Our Father's Business.

[The Baccalaureate sermon preached before the Cobb Divinity School and the public, Sunday morning, May 17, by the Rev. G. A. Hartley.]

Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?—Luke 2 : 49.

This verse contains the first recorded words from the lips of the Great Teacher. And it seems quite reasonable to expect that we may find in such an utterance germ truths sufficient to stir us to every good work. Jesus, at that time a youth of twelve years, had been in the temple at Jerusalem, asking the doctors of the law questions. Some of these no doubt tended to test their inner spiritual knowledge of the law and prophets concerning himself as the expected Messiah.

Up to this time Joseph had been called his father. After this never. Now that the Holy Child had become a son of the law, and seemed to enter upon his higher sonship, we hear no more of Joseph. Jesus thereafter calls Him his Father whose business he came to earth to do.

While returning from the passover his parents missed him, and for three days sought him sorrowfully. On finding him his mother asked, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?" To which he replied, "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

There is nothing supercilious or vague about the question, but it surely intimates a loving, delicate reproof, and emphatically declares the object of our Lord's mission to earth. Where should a son be but in his father's house, especially that Son who abideth in the house forever? He was in the right place, and about the one business of his life. Joseph and Mary are not the las parents whose missing son has been found amongst the doctors. Privileged sons. Happy parents. In calling your attention to this subject I wish to indicate, (1) what this business contemplates, (2) some results it has accomplished, (3) things necessary to its efficiency and success, (4) our responsibilities and duty.

I. WHAT THIS BUSINESS CONTEMPLATES OR UNDERTAKES TO DO.

The existence of no business, involving outlay and the wear of life, from the great railroad corporation down to the humble huckster, can be justified unless it has some definite purpose. It must be a means to some worthy end. For what, then, does the business spoken of in our text exist? Let us see.

Sin had darkened and deranged everything. The world was turned upside down morally. All harmony was broken. The race whom God had made in his own image to glorify him here by the abuse of freedom was lost, ruined, and in open rebellion. The wonder is that when man blew out the light God did not leave him to grope his way in darkness. But he did not. It is not irreverent to say that God made it his business to send his only and well-beloved son Jesus, the sacred embodiment of wisdom and strength, into this world, to undo the fearful calamity of sin, and to make it possible to work out the sublime consummation for which creation and man were made. This he does

1. By revelation. John speaks of Jesus as the Word, that is the expression or revelation of the Father. He came to reveal the full name and true character of God, and to make known clearly the plan of salvation through a new and living way. He bore witness to the truth. God was known to Abraham by the name, "God Almighty." To Moses at the burning bush, by the name, "I am that I am." Later he said to Moses, "I was known to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by my name God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah I was not known to them." God's revelation of himself had been progressive. But Jesus came to reveal his fatherhood and to declare one God in trinity. In that wonderful chapter, John 17, that has a relation to the Bible like that of the holy of holies to the temple, Jesus said, "O righteous Father, I have declared to them thy name, and will declare it." He had declared him to be "Father," "Our Father," and "Holy Father." And had declared, "I and my Father are one," and had also declared that the Holy Spirit would come in his name and in the name of the Father. But when did he make good that promise, "And will declare it"? It must come. See him with his disciples at Galilee after his resurrection. He is about taking his leave of them. Shall we have that name declared before he goes? Listen. He says, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Here we have it. It is not names, but name - singular—of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This is the full New Testament name of the Jehovah of the Old Testament, the last unveiling of the name of God. These three are one. Through the power of this name we may have perfect salvation. In our baptism, by our baptismal formula, we declare our faith in this triune God, as Jesus revealed him, and in his plan of salvation. To know this name aright is to know the God whose name it is.

2. By redemption. In the presence of this all other works pale into insignificance. It was the divine business to devise a way by which to save from sin and its consequences. To secure this end it was necessary that the resources of heaven and of God himself should be exhausted, that a price sufficient to redeem, or buy back, this lost world could be found. To make the salvation of all men possible, God invested all he had. No other price could be found sufficient, and nothing could be added to the infinite offering made when Jesus gave himself a ransom on the cross. "There remained no more sacrifice for sin.' The Mosaic offerings of blood and of life were but a preliminary or mere advertisement to this great redemption work. We were redeemed with more precious blood.

