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## SERMON DCCXXII.

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### THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY.\*

"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."—Matt. 13: 31, 32.

THIS parable, so obvious in its meaning that I need not detain you with a word of exposition, is substantially a prophecy in respect to the extension and influence of the Gospel among men. It contains the view which Christ took of the future history of his own system when he was himself upon the earth, and when as yet it had scarcely entered upon its career of expansive conquest. The same view, in a somewhat more definite form, is given in Daniel's interpretation of the little *stone* cut out of the mountain without hands, which finally became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. This little stone, like the grain of mustard seed, is a symbol of the triumphs and success of the religion of Christ. Both symbols coincide in presenting this general thought: *That Christianity is designed by God, and destined in the unfolding history of the world, to become the permanent and universal religion of the race, supplanting all other systems, and reigning supreme over the human mind.* This idea, confessedly among the largest known to Christian faith, is one of the cardinal propositions of Modern Mis-

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sions, forming the life and soul, the philosophy and stimulus of the whole enterprise. The Christian world is now moving forward under its impulse, seeking to make it historically real; and whether it be a mere fancy of moral sentiment, or a sober and rational expectation, is, as I judge, an inquiry that well befits this occasion.

I. A very strong *presumption* bearing upon this point, is furnished by the DIVINE ORIGIN of Christianity. Conceding, as all Christians do, the divinity of the Gospel, they can not fail also to observe that it purports to be God's religion for the *race*; containing the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, in respect to the spiritual duties, interests, and destinies of men; assuming a common necessity in the fallen condition of humanity, and pledging itself to a common service without any limitations of age or country. Hence the faith which traces the Gospel to God, logically presumes its triumph, identifying its success with the credibility of its divine claim. Though that success has not yet been attained in the fullest possible measure, still I am disposed to admit that if such a system as Christianity professes to be, were, in the ultimate issue, to prove a failure, having its day and then expiring, giving place to some better light, or yielding to some stronger power, it would be difficult to maintain one's faith in the doctrine of its divine origin. The supposition would put the theory of the system in conflict with its positive history, which is not admissible in a case where the power and the purposes of God are involved. Notwithstanding what men may perhaps deem its delays, the Gospel can not fail of its own destiny unless the God of heaven himself shall fail. Its theory must in some way and at some time become a fact. Ages may be occupied with the process; the exact order of events, whether as past or future, we may not be able perfectly to trace; still the presumption of success remains unshaken. Earthly empires may fail; false religions may become obsolete; but God's kingdom, never. We can not thus reason in regard to the local, temporary, and national system of Judaism as instituted by Moses, since upon its very face this system bore the stamp of limitation, being but a preliminary to that which was to be permanent and universal. The presumption alleged in behalf of the Gospel, applies only to the Gospel; and here, if I mistake not, it must come home to the convictions of a believer with a comforting and inspiring power. Believing that the God of heaven has set up the Gospel kingdom, he also believes that this kingdom will never be destroyed.

II. The faith now stated to you as a strong presumption, is confirmed by the positive assurance of PROPHEPIC PROMISE. After the most careful exploration of the Bible by critics and commentators, theologians and common Christians, the conclusion has been reached, and is now accepted with great unanimity, that, ac-

ording to the testimony of the Book itself, the religion which it proffers to the race, will endure, and finally spread itself over the entire world. God himself has declared that the Seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. He informed Abraham, that in his Seed, which is Christ, all nations of the earth should be blessed. By the pen of the Psalmist we are told, that he has given the heathen to his Son for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession. The oracle of which Isaiah was the honored instrument, is specially charged with this thought. "It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it," beating "their swords into plough-shares and their spears into pruning-hooks." The stem of Jesse was to furnish the branch that would teach men justice and judgment, salvation and grace, thus causing the earth to be "full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." The little stone of Nebuchadnezzar's dream was the symbol of a kingdom that should never be destroyed. The conception which Christ had of his own system, was always hopeful. He lived and died, arose from the dead and ascended into heaven, the assured expectant of ultimate triumph. The same conception glowed in the bosoms of the apostles, inspired their hopes and nerved their hearts to deeds of Christian valor. In the apocalyptic visions we hear the seventh angel sounding his trumpet: "And there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever." A jubilee in the skies celebrates the grand event, when, after the struggle of ages, earth bows to the sceptre of one Saviour, and all the kingdoms of this world submit to his sway.

