

BACCALAUREATE SERMON.

Delivered in College Hall, Wolfville, on Sunday Morning, June 29th.

By Rev. Calvin Goodspeed, D. D., LL. D.

1 Cor. 16: 13. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."

I am to remember as I speak to-day, that I have before me young men and young ladies from all parts of our country. I am not to forget that they represent much of the hope and promise of our people as they face their future and their work. They are also to form a part of our contribution to our young country which is being thrilled with the thought of becoming a great nation, and which is grinding its loins to meet the demands of a great destiny. Some of these, after years of study, are face to face with the grave responsibility and the serious work of life for which this has been a preparation. The others are beginning to glance out upon the future with eyes that are wistful as well as curious and altogether eager. All are soon to confront a world whose face is seamed and scarred with past conflicts. But still this old world's life tides were never more headlong and impetuous. Never was there a time when its opposing tendencies met with greater jar. Never were the restless tides of new thought chafing with more angry impatience against the bulwark of established beliefs.

What message shall I then attempt to bring you who are soon, and you who are somewhat later, to fling yourselves, or, if you are listless, to be flung, into the life of the world in its new conditions and to feel all its forces eddying around you and beating upon you. What am I to say to you who have your lives all before you, and whose energies are throbbing with more and more abounding pulse—you who have possibilities before you which surpass the perils and with inspirations everywhere? From your natural abilities and your cultivated powers much may well be expected of you. The fate of the future must lie chiefly in the hands of men of brain as well as brawn. If from anywhere are to come the men and the women to stem evil tides, to beat back aggressive unbelief, to lead in the struggle for right and good and God—it must be of men and women of your class. The world and good men and God over all are summoning you to do your part. How am I to attempt even to give voice to that summons and appeal? I do not think it can be better done than in these words of Paul to the Corinthians. They ring out like the quick sharp blasts of a trumpet on the day of battle. They are full of the electric thrill of the great soul from which they came. Would that I might be able to communicate some of their impulse and inspiration to you who listen to me this day.

While these crisp exhortations ring out separate and distinct like the strokes of a bell, they all have a common note. The apostle saw these Corinthian believers face to face with sin in its vilest but yet most seductive forms. He saw them confronted by the scornful wisdom of this world in the form of Greek philosophy. He saw them in an atmosphere which was most deadly to faith and inner life. He saw them too, as the pioneers of the new faith to a lost world, in a position of the grandest and most far reaching opportunity. The one great need to enable them to stand amid the soil and pressure and be worthy of their possibilities was that they be strong. But while in a situation demanding the strength of giants, they were showing the weakness and littleness of children. In this letter he has to control himself and deal patiently with their petty divisions and their small difficulties. But the desire that they might have that which would lift them above their littleness was growing more intense as he wrote. And here, when giving them his plans and instructions, it bursts up like a boiling spring from the deeper brooding of his thought.

Am I not right then in writing these short impetuous exhortations around the subject of Christian strength? I hope it may be of interest to all who are present but especially to those for whom this service is chiefly intended. I call your attention then to:—

1. Watchfulness as a negative condition of strength.

This injunction, "Watch ye" means more than to be ready to meet the onset of temptations or danger, it is a call to throw off all sluggishness, all inertness, all indifference, it is a call to be alert, wide awake, and open eyed. And do we need to be told that the sleepy and listless soul will never act strongly? Do we need to be told that only the man who is wide-awake and alert will ever be strong with a manly strength?

It matters little whether it be a sleeping lion or a sleeping hare. They are equally harmless and equally useless. Whether a man have great abilities or great possibilities of other kinds, while sluggish and indifferent, he may do less than a man of inferior powers. A sluggish mind like sleepy eyes cannot have much vision. Such a mind will never discern the approval of some great and dangerous tendency and be prepared to meet and master it. Such a mind will never quickly recognize the presence of a great opportunity and be ready to meet its imperative demands. A sluggish mind will never lead in the initiation of what is new however beneficent it may promise to be. Men of this type are

shut in to mediocrity if not inferiority. They can never do steady, strong thinking. They may do something now and then when some special emergency wakens them up for a time, but the old drowsy habit soon masters them and they sink back to the old low level.

