

S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF THE SYNOD OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CANADA, AT KINGSTON, ON THE 4TH JUNE, 1851, BY THE REV. WILLIAM REID, A.M., MODERATOR.

I Samuel iv. 13. *And when he came, to Eli sat upon a scat by the wayside watching; for his heart trembled for the Ark of God.*

The character of Eli as delineated in the Word of God is deeply interesting, and a careful consideration of it cannot fail to impress upon our minds many important and useful lessons. Although he was culpably negligent of his duty as a parent, and was not careful to restrain his sons from evil, we cannot but admire the general piety of his character, and especially his meek submission to the will of God, and his deep and heartfelt attachment to the cause of God. This last feature may be regarded as an invariable accompaniment of true piety, for both in ancient and modern times, we find that those who have been most eminent for personal piety, have at the same time been most remarkable for their deep interest in the glory of God, and their hearty and earnest attachment to His cause.

At the time to which our text has reference, there was war between Israel and the Philistines. The Israelites had been defeated in one battle, and had lost four thousand of their number. But they resolved to make another effort, and with the view of securing the victory, sent to Shiloh for the Ark of the Covenant that they might carry it to the field with them, placing greater reliance on the Ark itself than on Jehovah of whose presence and power the Ark was the token. Eli, who at this time was High Priest, was too old and infirm to accompany the Ark, which was carried into the camp by his two sons Hophni and Phineas. But although Eli was too old to accompany the Ark in person, his spirit went with it. His heart was bound up in it. His two sons went with the army of Israel exposed to all the dangers of warfare. But it was not for them that Eli's greatest anxiety was felt. He, no doubt, loved his sons,—indeed he had loved them with too indulgent a love. But there was something to which his affections were bound, with even stronger ties than those which bound him to the sons whom he had begotten. That object was the Ark of the Covenant; the Ark which was the token of Jehovah's presence, and the symbol of His grace and mercy. It was for the Ark he watched and trembled—it was for the Ark he died. For as we read in the following verses, he heard with calmness of the defeat and slaughter of Israel, and even of the death of his two sons, but when the messenger added, "and the ark of God is taken," it was too much for the aged priest. The other strokes he might have survived, but this was too heavy for him, and he sunk under it.

Eli had indeed good cause at this time to tremble for the ark of God. He was deeply concerned for its safety. But besides this there were other reasons that might well make him tremble for the ark. He knew the wickedness of the people in general and the peculiarly aggravated sin of his own sons who ought to have been examples to their brethren. He knew that the removal of the ark into the camp was a measure that God had not required and for which God's sanction had not been sought. He knew that if the ark should fall into the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines, the loss to Israel would be incalculable, while it would be cause of triumph to their enemies. He knew too; and perhaps it was this that most of all troubled and agitated the mind of Eli, when he saw the ark go from Shiloh,—he knew that he had been guilty in the sight of God, and that on this account awful judgments had been denounced against him and against his house. In this critical hour no doubt Eli remembered the threatenings of Jehovah, and trembled. Thus, then, the anxiety of Eli was not without cause, nor were his fears groundless. His

worst apprehensions were realized. The Ark of God was taken, and although the glory of Jehovah was vindicated in the presence of the idolatrous Philistines notwithstanding the capture of the Ark, still the calamity was heavy, and, for a time at least, Ichabod was written on the land of Israel.

We may apply to the church and cause of God now, what is written in the Word of God with reference to the Ark of the Covenant. Indeed, the Ark may be regarded as an emblem or type of the Church. The Ark was formerly the symbol of God's presence and grace, and the Church now is God's peculiar heritage, which He hath promised to bless with His presence, and protect by His power. The interest which was felt in the Ark of the Covenant by pious Israelites in ancient times, is felt by all true believers in the welfare and prosperity of the Church and cause of God at the present day.

In addressing you from these words on the present occasion, we shall, 1st, mention some reasons that we have in the present day for trembling for the cause of God amongst us; and, 2ndly, we shall endeavour briefly to point out the conduct that becomes the faithful servants of God, in the eventful times and critical circumstances in which our lot is cast. And may God vouchsafe to us His blessing and accompany with the power and demonstration of His spirit, whatever may be said in accordance with His mind and will.

