

CANADIAN PULPIT.

No. 45.

The following sermon from the pen of the Rev. W. Cleland, of this city, will be read with interest. Rev. Mr. Cleland was born in the parish of Kilmoro, Ireland, and was educated at the Royal College, Belfast, was ordained in August 1849, and was married on the 1st of October 1856 to the third daughter of the late Rev. J. Johnston, and niece of the late Rev. Dr. Cook of Belfast. His pastorates were, Brooklyn, N. Y., 1849 to 1854; Uxbridge 1853 to 1869; South Gower, 1869 to 1873; W. Gwillimbury, 1873 to 1879; St. Andrews, Niagara, 1879 to the date of his retirement.

TEXT:—"But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared," Ps. cxxx. 4. There is a fitness in things. The same medicine that is suitable at one stage of a disease may be very unsuitable at another. In attendance on his patients, the skillful physician is careful to keep this in constant remembrance, otherwise he may do harm rather than good. The spiritual physician must be no less careful to observe a like canon of treatment, else he may minister death rather than life. The Gospel is his repository of healing. Its doctrines are the medicine divinely prescribed for conveying relief to the sick and diseased and dying. Woo unto him if he fails to dispense this medicine, that is, if he preaches not the Gospel, yea, if he preaches not the Gospel in its fullness, "Woo is me if I preach not the Gospel," said one who discharged the duties of the ministry more than eighteen hundred years ago, with a measure of wisdom and success that has never since been paralleled, and who at the close of a life illumined throughout by an enthusiasm that neither toil, nor difficulty nor danger was able to quench, could say, in the proud consciousness of an abounding faithfulness, that he had not stammered to declare the whole counsel of God. But in his pulpit services, and perhaps yet more in his private ministrations, the preacher of the Gospel must be studious to exercise a wise discrimination. To address all as partakers already of the great salvation, needing only building up in faith and hope, would be highly injudicious, and probably, to some extent, injurious. The text is evidently intended for a distinct class among them, to whose spiritual condition it is peculiarly adapted. Revealing as it does the divine character in its most gracious aspect, it possesses interest and value for all, and that too at all times; but it is manifest that it possesses a peculiar significance for a special portion of them. Who these are, and what the peculiar import of the announcement it conveys will be seen as we proceed in the discussion. There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared.

Sin is brought before us under a variety of images in the Scriptures. It is described as uncleanness, corruption, disease—everything that is vile and loathsome it is. But it is evident that it is regarded under a somewhat different aspect in the text. Clearly, it would be grossly inappropriate to speak of the forgiveness of a disease. As the language of the text suggests, it is more than disease, or uncleanness, or corruption of soul. It is crime, and of the worst kind too. It is rebellion against God, it is treason to the King of kings, it insults His Majesty, it challenges His power, it defies His authority, it disregards His law, it tramples under foot His multiplied claims to love and obedience; and, were it allowed unchecked sway, it would overturn Jehovah's throne, and drive God out of his own universe. In consequence its appropriate penalty is death—loss of the divine Saviour, subjection to the divine wrath, the endurance of God's righteous judgments forever. This is not, however, the view of sin that is usually entertained by many to whom the gospel is preached. They fail to look at it in its true character, to see in its destructive tendency. They fail, as some one has said, to realize that they themselves are fast sinking under the load of its guilt into the depths of wrath. What such persons need is to be pitted with such an exposition of the exceeding awfulness of sin, of the imminent danger that always accompanies a sinful and impenitent condition; such an exhibition of the unspotted

holiness, unbending justice and almighty power of God, as well as such a faithful presentation of the unchanging claims of a violated law as may awaken them out of their lethargy and false security. And, when they are awakened—when, under a terrible realizing apprehension of the perilous condition in which sin has placed them they are led to cry out with the Jerusalem murderer, "what shall we do," or with the Philippian jailer, "what must we do to be saved," they need to be addressed in a very different strain. It would evidently be exceedingly injudicious, and probably highly injurious to continue to ply such persons with the preaching that has happily and by the power of the Holy Ghost, brought them into the condition, sad, it is true, yet exceedingly salutary, in which they are now found. To address them now in fervent delineations of the holiness of the divine nature, of the justice of the divine character, of the anger of the almighty against sinners, of the peril that attends the transgression of the divine law—to expatiate now upon the enquiry suggested by the psalmist, in the verse immediately preceding the text, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" would betray a sore want of the wisdom that is needed in winning souls, and be almost certainly more hurtful than otherwise. What is wanted now is a faithful exhibition of the divine goodness, of the divine compassion, mercy and love. To ply them now with the assurance of the text; to tell them now in all the fervor of compassionate and discriminating faithfulness, that there is forgiveness with God—forgiveness with God, even for such sinners as they now in all the bitterness of a timely awakening feel themselves to be, is the only way to usher them into the peace that settles down upon the troubled bosom, when a believing apprehension of



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of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus takes possession of the soul. But I can imagine an awakened sinner, as if feeling that the news is too good to be true, addressing to the preacher the enquiry, is there indeed forgiveness with God—will He, the Holy and just one, be propitious to me—is he of a very truth ready to pardon? The very reply has to be in the affirmative. From the throne of His glory the Almighty has unfurled the banner of His love; from the heights of His holiness He has sent forth the proclamation of His mercy. In the mystery of the incarnation, and the tragedy of the cross, he has sent forth the proclamation anew with added emphasis. In the volume of His Word He has given a multitude of most assuring declarations to the same effect, conveyed in a variety of expressions; speaking of His act of pardon, now, as a lifting up of the sins of the forgiven—a lifting up of a burden from off their shoulders, so that it shall oppress them no more,—and again, as a covering of them so that they shall be hid out of sight forever; now, as a non-imputation of them, so that they shall never rise up in judgment against them, again, as a blotting them out, so that they shall be as though they had never been, yea, as a non-remembrance of them, so that they shall be forgotten as well as forgiven. Is it any wonder then, that the Apostle looking at those to whom a compassionate God has graciously extended his forgiveness, pardoning all their offences, wiping out all their guilt, joyously announces that there is no condemnation to them, triumphantly asks, who shall lay anything to their charge? But the Almighty has not only given in His Word the most gracious assurance of his willingness to forgive, but He has proved it by visible token, by thrilling facts in instances as numerous and as lustrous as the stars that bestud a midnight sky. He has extended His forgiveness to multitudes even of the vilest and most abandoned of our fallen species; to such men as Manasseh, as wicked a king as ever disgraced a throne, as Paul, a bloody persecutor and blasphemer, as the Jerusalem murderers who imbrued their hands in the blood of the Redeemer; to such women as Mary Magdalene, out of whom the Saviour cast seven devils. And we rejoice to think that there are multitudes living around and among us, yea, in all lands illumined by the light of the gospel, whom he has made partakers of the same ineffably precious blessing. Nor should we forget the myriads, the countless hosts, around the eternal throne, once as guilty and as vile, as we in our self-humiliation have ever confessed ourselves to be, whom He has dealt with in mercy, received into His favor, gathered home to His glory.