

Erskine (Toronto), and Her New Minister.

Dominion Presbyterian Special.

Rev. James Murray preached to his new congregation on Sabbath last. He enters upon a ministry that promises to be long and fruitful. Three men have preceded him as ministers in that congregation, and it is more than sixty years since organization was first granted to ten persons, members of the United Secession Church of Scotland, from which germ the present congregation has arisen. It was in 1839 that the Rev. John Jennings was called, and for thirty-five years he continued to minister to the people, resigning in 1874 on account of failing health. Rev. John Smith succeeded him in the following year, and for thirteen years was a faithful and devoted pastor. His sudden death early in 1888 for a second time left the congregation without a minister, and in the midsummer of the same year a call was addressed to the Rev. W. A. Hunter, then minister at Orangeville. Mr. Hunter accepted and entered upon his ministry in Erskine in October of that year. In 1897 Dr. Hunter was obliged to seek relief for an affection of the lungs in a milder climate. He was greatly beloved, both by his congregation and by his brethren in the Presbytery, and leave of absence was granted him, and subsequently renewed, in the hope that he might eventually return to resume his pastorate once more. In the late summer of 1898 Dr. Hunter felt that he could no longer hope to return to his work in Canada, and asked to be released from his pastorate here. His resignation was sorrowfully accepted, and again the congregation sought one to lead them in service. Mr. Murray accepted their call, and now stands among them, strong, stalwart and alert to lead them in the service to which they have pledged themselves.

The theme of the induction sermon was strangely accordant with the history of the congregation. Some, not acquainted with the experience through which it had passed, thought it strange that "truth learned through suffering" should be the theme chosen, and yet it was eminently fitting. Few congregations have passed through so stormy an experience as this one. As early as 1853 there were some, indeed quite an influential section of the congregation, who could not see eye to eye with others, and they went out from the not too strong parent body, and formed what became the Gould street, now St. James Square, congregation. Still the parent congregation worked on, and gradually gathered strength again. Several years afterwards, in 1860, the church building, then situated at the corner of Bay and Richmond streets, was badly damaged by fire, and the congregation was obliged to seek a new meeting place for a time. Six years later, the health

of Dr. Jennings, their minister failed, and he was obliged to leave them for six months, but the congregation held its own under the temporary ministrations of the late Rev. Wm. Burns, then a student in Theology at Knox College. Two years afterwards a severe storm swept over the city, and the tower and roof of the ill-fated church suffered severely. In 1875 troubles from within again culminated in a considerable section leaving the parent fold, and forming what is now the Central church. The movement towards the residential parts of the city was begun by this congregation, which in 1878-79, purchased a site on Caer Howell Street, and erected a beautiful church there at a cost of \$32,000. Just five years after, the new church was almost completely destroyed by fire one Sabbath afternoon, but was rebuilt, and is now one of the most homelike auditoriums in the city.

Through it all Erskine Church has made way, perhaps all the purer and stronger because of the trials through which she has passed. Certain it is that, after building two new churches, partially rebuilding three times, sending out a nucleus for at least two strong congregations, she has now a church all but free from debt, a people far from discouraged, harmonious and eager for service, and a minister who has already proven himself a workman whom the Master has honored.

His sermons on Sabbath gave clear evidence of the spiritual tone of the man. For the morning Mr. Murray chose as his theme, "The preeminence of Christ," based upon the well-known passage, Colossians 1-12-18. Though no formal divisions were announced it was easy to recognize the three great thoughts that possessed the mind of the preacher. Naturally he was first held by the great theme of the passage—that God has made Christ pre-eminent in all things. Without attempting an exposition in detail, in a few clear, terse sentences, the preacher spoke of the pre-eminence given to Christ in equality with the Father, in creation, as Creator, in providence, and in grace, as the foundation and federal head of the church.

"But," said the preacher, as he passed to the second thought moving him, and his manner changed as he came to close quarters, "what is the great practical bearing of this great truth upon human life. What place do you propose to give Him whom God has made pre-eminent? Is he to hold the supreme place in your affections?" In earnest tone he spoke of the Christ as the only One worthy to hold the first place there, and suggested rather than described, the life of the man in whose heart Christ sat enthroned. It was scarcely a sermon here. Unstudied, careless of oratorical grace, the speaker talked with us heart to heart, and he spoke effectively.

Once again his manner changed as he spoke of himself and of his own determination with respect to this great truth. "For him, during his ministry, Christ should be supreme, the great central theme of all his preaching from that pulpit." During the first part of the sermon the new minister had been conscious of his new congregation, and was just a little hampered by the consciousness. When he had passed to the second part, he lost that consciousness and was an ambassador of Christ, pleading on his behalf with his fellowmen. Again, he remembered that he was preaching his first sermon in his new charge, but it was no restraining bond. He had risen above that, as he boldly declared that while he stood in that pulpit his supreme ambition should be to speak of the Christ whom he loved, and for whose service he hoped to win his people in love.

We had heard that Mr. Murray's strength lay in his power of appeal for a whole-hearted service on the part of the professing Christian and for the acceptance of service on the part of the careless. As we glanced round the crowded pews when the evening service was about to begin, we anticipated that he would have something to say to all that mass of latent energy. We watched him looking over his audience, and could almost anticipate the aspiration. "If only all this latent power could be utilized for Christ!"

Choosing the incident of Gideon's deliverance of Israel from the Midianites, and the war cry of Gideon for his theme, he spoke of God's choice of men to fight His battles, and of the qualities His soldiers must possess. It was God's work, he reminded us, and we chose to do it. In undertaking the work, it was of the utmost importance that we should be upon God's side, of far greater importance than that God should be upon our side. We had not thought of the difference, but he made us see it. Two qualities must be present in the soldier whom God chooses—Courage and Readiness. Courage, that he may not shrink from the difficulties and dangers incident to the warfare and promptness to seize upon the fitting opportunity as it passes, and utilize it.

For half an hour he had spoken to us all, when, suddenly, he dropped many of us, and spoke directly to his own people. Would they come up to the help of the Lord in this place. Many of them were unafraid, but were they all ready, alert, prepared to act at this moment, should opportunity present herself.

The rumor was true. Mr. Murray is strong in appeal, and we look to Erskine to hold her place as an aggressive congregation, and even to become more aggressive under his ministry.

Would we worship aright, our hearts must look up and cry, "Teach me, Holy Spirit, to worship," and he will do it.—Rev. R. A. Torrey.