I. In the first place, then, we are to mention some causes that we have in this our day for trembling for the Ark of God. We may, however, here observe that, when we speak of trembling for the Ark, and entertaining fears in regard to the cause of God, we are not to be understood as meaning that any real apprehension is to be entertained as to the preservation and final triumph of the Church of God. The recorded promises of her great King and Head forbid such fears. He hath declared that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her, and hath given the assurance, "Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world." However numerous and determined her enemies may be, the church is in no danger of being destroyed, for God is in the midst of her, and will be a wall of fire round about her. The heathen may rage, and the people imagine a vain thing,—the kings of the earth may set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed. But He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision. The struggle between truth and error, between light and darkness, between the Church of God and her opponents may be long and severe. But the final issue is certain. God will protect his own cause. He will vindicate his own glory, and cause His church to overcome all opposition, so that from being the church militant, it shall become the Church triumphant. But still, although all these glorious things that have been spoken of Zion are true, there are many events in regard to which we may be and are apprehensive. The cause of God may not be destroyed, but it may for a time be cast down. The candlestick may not be extinguished, but it may be removed from amongst us, and a season of spiritual darkness may overtake us. There may be famine, not of bread or of water, but of the word of the Lord. The enemy may come in like a flood, and a torrent of error and iniquity overspread the land. The fires of persecution may be again kindled, and the faithful witnesses of God slain. Pure and evangelical religion may be overborne in those places where it once flourished. The privileges which we enjoy may be taken from us and given to others. Such events have taken place in times past. The candlestick has been removed from the churches of Asia that once enjoyed its light. We have need of the trials and sufferings of our fathers, and of the calamities with which the church was visited in their days. And we may well tremble if we are conscious of circumstances which may lead us to apprehend such events in

regard to ourselves. And yet on reflection, we shall find that there are not a few things which may and ought to make us apprehensive in regard to the church and cause of God amongst us.

1. We have reason to tremble for the Ark of God, because of the fearful prevalence of vice and ungodliness in our day. Without affirming that the present time is in every respect worse than those that have preceded it, it must still be admitted that vice and ungodliness prevail to an alarming extent. Instead of being ashamed and hiding its head, iniquity walks abroad with a bold and unabashed front. Many of the most heinous offences that can be committed against God are lamentably prevalent. What daring profanity is uttered by the lips of multitudes amongst us. How often is the name of our God and Redeemer taken in vain. We cannot pass through the streets of our towns and villages, or travel by any of the public conveyances, without being compelled to listen to disgusting profanity and blasphemy, and there is perhaps no sin that indicates greater depravity of soul and bolder rebellion against God, for there is no sin for which so little excuse can be offered, and yet there is no sin that tends so directly to provoke God, for he hath declared that He will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain. Then again, notwithstanding all the benevolent efforts that have been made to arrest the progress of intemperance, how lamentably prevalent is it still, and how fearful are its ravages amongst us. Who amongst us could not relate tales of sadness and woe in connection with this vice? What minister has not had to mourn over some who have sacrificed character, health, happiness and substance, and step by step have sunk into hopeless drunkenness?—What corner of the land, what congregation of the church has not suffered from the ravages of this vice? and yet it still prevails,—cursing the land, polluting the church, beggaring families, destroying souls, and calling down the vengeance of God. Sabbath profanation also prevails amongst us to a fearful extent. Multitudes remember not the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. Both in town and country many appear to regard it as a day of pleasure and recreation, and habitually spend it in their own ways and finding their own pleasure. Shall we mention another vice which was the shame of ancient heathen nations and which is also the shame of christian lands in our own day, we mean the vice of uncleanness? The impure rites which were celebrated in the idolatrous temples of old, may not now be practised, but still this vice forms one of the darkest blots on the character of professedly christian communities.—It would be easy to add to this black catalogue, but we forbear. We have mentioned enough to cause us, if we are patriots, to be alarmed for our country, and if we are christians, to tremble for the Ark of God. "For these things sake cometh the wrath of God on the children of disobedience." Col. iii. 6. Such enormities have called down the judgment of God on other lands, and if we repent not of our sins, and turn from them, God may visit us with merited judgments.

2. We have reason to tremble for the Ark of God on account of the rapid spread of infidelity and anti-christian error. It is to be feared that much of the vice and immorality to which we have alluded is the result of a spreading infidelity. In consequence of the lamentable destitution of the means of grace, there is too good reason to apprehend that not a few have sunk into downright infidelity and that multitudes are sinking fast into that state. And while thus on the one hand, infidelity and open irreligion are spreading, on the other, superstition and anti-christian delusion are rapidly increasing. In our day the latter system is, perhaps, assuming the more prominent form, and is advancing with extraordinary boldness and rapidity. It is, indeed, one of the most remarkable and striking characteristics of the present day, that the anti-christian errors of Romanism are propagated with such energy and boldness. The day is not long gone by, when