

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Annual Meeting now in Session at
Hamilton.

MODERATOR'S SERMON.

Rev. Dr. Campbell, of Renfrew, Elected
Moderator.

Hamilton, June 14.—The 25th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church convened in Central Church this evening, when Dr. Torrance, the retiring Moderator, preached the following sermon. His text was:

Zachariah ii., 5. "For I, saith the Lord, will be the glory in the midst of her."

Spoken of Jerusalem and the old Covenant Church, shortly after the return from the captivity in Babylon, this promise is intended for the Church of the new Covenant period throughout the centuries that are to run till the consummation of all things, and it is as thus applicable that we purpose to consider it on the present occasion.

It will be observed that the promise is immediately preceded by the Divine assurance, conveyed in language very highly figurative, but on that account all the more forcible, of safety from external danger, from whatever quarter it might threaten, or whatever form it might assume. Fire is one of the most destructive elements in the material world, and God promised that He would be "a wall of fire" forbidding assault and even approach, having inaccessible foundations in the depths of His own infinite being, so that they could not by any possibility be undermined, or removed or shaken, and from which avenging justice shot forth with consuming violence against those who presumed to draw near to make an assault upon them—a wall of fire strong and firm and compact, at every point, without break or interruption, for it surrounds at every part, so that there is no opening through which an attack can be made by any hostile force. "For I, saith the Lord," will be a wall of fire round about her"—her defence and guard at every point from external danger.

After this assurance of protection and safety from without the text comes with an equally positive and forcible promise of beauty, and excellency, and prosperity from within. "And I will be the glory in the midst of her," words which clearly contain the doctrine that God is present in His Church.

In considering this doctrine of the text let us notice, I. the certainty of His presence. I will be the glory in the midst of her. That certainty has its warrant and guarantee in His own word, for He will perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which He has sworn to our fathers from the days of old. "I, the Lord, have spoken it, it shall come to pass; and I will do it."

Again it is assured by the counsels and of the offerer that He believed in the presence of Persons of the Godhead for the redemption of mankind sinners, for according to these the Father has engaged to call a people to Himself, to take up His abode with them, and bestow upon them the honor, blessedness, privilege of His actual presence.

It is guaranteed, again, by the inseparableness of the union between Him and the Son, whose living connection with the Church is a matter of Divine decree, and the cause of her existence from the beginning. "I in them," are the words of Christ in His solemn address to the Father in which He affirms His presence with His people; "and thou in me," so that His presence brings that of the Father—they are inseparably united in the carrying out of their saving purpose. There is not only that union between them which is essential and eternal; not a union simply of counsel, plan, and operation, but an economical union—union in that great and far-reaching scheme under which grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Again it is guaranteed by the attractiveness of the Church in the Divine sight. She is His new creation, and He is no less certainly drawn towards her than He was to the first creation, when it stood before Him in all the beauty and perfection of its departments, when He pronounced it good, and

rested in it with full satisfaction. In her as His new creation, there are the outgoing and energy of perfections for which no place was found in the first creation, as it came forth from His hand, and shining forth illustrated His power, and wisdom and goodness, and, in the case of man, His holiness. And not less certain is His presence in her than in it.

God's presence in the midst of His Church has been her privilege under every dispensation of His grace. Cain went out from the presence of the Lord—from the place of his altar and his worship—when he chose the land of Nod for his abode. Every sacrifice offered was a profession upon the part arrangements between the First and Second of God, and every sacrifice accepted was a proof of that presence. "Oh! that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat!" was the exclamation of Job under a stroke which he asserts was heavier than his groaning, and which implied that he believed in His presence although he had been deprived of a realizing sense of it for a time. In the day of his being deprived of public religious opportunities, David utters the longing desire, "When shall I come and appear before God?" Paul writes to the Corinthians that they should desire the gift of prophecy rather than the gift of tongues because if an unbeliever or unbelieving person came into their assembly he would be so convinced, and the secrets of his heart so made manifest that, "falling down on his face, he would worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth." The promise of the church is assured—the certainty of the Divine presence in the midst of His Church. It has been the expectation and experience of her people. "I. The manner of His presence, "I will be the glory in the midst of her." Not as He is the glory in the midst of the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church of the redeemed triumphant in honor, and blessedness—where the excellency of His natural and moral attributes shines out in undimmed brightness and unrestricted fulness, and in the harmony of their working in the economy of salvation, as well as in that of creation, for that glory is confined to the home of His immediate presence, and can be looked upon only by such as are partakers of the Divine nature in the fulness of creature attainment—who are filled with all the fulness of God.

