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"And how can they hear without a preacher?"—ST. PAUL.

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THE PRIVILEGES AND DUTIES OF THE CHURCH.

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TEXT — "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward."—Exodus xiv: 15.

The Church of Christ, of which we are a part, is on the march. The land of darkness is behind us. Before us the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, lifts its hills of promise, bright with the gleam of the morning; and voices like those heard on the Bethlehem plain tell of peace on earth and joy which shall be to all people. Just now we are come to a place where two eternities meet. The past utters its solemn message; the future beckons us on. The typical scene of the text suggests our duty; and God through His Word and works and girdling providences, bids us go on to the world's conquest and Messiah's glorious reign.

A Brief Retrospect.

A brief reference should be made to the salient events which have moulded the past and will give character to the future. Such as these may be mentioned: The geographical extension of Christian civilization; the subjection of forces of nature to the human will; the quickening of industries through inventions; the enlargement of freedom in human governments; the orderly control and protection of weak nations by the great world powers, and the banishment of slavery, for the first time in the annals of history, from the face of the civilized earth.

In still wider application the Golden Rule has gained in ascendancy, and inhumanity has yielded to love.... During the century Christianity has elevated character, made manly men, furnished lofty ideals of life, awakened in human hearts the humble and ceaseless refrain,

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling."

Then, too, the Gospel, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the supreme interpreter of the Word of God, has implanted a more general Christian consciousness in man that discerns truth and duty as never before, and feels its responsibility to maintain both; that promotes healthful public sentiment, guides the conduct of social life, attaches all human enterprises to the Cross, and is assured of the ultimate universal supremacy of truth and right. Moreover, the Christianizing of the world has given an impulse to missions which will last until the Master comes.

Protestant Christianity has planted itself under the eaves of the Madeline and Notre Dame in Paris, and entered many of the cities of France. In Russia religious toleration has been greatly extended and Protestant churches have been erected in St. Petersburg near by St. Isaac's Cathedral. Protestantism builds its sanctuaries in Rome, and the Bible House on the Corso looks across the Tiber on the towers of St. Peter's and the Vatican. In Spain, liberty of worship has found a place.

Time will not permit us to dwell on the great revivals during the century, beginning in Central New England and extending southward, as far as the forests of Albemarle.... In 1800 our own Church had 189 ministers, 449 churches, 20,000 communicants, and contributed \$2,500 to benevolent objects. At present we have 7,313 ministers, 7,657 churches, 983,917, or nearly a million communicants, and during 1899 contributed to

benevolence \$3,630,637.

To limit our view to the last decade we observe this significant fact that during the year 1894, in which the Church was occupied with two important ecclesiastical trials, there occurred the greatest number of additions on confession of faith in the entire history of the denomination. The year following, publicity having been given to doctrinal errors, and confidence in the essentials of Christianity having been weakened, there set in a period of spiritual decline. Yet the net increase of our Church in 1899 was about 9,000; that of the Congregational Church being about 2,400; whilst the Methodist Episcopal Church, North, had a net loss of 3,700. In later years in a great majority of the Christian denominations there has been, so far as indicated by conversions, a marked religious decline, and for this condition, some general, not local cause, must be assigned.

Here let it be observed that divisions in our church have never resulted solely from doctrinal differences, but mainly from opposing views of administration, or questions of national government. This fact indicates the prevailing and steadfast loyalty of our church to its doctrinal Standards.

This general survey must suffice. We acknowledge our indebtedness to the past. We are what it has made us.

At present—not an exceptional experience—serious barriers obstruct our advance. Our environment is an alogous to Israel at the Red Sea. Mountains wall us in; floods separate us from the land we seek, and enemies attempt to deflect our course. Piety is filled with alarms. Fear veils its face, wet with tears. Only hope, wrapt in the radiance of Jehovah's promise and leaning on omnipotent grace, discerns victory a little way on, and hears the pæans of a conquering host.

Problems Before the Church.

Notice some of the problems that confront us:

1. The problem of the city. The centralization of population, rapidly advancing, has been a marked feature

of this century. One hundred years ago three per cent. of our population was urban, now nearly thirty per cent. The problem of the city has raised anxious inquiries which no statesman or jurist can answer....

2. The problem of intemperance, most appalling in great cities, still waits a solution.

3. Another problem demands solution. The most thoroughly organized hierarchy in the world, Rome excepted, hides among the mountain ranges of Utah, builds its harems in secluded valleys, polutes the virgin soil, defies the government which would suppress its crimes, seeks to establish an empire of its own, and sends its missionaries throughout the civilized world, to delude the ignorant and entrap the unwary.

4. Another problem. Yonder it lies, in our beautiful Southland. It is a condition for which generations gone and ourselves are responsible. Eight millions of our population belong to the colored race, eighty per cent. of whom have been born since slavery ceased to exist. Among them are eminent Christians and loyal citizens, some of whom as ministers of the Word and educators have demonstrated the intellectual and scholarly possibilities of their race. But a far larger proportion belongs to a category widely different. The subject has serious and alarming aspects of which I need not speak.

