



Church of Scotland in Nova Scotia and the adjoining Provinces.

"IF I FORGET THEE, O JERUSALEM! LET MY RIGHT HAND FORGET HER CUNNING."—PSALM 137, v. 6.

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RELIGIOUS INTELLIGENCE.

Sermon by Rev. Dr. McCulloch, of Greenock.

"BUY THE TRUTH, AND SELL IT NOT."—Proverbs, xxiii, 23.
[CONCLUDED.]

First of a... there must be earnestness to find out the truth.

In every pursuit, the first condition of success is earnestness. If you would be rich, you must be in earnest in gaining and saving money. If you would be learned, you must be in earnest in the search for knowledge and the study of books. In like manner, divine truth is the prize of only him who seeks it earnestly. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Those who tell us that the search for "the truth" should be set about in a wholly calm and unsolicitous frame of mind, forget that such calm indifference is quite incompatible with the nature of an inquiry which is to determine what we are to believe in order to our salvation. The process of ascertaining how we are "to flee from hell and rise to heaven," is not to be conducted, surely, with the same coolness with which we would cast up a sum in figures, or calculate the density of the earth. To enter upon an inquiry with the heart uninterested and unsolicitous may do well enough when the subject of inquiry is of little or no practical moment; but to expect to succeed in finding "the pearl of great price," while yet we prosecute the search in a cold, speculative, or morbidly curious spirit, is manifestly preposterous. In such a mood of mind we cannot find what we seek—in such a mood of mind we are morally disqualified for finding it. Divine truth resolutely shuts the gates of her holy temple against him whose object is merely to survey the sacred furniture, and witness the solemn ritual. She flings open the everlasting doors only to him whose purpose is to worship at her shrine.

As a second condition of success, there

must be, manly independence of judgment.

When an earnest inquirer after the truth does not at once arrive at that certainty of which he is in quest, he is apt to become impatient. And such impatience Satan evermore takes advantage of, in order to lure him for satisfaction of mind to some other quarter than God and God's Word. Satan, indeed, would gladly sojourn his earnestness altogether. But when he fails in this, and finds the man too thoroughly in earnest to be balked of his object, he resorts to another device. He now commends the earnestness which yesterday he would have quenched. "You do well," he says, "to be anxious about the things which belong to your peace; you do wisely not to take rest until they are ascertained and settled; and if you will but go with your inquiries, not to that Holy Book which you have found to be beyond your powers of interpretation, but to your Church, or your minister, or your favorite Christian author, you shall obtain a solution to your perplexities, and rest to your soul." This is the device of Satan for misleading earnest inquirers. And how effectual a device it is, we behold daily evidence in the conduct of those infatuated religionists who relinquish the right of independent judgment in matters of faith, and bow implicitly to the traditions and authority of the Church. But can any man really ascertain what is Divine truth, and make that truth his own, if he is content to take his notions of it at second hand? It is impossible. Truth cannot be truth to us, unless we have searched it out, and ascertained it for ourselves. It can be only *hearsay* to us, so long as we have not sifted and tested it for ourselves. It cannot be ours—it cannot be spiritual food to us—it cannot be incorporated with our being, until we have gone to the Scriptures for ourselves, and gathered it out of them in the exercise of our own independent judgment, and under a sense of our own individual responsibility. And why should we

not thus go and gather it for ourselves? Why should we relinquish our God-given right, our God-given privilege? Why should we leave it to any Church, or minister or author, to decide for us? Can any Church, or minister or author, release us from our personal responsibility to God, or take our place and answer for us at the bar of judgment? Follow your Church, my brother, if you will, so far as it follows Christ, but not one hair-breadth farther. Believe your Church's teaching if you will, whenever that accords with Scripture, but never save then. To this Holy Book betake yourself for your religion, and to it alone—calling no man and no Church master, but evermore inquiring, judging, deciding for yourself, as one who must, ere long, stand alone and face to face with God, to give account.

Thirdly, There must be humble deference to God and God's Word.

To defer to human authority in matters of faith, is to surrender our rights and disown our responsibility as free moral agents. But to defer and bow to whatever has the stamp of divine authority, is only what benefits us alike as subjects of God, and as students of His infallible Word. Nor let it be supposed that a spirit of humble deference to God and God's Word, is at all incompatible with that manly independence of judgment just spoken of.—These two things are not incompatible, far less contradictory. The one is only the complement of the other. Observe, it is while we are searching out and ascertaining from the Scriptures what God's truth is, that there is room and need for the exercise of our own independent judgment; and it is, on the other hand, when that process is over, that the duty devolves on us of humble and implicit deference and faith. So long as we are engaged in finding out what are the doctrines of Scripture, there is scope for the freest exercise of our judging faculty; nay, there is a call to *that*, and a necessity for *that*. But whenever these doctrines