

THE ECCLIASTICAL AND MISSIONARY RECORD.



FOR

THE

Presbyterian Church of Canada.

"Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and the strength of salvation."

VOL. V.

TORONTO, DECEMBER, 1848.

NO. 2.

Eccliaistical Intelligence.

**LECTURE BY THE REV. DR. WILLIS,
INTRODUCTORY TO THE STUDIES OF
THE SESSION.**

DELIVERED 18TH OCTOBER, 1848.

DEAR FRIENDS,—

When meeting you again, at the commencement of another Session, it first of all becomes us gratefully to acknowledge the goodness of a protecting and fortifying Providence, in permitting us to assemble in safety: without any one painful casualty known to me to have occurred among us in the interval of our terms of study, which might have cast a shade of sadness over our reunion, or damped the joy of our mutual greetings. We have to felicitate ourselves, on the contrary, on the general good health with which both Teachers and Pupils again rally on the scene of professional exertion; each, I trust, ready to address himself to the business of his department with fresh vigour of mind, and the honest purpose, by God's assistance, to improve to the best effect his opportunities, whether for the communication or the acquisition of knowledge.

I congratulate my respected colleagues, as I also do you, my young friends of the various classes, on the goodly numbers which appear as candidates for matriculation in our Institute. It is, I trust, an auspicious omen for the prosperous course which it has to run in coming years, that the number of Students has advanced at a steadily increasing ratio; and that now, in but the fourth year of its existence, we may calculate on an aggregate attendance of fifty, either at the Theological or preparatory classes of this College,—including no fewer than twenty-eight or thirty Students of Theology proper. Let us hope that this is a token for good for the cause of religion in Canada, and especially of our Presbyterian Church. The prospect of such an accession of spiritual laborers will gladden the hearts of our existing ministry, and encourage our people in many districts of the land, whom hope deferred has well nigh rendered sick, as they have longed in vain for a regular ministrations of the blessed gospel of the grace of God, and all the invaluable consolations connected with the presence and daily oversight of faithful Pastors. It will indeed be a just cause of thanksgiving by them, and by us on their behalf, if the Lord has touched the hearts of so many, and inspired them with a desire towards the good work of true spiritual labors: not as seeking their own profit, but the profit of many; not as merely coveting the quiet and comfort and respectability of a professional life, as an alternative to the cares and

labors of worldly business; but as men deeply impressed with the value of soul, fired with love to the heavenly Master and Saviour, and burning with the ardour of a holy zeal to impart to others the benefits of that Gospel, whose sweetness you have yourselves tasted—whose saving and transforming efficacy you have experienced.

For; I cannot but remind you that this is a Theological College, and so identified with the cause that is most sacred. The door indeed is open to various walks of study; yet with us these are means to one recognized end—the accomplishing and qualifying the youth who resort hither for spiritual offices, as expositors of the Word of God, and missionaries of the cross of Christ. The terminus ad quem should not for a moment be lost sight of. Theological science may be said, indeed, not to stand first but last in the Student's curriculum; but however it may be with the science of Theology, religion lies at the beginning. On the doors of an ancient school, it was written,—“Let none enter hither, who knows not geometry!” It would not be inappropriate as a motto for our walls.—“Let none enter hither, who is a stranger to the power of godliness, and who feels no ardent interest in the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom in our land and through out the world!” We desire that a due consideration of the great recognised end of our studies here, should impress each entrant from the very commencement; this will tend to give the fitting direction, and mould, as it were, to all our academic habits, to all our intellectual exercises. My young friends, let me remind you how much the expectations of a portion of the Church hang upon you.—Let it encourage you, that the prayers of many a pious member of the body of Christ ascend in your behalf to God, for his blessing on the appliances that are used here to form a gospel ministry.—Let it also quicken your diligence and application,—let it deepen your sense of responsibility, and induce habits of seriousness, to know that our Seminary is so much the hope of a Church—placed by Providence in a position most favourable for ministering to the great spiritual needs of this land, and for wielding a most salutary influence on the religious and moral state of its people,—at the same time, feeling every day the inadequacy of all its efforts, in consequence of the deficiency in the number of its spiritual labourers, to the wide field opening before it,—and now more than ever convinced, that, whatever reinforcement it may occasionally receive from the parent land, its dependence must be mainly, yea, for continuous exertion on any large scale, almost exclusively, on its indigenous supply. Disappoint not, then, the desires and prayers of those among us who seek the good of Zion, and tremble for the ark of God. If these shall have a response in the integrity of

your motives, and the fervour of your purposes, we shall have some warrant to conclude, that He who originated such anxious desires in the hearts of His people, has put the corresponding intentions into yours; and so, in this mutual adaptation, we may, with some confidence, recognise not only the tokens of a Providential arrangement, but the pledge of a destined blessing.

But, this being premised, I cannot too earnestly impress on every candidate for the holy ministry, the duty of seeking to be well furnished with all the various knowledge conducing to the forming of intelligent spiritual guides; and, therefore, while I would guard you against devoting yourselves to sub-terfuge branches of inquiry, in a spirit of mere intellectual curiosity, I must also caution you against despising any of those preparatory studies which an academic curriculum embraces. It has been upon a grave estimate of their subserviency to the high ends contemplated by Theological Seminaries, that these institutions have either been so framed as to comprehend within the range of their own immediate provisions, classes for literary and philosophical instruction, or do presuppose attendance, with a view to corresponding acquisitions, at the public Universities. And we are justified by all experience and observation, in saying that where these preparatory departments have been overlooked, or greatly curtailed, even with a view to a speedier supply of the church, the result has demonstrated the advantage, if any, to have been dearly purchased.

Let me hope, then, that no entrant into our College will grudge to be detained for some seasons, from strictly theological studies, till satisfactory proficiency shall have been made in such as are preliminary. Indeed, those occupying the situation of tutors in this institution have been gratified to observe, that the opposite disposition has been more prevalent among the youth here. The principle of ‘nolo episcopari,’—a fear of being urged prematurely forward to a public and responsible status, has rather characterized our students, than a presumptuous forwardness. But it may be needful to some, that we should assure them how much they are mistaken, if they suppose that these preliminary attainments can be dispensed with. And it may be profitable even to the friends and supporters of this Seminary, to be assured by those of us who have had time and opportunity to compare systems, that it is no idle appropriation of our financial resources—if only these can be found—by which additional means may be provided, of elevating the standard of general education, in connection with sacred literature, among our candidates for the ministry; and securing to them, so much under our own eyes as possible, the benefits of an extensive preparatory course. I do not