

The World in a Sheet.

Missionary sermon preached at Jacksonville on March 11th, 1899, by E. P. Calder.

"And saw heaven opened and a certain vessel descending unto him as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners and let down to the earth." Acts 10: 11.

God has many ways of teaching His people their duty to Himself and to the world. Ever since the creation He has been speaking to men in tones of authoritative love, but though the motive has always been the same, the method has been varied and adapted to the progress of the centuries. To the first generations, as yet untaught, and with few outward accessions to knowledge, God spoke directly and thus revealed His will. Thus He taught Adam, Enoch, Noah and the patriarchs generally before the flood. But later on when man had multiplied his resources of knowledge and begun to worship other gods, the Divine Message was accompanied by greater displays of supernatural power intended to teach the superiority of Jehovah over all gods set up by human hands.

Visions, we may say, begin with the call of Abraham, and end with the apostolic age. To us upon whom hath shined the gathered light of the centuries, God speaks through the history of others. As beams still light the sky that comes from stars which astronomers tell us were quenched ages before we were born, so our conceptions of truth and duty are largely moulded by those revelations of God's will which were given to the world through the ministry of bygone generations. And thus the tree of Inspiration is not dead, though it may in a sense have ceased its growth. Preceding ages have seen the springing blade, the ear outbursting with promise, but now we have the "full corn in the ear,"—the ripened perfected harvest of truth. And thus from the "dead past" come echoes to teach and inspire us in the "living present." And though the fire-cloud that led Israel, no longer floats before us, we know that God still leads his people. Although the glow of the Shekinah has faded from the old temple at Jerusalem, and the voiceless dust covers the ruins of the temple itself, yet the blessed truth remains that God still bends between the cheurbins and lingers at the mercy seat to hear the prayer of the worshipper. Visions have passed, but the truths they have taught remain. For truth is not the child of time but of eternity, old as the ages it is ever new, and hence, though its environment may change, and those who publish and propagate it may pass away, its influence is never lost upon the world. For

"Truth is mighty, Truth is deathless,
It shall reign when time is past,
Spoke the Christ, the Truth incarnate,
"It is I, the First, the Last."

As when the building is finished, the workman takes down the staging, so now that the temple of Inspired Truth has been completed, the scaffolding of type and shadow has fallen away but the building remains. And thus all the lessons which prophecy and vision have taught the world comes to us endorsed and intensified by the testimony of the ages. And thus whatever the vision of the text taught Peter, it teaches us, and so I have chosen it because it holds several important lessons.

But before considering these, I wish to notice a few facts concerning the vision itself.

First, it marked a new era in the history of the church. Up to this time the Apostles had been working solely for the salvation of the Jews. Temple and synagogue were their meeting-places, and their theme was "Jesus the Messiah of Promise and Prophecy." But the vision opens a new door and bestows a new commission. It teaches the early church that the gospel is not a monopoly to be enjoyed by a chosen few, but a grand system of universal help and blessing, that it is not merely a strong tower in which a few may hide from the storm, but a lifeboat that leaps over the white crest of the billows, bringing rescue to young or old, black or white that may be struggling in the foam. In short, the vision was a striking picture of universal need, an object lesson intended to impress the words of Jesus when he said: "The field is the world."

But notice again that the vision came to a man who already seemed to be doing his duty. Peter, at this time was an ideal "home missionary." He was preaching the gospel among the "heathen at home" at the risk of liberty and life. Yet God opens to him a new door, and by a representative vision forces upon his attention the world. And now consider the form of the vision a great sheet united at the four corners and filled with all classes of creatures, a miniature world hung on four united ropes that not a single individual in the creation, might escape the notice of the man to whom the vision came. A world in a sheet! A world on four ropes! A world by four great arguments forced upon the attention of God's church, upon the attention of every redeemed individual.

May the Holy Spirit help us while we call your attention to these four arguments by which God would convince us of our duty to those who have not the gospel.

