

to the sin-burdened conscience and heart. They reveal the majesty and strength as well as the love of the Godhead, and are thus the support and stay of dying men. Who has ever ventured his soul upon a human saviour, or said to any of the vanishing shapes of reason, "Guide us through the valley of the shadow of death?" When the storm arises and the winds beat, and the heaving deep yawns restless to devour, think you that the loftiness of the dark beetling rock, as it lifts itself far above the spray of ocean, is a ything but a confidence and a joy to the drowning mariner, if he can only cling to its solid breast and, escaping from the foam below, rise by a sure pathway to the upper heaven! Even so is it with the Rock of Ages, which rises heaven-soaring, and we by it, from amid the surge and wreck of sin and misery; and it is because of its unearthly grandeur and elevation that it strikes the eye and wins the confidence, and attracts the clinging embrace and trembling yet hopeful footstep of those who were else lost forever. Never can we surrender this godlike greatness of the Gospel or suffer this high stronghold to be dismantled and destroyed. It were to surrender our own souls' refuge, and that of all the guilty, and with a heaven above that stooped not to our rescue, and an earth at our foot that rumbled to our tread, to sink unpitied in the waste of sin and ruin.

I observe *fourthly* that God's ways are not our ways nor his thoughts our thoughts in regard to the *progress* of redemption. Redemption has a history, and this is, of all others, the most difficult to scan, not only as its lie in the Bible, but in uninspired records. It has been said "Interpret the Bible as any other book;" but this ultimately means "Interpret God as you interpret man," and you cannot even interpret Church history as you do other history. It is in a sense which belongs to no other history the story of a battle not yet fought out, or of a campaign not yet ended; and there are combatants at work beyond the range of human observation, and a supreme celestial Leader whose point of survey none can share. It was to be expected, therefore, that the progress of redemption, as surveyed by human eyes, would present many anomalies and many difficulties, while, at the same time, true to the analogy of the substance of redemption, there would be a lofty, all-pervading grandeur that spoke to the devout observer the presence and the hand of God. I will illustrate this union of mysteriousness and divine greatness in regard to three features in the progress of redemption: the rate of its progress, the instruments of its progress, and the hindrances of its progress.

Look then at the *rate* of the progress of redemption. How much is there here, unlike the thoughts of man! To say nothing of the Old Testament dispensation, which spread over a period of four thousand years, during which redemption was indeed developed, but very little diffused, how strange and startling does it appear at first that even under the New Testament dispensation, whose law was expansion, notwithstanding the express precept of the Saviour, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," his religion has, even after eighteen hundred years, been carried only to a minority of the human family, and not only so, but large regions have been lost to the Gospel, corruptions and depravations of the most lamentable nature have widely and long prevailed even where it was professed, and Christianity has been not only deformed by error, but marred by impurity and weakened by division. This is the mystery, which, if seen only on one side, could shake our faith and subvert our comfort; but which when seen on another side positively strengthens our faith, and brightens our hope. For this religion, thus struggling for existence and often apparently defeated and well nigh crushed, not only lives but spreads; it is unspeakably more powerful in the earth now than it was in the days of the apostles, at the Reformation, or at any former period, and who can tell how powerful it may ere long become. Though its history is full of great contractions, it is also full of great and sudden expansions, and how far would an expansion carry the present Church—an expansion that bare it beyond its present bounds as far as a Pentecost did the early Church, or the Reformation the pre-existing Christianity? There may be something disappointing and tantalizing in a progress like this which resembles the advance of a ship by tacking, and not in a straight course, or the rise of the tide by the alternation of flux and reflux, but no one can deny that there is a divine hand in the onward movements, and that *it is all the more* glorious for its incessant recovery from

retardation and retrogression. When the whole is known it will be pre-eminently godlike, and it will be seen that God's law of progress, both as to time and space, was as far above man's law as the heavens above the earth.

Look next to the *instruments* of the progress of redemption. How unlike all that man would have conceived or devised! This applies even to the Old Testament dispensation, but far more to Christianity. The enemies of Christianity in the early ages said to its converts "You are the disciples of a carpenter; you are the capture of fishermen and publicans," to which the reply was easy, "Be it so; we are taken captive by one who has conquered the world, we are enclosed in a fisherman's net which contains philosophers, captains, senators, kings, emperors." Never was a kingdom founded like this kingdom of heaven? not by the sword like that of Alexander; not by learning like that of his great master; not by a mixture of superstition and force like that of the successors of the false prophet. It was founded by preaching, it was propagated by prayer, and no weapons but those of truth and love ever contributed to its real progress. Its leaders were the poor; its soldiers were slaves and women; its heroes were martyrs. How unlike the agents in any other revolution, and yet God chose the weak things to confound the mighty, and base things and things that were despised, and things that were not, to bring to nought things that were! By similar instrumentalities has Christianity perpetually renewed its strength. When banished from courts and camps and high places, its revivals have begun with the common people who have heard it gladly, and all through this last and divinest religion, only possible through woman's help, and appealing to a latent power in the sex, which Paganism in its blindness had disowned, and Judaism with its hardness of heart had but faintly and dimly recognized, has found its best auxiliary in her who was last at the cross and first at the sepulchre. What new development of glorious possibilities, undreamt of before, has the Gospel everywhere achieved and made tributary to its progress! Not only in the peasants of Galilee has it found the teachers of the world; but it has raised up its Luthers and Whitfields from the humblest places to agitate kingdoms and continents, its Baxters and Bunyans to lead millions to glory, and its Careys, Williamsses and Livingstones to explore new lands for Christ, or bring old races to his feet! Nothing so unlike human predictions, nothing so far above human thought as the march of this Gospel. If we confine it to apostolic successions, to consecrated channels, to time-hallowed boundaries, it spurns them all. Where we dig a path for it, it ceases to flow, and the buried river breaks forth in the desert. Hence our prayer should be that of Moses, but with more faith, "O Lord send by whom thou wilt send," and never should we despair of a religion which bloweth where it listeth, and comes from all the four winds at will to breathe on the slain that they may live.

