

**PROGRESS, THE LAW OF THE MISSIONARY  
WORK. A SERMON PREACHED IN  
ROCHESTER, N.Y., SEPT., 1843, BEFORE THE  
AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS, AT THEIR THIRTY-  
FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING**

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Progress, the law of the missionary work. A sermon preached in Rochester, N.Y., Sept., 1843, before the American board of commissioners for foreign missions, at their thirty-fourth annual meeting by Thomas H. Skinner

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**THOMAS H. SKINNER**

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Progress, the Law of the Missionary Work.

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN ROCHESTER, N. Y., SEPT., 1843,

BEFORE THE

AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

FOR

FOREIGN MISSIONS,

AT THEIR

THIRTY-FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING.

BY REV. THOMAS H. SKINNER, D. D.,  
Pastor of the Mercer-street Presbyterian Church, New York.

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## S E R M O N .

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PHILIPPIANS, iii : 13.

*Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching  
forth unto those things which are before.*

WHEN this service, by another's relinquishing it, was unexpectedly devolved on me, I too should most gladly have declined it, on account of the imperfect state of my health, had there been any one to whom I was at liberty to transfer it. And there was another reason which might well have led me to shrink from the duty of this hour, were it not that providential calls are designed for those to whom they come. I regard the present occasion as of very great sacredness, and as imposing on me one of the gravest responsibilities of my life. The representatives of three thousand churches are assembled to consult together upon the work of giving the gospel to the world. They have appointed me to speak to them, in the name of Christ, concerning the business of their meeting :

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surely I may ask, without disparaging myself or any other person, Who is sufficient for the just performance of such an office! It calls for so unusual an unction from above, for so peculiar and uncommon a baptism of the Holy Spirit, not to mention other high qualifications, that I suppose no one living, duly aware of its demands, could undertake it without fear and trembling.

When I began to cast about my thought to find an appropriate subject of discourse, this missionary institution presented itself before me in two aspects. At first I beheld it as having already a vast and most weighty charge on its hands: eighty-six stations among the distant heathen, with five hundred laborers; sixty-two churches with twenty-three thousand members; and more than six hundred schools with twenty-seven thousand pupils; besides numerous printing establishments, with their founderies and presses for the use of the missions: a trust demanding so large a measure of liberality and of devoted and patient care, and being in itself of so unrestrainable a tendency to growth, that the fear would obtrude itself, of its becoming a burden which would not be long endured, without retrenchment and reduction. And this apprehension was strengthened by the monthly returns of deficiency to meet the expenses, which, until lately, was becoming larger and larger; and also by the following remarks in the last Annual Report: "While the heathen world never presented such openings as now for

missionary labors, there are all over christendom indications as if the work would not be conducted on a much broader scale, without a new impulse from on high." "We are now only where it was needful we should have been four years ago." "This great and favored community has been virtually at a stand for a series of years in the work of foreign missions:" and there was yet further confirmation to this forboding, in certain intimations here and there given, that the Board has advanced about as far as it is expedient it should go in this work. These things almost seemed decisive in favor of my making a discourse against retrogression—of undertaking to demonstrate that the apprehension adverted to is groundless; that no station need be surrendered; no missionary recalled; no church left in its infancy; as sheep in the wilderness without a shepherd; no school dissolved; no pupil dismissed: that the business of the society is in no danger of becoming unmanageable; that this noble work of modern evangelism need not commence so soon a backward movement. In this decision, however, I could not rest; for while I mused, this association assumed another appearance. I regarded it as sustaining other relations and responsibilities. It appeared in my view as a company of the followers of Christ, banded together by his command and his spirit, and also by mutual covenants and pledges to attempt the evangelization of the world. Instantly, the large and numerous missionary associations already existing, with the extreme diffi-



culty of sustaining them, passed from notice. They could no longer be thought of. For now the whole earth, with its corruption, guilt, and ruin presented itself as the field of action, and the perfect occupation of it with christian churches and institutions was the labor to be done—the burden to be borne. To this enterprise, in its world-wide extent, and with its demand for resources existing only in God, every member of this Board stood committed, by virtue of his holy calling, so that it had been a violation of their christian compact to disavow the accomplishment of this, as what they distinctly designed, and what they assuredly expected, along with others, and with help from God, to be instrumental in achieving. With this apprehension of their character and undertaking, such a strain of address as the first view suggested, could have no reconciliation. It was dismissed at once, and instead thereof, the point which it seemed most needful for me to enlarge upon before my fathers and brethren of this sacred association, was that they go forward with their undertaking, on the principle which governed the apostle in his personal religion; namely, that of forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. Accordingly I determined to speak to you with whatever measure of grace and strength God might give me, **ON THE REASONS FOR PROGRESS IN THE MISSIONARY WORK—THE WORK OF EVANGELIZING THE WORLD.**

I. A great and fundamental reason lies in the very nature of Christianity. In the christian scheme the following facts are essential:—that mankind are in a state of sin, and dying in this state are utterly lost; that their recovery can be effected only by their being christianized, or brought under the power of the gospel; that the gospel can do nothing where it has not been propagated or is unknown; that christian missions are the necessary means of its propagation; and that, under the divine blessing, these means are adequate, and their end certain. These facts which are, we may say, the ground-work of missions, their plea, their justification, their praise, are also an argument which no one can answer, for their most thorough and vigorous prosecution. They make an appeal to the hearts of Christians, which, if it was justly responded to, would at once constitute the universal church a missionary society, and would keep missions advancing with increasing speed and power, until no man would be left beneath the wide vault of heaven without the knowledge of the gospel. These great primary truths of Christianity render all degrees of missionary apathy in the church her unspeakable dishonor and reproach, implying unparalleled hardness of heart, if not downright insincerity in her confession of Christ. We propound it, therefore, as a matter self-evident and unquestionable, that Christianity should either be renounced as an imposture, or else be propagated through the world with all possible diligence; that there is no middle

way, which reason does not instantly repudiate, between denying the gospel altogether, and going forward with the work of spreading it among the nations of the earth, until the universal human race is brought under its influence.

II. The next reason is that the great missionary commandment has not passed away. The charge of Christ to his first disciples was meant for us who are here this day, as absolutely and perfectly as it was for them. If our divine Lord were at this meeting in bodily presence, and standing up visibly before us, should address to us the words, "All power is given to me in heaven and on earth: go ye therefore into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;" we should be under no obligation to obey him which is not now upon us. The proof of this is whatever demonstrates that Christianity was meant to be a permanent institute. The command to christianize mankind is a part of Christianity, as much so as the law of brotherly love, or the ordinance requiring the celebration of the death of Christ. To submit to the gospel is to make this command a rule of conduct. It is in the Christian's code, and why is he not as firmly bound by it, as by the precept, Let brotherly love continue; or by any other statute which the gospel enjoins? Indeed there is proof special and peculiar that this command was not given to the first disciples, except as including their successors. This proof exists in the annexed promise of our Lord, that he him-