

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### A PLEA FOR TRUTHFULNESS.

THANKSGIVING SERMON BY REV. J. M. KING, D.D., TORONTO.

"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"—Isaiah v. 20.

We are met this morning to make devout, and public recognition of the goodness of God to us. As individuals, as families, and as a people, we have many and strong grounds for thankfulness. We have been preserved from the scourge of war, of pestilence, and of famine. We continue to enjoy civil and religious liberty. We retain our connection unbroken with an empire, which has known how to combine the elements of stability and of progress, of strength and of freedom and whose vast resources are employed in the main to promote the welfare of the race. We continue to have over us a queen, whose ready sympathies reach out to the humblest and most distant of her subjects, when they suffer; and in whose court purity and religion still find the home, which they have often sought in vain in courts of monarchs. In our own favoured land, we have reaped an abundant harvest. Remunerative employment offers itself to all who can and who will work. Agriculture, commerce, manufactures, all share, though perhaps in different degrees, in the general prosperity. If the poor remain with us, as we are taught to expect they will always do, partly as the result of uncontrollable circumstances, and even more because of improvidence and vice, their presence in the limited numbers in which they are found, may be only a blessing in keeping the heart tender, which can so easily become hard in times of prosperity, and in supplying an outlet for the exercise of that benevolence which should ever accompany the possession of wealth. Let me express the hope that the charities of our city, the House of Industry, the Home for the Incurables, the refuges opened for the orphaned, and for the fallen, will meet from you a ready, and, according to your means, a liberal response. The religious condition and wants of our country afford an additional reason for thanksgiving. To an active and large-minded Christian man, it ought to be nothing short of a pleasure—perhaps, I should say a sacred privilege—to have his lot cast in an age and a land where he can have a share in the establishment on durable grounds of institutions of sacred and of secular learning in these older Provinces of the Dominion; and in laying broad and deep the foundations of Christian institutions in the newer lands to the west, which are at no distant day to be the home of prosperous millions. Taking all circumstances into account, I know few nations which to-day have equal, none which has greater reason, than the people of Canada for thanksgiving to Him who assigns to men the bounds of their habitations and who is "God over all blessed for ever." No words of mine, I feel sure, are needed to awaken the spirit of gratitude in your breasts, who have gathered to-day in this place of worship.

On more than one occasion, like the present, I have taken advantage of the opportunity to call your attention to the duties which devolve on you as citizens; to the intimate connection which subsists between the religious and the political life of the community, and to the consequent interest which Christian men above all others have in seeing to it that the political life is pure and just and humane. I do not imagine indeed that many or perhaps any of you have come to entertain the weak opinion that questions of politics, that is questions of civil government, the securing of just laws and incorrupt administration, are too secular to merit the active interest of Christian men, that they belong to the world which has been renounced. The religious life which obtains among Presbyterian people, far enough from what one would like to see it in some respects, not infrequently wanting in fervour and outspokenness is yet too intelligent and robust to be carried away by this notion of an overstrained and sickly piety. But it may be doubted whether any of us appreciate at its full value, the influence which the political and the municipal life of the community is constantly exerting on the religious and the moral—I feel, therefore, that I am not overstepping the proper sphere of the pulpit, when on a day like this I invite your attention to some of the moral aspects of our public life. The place from which I speak properly rules out all party utterances. Were I discussing

public questions, instead of simply asserting moral principles, it would not be difficult to point out some recent acts which in any humble opinion deserve the condemnation of fair-minded men of all parties. But such animadversion here would be almost certainly misunderstood and might give an appearance of partyism to the utterances of this pulpit, which, I am sure, we would all of us regret to see them assume.

The field which is open to us, and which we may enter, not only without fear, but with a clear and strong sense of duty, is a far higher one than that of tariffs, or text-books, or re-constructed constituencies. It is that of political and public morals. I have no intention of making anything like an exhaustive survey of the field. All I desire is to specify some things in the political life around us, which appear to me to be wrong and mischievous, and in your name, as well as in my own, to express the strongest disapproval of them; or, rather, the reprobation with which deliberate and wilful wrong, as distinguished from mere imprudence and unwisdom, should be visited.

I begin by expressing the gratitude we owe to those—or, to many of them—who serve us in public life; whether in municipal councils, or legislative assemblies, or at executive boards. The feeling, indeed, obtains widely, that public men, as a class, are very far from disinterested—that they are animated, not so much by a laudable ambition to serve their country, as by a selfish desire to advance their own interests. The existence, not to say prevalence, of this feeling is to be regretted on several grounds. In the first place, it does grave injustice to a large number of persons, engaged in various ways in public life. It is not necessary to claim that all, or even the great majority of these, are actuated by disinterested and patriotic motives. It would be strange if this were the case with so many whom they represent undisguisedly selfish. But we may claim, with perfect truth, that a large number in city, county, and township councils, in Provincial and Dominion legislatures, and in the Cabinet at Ottawa and Toronto, are serving us at large cost of time and means, of domestic happiness and ease of mind, and sometimes at the risk of health, and even life. The failure to recognise this, the tendency to impute interested motives to public men is to be regretted, in the second place, as fitted to make them, if it is possible to make them, the selfish schemers which by so many they are taken to be. There are few things more difficult than for men, as a class, to rise above the estimate which is generally entertained respecting them. To have been an honest publican in the days of our Lord must have been extremely hard, with that phrase current in every household: "Publicans and sinners." As an example of the opposite, ministers of the Gospel are immensely indebted to the generally high opinion in which they are held for piety and goodness—to the public expectation respecting them. The low estimate, then, which so many take of the character of public men, is to be deeply regretted, as at once an injustice to individuals, and a grave public calamity. I feel, therefore, that I am discharging a plain duty when I ask you to give a grateful appreciation and a generous support to those who, amid difficulties and discouragement unknown to many, are giving their time and their abilities to advance the public interests.