One word only as to the *hindrances* to the progress of redemption. Man would have thought that hindrances would be speedily removed, or, if suffered to remain or to return, would constitute unmingled evils to the Church. But God, on the other hand, we can see, by giving the victory slowly, trains the faith and courage of successive generations; and by permitting old enemies to return or new ones to spring up, shews the unexhausted and inexhaustible power of his Gospel to face and put down every hostile power. The variety and vicissitude of attack when it is once surmounted, surrounds the Gospel with richer trophies and places on its head more crowns. We are the heirs at this day of all the persecutions of the Cæsars, of all the massacres of Rome. The blood of martyrs enriches us, and the books of apologists and confessors; we divide the spoils of infidelity, and turn the poison of heretics into food; the wrath of Satan is our security, and the gates of hell are the pillars of the truth. As it has been so it shall be. The onsets of unbelief that now disturb us shall be the consolation of our successors, and its scarce-remembered names and war-cries shall swell their song of peace.

Let me briefly notice in the *fifth* and last place that God's ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts in regard to the *limits* of redemption. Why should redemption have limits at all? Why should not all be saved as God wishes, and come to the knowledge of the truth? Thus man fondly argues, and by arguing like this not a few are in our day plausibly deceived, in forgetfulness of the warnings of consci-

ence and the solemn voice of God, to the effect that he that believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. On this awful subject we cannot in this darkling state profess to justify the ways of God to man, for this He will do himself in the day of the revelation of his righteous judgment. But it may be seen, even here, that whatever God appoints for the impenitent, cannot be inconsistent with his moral attributes. If the cross clears God from every aspersion in regard to the entrance of evil, not less does it do so in regard to the continuance of evil in his universe. What He has done in Christ is a sufficient proof that the fault is not his, and that man is the author of his own undoing. The hell of the Bible is prepared for the devil and his angels, and if men voluntarily share their sins, and that in spite of every divine remonstrance, they must share their plagues. Nor is this hell an arbitrary infliction, but the outgrowth of remorse, which in its most awful sufferings and penalties acquits God, and takes home the guilt of its self-destruction. Hell is darkness; hell is hardness; hell is hatred; hell is lust; hell is sin come to maturity, and weighing the sinner down under a sense of his own odiousness and the frown of God; and if the sinner would not, though warned and wooed by love a thousand times over, escape all this, is there not a point at which divine justice may say, "It is enough; *entree* is exhausted. Now must you eat of the fruit of your own ways, and be filled with your own devices?" I repeat, we are not called on to vindicate these awful ways of God, for this is his own prerogative; but surely considerations like these may make the bold accuser pause and tremble who would arraign them, and may prepare for the full disclosure in another world that while in this solemn matter God's ways are not our ways, nor our thoughts his thoughts, his ways and thoughts here also are as far above ours as the heavens above the earth.

And now, dear brethren, what should be our sentiments this day, as we draw near to a God so condescending and yet so great and awful. Let us approach with reverence and godly fear. Let us put off our shoes from our feet, for the place where we are is holy ground. Let us bow down before Him whose way is in the sea, and his path in great waters, and whose footsteps are not known, and yet whose counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. Of this let us be sure, that though his ways are above us, they are so only as the heavens to supply a pathway for the sun and a fountain for the dew, and that every cloud shall break in blessings on our head. Oh that we all proved Him, trusted Him, served Him in this mortal darkness with loyal service. Then should the day break and the shadows flee, and the solution of every mystery should be love! Amen.

### THE GENERAL ASSEMBLIES IN SCOTLAND.

#### ESTABLISHED CHURCH.

Thursday, 27th May, the Foreign Mission report was received and discussed. The following table shews the present and past state of the funds, with the concurrent expenditure.

Income of	Collections.	Donations, etc.	Legacies.	Total.
1875.	£8,619	£3,353	£2,444	£14,416
1876.	7,091	3,215	4,490	14,796
1877.	6,363	2,795	1,155	10,313
1878.	6,093	2,700	4,892	13,685
1879.	5,560	2,800	2,554	11,014

The expenditure has been as follows:—In 1875, £8,679; in 1876, £13,881; in 1877, £11,541; in 1878, £13,367; and in 1879, no less a sum than £16,062. The cause of this increase of expenditure has been an expansion of operations. It is a permanent cause; and, in consequence, the close of the current year is likely to see the entire surplus of £5,242 exhausted.

The report on Church work in the Highlands, was next taken up. It shewed a large amount of successful labour expended.

Other reports were read and disposed of.

Friday, 28th, the Assembly received and discussed the report on the increased liberality of the Church. From this it would appear that the income from the people from all sources, for Church and Mission purposes, had fallen off as compared with that of the preceding year to the extent of £52,000.

The rest of the sederunt was taken up in disposing of applications for admission to the ministry of the Church from members of other bodies. One we notice from Ontario.

In the evening the Assembly did not sit.