



DR. AND MRS. EPHRAIM ADAMS

CHAPTER XXII

EVENTIDE

THE review in the preceding chapter was taken thirty-one years ago. Then was the noon of life, now the sun is near its setting; an hour that invites not only to rest from labor but to moments of reflection. When Isaac went out to meditate, it was at eventide. The author, sitting down at the eventide of his life to pen a few reflections for this closing chapter, would meditate, as it were, aloud. Here alone, almost wholly alone; the old workers all gone; of the Band all but two. Brother Salter yet remains, the pastor, although with an assistant, of his Burlington church which a few years since celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his labors among them. He was the youngest of the Band and very likely will be the last. Ere long, probably, the cane will be his.⁴⁸ How sad was the accident on that bright summer morning that took from him his beloved wife!⁴⁹ Of the first wives of the other members of the Band, they, also, are gone, all but two. The wife of Brother Spaulding still lives at Ottumwa, the scene of their

⁴⁸ Note 16.

⁴⁹ Note 17.

early labors. The other is she who is with me yet. Why are *we* thus spared, together, the only two permitted to see a golden wedding day? Of later co-workers that have passed away as the years have gone, what a list! As their names are recalled and the names, too, of many of the members of the early churches, there starts up a face, attitudes are seen, tones of voice are heard, but they are no longer here. For each one the sun has set. What a large company from Iowa is gathered on that brighter shore! To be there when the shades of night have settled over this eventide, then to go in the infinite grace of the heavenly Father to join them, is the hope. And yet, while the eventide remains, 't is pleasant to think of the past. First of all, how God's hand has been in everything! As to the Band, its organization, its choice of a field, the timeliness of entering it, its preparedness to be entered, these were not from any human foresight or wisdom, but somehow of God. And since coming in the inexperience of youth to begin here the work of the ministry, in such a country as this then was, and continuing in it these many years, how evident now that God's care has attended! Twice only have there been even moments of anything like homesickness or anxiety. Once in the earlier years, in cholera times, when leaving the unkept burying ground, a marshy, weedy place, where we had buried one who had been suddenly stricken, the thought, Oh, to be taken sick and to die, perhaps,

and buried in such a place as this, far, far away from home and kindred! caused a shudder for a moment; but nothing of the kind has happened. Youth has been spared to manhood and manhood to age, even to old age of eighty and three. No chills or fever. In my preaching days, not a sick one of any kind; every appointment filled except a half dozen or so. Surely God's care has been constant. Twice lonely. Once in those early years, again, later. As the older brethren and those of the Band began to drop off and new brethren to multiply, there came one day the thought of becoming old, of standing almost alone, of being among newcomers, unknown, uncared for, unnoticed, set aside. This, too, for a moment was like a gathering cloud. But it has never been. Age, to be sure, but not the other part of it. A great joy has it been and one of life's great privileges to meet the brethren, especially at Association time. Never was one anticipated with greater pleasure than the one next to be held. So, as a Band, God has been good to us, not only in giving a goodly field, in his individual care, but in blessing us in our labors. Looking backward upon the past, there is but one unpleasant thought that intrudes. It is that there has been such dulness to see and slowness to improve the opportunities scattered all along the way. And yet, close to this there comes another, that God has used even imperfect instruments to his own glory. And this is joy again. Were life to be lived over, this

would be a good motto—Do the work at hand, do it well, and God will open the way. For he hath opened it and wrought, most wonderfully wrought.

Yes, what wonderful changes, how great the progress made! Not now in the world abroad, but in Iowa! When entered in 1843, it was a wild, Indian country, save two narrow strips; now it is a Christian state, covered over with happy homes; its once bridgeless streams, bridged; in place of bridle paths, roads for vehicles of business and pleasure; railroads, too, lacing and interlacing till stations are placed within a few miles of every home. Better yet, within every two miles provision is made for a schoolhouse. In every town and city, among the noblest buildings, are schoolhouses for the children. 13,861 schoolhouses valued at \$17,655,992; 28,789 teachers. These are pleasant figures to look at. As they are considered, there comes to mind a picture of a schoolhouse, visited over fifty years ago, where the teacher was weaving cloth, his loom festooned with pumpkins cut in strips and hung up to dry. A contrast, surely! And the the academies, the colleges, the seminaries. Our own Denmark Academy the first of all in territorial days. And of colleges, our Iowa College the first in the state. We called it a college then; it was in fact only a school at first, and a small one at that; but we called it a college, not for what it was, but was to be. It is pleasant now to look back and see how it has grown. Fresh in mind as if yes-