Blessed be God that we have some historic and prophetic way-marks in the Bible, not only going back to the beginning, but also reaching forward to the end—blending the antiquities and futurities of providence into a combined radiance, and thereby informing us, as a race, not only whence we came and where we are, but also whither we are going. By its historic power the Bible keeps alive the memory of providence past, and by its prophetic power initiates thought into the mysteries of providence yet to come. So far as the simple question of faith is concerned, no matter which way events seem to be moving. Often the apparent direction is not the real one. He who built the hills, for whom nothing is too hard, the God of one mind, has predestinated the ultimate victory of the Gospel. The heathen may rage, and the people imagine vain things; the kings of the earth may set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed; yet, in spite of the rage and opposition of men, the divine purpose will be accomplished. The Gospel will

enthroned itself upon the knowledge and confidence of the world, scattering away the shades of Pagan night, and blessing mankind with its saving power. This, I believe, not simply or mainly on the credit of missionary statistics, but on the authority of God himself. He settled this question in heaven before Christ became incarnate, or a mortal tongue moved to speak his name. Here the cause of Christian Missions must look for the right arm of its strength. Interesting as may be its accumulating facts, forget not that there is a grander fact in heaven, of which they are but the sign.

III. The view thus reduced to a certainty, commends itself to reason by the INHERENT FORCE OF VICTORY with which the Gospel is clothed. Judging from the analogies of divine providence, we should presume that the Gospel would be adapted to the realization of its own destiny. God's plan in the government of the world is to connect results with causes, augmenting the power of the latter in proportion to the greatness of the effect which they have to accomplish. The entire system of nature embodies and illustrates this law; and the presumption is, that the Gospel will be no exception to it.

What then are the facts? Is Christianity suited to be a victorious, and finally a prevalent religion? It is exceedingly difficult to do any justice to so large a question within the limits ordinarily assigned to a sermon. We might dwell upon the power of the Bible as derived from the fact that it is a book—a *written* record of the Gospel; and here show that the Christianity of which we are speaking, lives not in isolated impressions or traditional beliefs, but in the undecaying temple of language—the very form of life best suited to the integrity of the substance and the perpetuity of its power. We might dwell, too, upon the character of the evidence, showing it to be of the same kind that presides over faith in all the ordinary matters of this life, and hence inferring its adaptation to the fundamental principles that regulate the believing faculty. We might also consider the relation of Christianity to the intellectual and scientific progress of the race, showing that while it is not a science or a philosophy, it is nevertheless a powerful stimulus to both, never losing any thing, but always gaining much by the growth of human thought. So, too, the positive institutions of the Gospel—its rites, its consecrated day, its organized church, and its living ministry—withdraw it from the region of mere abstraction, and bring it out into salient and vigorous contact with human nature, giving form to its facts, and operating power to its principles. The essential simplicity of the system, while suiting it to all the demands and exigencies of migration, fits it to find a home wherever the foot of man has gone. The state of spiritual feeling which it begets—a feeling of tender sympathy

with Christ, and tender sympathy for man—is in perfect harmony with the command to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. This simple yet earnest instinct of piety, more powerful in some than in others, stronger in some ages than in others, is the silent, secret, ever-present force that has worked in the heart of the Church in all time past, and will continue to work till time itself shall be longer.

These *outer* elements of power to which we have referred, and upon which it would be interesting to descant, inclose and apply an *inner* force springing from the direct adaptation of Christianity to the nature and condition of man. Let us pause a moment upon this thought.

By the very terms of his nature, intellectual, moral, and emotional, in virtue of the very capacities which attend his existence, and that too irrespectively of all questions pertaining to his character, man needs the presence and power of some religious system as the anchorage-ground of thought, and not less as the basis of feeling and hope. He is made as if there were a God who made him; and hence the idea of atheism is outlawed by the most elementary utterances of the human soul. "Give me God!" is among the earliest, the latest, the longest, the loudest cries of humanity—the universal shout of thought lifting itself above the clamors of passion, and proving man to be more or less a theological pupil in spite of his sensualism and depravity. Now, need I say that to this urgent want Christianity responds with its revelation of God as the pure and perfect One, the Creator and Preserver of the universe, the ultimate seat and centre of all law and order, himself displaying such attributes, and existing in such relations to his dependent creatures, as deservedly to command their confidence, their affection, their homage? From the dark and dubious reserve of nature, made darker by the perversions of reason, it calls forth the Infinite Absolute, and places him upon a social firmament glowing with the signs of his presence. A new light falls on the path of reason; a new theology illumines her sky; what was hitherto but a wandering segment of thought, finds its position in the great circle of truth; the heart is in awe, and affection burns. All the streams of devotional existence become confluent in the God of Christianity. All the higher elements of human nature take on the form of the grand idea, and run in channels as pure as they are divine. The discovery of the Bible God is equivalent to a resurrection of reason from the dead, charming that reason with the magic of truth, and soothing the heart with the balm of life.