But men's souls may be asleep as well as their minds. This, if possible, is the worst state of the two. A man with his heart sluggish and indifferent is like a steamer when the furnace fires burn low, and the strokes of the engine become slow and weak. An inert soul loses its responsiveness. Press it with the most burning motives, and it will be like piling the coal into a furnace when the fires are out. We find men and women with hearts asleep in our churches, in our cities, in connection with all kinds of great questions and measures and problems. Giant evils abound in the face of the fact that they could be crushed were men but to act. The great work of saving a lost world goes heavily, because so many hearts are asleep and insensitive to the situation.

Alertness is more imperative in this day of feverish and headlong activity, than in the past when life was less eager and more staid. Men of sluggish head and heart cannot hope to keep pace with the echoing tramp of the double quick of the time, they can never hope to force ahead to a position of leadership and power, they must be satisfied to take a place in the rear.

Why is it that we hear so much of the dreadful deadline just now? Why is it that so many who once gave bright promise of success in various callings have to be carried on the tide of thought and forces around them rather than be potent and helpful factors themselves? It is because they have lost their mental and spiritual alertness. Perhaps in common and even college halls they were willing to make their brains but reservoirs for others thought rather than thought springs. They have gone forth to begin their own work as surveyors of other people's ideas which they have gathered. Perhaps even they have supposed they have laid in their stock in trade for the intellectual business of their whole life, and originality has been laid in its grave. But men who do not delve in independent thought soon lose their keen interest in their work, as do workmen who only put together what has been furnished them. Thus they become indifferent and generally sluggish. The pulse beat of their minds has slowed down. The intensity of their inner lives has relaxed. The response to motives has grown weak. They become discouraged and have not the nerve for the struggle needed to enable them to accomplish a worthy ambition and a high purpose. And they are over the dead line before age has whitened their locks or enfeebled their frames. In this age beyond all others, if they want to do strong work and quit them like men, they need to have these words of the apostle ringing continually in their ears like the voice of a clarion "Watch ye," be alert, be wide awake. The world has no need of sluggards. I you wish to do your part in a time like this, be intense be men of keen mental vision. Keep your soul open to the electric currents of the world's life and thought and needs. Let them move and thrill you as they relate to the world as it faces its problems in the light of time and eternity, God and destiny.

We have called your attention to one condition of power contained in our text. We refer you to

II. A still more fundamental and positive condition of Christian strength, "Stand fast in the faith."

Notice how Paul associates alertness and standing fast in the faith. He had unshaken confidence that "the faith"—the recognized body of Christian truth—would abide the tests of the most open eyed searching; for had he not been compelled to accept this faith by its abundant proofs when most bitterly opposed to it, as they were forced upon him on the very ground where the faith had its birth. The light was so clear that it forced itself through his closed lids. He felt too that the common people such as belonged to the church at Corinth might be able to intelligently stand fast in the faith. For it was not elaborately built up upon abstruse thought, like a system of philosophy, but upon patient and soul stirring facts. I am not so sure but that Paul may not be as reliable an authority as many who would shake our confidence in the faith. He had better opportunities to test it, and he had a mind equal to the best.

Through the ages the faith has had nothing to fear from men of eager thought and candid soul. It has suffered from those who would not test it fairly. So many have sought to judge of it by the head alone, while, as religion, its final and supreme appeal is to the heart.

To judge of it by the intellect alone, is like weighing a poem on a pair of scales or measuring the quality of love with a yard stick. This method made Rome a skeptic, while a recognition of its appeal to heart as well as head brought him back to faith. Those who today wish to judge of the Bible or of any other book are as unfair as they are specious. It must be judged of by what it claims to be. But let it be tested by its appeal to the heart and its needs as well as the head, and it will still bear the tests of the head as well as the heart.

