

Our Contributors.

CONCERNING THE DOWN GRADE

BY KNOXIAN.

Had Spurgeon tamely said that some of the Nonconformist Churches of England are not as orthodox as they might be nobody would have remembered the statement a month. When he said they are on the down grade he said something that everybody will remember as long as Spurgeon lives, and not a few after he dies. Every time you see the name of an English divine supposed to be liberal in his theological opinions, you always think of the down grade. An English book by a Nonconformist is likely to suggest the down grade. The ability to coin terms that strike and stick is useful, but it is dangerous. Rum, Romanism and Rebellion cost the Republican Party a Presidential election. The old clergyman who worked up that phrase worked it up too well. He made it so neat and handy that every Democratic politician from Maine to the Pacific could use it, and its use cost the Republicans the Catholic vote. The principal difference between Spurgeon and a thousand other men is that Spurgeon says things in a way that makes people remember them, and the other men don't. There are hundreds of men who go much farther and say that not only the English Churches, but the whole world, is on the down grade. Brother Jeremiah thinks all creation is on the down grade, but he can't say so in a way that impresses anybody. He wails in pointless style. He groans in general terms, and general terms are always easily forgotten. Spurgeon sinned, if he sinned at all, in a large company. Any number of other people think the world is on the down grade and travelling fast. Listen to this dear old man who begins every other sentence with the words,

WHEN I WAS A BOY.

He may not say so in as many words, but the thing he wants you to believe is that the boys are on the down grade. When he was a boy the boys never did anything wrong. They were all little angels in short trousers. They never snow-balled, nor hung on sleighs, nor wrestled, nor put pepper on the stove, nor played truant, nor gave the teacher athletic exercise by putting pins in his chair with the points upwards. People never know just how fast a schoolmaster can rise until they see him rise from a perpendicular pin. Oh, yes, the boys were all good in those early days. Why the old-time teachers wore out hides of leather on them it would be hard to say. Now, dear old man, shake up your memory a little, and see if you cannot recollect a few boys who were some distance short of perfection. Of course you were a model boy, but most likely the majority of them were a good deal like boys of the present day.

WHEN I WAS A YOUNG MAN,

says Brother Pessim, the young men didn't do so and so or did do so and so. Precisely so. We have heard that story many a time. When you were a young man the young men worked all day, and spent their evenings studying Marshall on Sanctification. They never went to an evening party. Of course not. No such thing was thought of. They never saw the girls home in those primitive times as a matter of choice. Oh no, it was always as a matter of duty. The young man of that period always walked on one side of the road all the way home and the young woman on the other. They never came within four rods of each other. Pray, Mr. Pessim, how did you ever get that good lady of yours? Did you propose to her at a distance of four rods? Now, Mr. Pessim, be honest if you can't be kindly and generous, and admit that young men were human then as well as now. Taking them all round, they are perhaps better than when you were young. They were not all good then; they are not all bad now.

WHEN I WAS A GIRL, ETC.

Now, Mrs. Grundy, don't go over that old story again. Please don't. We have heard so often about how good the girls were when you were a girl that we have concluded you were a girl before the Fall. Pray, Mrs. Grundy, how old are you? The problem we cannot solve is this: If you and all the girls were perfect forty or fifty years ago, where on earth did all the imperfect—not to say bad—old women come from?

WHEN I WAS A STUDENT,

says the old minister with a look that suggests the immense superiority of the students of his time. Now, before we admit that the students of the past were so much more learned, and so much more pious, and so much more devoted than students of the present, we might be permitted to ask what became of the embryo McCheynes and Chalmerses and Guthries and Cookes of the early day? A goodly number of the men who are said to have been mighty in something in their student days are here still. Good men, useful men most of them are, but positively there is nothing in any of them to prove that theological students are on the down grade.

WHEN I WAS IN PUBLIC LIFE

says the old member of Parliament or municipal man with an inflection and tone which shows most unmistakably that he thinks public affairs are on the down grade. Now, Mr. Solon, were the politicians all pure and patriotic and clean and sober when you were a public man? Didn't some of the free and independent voters of that time sell their votes for a dollar or two just as cheerfully as they do now? Didn't some of the candidates buy the scamps just as readily as they do now, and much more so? Tell the truth, Mr. Solon, and if you do so you must admit that public life has immensely improved in Ontario in thirty or forty years.

WHEN I WAS IN BUSINESS,
says the man who has made a little pile, with an air which proclaims that if he were in business again he could increase his pile. He would be a good deal more likely to lose it. Business is not what it was forty or fifty years ago.

WHEN I WAS A PASTOR,
says the retired minister or theological professor sometimes, with an emphasis on the *I* which seems to indicate that everything was done in perfect style in those days, and that little or no good has been done in the pastorate since. If everything was done so well and everybody was so good but a few years ago, one cannot help asking where all the tough old sinners came from. Any number of them are over forty, and must have lived right through the golden period.

