasing interest and zeal the Church has been turning her attention to this once neglected class of men, and the results of her labour are already manifest. The voice of prayer and praise now ascends from many a ship that spreads her sails to the ocean breeze, and

thousands of men are going forth to distant lands upon the peaceful errands of commerce, who are carrying with them all the warm and generous impulses of the sailor, and the manly and unselfish devotion of those whose hearts have felt the love of Christ, and the power of his Spirit; and their influence is felt for good wherever they go. Some of the most encouraging and hopeful aspects of the missionary work abroad, are connected with the fact that so many pious sailors are now representing Christian nations upon heathen shores. Those who have studied most the indications of Providence, and who have most thoroughly understood the character of the Christian sailor, have most wondered that the Church has been so slow to enter upon the work of caring for those who go down to the sea in ships; and of using with them the means that under God may be blessed to their conversion to Christ. The amount of good already accomplished by the scattering of Bibles and tracts among catholic and pagan nations through the means of seafaring men, whose hearts are full of love to Christ, can never be estimated until the records of time are reviewed in the light of eternity.

And when looking over all the appliances which the Church possesses for preaching the Gospel, we ask, What are the results already accomplished? We have no reason to faint or be discouraged, or to doubt whether God intends to use his Church as his agent for spreading over the earth the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus.

The representatives of the Church, and even of the American church alone, are found in almost every heathen nation,—amid the coral islands of the Pacific—upon the shores of Africa—on the mountains and plains of Asia, and the hills and valleys of Palestine where prophets and apostles lived and preached. In India and China and Turkey and the Isles of Greece, the American missionary stands as the herald of salvation,—preaching by the press or in the school, or by the way-side, or in the chapel, or from house to house—the news of

pardon by the Redeemer's blood. Churches have been gathered amid lands long shrouded in heathen darkness, and many precious souls have been converted and saved by means of those whom we have sent forth to preach the Gospel. Even the catholic world is fast opening to the truth and the light. A wonderful change is evidently going on in Italy. From their mountain fastnesses where they have long hid themselves, the Waldenses, (these ancient witnesses for the truth,) are coming forth and planting their churches and their school of the prophets almost under the shadow of Rome,—while in France the truth is gaining ground, and the precious doctrines of the Gospel are opening upon the minds and hearts even of men who have ministered at the altars of the Papal Church. And with these considerations, may we not look forth hopefully, and with a strengthening faith upon the great field in which we are called to labour? Surely never were the appliances for work so great, never had the Church more encouragement to go forth and thrust in the sickle and reap. Let us then seek to awaken our hearts to the duty of a full consecration to the work of missions in all its varied departments, at home and abroad—in the raising up and education of labourers and in sending them forth to the field. Let us stand by the seashore and give the sailor as he leaves his home some token of Christian love and care. Let us meet the mighty tide of population that is pouring in upon us from the old world, and supply the emigrant with the means of religious instruction and education. Let us send forth the colporteur with his messages of love, to visit every neglected hamlet and desolate home, and leave them some leaf from the tree of life. Let us send forth the ambassador for Christ to obey the last command of the Master, "go preach my Gospel to every creature." We cannot doubt the result. The enemies of God may make war upon the lamb, but the lamb shall overcome them. The Church will triumph. The ark is safe. The final victory may even now be near at hand.

Everywhere we look we find the precursors of the day,

and seem to hear the echo of God's word, "The night is far spent." Let us then take courage even while surrounded by trials. We are engaged in a work, the success of which there is no possible doubt. We are labouring for a cause dear to the heart of God himself—for the extension of the Church to which he has said "Thy walls are ever before me. I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands. He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye." Times of trial and darkness have and may come, but they shall only serve in the end, to manifest more fully the great love wherewith Christ has loved his Church. The promises of God cannot fail, and they all point us forward to the year of jubilee, and bid us labour and pray for its coming. It will surely come. The hour is approaching when there shall be heard the shout of the hosts of God's elect rising from the valleys,—ascending the hills—rolling on in streams ever deepening, over mountains and plains, and seas, sweeping round the world in one mighty and majestic anthem, whose echoes shall be caught by angels and borne heavenward,—“ We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, who art, and wast, and art to come, because thou hast taken to thee thy great power and hast reigned.”