I. The heathen are as truly human as we are. We may speculate as we choose, concerning the origin of the races, but in this gospel age our recognitions of citizenship and our methods of Christian work must all rest on

the fact that "God hath made of one blood, all nations." It is true that in other lands we meet with those whose skins and members are unlike our own, but these are mere external differences; they do not touch the soul. Their inner life is on a plane with ours. They think, they feel, they hope, they doubt, they joy and sorrow as we, they are swayed by the same passions. With them we find a common fatherhood in God and we cannot deny them a common brotherhood with us. This truth is ever enforced by the plan of the creation itself. The countries of the world are inter-dependent, that is one must ever draw upon the resources of the other in order to be properly sustained. From these northern lands we send to southern climes the products of our greater physical energy, our superior mental acquirements. They send us back the spices and the fruits which their perpetual summer calls forth from the soil. We carry a blessing to them and bring a blessing back. And thus the Englishman meets the Hindoo, the New Brunswicker greets the New Zealander, the Irishman joins with the Chinaman in the great fellowship of trade, brothers for business, sake.

And while we thus minister to the temporal wants of other lands, and they in turn minister to ours, shall we send them no word of spiritual help and bring back no inspiration to our own souls? Shall our best ships, our best navigators, our men who are skilled in picking up foreign languages, be chosen to serve the money side of our civilization, and nothing be said for that God upon whose word, that Saviour upon whose cross the civilization rests? Shall steam engines throb and white sails flutter in the breeze, shall great ships plough the ocean like a field to fulfil the demands of trade, and none go in obedience to him who out upon the Mount of Olives, with the resurrection glory on his brow, with angelic escort and bright cloud-chariot just waiting to take him to the great throne of the ages, said "go ye into all the world and preach my gospel?" In short, shall all the gathered resources that glorify this 19th century be sacrificed before the golden calf of commerce, while Christian nations plead that they are too poor to send the gospel to those who sit in darkness. Until the gospel becomes not only one thing but the supreme thing in our intercourse with nations we are living below our highest ideal of Christian character, we are false to the holiest interests of humanity and ungrateful beyond measure to him "who, though he was rich yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich." And if we recognize the heathen as brothers-in-trade we have a right to treat them as brothers in religion. True we cannot worship at their altars, then we must teach them to worship at ours. We cannot bow before those images which they call Gods, then let us tell them of our God whose nature and name is Love and plead with them to serve him. We are bound to do so by the great law of brotherhood which unites man with man, and if we fail to do it we are setting aside the great principle of mutual helpfulness which distinguishes man from the brute. Again, this argument appeals to those of you who are fathers and mothers. The home is the mightiest and the holiest of earthly institutions because it is the nucleus of the church and the corner-stone of the state. We have our happy homes, but while we rejoice in the fact; let us spare a thought for the homes of the heathen. In them the spirit of blessed home-fellowship is almost unknown. The husband is the absolute ruler of the household, the wife is his slave, the children are regarded as goods and chattels disposable at the will of the parent. In India many little ones are drowned in the Ganges or left for the jungle tigers as a sacrifice to their gods. Some are peddled off and disposed of like our surplus dogs and cats. Think of it Christian father as you come home from work and your children gather round you, and climb your knees the envied kiss to share. Think of it Christian mother as your little ones say their evening prayer at your knee, and with a good night's kiss you tuck them in bed and realizing what the gospel has done for your home, if not for Jesus' sake at least for humanity's sake, resolve to do what you can to bring this home-blessedness to your heathen brothers and sisters and their children. You may think that you cannot do much, but let me tell you that you mothers right in your homes, can do a mighty work for the missionary cause. The world does not lack money for missions but the true missionary spirit. The world can find means for anything in which it is interested. Propose a railroad or a factory, and if you get the people interested you will get the requisite capital. Give us the men and woman of the church for missions and we will get the money. When the circus comes to town, is it not met by the noble army of poverty-pleaders, that perpetually hinder the onward march of God's church. But 50 cents for general admission and the \$1 for reserved seats near the "grand stand" are forthcoming, and given without grudging for people are interested in the circus. The same is true of the opera, the billiard room, the bargain counter in novels, the merry-go-round and all the other hell-inspired nuisances of the present age. People are interested. So Christian parents you see your great opportunity. Educate the children in missionary sentiment, get them interested in the boys and girls of far away lands. Teach them to give,—to give at a sacrifice;