WHEN I WAS A TEACHER,
says the ancient ex-Domine with an omniscient air and strong emphasis and inflection on *I*. Yes, dear old man, we remember the time well. You made a striking impression on us. It was a lasting impression. The schools have been on the down grade ever since your time—in the use of the strap. You could handle a ruler or a rawhide with great effect. You made your mark, but we will not say where.

The real facts in this down grade business is that some men are on the down grade. Some are on the upgrade, and some keep as nearly on a level track as it is possible for them to do. Owing to some mysterious law of our being, nearly all those who are off on a side track think the rest are on a down grade rushing to destruction.

THE BI-CENTENARY OF "THE GLORIOUS RETURN" OF THE WALDENSES IN 1680.

X.

REMARKS ON THE FESTIVALS IN CELEBRATION OF IT.

As I stated in my last, they are translated from a work published by order of the Synod, and are, therefore, to be taken as expressing the views and feelings of that body. They are as follows:—

What has struck not only the political persons whose speeches have been already given, but also the strangers who have come to our festivals, is the union of faith and patriotism, of love to God and to the king, which has been remarked there. This note has been so often and so loudly sounded out, that the liberal press has not been slow to echo it. Since February a Roman paper, the *Capitan Fracassa*, pointed out in a leader the importance of the Bi-centenary which was about to be celebrated. The Naples *Pensola* did the same in its number of August 1-2. Since then, and all during the festivals, there has been a rolling fire of articles, editorial and contributed, in not less than fourteen home papers of all shades, without counting foreign ones. A Turin paper sent at its own expense a special correspondent who, in five successive articles, in a very kindly manner, told again the history of our people and gave an account of our festivals. The day after the arrival of the Prefect at Torre Pellice, the *Gazette Piemontaise* had an editorial entitled, "Religious liberty and national feeling." The following passages from it are worth the trouble of publishing:—

"Lately, a people cultivated and strong in the grace of Christ, has celebrated with much solemnity an important event in the political and religious history of Piedmont and of Italy. At Salbertrand, at Balsille, at Sibaoud, at Torre Pellice, and in all their mountains the Waldenses have celebrated the remembrance of the return of their forefathers to the paternal firesides, where they learned to pray to God, where their fathers fell asleep in peace, where they struggled and suffered for liberty.

"The event, apart from all religious considerations—a question which is not within our province—was of the highest importance, hence, we have taken a special interest in it. So have done, within wider or narrower limits, all the fair-minded and liberal papers of the Peninsula, because they have all seen in the Waldensian commemoration a display of our national life. There is only one paper as bigoted as it could have been in the Middle Ages, which has been offended at our publications. It has accused us of evangelical proselytism! We do not reply to such insinuations. The festival of this thoroughly Italian people has been of such a deeply patriotic nature that all who have witnessed it have come back greatly affected.

"It is away up there, in these valleys, a witness of these festivals said to us, 'that should go those who know nothing of either political or religious toleration; those who feel their love to their country growing weak; those who openly or secretly sneer at virtue; or those who know not what liberty is. Seldom have I felt my love to my country as strong as among these noble mountaineers.'

A few weeks later, in a remarkable article in the Turin *Journal Littéraire*, Deputy Faldella laid great emphasis on the fact that it is the religious feeling deeply rooted, but drawn from the perfectly pure sources of the truth, which, in the sphere of liberal ideas, can preserve the love of king and country, and prevent the excess of radicalism.

The Bi-centenary, plainly, has had the effect of giving new life to the history of the Waldenses, as well as to their principles in the eyes of their fellow-citizens, and of presenting these to them in a new light. It is for us now not to lose the opportunity of proclaiming them aloud, for it is a great privilege to be set in the front rank, it is, at the same time, a great responsibility. It is for us to show our people that we are really such as we have been represented, uniting a living faith to a loyal patriotism, but setting above the earthly country, the concerns of the heavenly one. It is for us to affirm the great principles of liberty and of conscience, but to live in the glorious liberty of the children of God, and to show what a conscience enlightened by the Spirit of God can do. It is for us to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, not satisfied with being a small flame which shines in the darkness, but having the supreme ambition of transforming into light the darkness which surrounds us, and of adding to our motto in the past, this in the future: *Lux lucet in tenebras!*

To this deep feeling of our obligations to our country must be added an overruling need of gratitude. Gratitude to God who, after having so wondrously preserved the remains of His Church, has so graciously spared and so richly blessed the descendants of those witnesses for the faith by raising up for them friends everywhere, and

*There is a mixed metaphor here, as the intelligent reader will notice.

