

CANADIAN PULPIT.

No. 49.

New Bottles for New Wine.

Preached in New Erskine church, Sherbrooke St., Montreal, by the pastor, Rev. A. J. Mowatt, Sunday morning, Oct. 14th, 1894.

TEXT:—"But new wine must be put into new bottles."—Mark ii: 22.

The text occurs in this connection. Some people yonder did not like the Lord's new things. Too new for them, they said. They called them innovations. So some of the good old elders of the day, the straight laced saints, the John the Baptist people, took upon themselves to talk to the young preacher about it, with a view to caution and check Him in His new things.

One thing they did not like about the new Gospel, it was too much given to parties, too fond of eating and drinking, too jovial, too sociable. While John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting Jesus Christ and His disciples were feasting. They were at a marriage here, at a supper there, at a grand banquet somewhere else, and the wine flowed freely. So those staid old elders who had been brought up to think that they must fast two days out of every week, at the very least, if they were to get to heaven at all, and that as for wine, they must not drink a drop on any account, were shocked at the scandalous goings-on of the young preacher and His followers. But He had His answer ready for them: "Can the sons of the bride-chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them? With you Pharisees it is different. With you it is a funeral, the dying out of the old, and so your fasting is quite in place. But with us it is a marriage, a sort of happy honeymoon, the introduction and inauguration of the new, and so we feast."

And then He told them the story of the wine and the bottles. Their bottles were of skin, clumsy primitive affairs indeed, but they liked them, they thought them so handy and nice. They did not believe they could be improved on. They kept their wine in them, and the wine thus kept tasted good to their lips. But they had to be careful not to make the mistake of putting new wine into old skins. The fermentation of new wine would soon burst the old skins, and so both wine and skins would be lost. The rule to be observed was this: "Old wine in old skins, and new wine in new skins!" He thus taught them in his own telling way that the new wine of the gospel must not be put into the old skin-bottles of Judaism, but into new ones suitable to the new conditions of things: "And no man putteth new wine into old wine-skins; else the wine will burst the skins, and the wine perish, and the skins; but they put new wine into fresh wine-skins."

Now, there is something here just to the point for us to-day, if I can get at it, and so my theme is: New bottles for new wine, or, the requirements of the modern church.

I. **NEW BOTTLES.**—People say to me on every hand: "You have a nice church!" And sometimes they say: "It is just like a theatre!" I do not know whether they intend to compliment or do the other thing, but just now I am in the mood, and we are all in that mood, to take everything as a compliment, so I say: "Yes, we have tried to combine the very latest ideas of what a church building should be, and I think we have succeeded."

I have been saying something like that to those who have spoken to me about it, and I do not hesitate to say here, in the presence of you all, that I am more than satisfied, that it comes nearer the ideal of a modern church than any church I have yet seen. I am glad to say that. I feel that the building committee as a whole, and the chairman in particular, and the architect, and all the contractors, have displayed admirable taste, and have done their best to give us a building in keeping with its high and holy purpose and its happy surroundings. I grant, of course, that I am somewhat prejudiced, and then we have not been long enough here as yet to discover defects. But without saying too much, I think I may say that.

But then let us take care lest we fall into the mistake of making too much of the mere building. We may do that. After all, fine as it undoubtedly is, it is but the bottle that contains the wine, but the paper that ties up the goods, but the basket that holds the fruit. Some care not what the wrapper around the parcel is. An old newspaper does as well as anything else. But with others it is different, the wrapper is a good deal in their eyes, they are fastidious about it. They are willing to pay a little more for their goods if they are nicely wrapped up, if they are wrapped up in tinselled paper and tied with a golden string. And, as a rule, the better the wrapper the better the goods, the better the bottle the better the wine, the better the basket the better the fruit. Anything does to wrap up something, for they are scarcely worth carrying home. Any kind of basket does 'o hold some fruit, for it is rotten, any kind of bottles for some wine, for it is trash. And yet, on the other hand, may we not pay too much for the wrapper and too little for the goods, too much for the bottle and too little for the wine? The bottle is for the wine rather than the

wine for the bottle. It is a mistake if all the glory is on the outside. I hope that is not so here. It is because we value the gospel so highly and salvation so much that we have put up so fine a church.

