

THE PRESBYTERIAN PRINCIPLE.

ADAPTED FROM AND RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO THE "PRESBYTERIAN," BY INDEX.

In criticising a sister Church, we do so, not with any purpose of unduly exalting the Congregational system, or of laying bare the weak points of a neighbour; but rather to aid in bringing two bodies, which are in some respects essentially alike, into nearer relations with one another. There is much, we confess, that is worthy of admiration in the Presbyterian Church. In her historical development, in her doctrinal principles as interpreted by her ablest divines, and her general maintenance of these, in her love of civil liberty, and the encouragement she has given to learning and literature—in all these and other aspects we esteem this Church for her own sake. If we had learned to overlook what we regard her constitutional defects, it was from the hope that, by cultivating friendly relations and entering into the spirit of the Congregational Church in this country, such evils would be almost entirely avoided and overcome.

It has fallen to the lot of this Province to illustrate the weakness of the Presbyterian principle in two opposite directions. To show that for all practical purposes it is a failure; powerless to enforce its authority, on the one hand, and using the semblance of that authority to certify and send forth to the Presbyterian congregations of the land, to fill their pulpits and be over them, "in the Lord," one of whom they know nothing beyond his own statements. The first case is so well known, and acquired so much notoriety a short time ago, that it is not necessary to repeat it in detail here, sufficient to say, that a popular minister of that body who had enunciated what were considered heterodox doctrines was "libelled," that his case was transferred from one "church court" to another, backward and forward, in shuttle-cock fashion, for months, and that finally his "peers," (Presbyterian, not New Testament), in the highest Court, the General Assembly, decided that it was not expedient to pursue the case any farther, and so it was dropped. Why? Because it was said the congregation to which the reverend "libelled" belonged was deeply attached to him, and stood ready to slip anchor, and launch out into the broad sea of Independency, a consummation most devoutly to be deprecated, and sooner than which the highest court, "willing to wound and yet afraid to strike," submitted to be "soundly whipped," as one of themselves said, and covered up their retreat by singing the doxology!

In another direction we have a suggestive illustration of how worthless for any practical purpose the endorsement of the Presbytery may be; and how it is possible for a man to be approved for the ministry by that body who is sufficiently changed on doctrinal points to pass a friendly examination, yet, who, for aught it knows, may be totally unfit for the work to which he is commended. The case is this: A minister of another denomination, whose long and grievous neglect of the duties of his office, in the face of repeated remonstrances from the officers of the church, had, as it was alleged by them, seriously alienated the sympathies of his congregation, indeed, to such an extent, that they were at last obliged to suggest to him that in their opinion, his only proper course was to resign the pastorate. This he did, they say, in the bitterest and most un-Christian manner. This minister then sought admission into the Presbyterian body, and the Presbytery of the place, knowing full well that he had come from another body, and that there had been unpleasant circumstances connected with the dissolution of the connection, yet, incredible as it may appear, did not by a single enquiry seek to ascertain the facts, to discover whether of a truth this minister was one whom they could righteously commend to the Churches, but at once, on his own testimony, received him and recommended him to the General Assembly. Let it be fully understood that we offer no opinion as to the truth of the statements respecting the minister in question; the facts may be as stated, or otherwise; that is of no consequence to the argument: the point is that the Presbytery was in complete ignorance of the facts, and did not think it worth its while to ascer-

tain them, possibly fearing that enquiry might be fatal to another triumph of the Presbyterian principle. Rather would the "church court" take the risk of sending forth a man who, for aught it knew, might be utterly unfit for the work and the occasion of immediate disaster. Perhaps this is one of the excellencies, which, benighted, we fail to appreciate in "The Presbyterian principle."

One result of such a system it is certainly not difficult to foresee. A minister so sent forth, with the "hall stamp" of "standard" upon him will be received by the people without question. Has not the Presbytery certified him, what need of further enquiry? he may be taken without any misgivings; and so there is thrown open a wide door, through which can pass untold injury to trusting Churches.

The Congregational system, on the contrary, laying as it does upon each Church the necessity of enquiry into the character of the men who seek its pastorate, throwing the investigation upon those who have no feeling of caste or order to influence them, is far more likely to arrive at the truth, and to prevent the introduction of improper men into the pulpit. The Presbyterian system begets a weak, unmanly reliance on an outside body, it provides ecclesiastical crutches for its churches, and then turns round and asks Congregational Churches to admire the limp and adopt the crutches. By your leave, and with many thanks, friends, we say emphatically, No!

It is not too much to affirm that the tendency in all denominations is towards Congregational principles: the late judgment of Vice-Chancellor Proudfoot in the Oshawa Church Case, marks an important step towards that bourne on the part of the Episcopal Church in this Dominion; the last great revolution, for such it was, in the Methodist body, was markedly in the same direction, while the "Presbyterian" appears rather to make a boast of the fact that their body "has in recent times allowed more Congregational liberty than before." In the face of such facts as these, will it be considered impertinent in us to reciprocate the kindly offices of the "Presbyterian," and to suggest to the Church it claims to represent, that she should promptly anticipate the inevitable, put the last Congregational spoke in her wheel, and prove herself to be in harmony alike with the convictions of to-day, and the spirit of the New Testament?

