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Bishop P. A. Wallace, D. D.

Delivered at the 59th session of the Tennessee Conference, held at Chattanooga, Tenn., Oct. 16, 1924.

Dear Brethren:

Under the protection of Almighty God, our all-wise and loving Heavenly Father, we are permitted to assemble in another annual conference. We come not only to give an account of our stewardship, but from this high mount of vision, to survey the field that we might properly visualize the tremendous tasks which are before us. We pray Almighty God to bestow upon us such pentecostal gifts of the Spirit, that this entire annual conference, during the days we may abide here, may be so imbued with power from on high, that all selfish and unworthy ambitions may be driven out, and that we may all be led to discharge every duty, fearlessly, wisely and solely in the interest of the Church and the building of the Kingdom of God among men.

The thought that the true minister of Jesus Christ is a co-worker with God, is in active partnership with God, whose purposes are ripening fast, unfolding every hour, right here before our eyes, is almost overwhelming in its conception. The thought that this old world is to be made a place where dwelleth righteousness, justice, love and brotherhood, by our working in active partnership with God, should send us out and down from this hill of privilege with hearts on fire with holy zeal, to render better service to our fellow man, and to measure up to the great responsibilities which are ours.

By the action of the General Conference, which met in Indianapolis, Indiana, last May, I come to assume the superintendency of the Tennessee Conference. I come not among you as a stranger—though I may be a stranger to some—neither do I feel like a stranger in a strange land. But on the contrary, Lookout Mountain, Missionary Ridge, and the hills and valleys of East Tennessee are scenes most familiar to me. I was born within the bounds of this conference. The first annual conference that I ever attended met in old E. St. church in 1890. I came as a lay delegate representing the Big Gully church and the Unita Circuit. Later I was received as a preacher on trial at Cleveland, Tenn., and received my first appointment from the hands of Bishop Lomax, of sainted memory. I am sure you will pardon this extended reference to myself, when you know how pleased I am to have the privilege of laboring with you for the ensuing four years, and being once again among the scenes of my early youth.

In taking the oversight of this conference, I am aware that I am following in the wake of one of the foremost leaders and churchmen of the race, in the person of George Clinton Clement, who wisely directed your efforts for the past eight years. I regard Bishop Clement as one of the greatest exponents of Negro Methodism, and one of the race's safest counsellors and leaders. I have noted with great pleasure the wonderful progress this conference has made under his brilliant leadership. It will be my object to take up the work where he left off, and to carry it up the hill of progress, if maybe, a little farther; to strengthen the things that remain and to plant the banner of the Cross and the standard of Zion Methodism on every hill top and in every valley of this grand old commonwealth.

To this end, I summon each presiding elder, each pastor, every preacher, conference worker—yes, every loyal member of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, to join the ranks of the marching, militant hosts and help to put the program over. A larger and better Zion in Tennessee is our slogan, and to bring about this consummation is our aim and purpose.

The last General Conference was a notable gathering; notable as to

its personnel, notable for its independence of thought and action, and notable because of its progressive, forward-looking legislation written into the laws that will govern the Church for the next four years. Perhaps the most important act of the General Conference was the New Financial Plan. The old plan had served its day, but had become inadequate, antiquated and obsolete. It could not meet the needs of a growing, progressive Church, and it was therefore set aside and a new one took its place. The Budget System was adopted. The budget is \$210,000 a year, and is to be raised by collecting one dollar from every member of the Church for General Claims and one dollar in addition for benevolences.

This system, if properly executed and faithfully lived up to by each bishop, presiding elder, pastor and member of the Church, in my judgment, will meet the growing demands of the Church, and put us on the highway of prosperity, unequalled before in the history of the Church. In order to do this everybody—bishops, presiding elders and pastors—must obey the law. Pastors are to make monthly collections and send them in to the Financial Secretary.

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THE SHIRKING PEWS.

The paralytic stroke of pessimism which has seized the pew is, we are told, in large measure accountable for the predicament in which the Church finds itself. In fact, it is the stockholders themselves who are driving the Church into insolvency by a policy of doubt and despair which would send any business into bankruptcy. A cause of this, it appears to an authority, is that the pew pessimists hear the problems of the Church discussed in dizzying phrases as problems of "world-wide" significance, and magnify a break in the wall as a total ruin, beyond hope of reclamation. It is, of course, well enough to view the Church's problems in the large. But as the Rev. Lloyd C. Douglas, a Congregational clergyman and author, who has held many important posts in church work, tells us, too many in the pew prefer to discourse on these problems in terms of world ruin than to discuss calmly the probable reasons why the Sunday morning congregation at Grace Church, Oortown, is insufficient to fill half the pews or underwrite the budget of its frugal expenses. Yet, he goes on in the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate (Methodist), "unless we local agents and department managers, soon give some attention to the smaller details incident to our tasks, it is clear that we shall have let ourselves in for more perplexity than even they suspect who report disquieting findings from the higher altitudes of prophetic discernment." He suggests that the situation be approached in the manner in which Nehemiah approached the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Instead of contemplating the whole ruin from a neighboring hilltop, Nehemiah rode around the debris one night with a notebook in hand. Next day he invited representatives of the various trades and unions, and persuaded each to rebuild a portion in which he was particularly interested. By lunch-time, the walls and the gate were as good as rebuilt. So, if something in particular in your church in Oortown troubles you, advises Dr. Douglas, attend to that yourself, each individual taking up a particular task. For instance:

"If the only ailment your church in Oortown suffers today is the fact that your official board is dominated by some close-fisted old rascal who, if he had practiced the same disgusting economies in his own business down-town, he advocates in the preferential program of the church, wouldn't he be able to buy himself a three-by-seven by next to the back fence in the village cemetery, could you younger business men of Grace Church see to it that he is relieved of his responsibilities at the first

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IS THE PULPIT A SPENT FORCE?

By Rev. J. W. G. Ward, Emmanuel Church, Montreal.

Such a question is like a door leading to a portrait gallery, where famous faces look down from their tarnished frames. Here is Chrysostom, the golden-tongued, and next to him, Augustine, mighty in argument. There are Luther and Calvin, Knox and Wesley, while the face of Whitfield recalls those grimy colliers of Kingswood, moved to throne Christ by glowing words. That was preaching! Other portraits conjure our memory like a wizard's wand. We join the vast crowds that thronged to the pulpit of Parker and Spurgeon and Phillips Brooks. We listen to the flaming eloquence of Henry Ward Beecher as he tears in twain the veil of cold greed hiding the iniquitous traffic in flesh and blood. What is the impression wrought on the mind? That these men had caught the passion and something of the power of their Master. While portraits of R. W. Dale, Talmage, and Mr. Jaren, constrain us to say, not without sadness: There were giants in those days.

These men were pulpit princes whose word was with power. But they have gone! Has the power of the pulpit also passed? There seems to be only one reply. The pulpit has been superseded by the press. Men read more than they did—though some think the less. The day when the pulpit was the chief means of instruction has gone. The Church is no longer the sole custodian of culture, nor can she hope again for the unquestioning obedience that once honored her commands. Yet far from being a spent force, the pulpit has a vital place to fill in these times, when the faith of some has failed, and when materialism still threatens all that the soul holds dear.

If however, we confuse the power of the pulpit with the men who have served it in the past, if we think that anything can supersede the living word that sways the multitude, or comforts the solitary, we forget the commission of the ambassador, and the Sovereign from whom he comes.

The days of great preaching are not over. There are still devoted men of God, who without sensationalism, hold vast audiences from week to week. There are others in quieter spheres, preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ, and with what result? They bring enrichment to the impoverished, consolation to the sorrowful, guidance to the perplexed, and that help and healing with which alone the Gospel is charged. Such work is of incalculable importance. Such ministries prove indisputably that God still speaks through his servants the prophets. The despairing find hope. The sin-burdened find relief. Power to fight comes to the warrior, and grace to carry the daily burden gladdens the Christian heart. "Your best work in the pulpit," said an eminent scientist to our late friend, Dr. John Watson, "has been put to heart into men for the coming week." This is the peculiar privilege of the pulpit today.

Yet cannot the same benefit be obtained from a good book or a readily-written article in the Sunday newspaper? Never, to the same extent. Man needs the bread of life, but he needs even more. Truth comes most powerfully through a sanctified personality that has experienced the goodness and mercy of God. One fact of our faith is capable of new emphasis. It is that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Wherever Christ went, men felt the power of his personality. The warmth of his divine-human heart, the reality of his love, were felt in the words he spoke. Revealing the glory of God and the potential glory of man, he yet traversed the most familiar paths to reach the soul. No wonder that Christ's preaching produced a profound impression.

Compared with his wondrous words,

the dry and dusty doctrines of the scribes were as chaff in contrast with golden grain. He led men forth into a new world. The crimson sun betokening fair weather, or the flashing scimitar of summer lightning became symbolic of spiritual things. The corn ripening under the kiss of the sun or waving beneath the breeze, spoke of the Spirit's ways. The flowers decked the green mantle of earth like the ornate embroidery on a royal robe, and not only was Solomon eclipsed, but the fact of God's fatherly care became more certain. While the wheeling ravens and the sparrows chirping in the streets also spoke of an unforgetting Providence. Jesus showed the mother in the home, leavening the meal, salting a scant portion of meat, or even patching a worn garment, and the commonplace became a vehicle of the eternal. And the man filling his wine-skins and gossiping the while about a scapegrace son who had come back, or hearing of a traveller who had been attacked on the Jericho road, provided material for a masterly parable.