thus you can do a work that shall bring joy alike to earth and heaven. Thus far in the history of the church the burden of Foreign Missions has been largely carried by our sisters. Womanly zeal has been kindled and womanly sympathy stirred by the needs of the heathen and woman's ingenuity has found means to carry on the work, and it is a pleasing thought that as the gospel has honored woman, so woman in her work is now honoring the gospel. When through the instrumentality of woman sin came into the world, man began the long sorrowful journey away from the Eden below. When in the arms of a Nazarene maiden God put the infant Jesus, he started the race back on its joyous, triumphant pilgrimage towards the "Eden above." And was not this a new commission, a perpetual call to womanhood, thus redeemed, thus exalted, to send the gospel as far as sin has gone—and thus restore the lost glories of the fair creation of God? To our young sisters, who, I believe in mental and moral endowments represent the noblest type of womanhood the world has ever seen, I would speak a word concerning this great work. The privileges you enjoy are unknown to lands that have not the gospel. And since Jesus has done so much for you, can you not do something for Jesus? Is it too much to ask, in his name, that from the fashions, the amusements, the frivolities of the day, you save at least \$1 a year for missions. That is only a small sum, less than one-third of a cent a day, but \$1 coming from every young woman in our land would mean a great deal to our cause. Every 1000 of these dollars mean another missionary and the giving of the gospel to at least 1000 more of the heathen. And thus would be kindled a light that will shine on, ever increasing till it merges into the resurrection glory that heralds a world redeemed. Queen Isabella of Spain offered to pawn her jewels in order to fit out Columbus on his first voyage. It looked like a foolish enthusiasm yet not so foolish after all for it meant the extension of the Kingdom and church of Spain. And soon from new discovered lands came back more treasure than the Spanish crown jewels were worth. And if the extension of an earthly kingdom was worth such a sacrifice, surely you can give up something to extend the kingdom of heaven and propagate the great church of the Firstborn. The gospel has exalted humanity and for humanity's sake we are bound to extend it till the peace and joy which it brings reigns in every home and every heart.

II. The second rope to the sheet; second argument.

The heathen without Christ are as surely condemned as we are. I know that this is disputed in much of the latter day teaching. The so-called "liberal theology" of the age would have us believe that God is so benevolent and compassionate that instead of sending the heathen to perdition he will eventually bring them to some sort of a heaven where they will learn his ways, engage in his worship and ultimately develop into full fledged saints. And many professed Christians are wrapping themselves up in this philosophy and trying to sleep off their sense of responsibility to the heathen. But against all our philosophizing God writes one plain, painful, all-conquering fact, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." That sentence is universal in effect, because sin is the universal cause. We know not how near God some of the heathen may come in their strivings after light, but we do know that spiritual light and life come only by the Holy Spirit. We know not what value God puts upon those desires after a purer life which well up in some heathen hearts, but we do know that nothing can cleanse the stain of sin but the blood of Jesus, and that nothing but his complete righteousness can cover human character and establish its standing before the judgment throne. The very fact that an atonement has been provided conclusively proves that the whole world without it was eternally lost. Universal condemnation is the platform on which the Cross of Jesus stands. Tear down that platform and you upset the Cross. If the Bible is true, if the Christian religion is worth the name, man without Christ is lost whether he lives next door to the church, where he can hear the gospel every Sunday, or in "darkest Africa," where the name of God is un-honored and unknown. Again this truth is enforced by the consciousness which the heathen themselves have of their own condemnation. Heathen altars, sacrifices and penances all endorse the fact that the heathen feel their guilt and their need of an atonement. They do not lack the knowledge of sin but of its remedy. And thus from every heathen altar and temple, from every helpless, hopeless idol worshipper comes a "Macedonian call" for help. Do we hear it? Shall we heed it? Or shall we sit philosophizing on what God will probably do with the heathen while millions go down from lives of suffering to the pangs of the death that never dies? Dare we as professed Christians meet these poor lost ones at the judgment when we have done nothing for their help? The question for us is not, "Will the heathen be saved without our help?" but "will we be saved if we don't try to help them?" If we do not have a zeal for the salvation of the perishing everywhere we have good reason to doubt our own discipleship. If I did not feel and labor for the salvation of the lost everywhere, I should give up my hope of heaven, expecting to find instead of my name in the Lamb's Book of Life one text in explanation of its absence, "If any man have not the

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