Neither is He the glory in the midst of her as He was with the Church of the old Covenant during her period in the wilderness, in the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, and in which there was an indwelling, a shrouded glory, which appeared when there were some special transactions between Him and His people; nor after her settlement in Canaan in the Shekinah, which dwelt between the cherubims whether in the tabernacle or in the temple. Even that which was a peculiar privilege and distinction, raising Israel far above all other nations in religious standing and character, was only a shadow of things to come, and a pledge and foretoken of a presence in the Gospel Church that would be felt more powerfully, be enjoyed more extensively, and be seen more clearly and closely than during the constitution under which she was then placed. Seen, not by the eye of sense, but by the eye of faith. Seen, not in visible symbol, or foreshadowing figure, but in the face of Jesus Christ, who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. Seen, not as in that inmost chamber of the mysteries of the Divine worship in the tabernacle or temple where it was concealed from the view of every one but the high priest, and even from his except upon the great day of atonement, when his entering in must be with blood offered for his own sins and for the sins of others. Seen, not in that form in which it filled the first temple when it stood complete in its structure, with all its scaffolding removed, rich and beautiful in its ornamentation, on which skill imparted by inspiration and wealth beyond calculation had been expended, making it a building such that never before had there been its equal, and never since has it been surpassed. When the presence of assembled tribes specially convened, with sacrifices of peace offerings, of burnt offerings, and solemn prayer, it was dedicated to the worship of the Lord God of Israel, the glory of the Lord, and we read, before had there been the house, so that the priests were unable to minister, because of its brightness. Seen, not even in that form in which it was seen by Moses, the man of God, who had freer and fuller converse with Him than any saint or patriarch by whom He had been preceded, when he was called up to the mount to be instructed in the details of the Divine plan of the dispensation which, dating from that period was to be in force to the times of reformation, and to receive those tables of the com-

mandments which had been of universal obligation since the morning of creation, and whose ever-enduring obligation was, it may be presumed, set forth in the imperishableness of the material on which they were engraved by the finger of the Great Lawgiver. True, that glory was in a form that could not be copied. In not one of His appearances has God assumed a shape which the chisel of the sculptor could embody in stone, or the pencil of the artist trace and reproduce on canvas. Yet, there were a reality and a power in the glory upon the mount, before which Moses bowed in humble adoration, that made his face shine so that he had to cover it with a veil in his converse with those that came to hearken to the commandments which had been given him to make known to them. Not then, according to any of these forms, is God in the midst of the Church of the present dispensation, "the glory."

We discard the thought that the words are intended to suggest any visible form or figure. He who is the glory in the midst of Israel does not present Himself to our organs of external perception, but to the organs of faith. He is seen only as He is revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, and in all the other attributes included in His name, and of which that name is expressive. He is seen in the midst of the Church upon the mercy seat which, in His sovereignty He has assumed in relation to sinners of the human family, and from which, to His own glory and to hers, He proclaims Himself to be "the Lord, the Lord, and the vision of glory, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." In the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament He is seen in the midst of the Church, and the vision of glory, as in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, while He displays the perfection of His character in the harmonious co-operation of all His attributes, and maintains the interests of His government unimpaired and unimpeachable. He is seen through Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, as He is the first-born of many brethren, and in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He who sees Him sees the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, and has the vision of that glory in the midst of the Church. In those visions which John saw when he was an exile in Patmos he saw Christ in His glory in the midst of the seven churches of Asia.

III. The design of His presence. Of several points which might be here stated let attention be given to the following:—

1. For the satisfaction of His own complacent delight. God takes pleasure in the work of His hands—whatever bears upon it the impress of His will and agency will engage His interest and regards. The remark may be ventured that in proportion to the treasures which His wisdom, love and goodness that He has laid out upon an object will be the interest He takes in it, and the pleasure He will derive from it. Next to the mediatorial Person of Christ, perhaps there is no object on which such treasures have been expended besides the Church. He has formed her for Himself that He might be glorified in her and by her. Made her partaker of His own nature, united her to the Lord Jesus as His body, so the infinite complacency that He has in Him as the Head passes on to her and rests in her. When He looked upon the first creation as it stood out before Him in the symmetry, beauty and adaptation of all its parts, He pronounced it good and He rested in it. And so does He in the Church, for He sees her to be all glorious within. "For the Lord hath chosen Zion, He hath desired it for His habitation: for ever will I dwell, for ever here will I dwell, for I have desired it."

2. He is her glory in the midst of her that He may enrich her out of the treasure house of His love and mercy. In that treasure house are laid up all that is denoted by the brief but comprehensive words, grace and glory; the former including everything that the sinner needs from the day he is awakened to a sense of his danger in the city of destruction, and sets out on his journey to the city that has foundations, and makes progress along the narrow way which has been prepared for him and in which his glory are held up, till he arrives at his destination; and the latter including what is meant by having an entrance ministered to him abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. What man knows what that is? Even the most earnest efforts to get full apprehension of its nature and greatness by close and prayerful meditation upon the descriptions of it in the words of the Holy