What is wrong, then, in the conduct of public affairs? How are the great principles of morality disregarded or violated therein? I answer, by the conspicuous absence of generosity in their treatment of one another by men of opposite politics; even, if common fairness in the means employed to damage a political opponent; and by the frequent use of deliberate misrepresentation, of charges of corrupt motive on the most meagre evidence, or on no evidence at all, and of low, virulent, and abusive statements. There are men at once capable and upright in both the political parties of the State. There are men in the Liberal party who are entitled to receive, as they do possess, the entire confidence of large numbers of their fellow citizens. And there are men in the Conservative ranks, who, on entering or re-entering public life, would have had at once a high position assigned to them, if they had chosen to cast in their lot with the Liberals; but how long would it be before we would learn of the existence of such men—men possessing high and statesman-like qualities—in the one party, from the public utterances of the other. On the contrary, important service rendered to the state is ignored or deprecated; mistakes, such as all commit, are exaggerated and paraded on all occasions, as evidence of incapacity, or

of something worse; legislative action is misrepresented, and public utterances are distorted to suit party exigencies, and to crown all, a stream of abuse, often childish in its weakness, sometimes fiendish in its malignity, is poured forth, to the pain of all right-minded people.

It would be unfair to say that this characterization holds good of all, or anything like all, our public men. Some who have been taking a leading part in the political discussions of the day, have shown themselves conspicuously free from at least the worst of the faults signalized. One follows with real pleasure an argument to shew the weakness or the danger to the State, of an opponent's position, in which no imputation is cast on the honesty or the ability of the man who holds it. I cannot help thinking, however, that there is on all hands a lack of generosity, if not in our public men, at least in their public utterances. Why, I ask, should the first kind word be spoken respecting a political opponent when the grave, closing over him, makes him no longer formidable, or when, after years of honest and capable service, he retires to a less prominent position in the ranks of his party, and that slow recognition of worth be made, only when it can be used at the same time to reflect obloquy on one still more feared? On the other hand, why should the refusal of an upright and capable gentleman to become the ally of a political party, become the signal for his depreciation throughout its entire ranks? Or why should the severe and dangerous sickness of a prominent politician be made the occasion for unseemly and heartless speculations as to the result likely to ensue on his death? These are exhibitions of human nature of which, in a Christian country, we have little cause to be proud. I refer to them with deep pain.

The evils of which I complain, as affecting the political life of the country, come out in their most pronounced form in the secular press, or, that portion of it which acts as the organs of the respective parties. It is far from pleasant to have to say this, for we all owe very much of our instruction and even of our intellectual enjoyment, to its ample—almost too ample—columns. When speaking of it, as it exists in our own city, it would be unfair not to bear testimony to the great enterprise which it displays, to the promptitude, almost regardless of expense, with which it supplies news to us from every quarter of the world, and on all subjects to its generally good tone on moral and religious questions (a tone, I will venture to say, considerably in advance of that of the community at large), and to the fairness, intelligence, and ability with which questions lying outside of party politics are discussed. In many respects, Toronto has reason to be proud of its daily press. It will compare more than favourably with that of any city of its size and advancement. But, where party issues are involved, it is not generous, and it is not truthful. It is often untruthful in its statements of facts, and unjust in its treatment of persons. I do not say this without having well considered the force of the imputation and the weight of the evidence by which it is sustained. Of course no one expects in the discussions of political questions in daily newspapers the calmness and impartiality of a judge. We expect wide diversity of opinion, and would readily allow for the deep colouring which is natural to strong feeling, and the slips of logic which may easily result from hasty writing. What we have in both our leading dailies—perhaps not in the same degree—is something quite different from this. I do not know any other name for it than disregard for truth. Reading for some time both papers, and with the view of ascertaining their moral tone, I have found, as no doubt many of you have found, where political and party issues were involved, a great amount of reckless assertion, conjectures put forth as fact, unwelcome facts suppressed or disguised, the position of an opponent misrepresented, a false turn given to his argument, an inference fastened on it, which the argument does not fairly admit, and which the opponent would be the first to disavow—in a word, all those liberties with truth, which, if practised in private life or in business, would not so much destroy all confidence and good feeling as break up society, the misrepresentation is in some instance so transparent that it is scarcely less an insult to the intelligence of the reader than it is an offence to his conscience.

What are some of the results? First, fair-minded men, men who value truth more than party, men who do not believe that either party or country, can be benefited by falsehood, become disgusted with politi-