So, too, the condition of man in the three-fold aspect of a sinner, a sufferer, and a victim of death, is such that he wants relief, not amusement, not dissipation, but relief—the kind which is best expressed by the term *salvation*. Though he may not always feel

the want, the grounds of it are in him; and sooner or later he will feel it. He can neither think nor die without feeling it. His condition is a reality, too real and awful to be always forgotten. Perfectly conversant with all the facts in the moral pathology of man. Christianity gently approaches him as a sinner, a sufferer, and a victim of death; in the first aspect proposing to him the doctrine of pardon through a redeeming Saviour; in the second, encouraging him to be patient, and inspiring him with hope; in the third, revealing heaven as the possible, and where faith is present, the sure and happy sequel of dying. What a system to break the gloom of life, to cancel the prophecies of guilt, to hush the thundering of Sinai, to chase away the shades of death, and shed its light along the corridors of the eternal future! See why universal human nature in all its races and forms of conscious life, may be drawn to the cross, and live forever! How perfectly adapted is the system to the historic condition of that nature! Fitting was it that angels should sing its inaugural when its author was born, and as fitting that the sun should be dressed in mourning when he was expiring.

This, my hearers, is but a meagre sketch of a great thought, rendered, I fear, almost obscure by the necessary brevity of the sketch. I wish to impress you with the idea, that there are inherent powers in the Gospel, which, contemplated in relation to man, become prophetic of triumph. Such a cause—yea, such a *theory*, if you choose thus to name it—ought to create a new material, intellectual, moral, spiritual destiny for the race, leaving its indelible mark upon the face of the world; and that such is the fact, whether you take man in the rudest form of savage life, or in the best condition of refinement and civilization that the chisel of mere nature ever produced, is a proposition which not even the infidel will dispute. We are in the habit of glorying in the superiority of the Teutonic race, especially the Anglo-Saxon branch, now so palpably asserting its mastery over the world, apparently commissioned to scatter the superstitions of earth, and determine the ultimate philosophy and religion of mankind; but let us not forget that the aboriginal elements of this race were once as rude as man can well be. The training which the God of the Bible has given to it, and not its northern latitude, or the composition of its blood, is the grand secret of its present and prospective condition. Not in the rocks that form the strata of the sea-girt isle, not in the waters that lash its shores, not in its geographical position, not in the sun which shines upon it, but in the religion which for centuries has there made its home, must the philosopher seek the causes of England's greatness. Christianity, no matter where it finds him, *makes* man in the moral and effective sense, doing no more than it ought to do, no more than it is fitted to do; and having made him, it then sends him forth with the creative wand in

his hand, a delegate of omnipotence to call a dead world into the activities of a new life, to extend its beneficence, and gather strength with every step of its own progress, unwearied with effort, and not satisfied with victory till the last soul shall be converted and saved.

IV. This argument, first beginning as a *presumption*, then ascending to a prophetic *certainly*, and then pausing to inspect the *inherent force* of the Gospel, we add once more, is well sustained by the HISTORY OF THE PAST. If there be any validity in the view we are urging, there ought, after the lapse of eighteen centuries, to be some facts supporting the induction, some signs of vitality and power upon the Gospel-heavens. It is time that reason should be able to see at least something on her own field, while faith sees all things upon the field of her God. Is there any thing to be seen? One or two of the objects that lie on the page of history, will furnish a sufficient response to this question.