terday is that rainy afternoon when its first little building at Davenport was dedicated. Not more than a dozen present. A prayer and a brief address. To think now of the Grinnell Campus, with its buildings and furnishings, its teachers, students and graduates—this is pleasing. It is a long term of service given to it, that of trustee from the first till now, at no trifling cost of time and money, and not a little of toil, with some anxiety. But to attend even one Commencement pays for it all. So there is pleasure also in thinking how the churches have multiplied. Instead of that little one at Denmark of 32 members in 1838, the first of our Congregational churches now extant, west of the Mississippi, there are now over 300 of them with a membership of over a thousand to one then. To think of the vast numbers these churches have sent to the West and North, to Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas and elsewhere, even to the Pacific, showing how Iowa has been a kind of seed plot for regions around and beyond—all this is pleasant. To have seen all this growth and development in one's own life, the privilege of having been in it and of it, is now the glow of the sunset hour. To see, as now it is so plainly seen, how God's hand has been in it all, makes it an hour, not only of joy and thanksgiving for the past, but of faith and hope for the future that things begun are to go on. Yes, with faith in God's loving this world and working for its redemption, life's sun is setting with no pessimistic cloud to obscure, but,

rather, in the glow of faith and hope. True, the skies are not all clear; clouds there are, enough of them. The millennium is not here; peace is not yet abroad upon the earth. The sins of the nations, yea, of the people, are many. The problems thicken of things to be done and changes to be made. To a thoughtful mind the appearance of impending crises is oppressive. But then it always has been so. And how the crises have been passed; what changes for the better have come, even in one short life, warranting faith and hope as to the outcome!

In youth, slavery like a dark pall overshadowed the land. Where is it now? How many things come to mind, once tolerated and defended, now discarded, set aside, things in which some religious principle or moral element was involved. Why should not the good work go on? Why not changes come—change after change, raising higher and higher the standard of morals, making our Christian civilization more truly Christian—Christians everywhere becoming more truly such, realizing what in this world it means *to be* a Christian? And what a gap here between what is and what ought to be! What a curtailment of worldly living; what truer use of talents and possessions as God's gifts for doing good in the world there must be before we begin to follow closely in the footsteps of our blessed Lord! Yes, *begin* to do it. For how superficial, how shallow does life now seem to have been! Looking at it thus in the reflections

of this eventide, how it seems as though the great thing needed was for Christians somehow to be brought to a stand in the rush and whirl of life, and each take time seriously to inquire, "Am I living as the Lord Jesus would have me? As to the purpose of my life, the use of what God has given me of talents, wealth and opportunities; in my home and among my neighbors; in social and civil life; in everything, even to the food I eat and the clothes I wear; am I living as Christ would have me, ready to put off and to put on, so as to be meet for his use here, and to meet him in glory hereafter?"

This would be a revival indeed!—just the revival which seems to be now needed; the only revival that can save the Church from being weighted down by shallow conversions, if conversions at all, followed by a low standard of Christian living, which she in her own practice is herself imposing. Such a revival is what the Church needs. The world needs it; in a sense is waiting for it, that there may be felt in it the force of the living Christ in the hearts and lives of his followers. For, somehow, just as this is, the standards of morality are raised, and the forces of evil are weakened.

Here we catch a glimpse of the time when strifes and contention shall have ceased; the mists and the clouds shall have cleared away; capital and labor and all such problems have found their solution; social questions, their ready answer; this greed for wealth

have died out; prosperity be sanctified, and the whole earth smile in the goodness of the Lord. This, when Christ is enthroned in the hearts of the children of men.

