

your time. Nevertheless, I am urged, by an imperative sense of duty, to claim your attention to a few parting words; and my hearts desire and prayer to Almighty God is, that I may be directed to speak to you with a wisdom, a plainness, and an unction, more suitable to the dignity of the office to which your partiality has raised me, than consistent with my own humble acquirements; and that while the treasure is in a mean "earthen vessel, the excellency of the power may be of God."

In reviewing the proceedings of this venerable Court since it was convened, so many important subjects crowd into my mind, that it is difficult to know where to begin. You have had under discussion measures of vital importance, connected not merely with the bulwarks of our beloved Zion, but with its very existence as a National Church. You have been led seriously to consider, not only how "to lengthen her cords and strengthen her stakes," but how to guard against enemies, who although disunited among themselves, have zealously combined to raze her from the foundations. No period since the great civil revolution restored our Presbyterian Church to its ancient privileges, has been pregnant with events of greater importance to her welfare; and it does appear to be a token for good, that the very circumstances which seemed to darken her prospects, have, by the good hand of God upon her, been overruled to promote her steadfastness, to deepen her spiritual views, to extend her influence, and eminently to advance her best interests.

If we turn to the controversy which the foes of the Establishment, reviving the equivocal spirit engendered in the times of the commonwealth, have so keenly excited against the connection between church and state, while we find much to lament and to deprecate in the spirit itself, we perceive, in its results, a quickening spirit on our people, and an infusion of greater energy into our institutions. The zeal of many, which, during a period of long uninterrupted peace, had begun to wax cold, has been re-animating: reformation of existing abuses has been extensively effected; a vast accession to the efficiency of the church has already been made, and is still proceeding; a more devoted attention has been excited to whatever can promote the usefulness of pastoral labours; and, above all, a spirit of revival has been shed abroad over the face of christian society, which it is our hope and earnest prayer may be only the harbinger of still better things:

If we turn to the steps which have been taken by the church to prevent the intrusion of obnoxious presentees to the pastoral charge of a parish, we observe, amidst some anticipated discouragements and irregularities, occasioned by the unaccustomed working of the measure, many circumstances which incite to perseverance, and open the brightest future prospects. A body of faithful pastors has been introduced into the church, whose active and efficient services have endeared them to their respective flocks, and afforded additional strength to the Establishment; the people have become more affectionately attached to the church of their fathers, which has made such disinterested efforts to secure their privileges; and a foundation has been laid for the progressive increase of a Christian spirit among all parties, which, under the blessing of our Supreme Head, cannot fail to promote the welfare of our Zion.

If, again, we direct our attention to the great question which has arisen out of this measure, as to the spiritual independence of our National Church, and which has occasioned a collision between the ecclesiastical and civil powers, we may confidently rely that, under the guidance of Him whose unseen hand brings good out of seeming evil, and who causes not only the wrath, but the prejudices and selfish views of men to praise him, even this apparent discouragement will eventually tend to the best interests of our beloved Establishment. If, in the meekness of wisdom, and with the humble but unswerving

spirit becoming a Church of Christ, we stand fast in that liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, we shall find the way cleared by a wisdom not our own, and the difficulties in which has placed us, overruled as the means of imparting purity, influence, and stability to our spiritual institutions.

Besides these evidences and anticipations of the protection and favour of our Divine Head there are others for which we have scarcely less cause of humble thankfulness. Nothing can more unequivocally prove the predominant influence of genuine faith in a Church of Christ than the awakening of an enlightened zeal for the diffusion of pure and undefiled religion throughout the world. I need not remind you that after a long period of lukewarmness and inactivity, such a zeal has sprung up, and has been remarkably blessed by Divine countenance and support. The unwonted efforts which have of late years been made for extending the blessing of religious education throughout the ignorant and neglected districts of our northern population, and for besetting regular Gospel ministrations, and for bestowing efficient parochial superintendence—efforts which have, in various instances, been blessed with a spiritual revival, not less remarkable than it is gratifying to the pious heart; the zealous exertions which have been made to relieve the spiritual wants of our expatriated countrymen in Canada and Australia, and which, although attended with difficulties and discouragements, continue still unrelaxed, and promise ultimately to produce the most important consequences; the impression already made on the vast regions of heathen India, and the enlarging prospect of success, unmissionaries, which we are privileged to entertain; and lastly, the measures adopted by the preceding General Assembly, and sanctioned by you for the important object of enlightening and favouring, and still reserved for a glorious destiny—measures which have been so judiciously followed up by your committee, and which seemed only wanting to comprehend all the great objects of missionary enterprise that a christian church important, and successful exertions of christian benevolence, at once display a principle of spiritual life and vigour in the church, and afford an evidence that the Saviour's blessing roasts upon its labours. Nor can I omit to notice other transactions of this Venerable court, which evince the same spirit of christian benevolence. The zeal with which you have seconded the efforts made by some of our inferior courts as well as by associations and private individuals, for checking the fearful progress of Sabbath desecration within the bounds of the church—the testimony you have borne against the unspeakable atrocities of the slave trade, with which unhappy Africa is still cursed, and to which, after all the efforts that have been made to abate its horrors, continue to fall a yearly sacrifice, and under the effects of which, the whole population—a hundred million of immortal souls—are sunk in hopeless barbarism—and the anxiety you have shewn to countenance and support the Presbyterian churches in England, Ireland, and America, which have claimed your aid or craved your friendly co-operation—your solicitude, I say, and your judicious intervention in regard to these important objects, are worthy of your character as a church of Christ, and entitle you to the gratitude of your fellow-creatures.