5. There is a philosophy so called, a seemingly misguided reaction from materialism. It denies a personal God, an incarnate Christ, a Saviour from sin. It is largely a revival of ancient agnosticism; a twin sister of pantheism; a spawn of unbelief; one of the greatest delusions intelligence ever accepted; the worst system of ethics that ever diverted souls from God and duty. This philosophy denies the existence of matter; insists that we have no bodies; that there is no solid ground under our feet; no girdling mountains, no gleaming stars; no disease, infirmity or death. But whereunto will this philosophy grow? It is gaining ground with an alarming rapidity, and is wrecking souls, homes and communities, over which once

fell the light of happiness and peace.

6. The increasing desecration of the Lord's Day presents a serious problem.

7. Still another problem is associated with the rationalism of the age. This is the Red Sea which casts up mire and dirt, and smites the trembling shore.... Wherever it extends, religious experience loses in depth and in power; revivals are few or unknown; worldliness increases; symbolism gains ground, and formal ceremonies impair spiritual worship.

8. Again, we cannot detach ourselves from existing social conditions. These must be corrected so far as they are wrong.

Solving the Problems.

Upon the shore of the Red Sea we are confronted with these problems. We are consciously insufficient, largely helpless, and sorely perplexed. The solution of these problems somewhere exists, else human history will prove a stupendous failure. What it is? Negatively:

1. It is not intellectual culture. This is important, even imperative. Yet knowledge may only increase the power to do evil. Brilliant men are often basilisks and attract only to destroy.

2. Nor will industrial education meet the necessities of our times. It also has its sphere. But industrial education cannot cure insubordination, arrest viciousness, or terminate crime.

3. Civil law is inadequate. It may restrain, but cannot regenerate.

4. Psychology may claim to have discovered the secret of society, and biology may vie with altruism in its endeavor to cure all sorts of ills, but our hope rests on none of these.

The agency by which this is to be accomplished is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. For:

1. The Gospel deals with the springs of all action. The world's philosophies and all civil legislation are occupied with overt acts and not with their sources. They may restrain; they never conquer. But the Gospel, energized by the Holy Ghost, works within, destroys the love of sin, substitutes inward grace, and thus

corrects the outward conduct; for out of the heart are the issues of life and death.

2. The Gospel addresses itself to the individual soul. Society is not regenerated in a mass. One by one we are rescued from sin. Whatever does not contemplate this fact will fail.

3. Human experience declares the same. The world's religions have lacked the interpretation and vitality of a faultless model. The mightiest intellects have admitted their impotency to conquer sin and liberate the race from its woe.

4. All history declares the saving power of the Gospel. The witnesses are found at the Five Points and along the Water streets of our great cities, in Hawaii, in Madagascar, among the Laos, and wherever the cross has been lifted.... The Gospel is the world's only hope, and when its principles are accepted, the personal and social enigmas which now perplex us, will be solved. Here observe:

1. This Gospel must be preached in its purity and entirety, and in the power of the Holy Ghost. This includes the great fact of sin, its eternal consequences, and salvation by the cross alone. New methods may be admitted, but the everlasting Gospel must be the theme.... Gymnasias, libraries, concerts, and entertainments, may have their places in the outer courts of the Church, but are not essential to its success.... Then, too, the Church at large must maintain and publish the truth. "Ye are my witnesses," said the Lord. Moving rapidly toward the shoreline of the Twentieth Century, we need everywhere the uplifted cross, a revival of faith, unswerving devotion to the doctrines of grace, the moral courage of Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms.

2. God also bids us advance in personal holiness. We are to forget the things which are behind. Christ has ordained us that we should bring forth fruit and that our fruit should remain.... Our lives must be illustrations of the truth carrying the gleam of nearing glory.... This ideal life involves Christian sacrifice for the Master's sake. Meditative piety simply is not the measure of our obli-

gation. . . . We must cry unto God and then go forward. We must give our substance, and more generously than is our wont, that the world may be brought to Christ. The tithe should be the minimum; wealth, out of its abundance, should give far more. . . .

3. Concentration of force is required by the exigencies of our age. The existence of denominations is not to be condemned. They may conserve truth. The Church when an organic unit became corrupt. When the great Reformation led the exodus from Rome, Protestantism resolved itself into different organisms. The hand of God was in it. But divisions are too many. Force is too widely distributed. The light falls obliquely. Churches of the same faith and polity should be united. . . . Brethren, let us begin with the nearest branch of our Church and invite Joseph, now separated from his brethren, to come home, or if he prove more magnanimous than we, and send his wagons, let us go to him. We revere and tenderly cherish the memory of noble men in the Southland who, having served their Master with conspicuous success, have gone to their reward; the Thornwells, Gerardeaus, Hoges and Adgers, and others of like spirit. Why should not we who remain, moved by the mind of Christ, seek to restore the unity of happy, never to be forgotten days?

