

SKETCH OF THE SERMON

(Reported in The Baptist Courier May 12, 1898.)

Dr. B. L. Whitman advanced, and began his sermon. "The days of martyrdom are not past," said he. Continuing, he said in part: "We have fallen on good days as far as external religion is concerned. But there is danger notwithstanding." He then read I Peter 3:15 and announced as his text, "The Foundations," and proceeded: "We need something to get us out of the everlasting apologetic air with which some are going about before the world. It is down in the foundations that we find the good things which shape life. Our ideals are our guardian angels. There are three words about which the lessons of the evening cluster.

"The first is law. Law compels obedience. We revolt against arbitrariness, but man must learn to obey others until he can take care of himself. It is better to let the law take its course, even when it is quite imperfect. Then order means unity. There are two essentials: men to make authority, and men to execute it. The great function of law is to secure order. The great peril of reforms is that they may fail to join themselves to those things which already exist. Convention is a strong point with us all. It is safer to be conventionally immoral than unconventionally moral.

"Law as commandment is simply a step to law as order. Law as order is simply a step to law as nature. When a man wants to plow, he yokes an ox not a cow.

At the bottom is nature, above that the intellectual, above that is the spiritual. The machinery of the world grinds on, feeding with equal satisfaction on man or mountain. What may be beyond, unless God speaks, man cannot know: but he knows there is something. Two worlds meet in man: the physical in which life roots; the spiritual to which he reaches out. We have the revelation of this in the Bible. Its main purpose is spiritual in function. Failure to recognize its limitations make many foolish.

"The creed of the agnostic is, 'I do not know;' his virtual creed is, 'I know that I do not know.' Agnosticism is a strange kind of dogmatism. When the theologian begins to dogmatize about science he begins to play the fool; when the scientist begins to dogmatize about theology, then he begins to play the fool. The final word of faith and the final word of reason is God.

"In the Word of God we have the final authority for the spiritual life. The perils that threaten the world today are the perils which grow out of the tendency to treat lightly the Word of God.

"The second element in the foundation of our hope is the word light. Ignoring a fact does not change obligation. The post may be hidden in the dark, but it hurts just as bad

when you run against it. Answering to this world or reality there is a world of thought. The test of truth is conformity of thought to reality. The Bible teaches the incarnation, not of a principle, but of a person. Truth must be an experience as well as a conception.

"Any theory of the origin and destiny of man that takes away from him spirit, makes life not worth living. The believer's standing in the kingdom is determined by his relation to Jesus Christ. Creeds are of use, but we are saved not by likeness to one another but by likeness to Christ.

"The word life is third. We hear of the transformation of light; the Christian is transformed by the life of Christ. Light is imperfect, but the worlds are none the less real for being beyond sight. Get the foundations fixed and you will not be easily shaken.

It was a great sermon by a great man on a great occasion. The above report is a vain thing as an attempt to convey an idea of the masterly address. This man, great of intellect, great and devout of spirit, great as an educator, is great on pulpit or platform. He has a magnificent physique, is large, clean-shaven and erect. He has a marvelous voice. Without seeming effort, almost conversational in style, his clear voice, forming the words rapidly, penetrated every nook of the large room, and the great concourse of intelligent and cultured people was literally held spell-bound during the hour or more while he was speaking.

✓ C. Whitman, 1898

THE FOUNDATIONS

Report and sketch of the sermon preached before the Southern Baptist Convention, at Norfolk, Virginia, May 12, 1898, by B. L. Whitman, D.D.; LL.D; President of Columbia College, Washington, D. C.

(Dr. Whitman passed to his reward many years ago. We have not been able to secure either a biographical sketch, photo, or the Convention sermon in full. We have, however, secured a report of the sermon from the Norfolk Landmark of Saturday, May 7, 1898, Also we have obtained a sketch of the sermon which appeared in The Baptist Courier, of Greenville, South Carolina, under the date of May 12, 1898.)

NEWSPAPER REPORT OF SERMON

"It was about twenty minutes past eight o'clock when the assemblage was called to order by Rev. Dr. J. T. Henderson, President, Carson-Newman College, of Tennessee. "How Firm a Foundation" was raised by a fine looking delegate with rich full voice and sung with great volume and spirit by the entire congregation. The volume of sound was tremendous and magnificent. Two verses were sung, after which the fourth chapter of First Peter was read by Rev.

Dr. McGregor, of Atlanta, Georgia. At the conclusion of the prayer the chairman in very complimentary language introduced to the congregation Dr. B. L. Whitman, President of Columbia University, of Washington, D. C., who preached the annual sermon. Dr. Whitman is a man of striking physique, commanding appearance, and has a rich, full, powerful voice, pleasing to the ear, therefore very attractive. When he arose he was greeted by profound attention which was continued through his magnificent discourse.

"Prefacing his sermon with a few introductory remarks to the effect that the days of the martyrs were not over and that in this Christian age when Christian nations and nominally Christian statesmen control the world's history, he announced as his text for the evening I Peter 3:15, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." He announced that from this he would take as the subject of his address, "The Foundation of Faith." He said that in the words of the text there were three predominating ideas expressed in the words, viz., law, light, life. He spoke of the obedience, the power, and the nature of law. In the beginning he said that while all truths were true they were not equally important. Hence it should be the aim of all to seek out first those most important. There is something to keep us from the apologetic air like the people who always are excusing

themselves for being Christians. This class he treated very sarcastically, after which he said, 'Our ideals are always our guardian angels. If they are high they tend Godward, if low earthward.' Then turning to the first division of his subject he said that law meant power, its function being principally to secure order. The trouble with reforms, he said, is that reformers will not join with the past, and pay too much attention to forms and conventionalities which, he declared, were very strong in this day and generation.

"It is almost impossible to do justice to the speaker, He was epigrammatical and logical. He hurled truth after at his attentive hearers in a manner which implanted them firmly in the understanding. Forceful and decidedly eloquent at times he never strayed from the subject, and when he said 'You can't control deviltry by diplomacy either in nations or individuals' a slight ripple of applause ran through the house.

"His arraignment of agnosticism was truly severe, and his declaration that the word of God was the foundation of faith won instant approval. Faith he declared to be the greatest of all instruments in scientific investigation, and the final word of faith and of reason is God; so that the final authority for spiritual life is the word of God.

"Again it should be stated that it is impossible to do Dr. Whitman full justice without publishing his remarks in full. There was a continuity about his discourse which

could not be broken without marring its beauty. To sum up however it can be said without fear of contradiction that it was one of the most magnificent efforts which has held the attention of an audience in this city for many days in the past. Dr. Whitman spoke in all about ninety minutes. When he concluded the chairman asked for another familiar hymn and "In the Sweet By and By" was rendered."