And if this is ever to be, who shall lead the way? Who but they who stand at the altar, the ministers of Christ, as the prophets of the Lord? they in boldness to declare the claims of the Lord Jesus upon every soul; that infidelity to him or wandering from him are sins calling for repentance and return; that for any soul refusing to obey him there is no hope of life eternal; that nations too can incur the displeasure and bring down the judgments of God who hath said of our Lord and Christ, "This is my beloved Son, hear him."

As these reflections come at this hour, when in a measure life's work is done and one seems almost alone with God, to what conclusions are they leading? Is it that from our pulpits the tone of awe and reverence of a holy God, a fear of his justice and judgments has been dying out? This not to frighten people, but to be true to God and to show that we see his ways and walk in them. Perhaps.

At any rate, if ever there was a time when the ministry should seriously inquire how to live and how to preach, now is the day. As these thoughts are borne in, the impulse comes to break out of this meditative mood and utter to the ministry at large a word of —, but no! this is too assuming. Still,

had I the ear of my brother ministers in Iowa, I would dare to say, Dear brethren, the crown of all work, the most potent, the most far-reaching power for good in this world, so far as man is concerned, is the preaching of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, each one in the church and among the people where in the providence of God he is placed. In his providence you are here in Iowa. One cannot go everywhere or do everything. This is your field. What better can you desire? Ponder well its history; its rapid growth; its wonderful development. There is inspiration in it. If in its workers at the beginning of things you see aught to admire or imitate, bear it in mind. But live not in the past. Dwell not upon it as though the favored times were behind you. Think not in yourselves to say, "No frontiers now; no more the days of heroic, Christian labor here, but the humdrum of commonplace, everyday work." No! no! Keep your eye upon the present. See what is *now* going on; what *now* is to be done, with your face ever to the future. Growth and development! They are just beginning. Look up and around. Two millions and more now here, indeed, but millions more are soon to be. The vast territories of thirty-one years ago are states now swiftly filling up with their millions crowding on to far distant Alaska. The whole nation is expanding within and without. New problems are pressing, problems at home and problems abroad. Think of Cuba. Think of the Philippines. Think of

the world. No! no! You stand at the threshold of mighty things, in view of which, now, now are the beginnings. This new century is to pass away and others are to come. It opens with no bow of peace spanning the heavens; no breaking of clouds as of victories easily won; but the gatherings of storms and conflicts rather.

The final issue is indeed sure, for God is; but not without faithful, courageous and self-denying labor on the part of his people. No! no! again. The true frontiers, the heroic days are before, not behind. Around every Christian minister there runs a line across which are new steps to be taken, new advances made to bring him nearer to the pattern of his Lord. So around his church. So around the whole Church at large in these world-engrossing days. The wide, wide gap must be filled, for a type of Christianity to cope with the present-day forces of this evil world and do the work now opening up before us.

For the doors are being lifted up. We are talking of a King and a kingdom here, on earth as never before. We are beginning to realize that it is not simply a personal salvation by and by in heaven above through a quiet, silent faith in Jesus; this world endured, got along with till that shall be, but that this Jesus has a kingdom here on earth. This kingdom is to be established by the faithful service of those who hear his voice. "As my Father hath sent me even so send I you." They that toil even to self-denial and

suffering here, are the ones to reign with Him above. What a life this is compared to one of ease and quiet with our heads upon the bosom of the Church and our hearts in the world!

Dear brethren, in view of the world's need, with the gospel remedy so plainly in view, do not the very times demand a Christian living and a Christian preaching as never before? Who will lead the way? Here is the frontier work, here are to be found the heroic days. Soon, soon this young century will have grown old. Sooner, sooner than this your sun will have set. Let it be at the close of a day well spent. Each faithful in his own field, for faithful work in Iowa is world-wide. Help to make her more and more the gem of states. This cannot fail to bless the nation and the nations of earth.

A single word more, — not as an expression simply of personal feeling, but in behalf of my brethren of the Band now no more, but who, if living, would doubtless join me in saying, "Dear brethren, you have been kind to us, and very considerate. We have loved the work, have loved you. In your annual gatherings of fellowship and counsel some of us have always been with you, till but two are left. Ere long it will be said, "The last one is gone." May the blessings of God rest upon you. Be ye faithful. And now, adieu.