1. Christianity has shown its power of progressive life, when contending with the frowns, terrors, and wasting energies of severe *persecution*. For the first three centuries it was, with almost no intermissions of violence, a persecuted religion: an intolerant Judaism and a powerful Paganism were alike determined to banish it from the world; the sword was kept red with the blood of martyrdom; the confessors of Jesus perished by thousands and hundreds of thousands; scarcely a spot in all the Roman empire furnished a place of safety for a Christian; and yet converts to the Gospel were constantly multiplying, more than replenishing the ranks of the slain, spreading themselves throughout all Palestine, and rapidly extending into every city, village, and country of the Gentile world. By the simple process of individual conversion, and not by any movement or patronage of the state, yea, in spite of the state, without any earthly bribes to tempt human ambition, the work of progression went forward with resistless power, till a persecuted religion itself became the victor without shedding a drop of blood, forever demonstrating its own capacity to outlive the violence of men. It is no answer to this fact to say, that persecution necessarily strengthens what it seeks to destroy. I deny the proposition. "Paganism was persecuted by the Christian Roman emperors; Mohammedanism was grievously persecuted in Spain; Heathenism, in South-America by the Spaniards; Judaism has generally, in all ages, suffered severe persecution;" and yet none of these systems flourished and increased under the ordeal, as did Christianity. The fact is peculiar to the Gospel, showing its power of progress and triumph even when opposed by the rage and cruelty of man. The life of the system, its truth, its evidence, its adaptation to the wants of human nature, and withal its defense by the God of heaven, were, in the early struggle, so fully tested as

never to need another experiment of the same kind. Living then, it can live anywhere, and at any time. No rougher seas await it than those which it has already crossed in safety. Let historic candor state the facts, and Christian reason accept the hopeful inference.

2. Equally obvious is the power of the Gospel when engaged in the war of thought with *opposing religious* systems. This experiment, too, has been tried sufficiently long, and on a scale sufficiently extensive, to authorize a conclusion. The tenets of a degenerate Judaism were hostile to the pure and simple doctrines of the crucified Nazarene; jealous and corrupt ecclesiastics did all in their power to awaken the prejudices of the common people, meaning to consign the name of Christ to oblivion, or to an immortality of infamy; the sophisms of the logician and the arts of the caviler were alike summoned to this service; and yet the Gospel, as ministered by apostolic hands, was planted in the very bosom of Judaism, in her principal city, under the watchful scrutiny of her Sanhedrim, in her smaller towns, and throughout the entire country; and churches were organized by the conversion of Jews to the faith, no other means being employed but the simple preaching of the word in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Warm was the conflict; long did it last, without any *prestige* on the side of Christianity, or any temporal inducements to invite mercenary friendships; and yet for years prior to the dispersion of the Jews by the Roman arms, the Gospel presented the palpable marks of a growing and victorious doctrine. Judaism glorying in her ancestry, proud of her prophets, attached to her temple, sacredly sensitive as to her ritual, and harmonizing with the proclivities of a corrupt age, became a waning power under the preaching of the cross of Christ. Her sons, by thousands and tens of thousands, yielded to the force of the new light.

The systems of ancient Roman and Grecian Paganism, confessedly the most polished and inviting superstitions that have ever secured the faith of mortals, are now dead, and have been for centuries; and it was the Gospel that killed them. The blood of martyrs ran in streams; the defenders of idolatry, in all but the element of truth, had the overwhelming advantage; still the Gospel kept pressing forward its victories over the receding foe, till the most attractive and pompous forms of Paganism the world has ever known, disappeared from the earth. Somehow men would be converted in spite of the vigilance and penalties of the state. This victory was not gained by Constantine, who merely accepted a result which the course of Providence was making inevitable, but by the men who fought the battle before Constantine was born—preaching Christ, suffering for Christ, living Christ, converting idolaters to Christ, and organizing churches in the name of Christ. England was once Pagan; all Europe was once



Pagan ; this whole continent was once buried in Pagan night ; and what, let us ask, has wrought the change which we are now so glad to behold ? Nothing but the gradual, progressive, and unceasing growth of Christianity, stretching its energy over the bosom of centuries, taking possession of human faith, and always crowding before it existing systems in order to make room for itself. I submit, whether its power of conquest is not sufficiently shown by facts to give at least some pledge for the future. What it has done so often, for so long a period, under so great a variety of circumstances, frequently under the most signal disadvantages, is enough by the sternest laws of induction to establish its character. The *prestige* of past success is the prophetic garland with which history now adorns its brow. It can break up all the encampments and batter down all the Gibraltars, in which or behind which false religions seek either their home or their shelter. To pluck up a religious system and plant another in its place, is no ordinary exercise of power ; yet this is what Christianity has often done in time past, and, as we infer, can do in all time to come.

