

The Record.

TUESDAY, MAY, 1859.

KNOX COLLEGE—CLOSING OF SESSION.

On Wednesday 6th ult. the session of Knox College was brought to a close. The closing address was delivered by Rev. Dr. Burns, and will be found in another column. It was listened to with interest and attention, not only by the students but by a numerous audience, embracing not a few ministers from different parts of the country, several professors of the University of Toronto, various brethren of other denominations, and a large number of friends residing in the city. At the close of the lecture, Principal Willis, who had also introduced the proceedings, addressed the audience and particularly the Students, in a few impressive and appropriate remarks, and then brought the proceedings to a close by giving out a few verses of a Psalm to be sung, and then pronouncing the benediction.

THE CHRISTIAN PULPIT.

Closing Address by Rev. R. Burns, D. D.

The great apostle of the Gentiles, at the commencement of his first letter to the Corinthian Church, makes this weighty announcement: "After that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe," (I Cor. i. 21.) The native abilities of man had been tried, and they proved to be only weakness. His wisdom was put to the test, and it turned out to be only folly. On his moral and religious character an experiment on a broad and extended scale had been made; and men soon manifested that "they did not choose to retain God in their knowledge;" yea, that He who is holy and true,—He who is the fountain of every blessing,—had no place in their affections or hearts. Science, both genuine and spurious, had done its part; idolatry in all lands had put forward its chequered and loathsome features; self-righteousness had devised its varied schemes of propitiation;—and the god of this world wrought with them all, and was in all alike unsuccessful. "When the fulness of the times had come," God spoke "by his son from heaven," and while "to the Jews Christ crucified proved a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness," to vast multitudes both of the one class and of the other, the tidings of salvation by the cross of Jesus proved "the power of God and the wisdom of God."

The context clearly proves that the term "foolishness" was not meant to apply exclusively at least, to the method of communication, but rather to the subject matter of the communication itself. The plan of saving men by an expiatory oblation on the cross seemed a foolish expedient; and, from that day to the present, man's estimate of it has been the same. In the meanwhile, higher orders of being desire to look into it, and gaze on its wonders

with surpassing interest. In the meanwhile, also, the plan develops itself with amazing success, and the "foolishness of God" turns out to be "wiser than men." The heralds of the cross "went everywhere preaching the Gospel, and "multitudes of saved ones were added to the Church." "Somightly grew the Word of God and prevailed."

It does not appear that the charge of folly was ever attached, at least prominently, to the simple idea of preaching, or to the position occupied by the preacher, whether designated a tribune, a platform, or a pulpit. In all ages indeed, the charge of imbecility has been advanced against the men who have occupied the Christian pulpit, and the matters with which they have dealt when in it. But a Paul at Athens and at Ephesus; a Chrysostom in Constantinople, and when an exile also; a Claude at Turin; a Luther at Wittenberg; a Calvin at Geneva; a Latimer in his stone pulpit at Paul's Cross; a Knox and a Chalmers in Scotland; a Whitefield and a Wesley in England; a Rowlands in Wales; a Tennant and a Davies in America,—these, with a host whom we need not name, expose the absurdity of the plea, and prove the weapons of our warfare and the instruments which the Christian pulpit has at command, to be "mighty through God." Julian, the apostate, had the sagacity to see, even amid the growing darkness of the fourth century, the might of the Christian pulpit, and he set up *his* pulpit also, to plead for the departing glories of his favorite paganism. God, by the hand of death removed him soon from the scene, but he lived long enough to prove that he was not at all a fool in the estimate he had formed of pulpit potency and of popular appeals.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, the lustre of the Christian pulpit had begun to wane; and monkery, and relics, and gorgeous vestments, and the images of Mary and of departed saints, had little in common with the heart-stirring appeals of the few spiritual men, who still gathered around their pulpits, dense masses of eager hearers. Julian saw this, and he took his advantage of it. He knew that Constantine's kindness had overlaid the Church, and that forms of prayer and the mysteries of the sacraments, were more in vogue than public weekly appeals to the popular mind. He availed himself of the crisis, and his example was followed, partially at a later day, by the leaders of the French revolution, and more systematically still in our own times. Medieval revivals, in the intoning of prayers and the fondling of rotten bones, have been strangely associated with wild speculations, both in theology and science. The venerable halls of Oxford are not unapprised of this, and the finest set-off against it is to be found in the weekly Sabbath assemblies, and popular pulpit appeals of Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, and Exeter Hall. If this new and noble phenomenon of the age is to be interfered with by the torpedo touch of a Pusey or of a Wilber-

force, the thinning process will begin by turning the pulpit to a corner, and by attempts to regale the teeming multitudes with prayers *bolden* and intoned in full style, and by the occasional exhibition of a venerable relic.

The most prolific sources of superstition in the Christian Church have been the use of an unknown tongue in its devotional services, and the turning of the pulpit to the side, in order to give prominence to the reading desk, and the paraphernalia of the altar and the liturgy. The plea for it has been, the worship of God as taking precedence in His house. But the application of such a plea to exclude or put into a corner the faithful and edifying exposition of God's own Word, and the substitution of "vain repetitions" in place of the warm and lively preaching of the Gospel, is sinful in a very high degree. "Christ sent me," said Paul, "not to baptise, but to preach the Gospel." "I charge thee before God," addressing Timothy, "and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine," II Tim. iv. 1-2. The apostle's words embrace the varied objects comprehended in the Christian ministry, as an ordinance for the salvation of men; and the Christian pulpit, with its understood accompaniments, embraces them all.

The Reformation brought back the Christian pulpit to its proper place in the sanctuary; and the reformers acted on a two-fold principle, which ought never to be lost sight of in our view of the apostolic ministry. In the first place, they brought out to view, what had been long obscured, yea, well-nigh ignored, the supremacy of Christian truth, and its prominence in all public instruction. The person and the work of Christ; the state of man as by nature guilty, impure, and helpless; the provision made for him by the Covenant of Grace; the offices of the divine Redeemer; the mighty change to be effected on every sinner ere he can be admitted to heaven; the necessity of that faith by which the justified man shall live; and the agency of the Holy Ghost, purifying the heart and controlling the life:—these, and their concomitants, held their due place in discourses from the pulpit, and the earnest preachers of these times expected no saving results, excepting from the warm and lively preaching of those truths in their systematic order, and practical relations. In an age nearer our own the Puritans and non-Conformists of England developed still more fully in their sermons the lineaments of evangelical truth; while in regard to the second particular, in my mind, they have never been surpassed by the preachers of any age or country, I refer to the knowledge of human nature they displayed, and their skill in adapting the truths of God to the ever varying classes and characters of men. This is what renders the pulpit an instrument of peculiar responsibility, and augments its voice.