

THE WESLEYAN DAILY RECORDER.

CONFERENCE OF 1869.

No. 12.]

TORONTO, ONTARIO, TUESDAY MORNING, JUNE 8, 1869.

[Vol. I.]

Pactry.

DARKNESS WITHIN.

BY REV. E. H. DEWART

"Are the consolations of God small with thee?—is there any secret thing with thee?"—Job xv. 11.

If in thy heart no golden sunlight lingers
To brighten life within,
And to thy ears God's sweet and joyous singers
Make only doleful din—
If, while the world is robed in peerless beauty,
Around thy spirit coil
Serpents of doubt and fear, and sacred duty
Is heavy joyous toil—
If, while thy knees are bowed in supplication,
Struggling to cast thy care
On Heaven, there comes no strength or consolation
In answer to thy prayer;—
Seek not to find a reason for thy sadness
In Him who changeth not,
As if His hand withheld the light and gladness
Which thou hast vainly sought.
All worlds upheld and gladdened by His favour
His boundless grace proclaim;
Thousands rejoice in Christ the living Saviour,
Through changing years the same.
His loving kindness is a fount unfailling,
Forever full and free;
If life is dark and prayer is unavailing,
The hindrance is in thee.
Is there no foal impurity still clinging
Around thy yielding heart,
Darkening thy inner light, and surely bringing
This conscious guilty smart?
Is there no idol shrined within thy spirit,
Where God alone should reign?
No love of wrong, which gives thee to inherit
A legacy of pain?
Are there no works of faith and love neglected,
To thee by Heaven assigned?
No daily Rimmon-worship, undetected,
Blighting thy peace of mind?
Arise and search thy heart—let nothing stay thee—
The fatal leak is there—
This traitor in thy soul may else betray thee
To ruin and despair.
Nor doubt, when thou with heart contrite and lowly
Hast all thy sin confessed,
Thy night shall pass away, and God the holy
Shall hear and give thee rest.
—From "Songs of Life."

MINISTERIAL FIDELITY: A SERMON

Delivered in Richmond Street Church, Toronto, on
Sabbath Morning, June 2nd, 1869.

BY THE REV. W. M. PUNSHON, M.A.,
President of the Conference.

Text:—"Who then shall be faithful and wise steward,
whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household,
to give them their portion of meat in season? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord
when he cometh shall find so doing."—
Luke 12:42-3.

"What I say unto one, I say unto all, Watch." This is the burden of this chapter's message, impressed in many varieties of homely and solemn illustration: by the certainty of the last revelation, by the ever-watchful providence of God, by the rich man doomed amidst his dreams of wealth, by the servants waiting for their master from the wedding, by the good-man's vigilance when the thief is stealthy and nigh. In their original utterance they seemed a doubt whether these were general warnings addressed to the whole church, or whether they were applied especially to the witnesses whom Christ had chosen; and Peter—spokesman, perhaps, of the unuttered thought of others—asked the question, "Lord speakest thou this parable unto us, or unto all?" Our Lord answers in the words of the text,—"words which, while they assume the church's obligation to watchfulness to be not less binding, fasten upon the ministers of Christ a responsibility commended by loftier sanctions, and involving graver issues; so that if it behoves a believer to be watchful, and faithful, and wise, upon the minister there is a double necessity, and that he, if he overcomes and be approved, is the heir of a sublimer recompense, and if he fail and be condemned—of a more appalling doom.

Amongst the many passages bearing upon ministerial character and service, I have selected this on which to ask your attention at this very interesting and solemn crisis in your lives. To you it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the present hour. The hopes and anxieties of years are crowded into it. If you have thought of it rightly, it has been a burden upon your souls, an occasion for searching of heart, a time whose approach has stirred the depths of your being to watchfulness, weeping and prayer. This hour, for you, is the central hour of life. All the past has converged to it; all the future starts from it. It compresses the obligations of time; it is charged with the destinies of eternity. In the presence of the God whom you have sworn to serve,—in the presence of christian people, whose wealth is in your character and usefulness, and to some of whom you may have to minister the word of life,—in the presence of watching angels, and of glorified spirits, dear to some of you, who look down with loving eyes from the reward,—in the presence, it may be, of scoffers who deride your calling, and of adversaries, both earthly and spiritual, who watch for your halting,—you are here to take upon you the vows of the Christian Ministry,