Man was not bought from Satan, but was redeemed from the "curse of the law." This redemption had respect to the demands of God, and his moral government against sin. When Jesus tasted death for every man he met the requirements of the broken law, vindicated the government of heaven, removed the legal hindrance to man's salvation, and made it possible for God to be just and to justify all who accept and believe on what the 'Lord Jesus had done for them. Redeemed, I love to proclaim it.

3 By regeneration and readjustment. Sin had deranged man in order of his own being, had broken the divine order of harmony between God and man, and between man and man as well. There was mutiny in the individual kingdom and universal rebellion. Originally God dominated man's spirit, and the spirit of man dominated the body. When sin separated man from God the spirit of man became dead in sins, losing its power to dominate the body; hence the triumphs of the flesh, and all the sad consequences. To restore the lost power to man's spirit and to readjust him within himself and in his relations he must be regenerated. Jesus taught that men must be born again. He made it possible that sinners might become new creatures. No extent of culture would do. Nothing less than the inwrought work of the Holy Ghost in the soul will suffice. It is like taking old cannon that has been used in battle against you, melting and recasting it into figures of liberty and peace. The spiritually dead must be quickened by the Holy Spirit, so that man will be himself again, and will love God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself. For all this God has provided, but his saving plan shapes itself to our free agency and never violates it.

II. SOME RESULTS ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED.

When leaving the world the Master laid upon his few disciples the task of preaching the gospel to all nations, and, so far as possible, of winning back from alienation from his Father a world for whose transgressions he had died. It was a stupendous undertaking, requiring divine wisdom and power for its accomplishment.

Serious difficulties confronted the little band. Rome, claiming to be mistress of the world, with armies, wealth, and population all immense, was bitterly opposed to Christianity, and by cruel persecutions sought to annihilate the infant church. But He who said, "Go," and also said, "Lo, I am with you," was the strength and leader of the valiant few. What hath God wrought? Rome has been conquered. Even during the reign of the cruel Nero, Paul speaks of converts saluting the saints from Caesar's household. Barbarians have been civilized. Heathen nations, in whole or in part, have been Christianized, and the name of Jesus is revered over nearly all civilized nations. The 120 despised disciples, unaided by any worldly power, have increased until the number of nominal Protestant Christians is fully 150 000,000. We have a civilization such as old China or even more modern Rome or Greece never knew. Theirs at best influenced the head only, while ours teaches men to love one another. They built splendid theaters, but never erected hospitals as we do.

The church is constantly increasing her territory, and we trust is growing in efficiency as well. Look around, and what do we see? Organizations numerous and helpful, have sprung up on every hand. All the benevolent institutions of modern times are the outgrowth of our Lord's mission. Dorcas societies, the country poor-house, elegantly fitted and richly endowed asylums for the sick, blind, dumb, aged, inebriates, insane, orphans, etc., all owe their origin to the one source. Not less than 280 missionary societies are sending forth their representatives to all nations, who go, like commercial travelers, introducing the valuables of the kingdom and generally representing the house of the Lord. Eight thousand workers now occupy five hundred separate fields, having 18,000 stations, with about 3,000.000 converts, and 7000 Sunday schools with 1,000,000 scholars. The British and Foreign and the American and Foreign Bible societies are giving the nations in their own languages millions of copies of the word of God every year. Tract societies and other publishing houses are covering the earth with good and pure reading at almost nominal prices. Sunday schools, Young Men's Christian Associations, Christian Endeavor societies, W. C. T. Unions and kindred organizations, with their far-reaching results are but different departments of this growing business, all co-operating with each other and with the Lord himself. Also the gospel hammer has broken the shackles, and set at liberty millions of slaves, so that a slave cannot live at least on British or American soil. The condition of woman has been wonderfully improved. She has been elevated from the place of a slave at man's feet to that of a companion and fellow-worker at his side, as God intended. In Christian nations women hold many foremost and responsible positions. As a British subject I feel proud to have so great a woman as Her Majesty Queen Victoria at the head of our nation. Apart from Christianity what power could produce such a woman as America's late queen, your lamented Miss Frances E. Willard? Was she not a brilliant production of this active Christian age?

