

Opening of the Session at the Presbyterian College, Montreal.

The formal opening of the Presbyterian College for the ensuing session was held in the David Morrice Hall, on Wednesday evening, October 2nd. The



REV. D. H. MACVICAR, D.D., PRINCIPAL.

Rev. Dr. MacVicar, Principal of the College occupied the chair, and the attendance was large.

There were also on the platform besides the chairman the Rev. Professors Ross, Cousirat and Campbell, the Rev. Dr. Barclay, the Rev. Dr. Robert Campbell, the Rev. J. M. Crombie, the Rev. James Patterson, the Rev. J. R. McLeod, Three Rivers, and the Rev. H. Beatt, Rockburn.

The opening address was delivered by the Rev. Prof. Scrimger, and he chose for his subject "The Minister's Working Theology," which he defined to mean the theology that is of chief practical importance to the preacher.

The Presbyterian Church, he said, had always demanded a high standard of education for its preachers, both in general literature and in theology. In this last the list of subjects has now become formidable. The calendar of our institution recently received presents no fewer than thirteen departments with corresponding professors, and every student is expected to take them all. Nor does anyone suppose that when he has taken them all he knows too much for his work. But it is never contemplated that he should seek to communicate all of these to the people. That would be pure pedantry. He must make a selection of those subjects which make directly for the practical ends he has in view. From the nature of the case the choice must be left to some extent to the individual minister, in view of his own tastes, special qualifications and the needs of his parish. But it is well to recognize that there are certain truths which are important in all circumstances. The object of preaching is everywhere the same, and human nature much the same. The considerations that are practically effective in leading to repentance and a better life lie within a somewhat limited circle. The truths which the preacher should most of all enforce in view of this are chiefly four.

First, the unique character and personality of Jesus Christ. Many think this ought to be the starting point of all theology. It is at least the starting point of a working theology. Christianity is not simply an advanced natural theology or an advanced Judaism that the basis of its claims should be made to rest on these being first made good. Neither philosophers nor Jews had been particularly ready to accept the gospel.

Christianity had its own appeal altogether independent of them, and puts Christ himself in the forefront. Hence the New Testament opens with the four gospels. These are the heartless records of the Apostles' preaching, and through the proclamation of their contents Christianity gained its earliest triumphs. The story of Christ as told in them contained some things that might repel, but there are far more that was fitted to attract and win. There was his manifest sincerity, his simple dignity, the exquisite balance and wholesomeness of his whole character, his directness of thought and speech that took Him into the heart of every subject and made it clear, His kindness and compassion, His appreciation of little children, His courage, His calm submission to persecution even unto death; in fine an ideal man. All these things were attractive to noble and generous minds. But behind all this there was a personality enveloped in mystery and constantly in the shadow of the supernatural. Reluctant as to His claims, and almost concealing His miracles, He yet impressed all with His superhuman power. Those who would not believe He was the Son of God had to suppose Him an agent of the devil. This element could not be ignored. With many it created difficulty but to many more it furnished the very guarantee which they needed, that if they trusted Him He would be able to save them. To all those who accepted Him the gospel message became an inspiration in the life, to kindle love and noble character. The preacher of to-day cannot follow a better example than that of the Apostles if he would secure like results.

This preaching of Christ is not quite the same thing as preaching certain doctrines about Christ, but rather the hold-

ing up of the living person in the details of his conduct and character. Doctrines are inevitable and necessary to keep one in a right attitude to the facts. Even the Apostles were forced to reflect upon the significance of these facts and the Church was early compelled to formulate the true doctrine because of the number of erroneous views being promulgated. But it was never intended that these doctrines should form the staple of preaching. The earliest creeds still give far more space to the recital of facts than to the statement of theory about Christ. The cry now heard everywhere, "Back to Christ," in so far as it expresses disparagement of the development of Christian thought is mere cant. In so far as it expresses interest in the person of Christ, it deserves encouragement. If Christ is thus the beginning of the gospel He may be said to be also the end of it, and the discussion might stop here. But there are some aspects of Christ's work that deserve special mention.

Hence a second element in our working theology is the atoning value of the death of Christ as the free ground of our justification. Jesus is unique in that his influence has been exerted far more by His death than by His life. He Himself anticipated this and the Apostles fully comprehended it. Almost the only thing common to all four gospels is the account of His death. The cross is the best known symbol of Christianity. But the power of it lies not in the mere description of the fact. It is in the significance of the fact as an atonement for sin. Here again Christ Himself gave His disciples their starting point, and they have put the atonement in the very heart of all their teaching. Peter, John, Paul, all alike give it prominence. In many quarters it was distasteful but they found that in spite of that it was the great attraction in the gospel for sin-burdened souls. It is still the element of greatest power. There is a disposition in some quarters to ignore it but the preacher who does so loses his most effective weapon. It is, however, not speculations about the atonement which are needed, but the fact of the atonement itself should be emphasized.

A third element is the constant activity of the ever-living Saviour for the salvation of His people. Christianity proclaims a Saviour who died but not a Saviour who is dead. The Apostles made much of the resurrection, not for its value but as an assurance that the Saviour was now alive. The activity of the ascended Christ manifests itself under three forms; first, as a perpetual intercession, showing His sympathetic interest in the needs of His people; second, in the gift of the Holy Spirit who is His representative and alter ego in the world, and thirdly, by His Church, which is His body. The Church is sometimes unduly exalted and almost substituted for Christ Himself sometimes unduly depreciated. But in any case it is an important and valuable organization, through which Christ perpetuates His activity in the world. This thought of Christ's continued interest in the world needs to be emphasized all the more because the Church has found it hard to retain a firm grasp upon it. More or less doubting it a multitude of intercessors, saints, angels, the Virgin Mary, have been put forward to remind Him of our needs and plead for His interest. These unscriptural cults have gained a stronghold even upon many intelligent minds. This shows the consciousness of need. But Christ Himself should be so preached as to render those unnecessary.

The last feature is the sure hope of the world's deliverance from sin by the second coming of Christ. This leads into the region of eschatology, confessedly a difficult subject, but one that cannot be ignored. The second advent is an essential part of the Christian faith. The main things to be looked at, however, are not the time or the manner of it, which seem to interest so many, but the objects to be attained by it. The first object is the final judgment of all—a truth which gives tremendous solemnity to life and must always be one of the fundamentals of preaching. The scriptural