at once the noblest profession and the most solemn responsibility upon earth. It is a duty of my position to counsel and to cheer you,—to remind you of the character it behoves you to attain, and to stimulate you with the hope of the recompense which awaits your toil. I came to this task under the constraint of office, having over you the melancholy advantage of years, but sad with a strong sense of shortcoming in my own soul. With lofty conceptions of the ideal of ministerial character, and a sincere love of it, and an earnest purpose for its attainment, I speak to you, "not as those who have already attained." I have to urge you to become what I am not, but am only striving to be; I can but indicate the glory of which I have caught only the faint and distant radiance; I can but point you to the pure bright summit, from the far slopes up which I am painfully climbing. If my counsels are shorn of their authority by this confession, give me credit for that sympathy with yourselves which may be an element of power instead. Listen, not to the teacher of unapproachable sanctity, but to the brother in experience, in infirmity, in struggle, in desire. The standard is the same although we fail to reach it. Pressed beneath the same sanctions, animated by the same hopes, reliant on the same Almighty arm, "come and let us reason together" of the minister's character and his reward.

There are various similitudes under which, each in its own aspect of fitness, the office of the ministry is presented; but the ideas of trust and of responsibility are leading and present in them all. The Minister is the Dresser of the Vineyard, tending early and late upon the vines; the Fisher of Men, toiling through the dark and in the rain; the Master-builder, charged to see to it that the house is safe and strong; the Shepherd, bound to feed and fold the flock, or to search through the gorge or the mountains for the one that has wandered astray; the Watchman, earnest and unweary in the hours when other men slumber; the Ambassador, to whom are confided the honor and the message of the King. In none of these, however, is there a more impressive illustration—a greater blending of trust and tenderness—than when, in the Lord's own words, the Minister is the Steward of the household from which the Lord is absent for a season. You will readily appreciate the fitness of the allusion. The Church is a wide and loving family—a brotherhood united by sacred bonds, by community of interest, and by the love of one common Father. Of this family the Steward has charge. He must provide for its wants and vindicate its honor; he must maintain its rights, preserve its purity inviolate, and cherish among its members the harmony without which the family compact would be snapped asunder; he must watch over the health and welfare of the weakest, encourage the timid, and repress the rash; he must guard equally against excess and against indifference,—against the parsimony which would grudge, and the wastefulness which would spend all; he has authority, therefore, but it is to be wielded only in the interest of the family and of the Father, and he must act as under the glances of a loving eye, which marks his every movement, and under the presence of the thought that his Lord may at any moment return and ask for the account of his Stewardship. Now lift all these duties into the region of the spiritual; think of the family as being a family of souls on their journey to heaven, and seeking their inheritance there; think that the responsibilities of the Stewardship stretch out into eternity; think that misapprehension of the Steward's obligations, or failure to discharge them aright, may involve loss that is irreparable, and bow down the unfaithful one beneath the terrible guilt of blood; and then, while in the deepening sense of the awfulness of the office upon which you enter to-day, your humble souls may well cry, as under a burden, "Who is sufficient for these things?" you will be penetrated with a desire, passionate in its intensity of strength, that when the Master comes you may be able to stand in His presence "saved" yourselves and "saving them that hear you."

You observe that the two great qualifications which the text implies as necessary to a successful stewardship, are those of *fidelity* and *wisdom*: "Who then is that faithful and wise steward." The first of these has reference to the disposition of the heart, and the second to the due apportionment of endowment and strength. The first is the active principle, the second the discriminating application of means. In the union of these will be found the complement of the Minister's qualification, and the sinews of his power. That you may be thoroughly furnished for your work you must, indeed, have other qualities, upon which I cannot largely dwell. You must have *knowledge*, garnered stores of the wisdom of the older time, the best thoughts of the best thinkers, hoarded for mental exchange. You must have *industry*—a diligence which does not flag, which seizes upon every opportunity, wearied in the work often, but of the work never. You must have *courage*, the best shield of faith; the bravery which at all hazards, and in all seasons, will confess the Master, stern in its denunciation of popular vices, bold in its reproofs when rank and riches sin. You must have *patience*, the hope which waits for God though the wheels of His chariot tarry, which is not disheartened by months of discouragement and delay, which cheers itself by songs in the night, all through the winter singing of the spring which lies, flower-crowned and fair, beneath snow. You must have *meekness*, that you may bear the indifference of the ungolly, and the