We need our Southern brethren, and they need us. Our form of Government is the same. Our modes of worship are the same. Our traditions blend. We adopt the identical symbols of faith and our devotion to the doctrines of grace never wanes. We stood side by side in the war of humanity before Santiago, and together stormed the castles of Manila, and have vied with each other in our loyalty to our national flag. Why not unite our forces in the interests of the Church of God, and flinging out the banner of the cross, claim for King Immanuel the land of our love?

Duty Encouraged.

The encouragement to seek the world's salvation should stimulate effort. God is in all history and is ever

marching on. The conversion of the world is as certain as his throne. Greater achievements than ages have known await the Church of the coming century. As by a series of ascents, our planet reached the elevation which evoked the angel's song, so each cycle of our race has left it in a higher orbit. The patriarchal age was an advance on the Noachian, and the theocratic on the patriarchal, and the advent of Christ on all that had gone before. Then the Reformation proved a long stride forward. And it is possible for Christendom and the civilized world, across which falls the radiance of the cross, to reach still higher ground and do it soon. . . .

Again, the immutability of truth encourages us to go forward. We do not labor under an uncertain commission, nor do we stand on sinking sand. The Book which has revealed a Redeemer to lost men, and in every age sealed broken hearts; that has guided the steps of the sorely perplexed, given rules for the government of life, withdrawn the veil from the unknown, and enlarged our vision of the King's country, this Book shall outlive sun and stars. Vedas, Shasters, and Zend Avestas may contain some fragments of truth, and Upanishads may interpret them, but compared with God's Word they are like the dim candle which dies at noon.

No assault upon this inspired Book has ever prospered; no unfriendly criticism has quenched its light; no denial has broken its power. If trampled upon by unbelief and humiliated by neglect, it has put on new strength, like the fabled giant who rose stronger than he fell. It is to-day with quiet steps traveling with the sun. It speaks languages new and strange, and gives them a deeper, sweeter meaning.

The gospel in its fullness is adapted to every age and class. It recognizes no barrier in lineal descent, geographical lines, intellectual distinctions, or social caste. In it there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free. In view of all this, why not go forward? The difficulties of the way and the problems of the age should not deter us. As

the European conqueror said, great mountains crossing his path, "There shall be no Alps." So, as we lift high the cross, let us say to each obstruction: "By this we will conquer." . . .

The end of the world's history is not yet. Devout souls have waited long for the second glorious coming. There is certainly a beyond, richer and better than all the past. The Twentieth Century may prove the gateway of millennial glory. Go forward.

The evangelization of America claims our first attention. The command to begin at Jerusalem determines obligation to our own, and indicates the point of departure. To neglect America is to fail everywhere. The greater our spiritual power at home, the greater it will be abroad.

We must seek the salvation of our youth and establish Sabbath schools wherever the tide of immigration flows. We must circulate healthful, evangelical literature, and scatter broadcast the Word of God. We must endow Christian academies, colleges and theological seminaries. We must conduct into the ministry poor young men from the fields, the fishing booths and the joiners' shops, and send them forth fully equipped for their work. We must multiply mission stations at home and abroad. We must increase the number of missionaries and support them better, for the laborer is worthy of his hire. And we should minister in tenderness and gratitude to the servants of God who have fallen in the furrows of the fallow ground, or have sunk under the weight of their sheaves. All this we should do with our might, and before the Twentieth Century is half advanced, we may give the gospel to every creature, if we will but consecrate ourselves, our service and our substance to the Lord who bought us with His blood.

Our recently acquired possessions, whatever their governmental status

is or may be, must be evangelized. Cuba and Porto Rico must be brought to Christ. The Philippine archipelago, reaching from Formosa to Borneo and the Celibes Sea, must be Christianized. China and India, Japan and the lesser isles, are waiting for the salvation of God. Africa and South America, are appealing by their perishing need, and we must do our duty or ourselves be cast away.

This age of marvels speaks with the archangel's trump. It is no time to slumber and sleep; to chase thistle down or rest under the trees. The Master's command, the history of generations, and the promise of God, inspire faith in results. We should expect great things and go forward.

There is nothing impossible with God, and for a consecrated Church, beyond the toil and conflict, there await diadems and crowns.

Brethren, commissioned by the now reigning Christ to bring a lost world to him, let us go forward. Refusing all compromise with the world and sin, let our consecration to him be complete. May we never yield to sloth, lukewarmness, doubt or disbelief, and when to advance seems to invite defeat, let us rely on God, in whom is everlasting strength, and go forward. Then shall our cry, winged by faith, ascend on high, and Pentecost, long delayed, shall come. Nations shall be born in a day, and our world, now marred by sin, shall become God's own fair world again.

If that consummation does not come in our day, then beyond life's tempestuous sea we shall behold it from the battlements of heaven, joyfully awaiting the glad coronation day, when the church on earth shall join the church in heaven, and enemies conquered, faith triumphant. Jordan passed, we shall abide in the land of the King, and reign with him forever and ever. Hallelujah. Amen.