

**GROUND OF CONFIDENCE IN FOREIGN
MISSIONS: A SERMON, PREACHED AT
PORTLAND, MAINE, SEPTEMBER 9, 1851,
BEFORE THE AMERICAN BOARD OF
COMMISSIONERS FOR FOREIGN
MISSIONS, AT THEIR FORTY-SECOND ANNUAL
MEETING, PP. 1-31**

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Ground of Confidence in Foreign Missions: A Sermon, Preached at Portland, Maine, September 9, 1851, Before the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, at Their Forty-Second Annual Meeting, pp. 1-31 by David H. Riddle

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DAVID H. RIDDLE

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AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

FOR

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AT THEIR

FORTY-SECOND ANNUAL MEETING.

BY DAVID H. RIDDLE, D. D.,

OF PITTSBURGH, PENN

B O S T O N :
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1851.

SERMON.

ISAIAH XLII. 14, 15.

FEAR NOT, THOU WORM JACOB, AND YE MEN OF ISRAEL; I WILL KEEP THEE,
SAITH THE LORD AND THY REDEEMER, THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL. BEHOLD,
I WILL MAKE THEE A NEW SHARP THRESHING INSTRUMENT, HAVING TEETH.
THOU SHALT THRESH THE MOUNTAINS, AND BEAT THEM SMALL, AND MAKE
THE HILLS LIKE CHAFF.

THESE words illustrate "the wisdom of God in a mystery," as distinguished from "the wisdom of this world," that cometh to nought. In the estimate of this world, power is the great object of desire and idol of admiration. The philosophy of human enterprises is, that success is rationally to be expected, as the instrumental agency is adequately proportioned in power to the result to be accomplished. Is a great work to be done; a railway, for example, to be constructed? Physical power, and the pecuniary means of obtaining it, must be provided, in proportion to the obstructions to be overcome, the mountains to be leveled, the valleys to be elevated, and the rivers and ravines to be spanned. Is a locomotive to be propelled along the highway, or a vessel along our rivers or across the ocean in a definite time? The propelling power or momentum must be proportioned to the speed desired, or resistance

to be overcome. Again, is a community or nation to be moved and moulded anew, in political principles or social customs? Power, of a different kind, must be employed, proportioned to the amount of existing error, prejudice, force of habit, or indisposition to change, — mental power, reasoning, persuasion, eloquence, and the enginery for bringing this power into contact with the mind and heart.

Such is the wisdom of the world, and such is its philosophy of success. In carrying on his great plan, “according to the good pleasure of his will,” God seems resolved to demonstrate another and deeper philosophy of power. It seems good in his sight so to accomplish results by instrumentalities, that in every case “the excellency of the power,” the superadded element which alone philosophically explains the result, “may be of God,” and not of the instrument employed. “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.”

Look at the case presented by the text. A great result is to be accomplished. Mighty resistance is to be overcome, mountains are to be threshed and beaten small, and hills made like chaff. And what is the agency employed? “Thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel;” “few men,” according to one interpretation, “dead men” in another; powerless and inadequate on either or any interpretation. Where is the proportion which human philosophy demands as indispensable? On its principles, what prospect is there of success? Yet the voice of God says, “Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel.” The philosophy of success here is the help

of the Almighty, supplying the obvious inadequacy of the instrumental agency. "I will help thee," — divine efficiency, working through human weakness. "I will make thee," or cause thee to become, "a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth; and thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and make the hills like chaff." The beautiful principle contained in this passage may be thus expressed: — *Want of proportion between instrumentality and results is no ground of discouragement in enterprises to be conducted by faith in God.*

This principle, illustrating the divine philosophy which governs God's great administration, would allow of a great variety of applications. We purpose on this occasion to apply it to the great enterprise in which we are engaged, and are here assembled to promote, *the work of foreign missions*; an application which all will grant is admissible, and by the divine blessing may be profitable.

I. Guided by the drapery of this passage, let us first contemplate *the inadequacy of the agency*, or want of proportion between the instrumentality employed and the result to be accomplished. For this purpose place in juxtaposition these two elements, a worm and the everlasting hills and mountains. What a contrast! What a sense of disproportion is at once produced! According to ordinary calculations, can a worm ever thresh these mountains, and beat them small, and make these hills like chaff? The reply of philosophy and experience is, No! It is impossible. To expect it is the acme of absurdity. Again, think of Israel as a people, in comparison

with the colossal empires and organized structures of power and opposition by which they are surrounded. What disproportion, estimated by human standards! Can these "few men," destitute of all elements of influence, inferior in science and wealth, wrestle successfully with the countless numbers and almost limitless resources of the rest of the world? Anterior to the event, who would venture to say that this nation, in the principles it embodied and was designed to perpetuate, would exist, and be wielding power when the whirlwind of ages had swept away these mighty empires, leaving only dust on the history and memory of their former greatness? Sense and human philosophy have here but one reply. "It cannot be."

Such is the contrast, figuratively presented, between the resources of the church, and the results to be accomplished in the enterprise of foreign missions. On the one hand are "mountains," whose massive and gigantic proportions it is difficult, with all our increased appliances of information, fully to realize, — mountains of error and iniquity, idolatry, superstition and false religion. "The strength of the hills" is here also "girded with power." Mighty systems, the growth of ages, the work of Satan and his auxiliaries, reared by the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high places, exerting their powers of construction, in many instances without any counteraction for ages, like coral workers in the depths of the sea, systems interwoven with the philosophy and science, associations and social customs of different nations, with the memory of the ancestral dead, venerable for antiquity, proud

in conscious power, strong-holds where prejudices and passions are entrenched! Yes, brethren, great mountains! The hand that reared these emblems of strength and endurance, over the geography of the earth, has selected them as best adapted to convey the reality. Verily, even the Himalayas and the Caucasus are only "figures of the true." Let any man carefully analyze the component elements of any one of these systems, Buddhism, Brahminism, Fetishism, Mohammedanism, or, worst of all, corrupted Christianity, "the mystery of iniquity," which began to work in apostolic times, and is coming to its grand climacteric in these last ages; let him try to unravel the manifold complications of caste, entangling in its web every grade and class of society, presenting at every point a fresh antagonism to the truth; and he will see the appropriateness of this figure to express the facts that meet us all over the field which "is the world," and be better able to measure the magnitude of the result to be accomplished. These great mountains we may not wisely, and cannot truthfully despise or depreciate.

And what, on the other side, have we of instrumental agency? "Worm Jacob, and few men," the very emblems of weakness and inadequacy. These words figuratively, but forcibly and fairly, represent the agency employed.

1. It is so intrinsically. The infinite Jehovah, who "sitteth on the circle of the earth," in thus designating Jacob, uses a figure indeed, but only thereby more impressively conveys the fact. By this selected phraseology he testifies the truth in the case, not only of ancient Israel, but of his people, the "true