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The Morning Call

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SERMON ON HOSPITAL

Delivered by Rev. S. G. Wagner
Yesterday.

A MASTERLY DISCOURSE

And Appropriate, as the Offerings at
Both Services Were Devoted to the
Local Institution — Abstract
of His Sermon.

Rev. Dr. S. G. Wagner, pastor of St. John's Reformed Church, yesterday morning preached a sermon on the subject of the hospital, basing his remarks on Matt. 25:36: "I was sick and ye visited me." He said it was an especially suitable occasion for the subject, as the offerings of the congregation at both the morning and evening services were to be for the Allentown Hospital. He said in part:

"It may be safe to affirm that the hospital is a Christian institution—an outgrowth of the Christian Church. It is one of the noblest and most commendable fruits of that love which the author of our religion, so preeminently emphasizes, and so strongly enforces upon his followers, which in fact he affirms is so essential to his own being and nature and consigns to the nature and being of all his children. 'Tis said of Julian the apostate, that although he bitterly opposed the so-called new way, was an unrelenting enemy to anything it stood for, he was still obliged, on witnessing the simple, beautiful and lovely lives of those of that strange faith to commend or at least challenge attention to some of their wonted doings. He conceded that should they overcome and conquer popular prejudice, it would be accomplished not by their faith, but, rather by their works. These were such that they extorted from him the eulogistic phrase or exclamation: 'See how these Christians love one another.'

Jesus, sent a supplicating message to Him by a letter carrier entreating a deliverance from his disease and Christ so far honored his application that he sent one of his disciples to heal his disorder. The application of this great man was a marvelous one and well worth repeating in part in the way of satisfying a curiosity as to how Christ was received by the outside world. He writes: 'I've heard the reports respecting Thee and Thy cures, as performed by Thee without medicines and without the use of verbs. For, as 'tis said, Thou causest the blind to see again, the lame to walk and Thou cleanse the lepers and Thou castest out impure spirits and demons and Thou healest those who are tormented by long disease and Thou raiseth the dead and hearing of all these things of Thee I concluded in my mind one of two things, either Thou art God and have descended from heaven and doest these things or else being them Thou art the son of God; therefore, now I've written Thee and besought Thee to visit me and to heal the disease with which I am afflicted. I have also heard that the Jews murdered against Thee and are plotting to injure Thee. I have a very small, but noble estate, which is sufficient for us both, for Thee and for me.'

"The following of so strange a Being would be likely to catch His spirit, to be prompted by His feelings, to be influenced by His examples, and, moreover, to obey His commands. Some of them, His first disciples, the early Apostles, have been especially endowed by Him, did as He did. They went about doing good, healing all manner of diseases. * * * The deacons and deaconesses of the early church visited the sick in their homes. Even in times of persecution and pestilence all Christians joined in such pious and commendable acts. For a somewhat extended period the Christian Church was under the ban of the state and hence their good deeds did not always see the light of day. They were not flaunted before the public, observation did not invite public opposition or possible persecution. During that period, therefore, we have no knowledge of the development of the building, known as it is now, under the name of the hospital, but when the ban of the state was lifted then such separate buildings for the reception and accommodation of the sick and needy and the stranger began to be erected in all parts of the empire and as the bishops were the first having authority in those days these buildings came directly under their care and they in turn employed others to manage the details. It is reported of Basil, the Great (330-379) that he has the credit of having built the most complete institution of the kind, having provided in it accommodations for seven lepers. The Emperor Julian was stirred up by the example of the Christians to provide on a general scale for the sick. Somewhat later Placella, the wife of Theodose the Great, is mentioned as devoting much time to hospita service, performing even menial duties.

"The first person to build a hospital in Rome was again a woman named Fabiola, one of Jerome's converts, who out of penitence for what theology calls a construe sin (a second marriage after divorce on the ground of her husband's adultery, which was contrary to church law) devoted all her property to charitable purposes. Jerome himself (her instructor) had previously built a hospital. There is mention made of hospitals in Gaul in the fifth century. In Germany in the eighth or ninth century. The Irish missionaries in the latter period built them in different parts of Northern Europe."

The speakers here produced a further number of examples to prove that the hospital is an institution of the Christian church and for ages maintained and supported by the church. Continuing the speaker said: "And it is still fostered by the church. In almost every large city, in home and foreign lands you will find one or more hospitals built by the Catholic or the Episcopal or possibly by some other denomination. In our own church, by order of the late general synod, the institution of the deaconesses is being re-established and in all probability in the near future we shall have one of these noble organizations in our own valley. Measures have been adopted in that direction. Why should not the modern Christian church engage in work like this? In the exact proportion in which she may have lost her interest in this form of beneficent work, has she lost her influence over the masses. * * *

"Our local hospital is now knocking at our doors and hearts. It wants help from each one of us. It has a right to expect it. By the generosity of this community, of its men and its women, it has been founded. Through means furnished by one of noble Christian-hearted fellow-citizens a new wing has been far advanced towards completion, which will add greatly to its efficiency. Our home physicians and surgeons, without money and without price, have cheerfully laid their time and energy and wisdom and skill upon its altar and much, yea very much, good has been done. Many sick have been healed, many suffering have been relieved whether by the healing potion or the sharp knife of the surgeon. The mortality has been exceptionally small in the large number of cases treated. The circular sent to the different church sets down the number at 875, representing a dozen denominations and nine nationalities, most of whom were treated free of charge. This shows clearly that our excellent hospital is carried forward in the spirit of the Master. It is no respecter of persons. * * * In my official capacity as pastor of this congregation I have had an occasional opportunity to visit and see for myself the altogether satisfactory condition of the hospital, its wards and its equipment, the kindly service of its nurses and employes and the commendable supervision of its physicians and surgeons. I once dreaded the very name of hospital. I dread it no longer, now that I came and saw and conquered prejudice. Let us one and all be friends and warm supporters of the hospital. It is ours, it belongs to us, we have a right to expect its services if we need it. What we do to further the institution ourselves, we do for the sick and the suffering who may at any time be brought into it. And let our inspiration be the words of the Great Healer: 'Whatsoever ye did unto one of the least of these, My brethren, ye did unto Me. I was hungry and ye gave Me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave Me drink. I was a stranger and ye took Me in; naked and clothed Me. I was sick and ye visited Me.'