3. Nor is the argument less satisfactory, if we consider the capacity of the Gospel to protect itself against *fatal corruption* and final decay from this cause. It must be confessed, that, as to its purity, Christianity has at times suffered much in the hands of its professed friends. In the very outset, Jewish converts were anxious to ingraft upon it the obsolete system of ritual ordinances, especially the rite of circumcision. When Pagan learning bowed her head to the Gospel, and her philosophers were brought to the Christian altar, then came the age of speculation, giving birth to theological schools with their peculiar tenets, and often adding much that did not belong to the system. At a later period, and by a process of gradual accretion springing from two or three fundamental errors in respect to the polity of the Church, the ponderous and awful system of Papacy sat enthroned upon nearly the whole Christian world, suspending the free activity of thought, interdicting the use of the Scriptures by the laity, outraging the sacred rights of private judgment, corrupting the faith of men, and ruling them with a rod of iron. We can not deny these facts ; they are matters of history, and hence it must be admitted, that, as to its purity, Christianity has sailed on troublous seas.

Is the system dead, or is it still alive ? We have every evidence of which the case admits, that the Scriptures of both Testaments have been safely preserved during the last eighteen centuries ; and hence, that the Bible, as we now read it, teaches the same Gospel that was taught in the days of Paul. This proposition can be proved to any one competent to understand the argument. Moreover, there has been no time in which a true Christianity was not a living fact in the experience and faith of men, no time in which there were not witnesses and defenders of the truth,

holding one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Ever since the days of the Apostles, there has always been a true Church of Christ among men, as well as a true Bible. The Waldenses, older than the Papacy, and always resisting its corruptions, never bowed the knee to the Pope of Rome. And as to the Papacy herself, many of her ecclesiastics, and doubtless millions of her laity were real Christians, and therefore a living part of the body of Christ. When Luther lifted up his voice, protesting against the iniquities of the age, and publishing the true Gospel, multitudes in the Romish Church were ready to embrace his cause, and they did embrace it; and hence, the Protestant Reformation. These are facts, and I do not think it well for Protestants to be so furiously Protestant as to deny them.

Conceding then, as we cheerfully do, the corruptions of past ages, we are nevertheless happy to present to you a Bible that has outlived this ordeal; and point your eye to a true religion among men that has also outlived it, and is still on its deathless march. Surely a system that has waded through eighteen centuries of human error, and lost neither its identity nor its power, must have some elements of life in it, enough to make a very fair promise for the future. We can see no sources of corruption and internal decay in the future, that are likely to form a severer test than those which have been victoriously met in the past. The dark shadows that have rested on the dial of Christian history, never blotted out the sun. It has continued to shine, and as we infer, will continue to shine to the end of time.

4. We are brought to the same conclusion, if we contemplate the resources of the Gospel in relation to the assaults of a learned and hostile *infidelity*. There certainly has been no want of effort on the part of infidelity to make out a case against the Bible; nor has there been a total want of learning and talent in conducting this warfare. Hobbes, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, and the like, were confessedly men of distinguished ability, fully competent to give at least, a fair example of what can be done by argument for the destruction of the Gospel.

What has been the result? How much impression has infidelity made upon the faith of Christendom? How near has it come to a dethronement of the Bible and the abrogation of Christian beliefs? True, it has gathered some disciples, who have generally been about as much at war with each other as they have been with the Bible; but it never organized them into a solid and compact army; and as for making any great and lasting impression upon the faith of men, infidelity is manifestly a total failure. Its system, whether in the form of atheism, deism, or pantheism, has never been able to take a strong hold of the human mind. This is a matter of fact. Directly, then, Christianity has never suffered but little, and permanently not at all, from the assaults of infidelity.

