

# THE ECCLESIASTICAL AND MISSIONARY RECORD.



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**Presbyterian Church of Canada.**

"Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and the strength of salvation."

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**INTRODUCTORY LECTURE ON  
CHURCH HISTORY.**

BY DR. BURNS.

(Read in the Divinity Hall of Knox's College, on  
Thursday, November 3, 1848.)

GENTLEMEN.—Lectures on Church History, are not to be identified with historical annals. In order to lecture upon any subject, indeed, a general outline of the subject is presupposed; and an analytical and chronological chart of the leading revolutions in the history of the Church may, you ought to precede all discussion regarding them. But a "Professor of Church History" ought not to be a mere chronicler. He must lecture upon the history of the Church, leaving a large part of the history itself to be learnt from books. Church History, as hitherto taught, has been limited very much to mere narrative; and as the benefits of this may be realized far better by means of private reading than by public recitation, the interest taken in the study has been small. Well may we express regret on this account, when we think of the peculiar delight which the study of Church History, when properly conducted, must inspire. For, what is really Church History? It is the history of God's arrangements with our world, for displaying his own glory, and securing the salvation of his people: the history of successive dispensations of grace in behalf of guilty man: the history of the doctrines, the worship, the institutions of the visible Church; the history of the effects of true religion on the literature, the arts, the civilization of the species: the history of the relations established between the various sections of the Church and the civil communities of men: in a word, the history of the contest between truth and error for the mastery. On such a history much precious instruction may be grafted, and the historian and herald of the Churches, may become also the minister of God for the salvation of his people.

The value of Church History may be estimated by reference to some of its legitimate objects. One of these is the establishment of the truth of the Gospel by arguments derived from its rapid progress and success; and Church History illustrates the nature and extent of that evidence, by reference to monuments of unquestionable relevance. Another object is, the history of the fulfilment of prophecy; and in this relation, Church History ranges through the four great empires of antiquity; the life of the Great Redeemer himself; the dealings of God with his ancient people since the Christian era; and the rise, progress, and present state of the Eastern and Western Antichrists. A third object is, to furnish a map of the human

mind and of the human character; and this Church History supplies by opening up the springs of action, and exhibiting man under varied and ever shifting influences. The philosopher of civil history will labour in vain if he overlooks entirely the influence of religious causes, which are the strongest of all; while the philosopher of ecclesiastical history will lose his mark if he limit his researches to the influence of religious causes on individual character alone. God is the moral Governor of nations; and the Student of Church History waits on His mighty movements, in His gradual subjugation of all things to the setting up of that kingdom which shall last forever.

The history of religious truth leads to the trial of its reality by its influence on morals. There is much to grieve every sensible and virtuous mind in the causes which have in all ages interfered to prevent the blessed influence of truth from being practically realized; and yet the researches of the historian into the nature and operation of these causes, are of great value. They show us the true nature and extent of that violent hatred to the truths of God, which in all ages has characterized fallen man. The early departure of men from the knowledge and worship of the true God; the varied forms and phases of incipient idolatry, with its wide-spreading influence afterwards, all over the east; the common origin which may be assigned to all the forms of paganism; the character and influence of that peculiar system which God was pleased to institute as the precursor of a still more glorious economy; the mighty change which Christianity, in primitive times, effected in the moral and social condition of man; and the history of modern efforts for the Christianization of the world:—these are themes of mighty interest, and they lie directly in the path of the Church Historian. They form at once the literature and the morale of theology; and the controversies of theology lose much of their repulsive aspect when viewed in connection with the blissful traces of Emmanuel's footsteps in the progressive regeneration of the human family.

The study of Ecclesiastical History embraces an enquiry into the causes of error, and such an enquiry is of great advantage as supplying in many cases the means of exposing and refuting the error itself. Many very plausible opinions and practices have gained currency amongst men, from the simple circumstance of their having come down to us with the stamp of a venerable antiquity; and the want of any historical record of their origin, has been held as a receipt in full for their title to acceptance. Now when we can not only expose the absurdity of an error from its own abstract character, but point out the time and the circumstances of its rise, and of its first introduction into the Church; when we can trace it to certain

**FAREWELL!**

There is a word which none but they,  
Who feel its power can tell—  
Which pierces to the inmost soul—  
That simple word—farewell.  
It past recalls—to future points,  
With deep and poignant grief;  
Until our swelling hearts, alone  
In tears, can find relief.  
Earth is indeed a parting scene;  
We meet—but meet to part,—  
For scarce our meeting joy is o'er,  
Till farewell reads the heart.  
How often in our pilgrim path,  
We feel the tender snare?  
How oft the piercing, deep-heaved sigh,  
Swells from the aching heart?  
How oft each inward thro' is told,  
Though tearless be the eye,  
By looks expressive more than words,  
That speak th' unuttered sigh?  
While we exchange that parting word,  
Our feelings, who can tell,  
When with some long-loved friend, we take  
In time our last farewell?  
But though by heaven-bound pilgrims here,  
The parting word is given  
Mid tears of sorrow—still we hope  
With joy to meet in heaven.  
And meeting there to part no more,  
Farewells shall be unknown;  
The hallowed link no more be broke,  
Around our Father's throne.  
We all must take a last farewell  
Of all that charms us here,  
And on the banks of Jordan drop  
Our last—our parting tear.  
May we then be prepared to leave  
Each changing scene below—  
To plume our wings for brighter worlds,  
And strangers be to woe! J. A.

B. Kennedy