scoffing of the profane, enduring, sublimely as your Master, the contradiction of sinners.—You must have *nobleness of soul*, to lift you above the insolent pettinesses of murmuring, and vanity, and envy; the rare heroism of the Baptist, willing to decrease so that the loftier teacher may be exalted and honored. Above all you must have *charity*—the yearning after souls—the travail in birth for souls; a Divine, tender magnanimity of compassion, akin to that of Moses when he wished himself blotted out of the book for the children of Israel's sake,—akin to that of Christ when he was "straitened" until the accomplishment of his baptism of blood. All these in their measure, are comprehended in the *fidelity* which is the prominent duty of your lives; but it is to *Faithfulness*, in the full import of the word, that you are exhorted now: "It is required in Stewards that a man be found faithful." Nothing can compensate for the lack of this. You may have talent, it will not profit; you may have popularity, that is easily acquired, and if that be all it is a poor recompense for any man's toil; you may have an average personal experience, winning manners, and a blameless life, these negative qualities will neither do you nor the world much good; you may pass through your duties respectably, and hear a good report of them that are without, and yet be destitute utterly of the true spirit of your calling, and thro' with no heroic purpose for saving souls. Oh, think of this! Burn it into your hearts amid the solemn sanctions of this hour: "I may be talented, popular, agreeable, blameless in the world's eye, respectable, scholarly, and yet in the sight of God accursed, because unfaithful, and sent away from the judgment with the brand of the traitor and the felon. Brethren, for myself and you, I deprecate that doom. I urge you—

I. *Be faithful in the keeping of your own souls.* You have already testified, in the presence of the great congregation, that you have experienced, really and consciously, the change of heart, and that you are living in God's favor, and striving earnestly after the fulness of God's grace. We do not, knowingly, lay hands upon any who are not thus spiritually alive. The blind cannot lead the blind. Corpses cannot animate the dead. Let me affectionately remind you that in the maintenance of your own inward life consists the secret of your power. Alas for you if you deal in the cold traffic of unfeeling truth; if languor or worldliness be suffered to eat out the heart of your piety; if you relapse into formality or secret unbelief; if the flame upon the closed altar burns dimly, or is quenched; if you minister in a service from which your affections are estranged; if the inspirations of the former time are but as a worn-out spell, or an extinct volcano, with no fire in its passionate heart! What of good to the world, or of blessing to the church can come from the ministry of a man paralyzed in soul—a man who flaunts upon his brow the shrivelled symbols of his former consecration,—a man whose heart is like the sepulchre on the resurrection morning—a thing of clothes and spices but without a Christ. Brethren, be incessant in prayer and watching, I charge you, lest there come upon you this dishonor. Your ordination will not save you from barrenness of soul. Your ministerial status will be no help to preserve you from that declension which is your greatest peril. It is no safety to you that you wear the garb of piety, and speak the language of piety, and are busied day by day in the activities of piety. Nay, there is a sense in which these advantages are an increased source of danger. There is a familiarity which breeds indifference, if not contempt. In the wards of a hospital the sensibilities are blunted to suffering; on the field of battle men overcome their horror of blood. So strangely have we been warped by the fall that the highest excitements are apt to degenerate into the sensual and the unworthy, just as the fall from the cliff is headlong if there be the false step on its verge. Moreover, as Ministers, you are the subjects of especial assaults, because a watchman slain makes the surprise of the citadel more easy; and you are the subjects of especial temptation, because your fall would be to the adversary an occasion of peculiar triumph. You will not be free from the common allurements which beguile unwary souls. The love of ease, the love of money, the love of applause, the prompting to be selfish, and censorious, and petulant, and proud—all these will beset you if they beset ordinary men; nay, it will be with fiercer onset, for the dwellers on the mountain shiver in the terror of the blast, when the peasants of the vale are unconscious that the hurricane is roused. Besides these you will have temptations of your own, springing out of your office, in which those around you cannot share. If God gives you success, you will be tempted to elation,—if you labor without visible result you will be tempted to despond; if your work is easy, you may yield to spiritual indolence; if it is difficult, you may suffer it to master you, in spiritual apathy, or vaunt that you can overcome it, in spiritual pride. You must prosecute it amid counteracting influences. Your plans may be thwarted by the opposition of your associates, or by the indifference of your professed friends. Weak men will obtrude their partialities, and timid and narrow men will cherish their prejudices and ambitious men will make sacrifices to their vanity, and sensitive men must be continually appeased, and crotchety men must be continually humoured. It will be difficult for you to preserve your soul