Indirectly, these attacks have rendered no inconsiderable service to the Christian cause. The argument for the truth of the Bible is doubtless much more perfect, and much better understood, than it would have been if this Bible had not been assailed by foes. Hume, for example, was ready for a jubilee when he had finished his essay on miracles; yet he had not gone to his grave before Christian scholarship revealed the sophisms of the philosophical dreamer, receiving into its bosom a positive power in being called to make a reply. Gibbon and Paine verily supposed that they had made a decided impression adverse to the Bible; but in the answer of a Watson, to speak of no others, the Christian world has ample reason for being satisfied with the result of the argument. In the days of Bishop Butler it was quite fashionable in England, especially among the higher classes, to scoff at religion as a foolish whim, fit only for feeble minds, and this state of facts gave birth to his immortal Analogy—a book which no man can read without being impressed, and which no man can answer without disowning the constitution and course of nature. The attack upon the historic argument is more than met in the labors of a Paley and a Lardner, exploring the ample resources of this field, and showing that if any history on earth be credible, the Bible history is credible. The contents of the Book being brought into question, sharpened the vision of such men as Jenyn and Erskine, first to see, and then to state, the internal marks of its divine origin. Geology, even before it had really become a science, was warmly greeted by the hosts of infidelity; but, alas! for their hopes, not a few Christian scholars had the good sense to interrogate this science for themselves, to study the rocks, to examine the facts as they lie in the bosom of nature; and as the result, we have the two theologies, the biblical and the geological, not only mutually consistent, but in some respects, mutually confirming each other. The Christian world need not now be afraid of geology. It has ceased to have even the appearance of a foe. As far back as the second century, a writer by the name of Celsus, sought to prove that the history of Christ, as given in the four gospels, is not worthy of belief; and in doing this, quoted from these very gospels so largely, that if every Bible on earth were destroyed, we could make out the principal facts of the Saviour's life from the quotations of Celsus. Thus the God of heaven has caused the wrath of man to praise him, using the testimony of an avowed skeptic to show that the gospels, as we now have them, are not a forgery of the dark ages. On this question an enemy testifies to the truth.

An apostle tells us that "we can do nothing against the truth;" and if I mistake not, the history of infidelity, in its attack upon the Bible, affords a pertinent illustration of this remark. Science, whether that which investigates the structure of the globe, or that which discourses with the heavenly bodies, or that which inquires

into the origin and identity of the human race, or that which examines the constitution and functions of the mind, or that which explores the monuments of antiquity, or that which searches the wide field of profane history, has long since published its declinature to serve in the cause of infidelity. Earth has no truer sons of science than the very men who bear the Christian name. Lieutenant Maury, one of the first scholars of the age, observes: "I have always found in my scientific studies, that when I could get the Bible to say any thing upon the subject, it afforded me a firm foundation to stand upon, and another round in the ladder by which I could safely ascend." The consistency of the Bible with science, yea, its positive aid within certain well-defined limits, give it a position and prospect of the highest order and grandest character. It silences the most formidable battery that humanity can employ against the system. Scholarship need not disown itself to bow at this altar. We hence conclude, that infidelity has not power enough of any description to pluck up the Gospel tree, which, first planted as a grain of mustard seed, is now spreading its branches over the world. Infidelity has no missionary character, no enthusiasm to inspire it, no organization to give it solidity of form, and no terms or principles of unity to concentrate force. I have no fear that Christianity will ever lose its grasp upon human nature from this cause.

The case as now presented to the vision of hope, surely merits a note of praise. The Gospel being what it is in the end proposed, and having descended from the throne of God, suggests its own strong presumption of success, even if no heavenly oracle had marked its path on the map of the future. The prophetic promise takes up this presumption and reduces it to a certainty. The inherent force of victory which belongs to the system, shows that what the oracle utters, is not too much for reason to credit. For eighteen centuries its power of life has been thoroughly tested; persecution has done its worst; opposing religious systems have fought against it, and fallen before it; in the mysterious providence of God, corrupting agencies have been permitted to try their strength; infidelity, sometimes learned, and always hostile, anxious for a combat, and determined upon victory, has ransacked earth for the weapons of attack, marching and counter-marching in all directions; and yet here is the religion of the Son of God, here its Bible, here its Church, here its Sabbath, here its ministry of the word, here its disciples, here its evidences, here the literature to which it has given birth, here its schools of the prophets, here its Divine Spirit, here its means of life and progress, laying the foundation for an induction as rigid and sober as any that a Bacon or a Newton ever applied to the material system—an induction, moreover, in happy coincidence with what needs not the induction to be credible. Can that be a false conclusion which has so many signs of being the true one?