No doubt the conclusion will be drawn by some who read these words, that the sooner the Presbyterian Church is incorporated with the Congregational on fair and honourable terms the better for the great cause which we all have at heart.

PULPIT PRAYER.

BY REV. W. W. SMITH.

(concluded).

A peculiarly valuable thing in pulpit prayer is the calming of the mind, both in preacher and hearer, effected by it. When burdens press,—when the world has been present in disagreeable forms,—we obtain access to our Divine Help, and are strengthened and calmed. The remark was homely but pertinent, when an old minister said, in answer to a suggestion that someone else should pray before he preached: "No, I like to *whet my own scythe*." And many a one has found the kindling of soul obtained in the morning prayer, present through all the following discourse.

Paradoxical as it may seem, those ministers who quote most Scripture in their prayers, are often the least impressive and stimulating in their pulpit intercessions. For such is the weakness of human nature, that it is not always that a quotation is given because it best expresses the exact shade of emotion we wish to embody in words; but because it is easiest, and saves us the trouble of further thought. The best way of using the exact words of Scripture in prayer, is to plead the promises, as promises.

Pulpit prayer deserves to be studied; and in proportion as it is studied, with prayer in the study of it, will it be edifying and satisfactory. Some men excel in this matter; and their pulpit prayers are found quite as edifying as their sermons.

The language should be terse and plain. The tone should be reverent, but not whining. The pitch not to be on an ascending scale, till breathlessness ensue, and then a sudden dropping down, to begin the ascending scale again! The volume of voice should not be so great as to be deafening and confusing; nor so small as to make it difficult to catch the words. Nor is it a practice to be unrebuked to *begin* in so low a tone as to be indistinct for a time. As in pulpit prayer, so in all pulpit speech, every word—from the very first word—should be distinctly uttered.

I have not spoken of reading prayers from a book. The making of such belongs to authorship; and the reading of them to the science of reading—an art by itself. Yet the arranging of a prayer from the pulpit, like the arranging of a discourse, should be a matter of care and thought. God, who helps the good minister of Christ to preach, will also help him to pray.

People are fastidious about the length of prayers. To be acceptable to the people's ideas they must never exceed ten minutes. And probably we have but ourselves to blame for this:—if they had been more perfect models of what a prayer should be, more length of time, no doubt, would have been allowed them. Just as telegrams and post-cards have tended to condensation in messages and letters generally, so the three-minute and five-minute rules, in Y.M.C.A. meetings, and in conventions, have tended greatly to condensation in pulpit prayers. Condensation is not everything, nor the principal thing; but it is yet a great thing; and generally is accompanied by strength;—and let us hope, always with clearness.

The pulpit prayer should have a special reference to the Scripture reading, and the sermon—just as in the case of the hymns. And here opens out a rich vein for felicitous thought and expression.

Variety of Scripture-topic will suggest variety in petition. And the theology of a pulpit prayer should be sound. Do not ask God to do what He plainly commands us to do. And do not let us make God, in our prayers, the author of evil, when in our sermons we assert that he is *only the author of good*. And, finally, if we look for conversions under our sermons we may do the same under our prayers—if we only make them as earnest, as pointed, as appropriate, and as varied. It is a subject that needs more study—and will repay it.

MR. MURSELL WITH THE STUDENTS OF C. C. B. N. A.

In one of the Rev. Arthur Mursell's letters, in the "Christian World," is the following reminiscence of his visit to our college in Montreal:—

"I cannot quit Montreal without a grateful allusion to the kindness of the students of the "Congregational College of British North America" in inviting me to meet them in their class-room for a little free-and-easy chat. I was a little embarrassed at the interview, but still much pleased at the opportunity it afforded me. What ought I to have said to them, Mr. Editor? What would *you* have said to them? There was much to say of the greatness, the responsibility, the difficulty of their sacred work; there was much to offer of devout and affectionate congratulation on their having consecrated themselves to a task so grand and glorious. But, writhing, as I have been, during the last five months in my otherwise delightful intercourse with the religious life of this side the ocean, under the rigid sectarianism which seems to eat into the fabric of the Church, corroding its heart, and checking its real vitality amidst organizations and machineries,—I felt that I could not repress an appeal to the Christian manhood of the rising ministry of Canada, to make a noble stand in Christ's name against the exclusive *regime* which disfigures the aspect of religious life in the west, scoring out the dimples of love with the corrugations of the controversy. My heart would not let me withhold a challenge to those amongst them who were brave at heart and loyal to the catholicity of the Master's spirit, to swear that, come what come might, they would lift the banner which bore the inscription of Christ's simple name and the escutcheon of His naked cross higher than the standard which was in-