in patience, and in the meekness of wisdom. Tempted by the outside enemy and by the inside traitor, tried equally by danger and by duty, with the peril lurking both in the heart and in the office, bewildered by the magnitude of the interests committed to your frail guardianship,—nothing will save you but a continual dwelling under the very shadow of the mercy-seat: a clear, constant, strengthening walk with God. Brethren, be faithful in this matter. Live so near to God that the adversary cannot approach to harm you. Let your ideal be the Divine Saviour who could say, looking calmly upon a world of foes, "The Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." Satan will not enter the house if there be no beckoning eye from the window. Keep your spirit free from all allies of the Evil One, that so, humbly trusting in your heavenly helper, and baring your heart for Divine scrutiny, you may rejoice to say, "Thou hast proved mine heart, thou hast visited me in the night, thou hast tried me and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer."

II. *Be Faithful to the Truth.*—You have already testified, before many witnesses, your belief, whole-souled and earnest, of those truths which have been handed down to us from our fathers, and which are hallowed by centuries of toil and triumph. We have a right to expect of you that in this testimony you have made no rash avowal. You have had opportunities, during your years of probation, of becoming acquainted with our system of doctrine, both in the harmony of its strength, and in the power with which its enforcement is attended. You have seen the illustration of the doctrine in the life. It has been the glorying of our church that, by the grace of God, no doctrinal controversies have disturbed it through the century of its evangelistic labour. We ask of you in confidence that you will not "make" this "glorious void." In the name of your fathers who confide to you their trust unimpaired, in the name of the churches to which you will minister, and whom your heresy might disturb and injure, in the name of the Methodist people to whose taste this word has been sweet, and who cry in hunger of heart—"Evermore give us this bread," because of the scoffing world, who will acknowledge the moral power of a whole army valiant for the truth, I ask you to hold fast, and to hold forth, the ancient Word of Life.

There is a necessity for fidelity to the truth especially in times like ours, when every doctrine passes through the crucible, when that which has commanded the veneration of ages is roughly handled by the scepticisms of modern thought, and when even those truths on which our dearest hopes repose, are in some quarters fiercely assailed, and in others lightly regarded. Perhaps there never was a time when the enemies of the truth fought with more various weapons, or were animated by a more cruel antagonism. The ancient adversaries return to the charge as freshly as if they had never been beaten; and there are others, more subtle and dangerous, who fight in the army of aliens, but in the armour which they have stolen from the faithful. You will have to exercise your ministry in the midst of this luxuriance of error. There will be around you a dark ingenious spirit of unbelief, poisoning the fresh blood of youth, and disheartening the last hope of age; sometimes like Herod, coarsely insolent in its impiety, sometimes like Judas betraying the Saviour with a kiss. There will be an earnest, well-disciplined, crafty superstition, restless in its endeavours to regain its ascendancy, marshalling its forces with wonderful skill—holding to its purpose through the patient years with a zeal and devotion which it were well for its opponents to imitate; but hiding the Saviour in the drapery in which it swathes him and hampering the free grace of His atonement by a frail and tangled net-work of its own. There will be a pretentious formalism, denying all connection with Romanism, but quietly doing its work—high in its asceticism, and haughty in its exclusiveness; a thing of wax-work and symbols, but with a soul of treason to the old Protestant truth. There will be a wide-spread indifference, more fatal than enmity, because it is so intangible that you can no more fight with it than with a shadow. A spurious liberality, which the tendencies of the age foster, which proceeds on the assumption that all religions are alike, and that there is no essential difference between truth and error. There will be the avowed denial of the divinity of Jesus, or of the freeness and fulness of His grace, or of the spirituality of His reign. There will be, as it would seem, a restless and intolerant evangelism, blinding the world and deluding the unwary in the Church by the utter errors of half-truth, ignoring repentance in its professed exaltation of faith, virtually disowning the Holy Spirit in its desire to vindicate the human spirits freedom, substituting an Antinomian apathy for the liberty of the gospel of Christ—running a tilt against the sects, while itself is the straightest and most uncharitable of sects, consistently speaking evil of "system from its own Babel of disorder, and yet encouraging on system attacks upon all christian organizations in a spirit more akin to that of "robbers of churches," than of apostles to a leprosy and unhappy world! There will be other forms of various and eccentric error, which it does not take to dignify by a mention; and you may take it as an axiom that no form of heresy can be too sacrilegious or too silly for the credulity of men. How needful amidst this abounding darkness that the light-bearers should let their