Say not, in reply to this argument, that faith in the final triumph of Christianity is a mere whim of its friends. We resent the allegation as an insult to their intelligence. Say not that missionary effort is simply a pious gymnasium to give the zeal of the Church an opportunity to air itself, and profit by the exercise. While we concede the subjective profit, we maintain that the object to be gained, is no dream of human fancy. Say not that the progress has hitherto been too slow, for in respect to moral causes operating in so wide a sphere, man is not competent to decide beforehand what is really slow or really fast. Often what seems to be the tardiness of Providence is really its greatest speed. The actual momentum of events towards a given point, is a question for omniscience to settle. Above all, say not that the world is moving in the backward direction; he who thus talks, has not the soberness of a philosopher or the genius of a true poet, or the faith of a Christian. The world never did move backward; and it never will, while God sits upon the throne. The orbit of moral causation may be a very large one; still progress is, ever has been, and until the end of all things ever will be, the general law of Christian history. The progress of which we speak thus confidently, should not be confounded with the *development theory*, which, if it mean any thing, either implies or positively asserts, that the Gospel as it came from God in the apostolic age, has been gradually growing into a more perfect form of either truth or statement than that in which it was originally given. God's plan in the bestowment of a revelation did indeed observe the law of progress, stretching over a period of some four thousand years, and gradually increasing both the clearness and quantity of light; yet, when that revelation was complete, as was the fact at the terminus of the apostolic age, there was, as we suppose, no farther opportunity for this kind of progress. What then remained, was to apply the system to human nature, and not to modify or improve it, or even state it in better words than those of the Bible. There were no new facts to be added, no new doctrines, principles, or promises. The thing was to stand as God had left it, not as a crude and imperfect germ, but as a full-grown system in itself, challenging the faith of coming ages. Hence development in the *outer*, and not in the *interior* spheres of Christianity, is the only progress that we mean to assert; and this we do assert with a very hearty conviction of its truth.

V. I have perhaps already detained you too long; yet I can not pause without dwelling for a moment upon the corroborating and inspiring FACTS that salute our hopes in the PRESENT AGE. Where are we in this latter half of the nineteenth century? Just where preceding causes have placed us; and, I may add, where posterity will look back to admire the wonders of Providence, and if we do our duty, to bless the God of heaven for our labors. We have

a great trust from the past to keep, and to convey to the future. The enterprise of Modern Missions, in its birth and progress up to the present moment, lies within the lifetime of some who hear me. Those who can look back to the state of the world, both Pagan and Christian, as they saw it and thought of it fifty years ago, need not be told that a most remarkable change has been wrought in this brief period. Could the fathers who wept, and prayed, and hoped, and died at the commencement of this century, be now recalled to the scenes of earth, they would look with a rapture of delight upon what, by reason of its familiarity, may perhaps excite but little emotion in our minds. We are living in the midst of events that will hereafter be decked in the robes of historic grandeur, and that too, not merely in respect to our material improvements, but more especially in respect to the aggressions of Christianity upon the abodes of human darkness. To the man, if such there be, who says that nothing has been done, or that what has been done, creates but a feeble promise for the future, I am inclined to reply by asking him whether he knows what the facts really are, of which he speaks so slightly? What, my hearers, are the facts?

Is it nothing, that a commencement, serious and earnest, and in the fear of God, has been made? Is it nothing, that, since this commencement, a regular and rapidly increasing progress has been secured? Is it nothing, that the Church has been aroused to consider, at least to some extent, the claims of her God and Saviour as well as those of a lost world, upon her benevolent effort? Is it nothing, that her sons and her daughters and her worldly substance have been nobly laid upon the altar of Christian Missions? Is it nothing, that twenty-four Home Missionary organizations, thirty-two Foreign, and ninety-one Bible and Tract Societies, making an aggregate of one hundred and forty-seven large associations of Christian men, all seeking to spread the Gospel throughout the world, have unfurled their banners to the breeze; and are at this moment laboring with their men and their means to carry the religion of Christ to every part of the habitable earth? Is it nothing, that Protestant Christians are now annually spending for this purpose nearly seven millions of dollars? Is it nothing, that one thousand three hundred and sixty-nine missionaries, about four hundred of them being from this country, aided by nine hundred and thirty-four assistant missionaries, and two thousand seven hundred and thirty-seven native helpers, are now at work upon the foreign field? Is it nothing, that two hundred and eleven thousand three hundred and eighty-nine communicants now adorn the gates of Zion in the regions of Pagan night, besides hundreds and thousands of others who are sleeping in Jesus, and singing in heaven? Is it nothing, that the nominal converts from heathenism at the present moment exceed a million and a half of human beings? Is it nothing, that an entire nation of Pagans—I allude to the people of the Sandwich Islands