We have also good government, freedom of the ballot, equality of man before the law, all the results of this grand movement. It is true that war has not yet been driven from Christian countries, but it is also true that every year it becomes more difficult, and requires greater provocation to incite Christian nations to fight even in the interests of humanity; and certainly much has been done towards ameliorating and softening its horrors by introducing hospitals for the sick and wounded, surgeons and nurses to care for the suffering, chaplains to comfort the dying, the exchange of prisoners, white flags of truce instead of the red or black flag of extermination. And let us hope that the time for settling national troubles by arbitration is near at hand. And what shall I say of the Christian schools and their almost unlimited influence that have been established and are being supported by the church? They are like business colleges in the commercial world, principal distributing centers, sending forth the grandest of all productions, true, faithful, and well equipped laborers for all fields and all departments of our great work.

The nations of the world are open to receive the gospel. Thousands of student volunteers are pledged to mission work, and Christian nations largely control the money of the world. These effects prove the cause to be nothing less than divine. It is not within the narrow limits of my vocabulary to approximate all that has been done. What a host now in glory. Christianity now stands out in beautiful proportions for the world to look upon. Are any still asking, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" We reply, "Come and see."

III. SOME THINGS NECESSARY TO EFFICIENCY AND SUCCESS.

Business is a strong factor in the progress of the affairs of this active age. But it has necessities and laws that must be recognized if made successful. We attach importance to having correct ideas about partnerships, companies, trusteeships, and fidelity in secular affairs, but do we properly think of the affairs of the church and of the Christian life in a true business aspect? Are not the children of this world "in their generation wiser than the children of light"? Are they to plan and work to make successful the concerns of this life, and we to allow those weighty matters that pertain to the true riches, to salvation and eternal life, to go on in a haphazard, slipshod way? We reply, No. Jesus spoke of and entered upon his mission as "business." We should enter upon and pursue our spiritual work in a like practical and wise way, observing such conditions as will enable us to secure the best results. While our work is not accomplished by mighty or by power, but by the spirit of the Lord, it is nevertheless our duty to keep open the channels through which the Holy Spirit is to work. No denomination or local church or school can be efficient without.

1. Organization. It is strange that in the midst of a highly organized condition of society the church should give so little attention to practical organization. In worldly matters this is considered indispensable. So soon as a co-partnership is formed and a firm name decided upon chosen men are assigned different departments, as may be thought best in the interests of the whole, some to buy, some to sell some for outdoor work, some for construction, some for transportation, some for book-keepers. In a word, the business is organized and every man has his place. No one meddles with the work of another. The denomination and the local church should be equally as systematically and thoroughly organized for the Lord's work, not to be worked. The world is the field. The church is the army of laborers going forth to toil. The denomination should have its most suitable and efficient men and women on her boards and for editors, teachers and in all places of leadership and responsibility. The church should select her best members for deacons, helps, trustees, treasurers, and especially for clerks. Committees should be carefully organized, and then the pastor should have his eye upon the whole, seeing that details are carried out. Many a well begun work has miscarried for the want of a little attention to details. No less attention should be given to schools.

2. Co operation. In all Christian work there should be loving co operation. Jealousy or rivalry should never be thought of. Christians, like bees, should be busy in the interests of a common hive. The greatest of all arts is the art of successfully working together. The hand cannot say to the foot, "I have no need of thee." Each member needs all the rest. Each needs the encouragement of all the rest. As in the times of the prophet Isaiah, when "the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smiteth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the soldering; and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved,' God's people form a prolonged partnership, passing down from generation to generation through the centuries, accumulating vast treasures as time goes on. The best interests of this work demand co-operation.