light shine before men. Dear brethren, your duty, always imperative, becomes invested with more solemn obligation, to hold fast, and contend earnestly for, the faith which was once delivered to the saints. The ark is not in danger, but it must have well-furnished Levites in its service. While error has its emissaries everywhere, some from barbarous Phrygia, some from scholarly and sceptical Athens, be it yours to abide in the good old paths in which your fathers travelled to Heaven. "Inwardly digest" the truth until it is assimilated to your nature, and enfolded with your every interest and affection. Take your stand, firm, calm, heroic, by the ancient altar, and from that altar let neither ritaldory nor rationalism expel you. Be no longer children, except in simplicity; but in understanding be ye men. Let your faith rest with a child's reliance, and yet with a tenacity strong as the death grasp of a martyr, upon the truth as it is in Jesus. You must be children of the truth, if you are to be its witnesses. Feeling it in the heart, your faith a living faith, blest with its consolation and hopes, you will withstand the enemies in the gate; and though wittlings deride, and scoffers sneer, and cowards basely flee, your resolve will ring out like a clarion in the ears of a world, which your fidelity shall constrain to heed you. "I determine to know nothing among men, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

III. *Be faithful to the Church of your choice and to your Brethren in the Ministry.* In the present state of the world and of the minds of men, there must be distinct organizations of believers as well as, and within, the universal church. The central thought, the great necessity of churchmanship is of course, union with Christ. But human hearts have strong chords of sympathy, by whose inevitable influence like years for like, and the believer longs for the companionship of those who are inspired by the same hope, both for mutual benefit, and for the completer outworking of all schemes of holy toil. Hence comes the visible church existing not so much a mechanical idea, as a social necessity—a supply for that creaturely want which abhorred the utter loneliness, even in Eden—a realization of the soul's strong instinct of brotherhood; but christianity is the religion of intellectual freedom—it snags all fetters alike of social and mental bondage, and secures the sacred right of private judgement unto all. Those who are substantially agreed on these vital points without which christianity itself could not be, may still have minor, though important differences of opinion. Here again, by the same law, like years for like. So comes the denomination, an inner circle within the church, neither unwarranted nor unscriptural, I take it, because it springs out of the genius of christianity, and is almost a necessary adjunct of a free church life. The denomination becomes harmful only when it cherishes a spirit of exclusiveness or jealousy, and is forgetful of that divinest charity which is the core of all the creeds. The talk about absorption is, at best, an amiable dream. The crusade against church organization is at once a folly and a sin. There is room, I think for the exhortation to fidelity to the church which you have chosen. I am not so foolish as to claim any exclusive excellence for Methodism. I have no quarrel with the churches. I am catholic enough to wish them God speed, and my co-operation with their work has ever been warm and willing. Each of them, that is faithful to Christ, has its mission from the royal signet, and in the past, each of them has done some work for the world, which no other has done so well; but amid an all-embracing generosity, commend me to the man who has a home. You are to minister in the ministry of the Methodist church. Not in vaunting, but in gratitude we express our conviction that it is "not a whit behind the chiefest." It has a heritage of sound doctrine, and traditions inspiring as the chronicles of ancient kings. It has a theology, bound, well-defined, scriptural, free from all unworthy limitations of the Son's love, free from all disloyal forgetfulness of the Spirit's grace. It has a godly discipline which it knows how to enforce, and which hedges round the enclosures in which its flocks are folded. It has a church order as effective as the most orderly, and a church life as vigorous as the most free. It has, moreover, a wonderful adaptation, not for clan or family, but for all circumstances, complexions and climes. Unbending in its woven roots and giant trunk like the old oak of the forest, it courts the rays of every sunbeam in every breeze that blows. Its past is the augury of its future, if it be not traitorous to its heavenly calling. You have a church, therefore, that is worthy to be served by heart-hearted and enterprising sons. Be faithful to it, I charge you. Do not allow it to become the vassal of any but Christ, nor the enemy of any but sin. Work for it as if you were jealous for its honour, and remember that its honour is its fidelity to the Head of the church in heaven. You have studied its doctrines and have seen the workings of its polity. You have accorded to it your intelligent preferences, and in the face of the world, you testify to-day that you believe it to be the best sphere of toil in all the world for you. Keep to it "until death do you part." Bind yourselves to it with the solemnity and tenderness of a marriage vow. Don't be tempted away from it by the hope of increased respectability, or ease, or gain. Free yourselves from the unworthy littleness which motives like these imply. The prodigals who go off into the far country have sometimes only a brief enjoyment, succeeded by a famine of soul. Wander whence you will, you will not find greener pastures, nor stiller waters,