—has become as really Christian as we are? Is it nothing, that missionary stations, and in many instances missionary churches are now to be found in almost every part of the heathen world? Is it nothing to have explored the earth, to have become acquainted with the languages, religions, manners, and customs of the benighted nations, to have reduced many of their languages to the written form, to have commenced the process of giving them a Christian literature, to have established schools among them for the education of the young, in short, to have set up the initial elements of a permanent and established power for their final conversion? Is it nothing to have gathered a very large and useful experience both at home and abroad, as to the best manner of doing this work? Is it nothing, that, in the good providence of God, the causes of resistance and difficulty have greatly lessened, while the facilities for action and progress have been as greatly increased? Is it nothing, that the hostile religions of earth are evidently on the decline? Is it nothing, that the Turk begins to inquire for the truth, that he may read the Bible, and become a Christian under the very eye of the Sultan, without working a forfeiture of his life? Is it nothing, that the dead forms of Armenian and Nestorian faith are being penetrated with a new life? Is it nothing, that the wandering Jew, the suffering fugitive of every clime, is forgetting his prejudices, and seeking his Messiah in the person of the historic Jesus? Is it nothing, that the Christian nations, especially those from whom we may reasonably expect the most, are rapidly asserting their intellectual and social mastery over the rest of mankind? Is it nothing, that even the Man of Sin gives unequivocal signs of old age? Is it nothing, that the mental and moral power which must determine the fate of this world, is now held by Christian hands?

I know where I stand, and to whom I am speaking. I am addressing a Christian audience; and would ask, whether the facts of which I have given the merest hint, and which, I may add, are mostly the creation of the last fifty years, are to be set down to the account of nothing? You will not thus read the signs of the times. You will not thus expound either the ways or the ends of Providence. Blot out all these facts, and let the world be what it was, and as it was, at the beginning of this century; and even then we should hope, because the God of heaven bids us to hope; and shall we cease to hope when this same God covers the missionary firmament with the visible signs of his presence? Can we not accept all that his providence produces; and look cheerfully forward to that happy day, when all past providences shall culminate in one? Is it wild enthusiasm to observe facts, and then draw the conclusion to which they manifestly lead, especially when inspiration puts its seal upon the inference? We surely need no new causes in kind, no return to the age of miracles, no departure from the laws of Gospel progression, which are not only taught in the word

of God, but have been tested for the last eighteen hundred years ; I say, we do not need this in order to make the final triumph of Christianity a rational object of human hope. The existing dispensation moving forward from its present point, accumulating the means of action, intensifying the energy of that action, incorporating into its own bosom the total force of all natural and providential laws, and above all, favored with the presence and gracious power of God—the dispensation which says, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature,” and which also says, “And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world ;” this, as we think, is the dispensation in connection with which the heathen will be given to God’s Son for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession. It is the dispensation of Christian labor, the one that we are now called to use, the one that has been in use for centuries, the one that will yet fill the earth with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

These, my hearers, have been, and in some respects still are very dark days. A great commercial disaster has swept over the land, and fortunes have faded in an hour. Men have not known what to do ; they have trodden the walks of business with anxious hearts ; their skill has failed them, and in instances not a few, their wearied and exhausted natures have sunk into the griefs of despair. Blessed then be the God of heaven, that in this missionary work there are no panics, no suspended payments, no rapacious creditors, and no heart-broken debtors. Faith here makes a clear sky. Here you may place your investments with perfect safety. The work will carry with it all that is consecrated to it. Your funds here deposited, will come back in the rich rewards of an approving conscience, and a smiling heaven. Your children on this altar will be a burnt-offering unto the Lord. Your zeal, your plans, your prayers for this cause will connect your lives with an immortality of blessing. Go forward, then, ye sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty ! By all that is sacred in a divine command—by all that is tender in the Saviour’s love—by all that is affecting in the condition and wants of the world—by all the resources with which Heaven has honored your pilgrimage—by the precious memories of missionaries whose ashes are slumbering on Pagan soil—by the animating hopes that reach far into the future—by all the motives that can be addressed to a Christian mind, we say to you, Go FORWARD. Onward, ye soldiers of the cross, to the conflict and the crown ! The eyes of future ages are looking down upon you ! All heaven is observing ! Though you may fall ere the shout of victory shall rend these earthly skies, still the very banner you now carry, will be floating in the breeze when a world redeemed shall stand waiting for the coming of our Lord. Go forward, and be as immortal as the cause you sever.