†This is different from the common form of the motto. It means, "The light shines into the darkness," not simply "in" it, as the other does. It is a change in harmony with the idea expressed in the latter part of the sentence.

by entrusting them with the accomplishment of such a glorious work. Gratitude to that faithful God who has made us feel our presence at all our festivals; who has been pleased to smile on them by giving us the most beautiful weather that one could have desired; who has made us experience how close are the bonds which unite in but one bundle the Waldensian family; who has gladdened us by the tokens of affection and edified us by the words of faith from so many brethren from abroad; who has disposed everything in such a way that from each of our festivals separately, and from all together, we have been able to carry away recollections so sweet and so precious. Gratitude to Him who has inclined towards us the heart of our Sovereign to honour us by so much kindness; who has favourably disposed towards us the Government and the political men of our country; and who has granted us to see how greatly the times are changed, and has surrounded us with so many tokens of the sympathy with, and interest in us, of our fellow-citizens.

Vea, my soul, bless the Lord and forget not one of His benefits! But let not thy gratitude be a momentary blaze. Let it enlighten, let it warm, let it consume around thee, and let it be with a new impulse, O Church of the valleys, that, feeling the love of Christ constraining thee, thou shalt cry out, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel!"

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THREE GREAT PREACHERS.

BY REV. PRINCIPAL KING, D.D.

At the recent opening of the session of the theological department of Manitoba College, Rev. Principal King delivered the following lecture:—

Among the too numerous subjects assigned to the chair of the Principal of Manitoba College, Homiletics, at least since the Rev. Mr. Pitblado's regretted departure, has had to have a place. In dealing with this branch of preparation for the ministry, my plan has been to state and expound with as much fullness as possible the more important principles of the science or the art (it is both), and in addition to pass in review some of the more eminent preachers, both of earlier and of later times, with the view of ascertaining their distinctive merits and of fixing attention on the sources of their power.

In pursuance of the latter part of this plan, and as also supplying a subject which may not be without interest to the Christian public, who have favoured us with their presence, I desire to speak to you this evening of an illustrious triad of preachers; Vinet, Liddon and Newman. Superficially viewed, they may appear to have very little in common, more closely regarded they will be found to have much; I am not concerned, however, to justify their combination in this lecture by any other consideration than this, that they have all been, in very different degrees indeed, helpful to myself in exercising the ministry; more, perhaps, than any other preachers whose acquaintance has been made simply through their published writings. Of the three, one spoke in French the other two in our English tongue. The former ended his career almost half a century ago, the grave has just closed over the two latter. Exercising their gifts in spheres wide apart, and amid very different surroundings, it will be found that in their hearts they adored the same Saviour, and by their eloquence vindicated the same essential and eternal verities.

VINET.

Vinet, the first named, was born towards the close of the last century in Lausanne, one of the most beautiful cities in Switzerland, or, indeed, in the world; having at its feet the blue waters of the lake of Geneva, and in the distance, but in full view, the majestic and snow-clad peaks of Mont Blanc. He received his education in his native city, which then, as now, was the seat of an ancient school of learning. He was destined to the ministry by his father, but having early displayed literary and philosophical abilities of a high order, he was, at the age of twenty-two, appointed professor of the French language and literature in the university of Basle, receiving ordination as a minister of the Gospel about the same period. In that famous border city, even at that early date the scene of zealous missionary enterprise, Vinet continued to teach from 1819 to 1838. There probably he formed those decided spiritual views of religion which are found in all his discourses. In 1838 he was recalled to his native city as professor of theology; a position which, first in connection with the ecclesiastical establishment, and afterwards with the newly-formed Free Church of the Canton de Vaud, he occupied until his death. He was in his day a prolific author, giving to the press no less than twelve or fourteen volumes on various subjects of a literary, philosophical or religious character. It is his sermons only with which we have to do here. These were given to the public at various times, and comprise in all several volumes. A large number of the most striking of them has been made accessible to the English reader in two volumes, entitled respectively, "Vital Christianity" and "Gospel Studies."

The sermon must take its character to a large extent from the audience to which it is addressed. Its form, its contents even, must be governed in some degree by the needs, the tastes, certainly by the intellectual and moral appreciations of those whom it is designed to help. Vinet addressed himself largely to men of culture, many of whom were either uneasy in their hold on the Christian faith or had actually relinquished it under the influence of the materialistic and sceptical thought of the age. It was his aim to recover for them their impaired or their lost religious convictions. This aim he seeks to accomplish by calling attention with rare and penetrating insight to the spiritual in man, and to the adaptation of the Gospel to all its deeper needs and its loftier aspirations. The worthlessness of all material splendours; the insignificance of all merely intellectual achievements, the transcendent glory of the moral and the spiritual above all