But there are some who think one cannot be an open-eyed man of to-day unless he slips his anchor hold on "the faith of Paul. To be wide awake and up to date, he must speak patronizingly of it, he must publish some doubt, or he must make some attack upon one of the truths which have steadied the faltering, comforted the troubled and given assurance to the dying in all ages. It is well to remember that

there is superficial doubt as well as superficial faith. Thoughtful and sincere men turn away from the old faith, if they ever do, with shadowed souls and hearts ready to break. When Prof. Clifford lost his hold on faith he could say "We have seen the spring sun shine out of an empty heaven to light up a soulless earth; we have felt with utter loneliness that the great companion was dead." Romanes in like case said, "When at times I think, as think at times I must, of the appalling contrast between the hallowed glory of that creed which once was mine, and the lonely mystery of existence as I now find it, at such times I shall ever feel it impossible to avoid the sharpest pang of which my nature is capable." Theodore Jouffrey, when in like case had to say, "when he felt that all certainty had dropped from beneath his feet." "This moment was frightful, when, towards morning I threw myself exhausted upon my bed it seemed to me as if I could feel my former life, so cheerful and complete, die away, and before me there opened up another life, dark and dispeopled, where, henceforth, I was to live alone, alone with my fatal thought which had just exiled me thither, and which I was tempted to curse." A doubt which is proclaimed upon the house-tops is always shallow. All sentiment of unbelief prove the unbelievee vain as well as shallow. Let us always distinguish between the reverent doubter upon whom his belief is a burden and a woe, and the light hearted type who strikes at the foundations of heavenly hopes and eternal destinies as though it were a pastime. The former should have our respectful sympathy. The latter but shows his spiritual stupidity.

But while mental and spiritual alertness is necessary to steadfastness in the faith, certainty of belief is indispensable to Christian strength. But there are men today who challenge this position. They tell us that as soon as we accept anything as certain all hope of progress is ended. They say the quest for truth is more helpful than its possession. They assert that this is the only way to keep thought from becoming fossilized and to preserve its vitality. One's views of truth must be kept in perpetual flux. We must "be ever learning," like those to whom Paul referred, "and never coming to the knowledge of the truth." We must be like mills that are ever grinding and never producing any grist. We must be like steamers which are perpetually churning the waters and never reaching any port. It is this spirit which underlies the disposition today to reject all that has come down to us from the thought of the past. It is this which is making the words "creed" and "traditional" terms of reproach. It is this tendency which makes all positiveness of statement of belief offensive to many. But surely those who hold this view are in error. It is not necessary to be in perpetual doubt in order to cultivate the highest mental power. The hope of reaching assured results is really needed to inspire the mind to its best endeavor. The student will soon tire of the problem of whose solution he despairs.

It must also be remembered that we can tax our best powers in thinking down into truth as well as in enquiring whether something is true. With teachings like those of the Bible with their soundless depths, our thought never needs become fossilized for lack of scope or call to its highest exercise. In fact, the greatest thought of the ages has been by those who have accepted the faith of the Bible and have done their best to delve down into its mysteries of grace.

But truth does not serve its highest purpose in giving scope for mental effort. We are infinitely higher than mere thinking machines. Being is higher than thinking and the thought which does not make the very being of man stronger and better is of little worth. Were we but thinking machines, we might question all our lives whether bread were wholesome or poisonous and refuse to eat. But with bodies this course would lead to disaster. And does not the soul need truth as the body bread to make it strong, the man who spends his lifetime in questionings will inevitably starve his soul and condemn himself to spiritual impotence.

No, you cannot satisfy the souls craving or arouse its potent energies with doubts and questionings. Nothing but certainty can meet a man's needs as he stands face to face with the questions of God and eternity and destiny. With the tremendous possibilities of being of which he is conscious, his whole soul revolts at the thought of resembling a bit of flotsam dashed hither and thither upon a misty sea. He cannot abide being like a man on a rudderless ship while the breakers are sounding across the darkened waters as the angry surf is sullenly dashing against some rugged shore. "I don't know" and "I doubt" will never give thews to a man's soul. He must have his feet planted upon some immovable certainty rather than upon a shaking bog of questioning before he can brace himself to play a strong part in the strife of life and the battle of ages. Without this unshaken certainty he can have no fulcrum from which to move the world. All his life will be reduced to a hesitating gamble, although the stakes are known to be as tremendous as the utmost possibilities of a being which is thought to be endless. No man can be strong with death and what may come after death facing him and nothing but questionings upon which to steady his shrinking soul. The best that can be his is the weakness of bravado or the stupor of despair of some knowledge.

But there must be more than mere certainty of knowledge to help a man to be strong. All knowledge is not power,