3. Earnestness. The most successful Christian workers are pre-eminently earnest workers. All true earnestness has its fountain in the heart. It comes from the heart, and reaches the heart, and is largely the secret of success. To save sinners is the grandest work known. All Christian workers should be in dead earnest. To save the belongings of a sinking ship would be an important act, but to save the officers and crew would be infinitely more important. To educate men and fit them for positions of usefulness in this life is a good work, but to save sinners is transcendently better. Souls are perishing. Let us be in earnest in this work for the Master. What our hands find to do, let us do it with our might. Now is the accepted time.

4. Consecration. Even converted souls and an educated ministry need to be consecrated to service. As the Master was amongst the disciples as one that served, so he would have his followers devoted to the Father's work. Success in soul-saving does not depend upon possessing a diploma, or on brick walls, tall steeples, or even a large following. That man is a success in the work of the Lord who fully does the will of God, converts or no converts, and can say with the apostle, "For me to live is Christ." That the Christ-life may be reproduced there must be unreserved consecration and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Whatever may be the natural ability possessed, and the education and culture acquired, all should be baptized with the spirit of power from on high. Good machinery without power is unavailing.

IV. OUR RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTY.

As a part of the whole Christian brother-hood of this generation, we have in common resting upon us the responsibilities of trustees, holding in trust for the present and succeeding generations the accumulated treasures of more than eighteen centuries. To us has been intrusted the spiritual light of the world, with the command to let it so shine that men may see our good works. Persons personally unknown to us contributed to our salvation, and now we are to pass on like blessings to our successors. David served all succeeding generations by serving well, by the will of God, his own. So may we. The only true life is a life of service. Jesus was as fully distinguished in his character as servant of God as he was in that of son of God. He would have his disciples be the same. He said of himself, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me," and "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." Of his disciples he said. "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." "Even so." For the same purpose. To finish the work the Father gave Jesus to do.

It is impossible for Christians to study the relations of this work without feeling that there is a responsibility placed upon us by our Lord's command, only less weighty than his own, as we are less able than he was to carry out that command. We should keep the work progressing. Each preceding step should add a force that will make the succeeding ones more rapid, and increase the speed of all that is to follow. As a denomination we are also trustees. We of to day have under our care the entire denominational field, and all accumulations from the days of Randall to the time of this commencement season. We have position and strength, and should be adhesive and progressive, that our burden may be enlarged. It is our duty to conserve the spirit, beliefs, ordinances, institutions, and organizations, that, by God's blessings, have made us a strong and progressive people.

The denomination of the present is under great obligations to the denomination of the past, and we should in our turn place the denomination of the future under even greater obligations to us. Let us be true.

The denomination has a number of factors of strength and growth, but time will permit me to speak of two only; the school and its graduates. The true worth of Christian schools cannot easily be overstated. The prosperity of a denomination depends largely upon the efficiency of her schools. We must look to these institutions for our best pastors and missionaries. The highest interests of society are intrusted to them. They fit men to meet the needs of the world as nothing else can do. The highest type of education cultivates the religious as well as the intellectual life. It may well be questioned whether mere intellectual culture does make the world better morally. Some of the most highly educated nations, such as Greece, have been grossly impure, and some of the worst of men have been highly intellectually educated. One of our late provincial governors, who was an enthusiast on the subject of Christian education, said in one of his flights of oratory, "Any education that does not develop the religious in man is at best but 'illuminated wickedness.'" No education from which the Bible and Christian teaching are excluded can possibly meet the highest needs of man. Strong and good schools are necessary to the growth and efficiency of a progressive denomination. Educated men are under the responsibilities of superior advantages received. Besides the instructions the schools impart, teachers do reproduce themselves in the lives of their pupils. It has been argued that it matters not whether a teacher of mathematics is an infidel or a Christian, so long as he is a good teacher. To my mind this is an important matter. An infidel cannot divorce himself from his principles while in the class-room, and if he is at all fit for the position it is impossible for him to avoid the law of reproduction. He will leave infidel impressions if he makes any moral impressions. One of the greatest blessings resulting to our young people while being molded and shaped during their higher school studies is that of being under the influence of inspiring Christian teachers. Warm hearted, godly, spiritually minded teachers are necessary to the success of such schools.

(Continued on page three)

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