Fathers and Brethren! While it is doubtless both useful and gratifying to call to remembrance the gracious dealings of our Divine Head towards our ecclesiastical Establishment, in the protection he has bountifully vouchsafed, and the Christian spirit he has been pleased to infuse, a more painful task remains to be performed. The Church is still beset with difficulties, and troubled on every side: "without are fightings, and within are

fears." Nevertheless, we are comforted with the undoubting conviction, that the combined efforts of Papists, Dissenters, and Infidels, which are the natural consequence of the awakening and increasing spirit of Christian devotedness within the walls of our Zion, are but one of the means which her heavenly king employs still farther to excite the faithfulness of her members, and to purify her from remaining corruption. Rest assured that so long as she proceeds in a course of spiritual improvement—so long as, with humble prayer and unflinching fortitude, she perseveres, through god report and through bad report, in rectifying abuses, in removing obstacles, in stirring up Christian virtues and graces, in affording new means of religious instruction and missionary enterprise, at home and abroad, and in zealously "contending for the faith once delivered to the saints," "the gates of hell shall not prevail against her." The Heathen may rage, and the people imagine a vain thing; worldly politicians may combine with ambitious sectaries to plot her destruction; but He that is for her is greater than all that can be against her." She will rise more graceful and more mighty from the conflict, and will discover in future, as she has experienced in times past, that the fire of persecution, while it consumes her bands and enables her to walk more freely and more firmly, shall not pass upon herself to injure her; for the Son of God will walk with her in the midst of the furnace: and the more intensely the flame glows, only so much the more shall she be warmed and enlightened, melted and purified.

Right Reverend and Right Honourable,—I cannot conclude without reminding you that additional faithfulness and devotion to the cause of our Divine Master are required of us. While the framework of our Church, being founded on the Word of God, and beautifully adapted to the important purposes of parochial instruction and spiritual edification, is worthy of admiration and deserves all your zeal, such are the evil dispositions with which it has to deal, such the weakness of the human instruments by which its functions are exercised, and such, also, the inadequacy of its provisions for supplying the spiritual wants of a rapidly increasing population, that much lamentable defection prevails among its members, much lukewarmness, many corrupt practices, much open profligacy. These require to be restrained and corrected with a paternal hand. On you, Fathers and Brethren, this important task devolves; and my earnest prayer for you is, that, on returning to your respective parishes, you may carry along with you a portion of that quickening spirit, which your important labours, while assembled in this place to consult and provide for the spiritual welfare of our much-loved country, were calculated, if prosecuted in a devotional frame, to cherish in your hearts. To all of you high interests are entrusted by our Spiritual Head, but especially to those who labour in word and doctrine. You, Reverend Fathers, are ambassadors for Christ, and stand in his stead to bear the message of salvation to perishing souls, and to offer them the means of salvation which he has purchased with his own blood. It is a duty of surpassing dignity and importance. "Who is sufficient for these things?" Well might we tremble and despair if left to our own strength; but we are re-assured when we call to mind the promised aid: "My grace is sufficient for thee," says our Divine Master, "my strength is made perfect in weakness." Trusting in this gracious promise, let us go on our way fearless and rejoicing.

Beloved brethren!—The task is arduous; but the aid is ample, and the reward unspeakable. To instruct the willing, to encourage the fearful, and to build up believers in their most holy faith, are labours of love with which the heart goes along. But faithfully to warn, wisely to reprove, gently yet firmly to correct, meekly and patiently to confute those who oppose themselves—these are duties more painful and more difficult, demanding a zeal, a prudence, a devotedness, a Christian charity, which those alone can attain who have felt the power of the Gospel on their own hearts, and have deeply imbibed the spirit of their Divine Master. Yet how blessed the employment! To be a fellow-worker together with God himself, in saving but one soul from eternal destruction, and bringing it to the marvellous light of the Gospel—would not this beyond measure repay a whole life of toil and suffering? But what shall we say, if it should please Him in whose hands are the hearts of all men, to employ us more extensively in his service—to use us as instruments for the convic-

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