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→ SERMONS ←

THE ART OF DOING GOOD.

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And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not: And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.—RUTH ii., 15, 16.

THE Bible student comes on the book of Ruth with delight. He has grown weary of war. The book of Judges is full of stories about the wars waged in Israel—sometimes with other nations and sometimes their most disastrous civil conflict. The last war, with the account of which the book of Judges closes, was a civil strife which resulted in almost blotting out one of the tribes of Israel. Benjamin was “minished and brought low” before that war was ended.

It is a beautiful transition to come away from all this; to find one's self standing in a harvest field once more; to listen to the peaceful murmur of the reapers' voices as they gather in the ripened grain, instead of the horrid din of battle. We had almost imagined while reading the book of Judges that every heart in all the land was well-nigh broken, and that every hearthstone was desolate, and we are delighted to find that here near Bethlehem there is peace and plenty and the shout of the harvest home. The religion of the Lord Jesus is leading the world to a wonderful transition—when all battlefields shall become harvest fields; when the spear shall be beaten into a

the Bible is to teach and convince man that he is made in the image of God, that Christ lived a perfect life and died upon the cross, and that man by faith may find salvation. The great God who rules above declared life is a vapor, not in poetical language but in the language of helpfulness. It touches the heart alike of the peasant and the sage. Godliness is the one profitable thing of the present life and of the life eternal.

"Not many lives, but only one have we—
One, only one;
How sacred should that one life ever be—
That narrow span!
Day after day filled up with blessed toil,
Hour after hour still bringing in new spoil."

This substantially is the one idea. How to live the Bible considers of vastly greater consequence than what life is.

Considering then the object of the Bible to be the affording of help, is it not fair to say that men throwing their criticism against it are spending their strength for naught? It was not given for science. Copyists have made errors in all ages. Richard Baxter said "The Scripture is like a man's body; the sense is the soul of the Scriptures, and the letter but the body." The person who throws into our faces the small dust of criticism and asks "Where is God?" may be likened to one who should scrape up a shovelful of dust from the rocks and throw it in our eyes saying "Where is the earth?" We would answer where it was before, though our eyes might be so full of sand that we could not see. Wherever the light of the Bible shines are men better. Search the Scriptures; they will help, they will comfort, they will bring peace, they will sustain in the hour of dying.

Sowing in Tears.

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They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.—Ps. cxxvi., 5.

We have here brought into juxtaposition the two principal divisions of that process of husbandry which engages the industry and furnishes the support of the great masses of the human race. We have them

brought together in the relation of contrast. The sowing is in tears, the reaping is in joy. That which is true in the natural world finds its counterpart in the spiritual. The initial processes of the religious life are, like the sowing, in tears. The final processes are, like the reaping, in joy. We may see this in some of its aspects.

I. Sowing as compared with reaping is a very laborious process. The land must be cleared, the soil broken up, the stones and rubbish removed, etc. Only by long, laborious service does the husbandman get his seed properly in the earth. That which is reaped in a few hours has cost him in the sowing many long weeks of toil. It is so in the spiritual life. The hard labor is at the beginning. The fallow ground and the stubble are to be broken up. The agony is at the gate that opens into the narrow way of a religious life. All after experiences are comparatively facile and pliant.

II. Sowing as compared with reaping is a lonely work. The reapers go in bands with shout and song; but the sower goes alone. And so in those spiritual processes connected with the new birth, each heart "knoweth its own bitterness." Over those inner furrows of the soul goes no sower but the man's own conscience in the sight of his God.

III. Sowing as compared with reaping is in an untoward season. The sower can not wait for the warm, sunny days of May. He must be out in the rough winds of March, under the dark, leaden sky, and upon the cold, clammy earth. It is only the sluggard that "will not plow by reason of the cold," and so "begs and has nothing in harvest." It is so in spiritual things. The harvest is in revival periods of warmth and enthusiasm, but the sowing must be in times when the church is cold and everything looks discouraging and gloomy.

IV. Sowing as compared with reaping is a self-denying work. The father takes from his granary corn which he needs for his present supply, and scatters it that it may fall into the ground and die. The initial processes of religion involve self-denial. Man must be grown up. Many

selfish aims and ambitions fall into the ground and die, that out of them may spring a higher and nobler life—the life that we live by the faith of the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us.

The Benediction of the Lord's Day.

BY W. W. EVERTS, D.D. (BAPTIST), N. J.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, etc.—Rev. I., 10.

I. The benediction comes through man's conscious attention to the Word of God.

II. It comes in pledging loyalty to God's will.

III. It is realized in union of public worship.

IV. In the breathing forth of the world's gratitude and peace.

V. In the celebration of the resurrection

of Christ and of the resurrection of the time to come.

The Inefficacy of God's Word—How Produced.

BY REV. JOHN GORDON (BAPTIST),
BUFFALO.

Making the Word of God of none effect.—MARK vii., 13.

We make it of none effect when we,

I. Fail to read and study it and to appropriate its blessings.

II. When we give precedence to any human authority or law.

III. When by our lives we misrepresent it before the world.

IV. When we fail to urge its truths upon the anxious inquirer or careless sinner.

THE PREACHING FOR THE TIMES.

BY PRESIDENT WM. W. PATTON, D.D., LL.D. (CONGREGATIONAL), HOWARD
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This phrase is heard on every side. It is on the lips of theological professors and students, of church committees and pastoral candidates, of preachers and hearers. Everybody agrees that we ought to have preaching adapted to the times in which we live. Those who deliver ordination sermons and installation charges say so, and the assertion is emphasized by all the editors of religious and secular papers. But the words do not mean the same thing, we fear, in each utterance of them. Sometimes they are a mere passing phrase—a sort of cant expression with those who are fond of being considered abreast of the age. In other cases they occur in the remarks of young men disposed to criticise their seniors and ambitious to fill their places. Now and then they cover the desire of the speaker to have evangelical doctrine give place to some form of heresy, or rationalism, or free religion. Yet often they indicate an honest anxiety to have the Gospel so proclaimed as to be most widely and certainly effective. There is a taking sound in the words. They harmonize with our habits of thought and speech. We naturally

think well of the times in which we live, and commonly utter their praise. We take pride in their peculiarities. We claim for them a special power. They mould men and even institutions. Surely they must be kept in mind by the minister of the Gospel, and he must frame his discourses to be in sympathy with them. And then how absurd it must be to have any other preaching! As the preacher lives in the times, surely he must preach to them, else he is not really addressing his own generation, and he might as well hold forth to the tombstones. How shall we discriminate in this matter, and run the line between truth and error?

Suppose we start from a fundamental truth—that in matters of chief moment, the times are ever substantially the same. Men change only in the non-essentials of life. The stream of human nature, and very largely of human experience also, runs in its ancient channels. Necessities and duties vary but little. Men now as of old are busy in providing shelter, clothing, and food for themselves and their families. This occupies hand and thought with the multitude, day after day, their