Christ is the preacher's model. So long as his servants strive to meet human needs as Jesus did, declaring the message of redemption, and applying the Gospel to the problems of today, the pulpit cannot be a spent force. Yet that does not mean that it cannot be more powerful than it is at present. Men want to hear the timeless themes of the divine ideal for the race, and Christ's love and sacrifice. They need the challenge of the Cross. But the more humanity blends with our divinity in the pulpit, the more effective will be its witness. There is need to remember that the sunlit heights may daunt some by their very altitude, and many a man so weary of life's way that he lacks even the inclination to essay the ascent. The minister who is in close touch with men, and still better if he has had some business experience, will make allowance for such. He will be touched with a feeling of their infirmities. He will impart reinforcement as well as counsel, but also comfort and courage. Understanding the discouraged and despairing before him, he will lay his glowing human heart alongside theirs, as Elisha placed his body on that of the stricken child. And what an effect this has on a human soul! Such preaching cannot be in vain. When he has built his altar and laid thereon the sacrifice of mind and heart, the divine fire will kindle it, and inspiration and conviction will result.

There is one other thing that needs to be re-affirmed, the power of the pulpit depends also on the pew to a remarkable degree.

Great hearing makes great preaching. Without disparaging our pulpit princes, one sometimes wonders if some of their success is not due to the fact that people go expecting something great, and so get it. We need to foster that spirit of expectancy, and then—strive to meet it. When a man feels that his congregation has assembled not to hear him, but to receive the word of the Living God, when he sees the look of earnest desire in their faces and knows that both he and his message have been the burden of his people's prayers, he will wield a power like unto that of the preachers of the past. His word will be in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Like Parker, knowing that he is an ambassador of Christ, the thought may overwhelm him for the moment, but realizing too that he speaks in the name of the Eternal King, he will be strong. God's word cannot return to him void. A new note of urgency will ring in his message. A deeper tenderness and sympathy will be felt in his ministry. And both he and his hearers, yes, and the world at large will begin to know the majesty of his mission. Thus while God speaks to men through men, the pulpit cannot be regarded as other than one of God's greatest agencies for the restoration of the race unto himself.—Church Management.

SONGS OF VARIOUS SCHOOLS.

INTERPRETED IN MASTERFUL STYLE BY ABBIE MITCHELL.

At Rush Memorial Church Recital.

Music is a jealous mistress and requires much of her admirers and lovers. Rigid and arduous must be the preparation before the acolytes are admitted to the ranks of priests and priestesses who chant her canticles and intone her prayers. And this course of training means traveling over a long, hard road, beset with trials and tribulations that tax the strongest fibre of the soul.

But to those who possess the will and courage to endure to the end there is no greater reward than is contained in the gracious favor of the goddess as it is conferred upon worthy exponents of her art.

Such an exponent sang a few nights ago to the delight and pleasure of her hearers, Abbie Mitchell, dramatic soprano, incomparable in her art, interpreted a program of unusual interest, with Medville Charlton, Mus. Doc., (A. A. G. O.) at the piano.

The recital was given in the auditorium of Rush Memorial A. M. E. Zion church, the Rev. G. M. Oliver, pastor, under the auspices of the church choir, of which Mrs. Elsie Benson Bourne is organist-director, and Mrs. Ruth A. Handy, president.

The program covered a wide range, and furnished an interesting background for interpretative ability of the artist and her accompanist. German lieder, Russian melodies, Italian and English art songs, with a Mendelssohn aria from a sacred cantata, "Hymn of Praise" and Coleridge-Taylor's wonderfully fine song for a soprano from "The Death of Minnehaha," second part of the "Hiawatha" trilogy, all sung in English brought rare enjoyment to a discriminating and appreciative audience.

Of course, the audience was not as large as it should have been. It is an unfortunate truth that with all his vast store of musical inclination, the Negro is notably lax in patronizing musical events. Russian, Hebrew, French, Italian, German or English artists of the calibre of Abbie Mitchell and Melville Charlton would have been greeted by an audience for which Rush Memorial church could have found no accommodation. Those present, however, made up in enthusiasm what they lacked in numbers.

With an unusual linguistic equipment at her command, Miss Mitchell elected to use only English for this recital; and it was a wise decision. She sings the Italian, German and French scores with the intonation and accent of a native, and she sings Hungarian, Russian, Yiddish with equal facility. But in choosing to stick to English in this recital, she was favoring the majority of the audience who lacked familiarity with most of the songs on the program.

This was true because the songs used are not often heard by race concert audiences. The opening song of the first group was a Madrigal by Vincent D'Indy, and this was followed by two Schubert lieder, "Restless Love" and "My Abode."

A variation from the printed program brought Godard's "Florian's Love Song" from its original position in the fourth group to head the second group, taking the place of Grieg's "Springtime." Then came two songs by a German composer of unusual attributes, Hugo Wolf's "In-satiable Love" and "Foreaken Maiden." Giuseppe Lillo's "Tomorrow," with its swing of classic syncopation, won the audience's favor and had to be repeated.

On her third appearance, the artist went out of the realm of soprano numbers and gave that magnificent tenor aria, "Sorrow of Death," from Mendelssohn's "Hymn of Praise" ("Watchman, will the night soon pass?") This was one of the notable high lights of the evening. Then came a Russian group, two songs by

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