

Our Contributors.

A Sermon by "Ralph Connor."

BY CHARLES GALLAUDET TRUMBULL.

In a little frame church in a "boom city" of the great Canadian Northwest the Sunday morning congregation was gathering. It was not a wild-looking congregation. The only evidence of the frontier was the rich bronze of complexion and hair, and the hands roughened by hard work in the open, that marked both men and women alike; for Canada, unlike "the States," has never had a "wild West." With her, schools and missionaries went first; education and religion paved the way for the settlers, and the country has not had to pass through the period of license and lynch law that marked the early life of so much of America's West.

But it is a very different audience from that of the Eastern village or town church. That deep bronze of skin and hair is everywhere to be seen. There is a solidity of mien, a settled earnestness, a come-for-business air, which one associates with the church-goers of Drumtochty. There, by the door, is the living type of a Scotch Presbyterian elder of the Old Country, with clean-shaven lip and chin, and aureole of white whiskers and hair wreathing the whole benignant, if austere, countenance. Mothers with children are here, young men with young women, and a large number of men,—young, middle-aged, and old. In addition to the types, so recognizable, of the new Scotch-Canadian West, you see American residents and visitors, and even a couple of American commercial travelers, many of whom go to church "on the road," as the three thousand "Gideons" will testify.

The church furniture is of the plainest. Ordinary wooden chairs, a bare wooden floor, a cabinet organ, and limp-backed little hymn-books without music, constitute the outfit. The choir of young folks is at the right of the pulpit. Presently the minister enters from a door at the left, ascends the pulpit, rests both elbows, with hands clasped, on the great Bible in front of him, leans forward with an earnest "Let us worship God!" and with bowed head commends the congregation and the service to the Almighty.

Those in the church that day to whom "Ralph Connor's" books have preached many a lasting sermon, follow the service and attend upon the minister's words with more than an ordinary interest. They cannot believe that the "Sky Pilot," when in the pulpit himself, will bear a commonplace message or conduct a commonplace service.

The minister reads a few verses from Psalm 118, and then from the little red backed "Presbyterian Book of Praise" they sing one of the "Selections from the Psalter," as the Psalm-singers use it:

"O set ye open unto me
The gates of righteousness;
Then I will enter into them,
And I the Lord will bless."

Again the minister reads, Psalm 138,—they love to praise the Almighty, these Scotch folk,—interspersing it with a word of earnest, homely comment, and then, "May God bless to us the reading of his Word. Let us pray." The prayer that goes up is a loving conversation between the children and the Father, yet with no lack of the deep rever-

ence without which the Scotch minister and congregation cannot worship. But it is the Father-note, more than the Law-giver: "And when we sin, may we remember that we have not only been breaking the law of God, we have been sinning against our Father's love." During this prayer again there was the leaning forward with the arms resting on the great Bible, and hands clasped,—as though unconsciously trying to draw near to his people and to the Father at the same time.

After singing Godfrey Thring's "Hail! sacred day of earthly rest," came the reading of a New Testament passage from John 13 and 14,—the sermon passage, it proved. Our Lord was telling the disciples, "Yet a little while I am with you. . . whither I go, thou canst not follow me now." In answer to Peter's impetuous "Why cannot I follow thee even now? I will lay down my life for thee," came the fatal foretelling, "Wilt thou lay down thy life for me? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice." And then the minister paused to picture the tumult that this prediction about Peter, their leader, the Rock, must have caused in the breasts of those men. "Can you imagine," he said, "the panic that must have fallen on Peter and the disciples at those words? Then listen: 'Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.'" And so he read on into that peace-bringing fourteenth chapter of John, and the beauty and the significance of it were ten-fold to the hearer because of the way in which the minister had linked it, as did our Lord himself, to the startling words which close the thirteenth chapter. And when the minister came to preach on the fourth, fifth, and sixth verses of that fourteenth chapter, his hearers were ready to understand the message as they would not have been without that reading.

"And whither I go, ye know the way. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; how know we the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way."

"The mind of man," said the minister, "has a strange capacity for refusing to understand what it will not accept." Then he described our Lord's manner of revealing to Thomas—doubting type of us all—the great saving truth of Christ the Way. "But mark how simply he did this," said the minister. Remember that Thomas had not had a course in the Epistles. He was not ready for an explanation of that great mystery, the doctrine of the Atonement. He could not have understood it if he had been told. And so Jesus tells him simply, and in words suited to his experience, how he may come to the Father through Christ the way; tells him that if he has known him, he has known the Father."

That, in a word, was the message of the day. The minister took care not to say that we, modern children of the faith, are not able to grasp the doctrine of the Atonement. He took care to refer with respect and reverence to that doctrine as commonly understood. But one of his hearers at least, and I doubt not many another, had borne in on him the beauty and power of the Saviour's manner of teaching, and could not but silently contrast it with the labored and laboring attempts to explain, to the last degree the sacred mysteries of our Lord's life and

mission with which some modern teachers, having taken courses much fuller than the inspired Epistles, would instruct the descendants of Thomas.

I was talking with Mr. Gordon in his home, the next day, about the service of the previous day, and I told him how his sermon had impressed and helped me.

"It was rather a curious thing," said he, "that sermon. It didn't come out at all as I had planned it. When I began to prepare it, I intended it to be a discourse on just how Christ brings us to the Lord,—how he acts as mediator between the Almighty and ourselves, and so on in the regulation doctrinal manner. But I found, on studying the passage on which I was to preach, that all that wasn't there. I began to study what the Lord really said on that occasion, and why he said it. I tried to realize how Thomas felt. He wasn't ready for a doctrine of the Atonement."

"He hadn't had a course in the Epistles," I quoted.

"Exactly," Mr. Gordon continued. "How did Thomas feel at that time? How did the Lord treat him? What did he give him?"

"The trouble with our theological students," he went on with great earnestness, "is that they look out through squared-off windows of systematic theology. They go through the high school, through the college, through the seminary, and then they are ready to preach. But what do they know about men? That is their lack, and the great need of the ministry to-day: a knowledge of men and what to give them. And what men need," he added, "is not theology, but the life story of Jesus Christ, simple and direct."

Is it not because of his fidelity to that conviction that Charles W. Gordon is to-day, in the city of Winnipeg, as the Sky Pilot was in logging camp and mining town, a power for Christ among men. "There are only three or four men in Winnipeg," the President of the Young Men's Christian Association there said to a friend, "whom we can count upon to speak to our young men in a way that will get hold of them. But Mr. Gordon is one of them; we can always depend upon him."

Some church folks in Minneapolis were very desirous of getting Mr. Gordon to come to their church and give a reading from one of his books, the plan being to sell tickets and make a great occasion of it. Mr. Gordon thanked them, and declined. He is always ready to preach Jesus Christ to souls, whether from his own or another's pulpit, or in his books. He is not ready to go on exhibition. May the Lord raise up more such men to point the Way to their brothers!—S. S. Times.

Presbyterian Volunteer Union.

This Union was organized in 1898. Its membership is made up of all Volunteer Students in Canada who are Presbyterians. It is, therefore, the Presbyterian end in Canada of the Student Volunteer Movement. It exists in loyalty to it, and seeks to do, in its own particular province, all the parent Movement enjoins upon its members.

It aims, through its Executive, to keep in touch with all Volunteers. It seeks to stimulate, develop, and maintains their interest in and purpose towards the work of foreign missions, and by sympathetic interest in the life and special circumstances of each Volunteer, to contribute to the realization of their life's purpose. The Union, as it may be able, and so far as it is right, does what it can to conserve this student missionary interest to the work of our own Church.