

A SURPRISE

(Sunday Morning, August 19, 1906)

One of the side features of the convention was something of a surprise. It was in the form of a delegation from the First Christian Church of St. Paul, making request that one of the ministers attending the convention should preach at their morning service on the Sunday which concluded the convention sessions. The regular pastor, it seems, was absent on a vacation, and the deacons learning of a Bible Student Convention in the city thought surely some ministers would be present and that one of them could take their service. Bro. Williamson, as the chairman of the convention, having heard the request, promptly assured the delegation that their wishes would be complied with, and that the speaker would not ask for any share in the collection taken at the service. The matter was given to Brother Russell to decide upon, and he requested Bro. Williamson to fulfill the invitation. The matter was not announced at the convention, as it was not desired to detract from the attendance at the convention sessions, and but few friends of the Truth were present at the First Christian Church, together with about seventy-five of the regular congregation. One of the deacons asked Bro. Williamson how much time he desired in speaking, and when Bro. Williamson replied, "About forty minutes, brother," the deacon seemed somewhat startled. He had prepared a lengthy program (apparently the usual church service), which of itself would require nearly an hour, and leave very little time to anyone to speak. He made the remark that the weather being extremely hot perhaps the speaker would not like to say so much that morning, and that if he preferred to close his remarks sooner than thirty minutes it would be all right!

The elder of the church conducted the formal parts of the service, which consisted of an organ voluntary, the doxology, an invocation, responsive readings, a hymn, Scripture reading, another hymn, prayer, taking the collection, another hymn, announcements (including the annual young peoples' watermelon party), and the introduction of the speaker. The announcements contained an item calling attention to Bro. Russell's discourse, "To Hell and Back," for the afternoon, and in making mention of this the elder said some very striking things, which rather surprised his hearers. He remarked, "I know something of these people, and I am satisfied they are doing a good work. I trust that everyone in this congregation who can do so will make it a point to be present at this lecture this afternoon. I am satisfied you will hear something good - something you never heard before." It was evident the elder wished to give a favorable impression of the society and its presentations to the congregation, for in making the introduction to the speaker he said further: "We, as a denomination, have a work to perform, which we are trying to accomplish, and the Watch Tower Society also has a work to perform, which it is accomplishing. That society is doing a very remarkable work, a work which no one else seems to be doing - I had almost said, a work which we ought to be doing! Bro. Williamson will tell us something about it in his talk this morning, and I trust you will give him an attentive hearing, and a cordial greeting at the close!"

It was difficult to determine whether the gentleman fully appreciated the significance of his remarks or not, but the congregation certainly gave excellent attention, and was very cordial in its greetings after the service. Notwithstanding the hint given by the deacon before the service Bro. Williamson found enough in the message of good tidings of great joy to keep the congregation interested for an hour, probably three times as long as they had listened to a discourse in their edifice previously, the subject of the talk being, "The Doctrine of Free Grace," and the text, Romans 5:12-18. Quite a number at the close of the service intimated that they had had their minds stirred with new thoughts, and seemed desirous of hearing of more of "this way."

FAREWELL ADDRESS BY BROTHER RUSSELL

(1911 Convention Report, Page 301.)

Dear Friends, we have come to the closing hour of the convention. From all that I can learn, I am sure all of those in attendance have been greatly pleased by this session of fellowship together and study of God's Word. We are learning more and more how precious is our Heavenly Father's Word. We are learning more and more that in past times we have misunderstood it greatly, and that a great blessing comes to us in connection with its study. It is not inappropriate that we remind all of the dear friends that the Bible is not understood by the majority of people, and not intended to be understood by the majority. Our heavenly Father's plan is that to the great mass of mankind it shall be a sealed book. The only ones to whom he is pleased to reveal the secret of that Book are those who are his people. And by his people we mean not those of any particular sect, or party or denomination or shibboleth, but those who are his through consecration of their hearts, through full devotion to the Lord - the class that is mentioned, you remember, by the Lord when he says, "The secret of the Lord is with them that reverence him, and he will show them his covenant."

So then, I trust that the Bible students of this convention have for the major part been of this fully consecrated class, and I trust therefore that their eyes being anointed by the Holy Spirit they have been enabled more and more to see and know and appreciate the deep things of God, the things pertaining to the divine plan, as it relates to the present life, and also those features of the divine plan which relate to the life which is to come, both for the church on the plane of glory and for the world on the earthly plane, because the secret of the Lord is for those, and they may know it more and more as they seek to grow in grace, grow in knowledge, and grow in love, and grow in all the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. I will trust, then, that you have made progress, and as you go from here this afternoon, or tomorrow morning, to your homes that you will carry blessings with you to the other friends there, many of them just as sincere as ourselves, and their

heart sympathies and prayers have been with us I know, and many letters tell us so. As you go back to your homes I wish you would carry, amongst other things, my love to the dear ones at home; tell them they were remembered here every day; that we were of those who were favored with the opportunity and means to come, and we thought of the others not thus highly favored, not thus highly privileged; and that while we were drinking at the fountain of grace and truth, we were hoping and praying that some blessing would extend out to them; and then in harmony with those prayers and those desires, as you go to your homes try to unfold to others some of the blessings you have received. As your cup has been filled, may it continue to overflow like the widow's cruse of oil, you remember, they brought vessels and poured oil into them until they were filled, and then more were filled, and they kept bringing more vessels, and they were filled; and so it is with God's Holy Spirit; if we shall as vessels of the Lord go from here full of the Spirit of the Lord, his blessing will be with us so that these shall overflow upon all the dear ones with whom we come in contact, that they may have a share of these blessings. God who is rich in grace is able thus to provide for those afar off as well as those who are near. And now may the God of Grace and Peace be with us and bless us, and may we carry with us to our homes the Divine blessings. Amen.