New bottles for new wine, new churches for new church purposes. New appliances for the growing requirements of a new age. New and improved machinery for new power and new work. New methods to suit the times. Such is the obvious teaching of the Master here: "But they put new wine into new bottles."

The children of the world are wise, they are quick to see and take advantage of circumstances. You do not find them putting new wine into old wine skins. It costs a lot of money perhaps to provide new wine skins, and the temptation is to keep to the old just as long as possible. But the true policy is to put themselves to the extra expense, and have out and out new wine skins. They know so well that if they do not, they will lose both wine and skins.

Now, is everything to be new but the church? You go into a growing city, such as this is, a city full of business enterprise, modern improvements, rush and progress. You go along its streets and you see on every hand abundant evidences of life and energy. Where the old horse-car used to trail along and wait for you, the electric car now whizzes past you, and you have to look alive if you do not want to be left behind. Where the gas lamp flickered feebly in the darkness, the modern arc-light now turns night into day. When the old stores are replaced with splendid modern business establishments, the banks and hotels have lifted themselves up, and occupy grand towering edifices that let the world see how important they are to-day. The schools and colleges too have developed, and now occupy buildings in keeping with the requirements of modern education. The bakeries and tailor-shops and butcher-stalls and groceries have felt the throeb of the new life, and have moved into improved quarters, and are right up to date in their methods of work. But perhaps there stands the old church in the old place, and everything has moved on but it.

I tell you that is not the way it should be with religion, the gospel. It is not the way God wants it to be, the church should be at the head of the true modern progress; it should take the lead and show the way.

To keep abreast of the times we build new houses in new localities, and we fit them up with the latest improvements. Are we less christian because we do so? We may be, but we may not be. We may read the Bible just as well by the light of a modern incandescent lamp as our fathers did by the light of an old tallow-dip. We ought to do it better. We often hear men sighing and saying that the old days of the fathers were so much better than these, but we have the best authority for saying that it is not true in any respect. A sound of going is heard, the sound of modern progress, the waking up of new life, the coming of better times, the moving forward of the Lord's consecrated army, and we are here, all ready to have a hand in and to take advantage of the blessed Good-to-be. We want to be in it. We want to know the joy of it. We want to be filled with its fulness. O Christ, lead us! O Spirit of God, fill and use us! Is it not that we may be more for God as a church and people that we are here, more for His service, more for His glory?

II. **THE NEW WINE OF THE GOSPEL.**—The Gospel is sometimes called the old story, but it is not called that here. Here it is called the new wine and the new song. It likes new things—new churches, new methods of Christian work, the new heart, the new life the new Jerusalem, the new heavens and the new earth, all things new. The risen Lamb says: "Behold I make all things new!"

The Gospel is new wine. Nothing old and stale about the Gospel. It is as fresh and sparkling as though it leaped from the heart of God not later than yesterday. Our sermons grow old and stale perhaps, they get to be sour and flat, no effervescence about them, no spirit in them! And can you blame them? "Stale stuff! they call them, they are not new sermons, fresh-ground from the mill of consecrated thought, new wine fresh pressed from the vintage of God's truth. You do not hear of such sermons turning people's heads and hearts, making them happy with themselves and all the world. Wine does that sometimes, and the gospel does it too, if we can only preach it right. It does this—it makes old people young again, sad people glad, staid people lively, slow people quick, stingy people generous, good-for-nothing people of some use. It did that yonder on the day of Pentecost. Under its influence men behaved so unlike themselves, some sneered and said: "That is what new wine does!" But it was the new wine of the gospel.

Oh for that new wine in this new church! I want to preach it, you want to hear it. Let it be said of us, even though said with a sneer: "The staid old Erskine people are all turned in the head since they moved up to Sherbrooke street, they are the talk of the town with their new church and their new ways of doing things. But the effervescence of their new wine will soon work itself off, and then they will be as stale as they used to be."

And, brethren, are we to have the new wine of the gospel here, the gospel in its saving power, waking us all up to the joy and blessed activity of the new life; or is it to be the same old stale story here, the story we have heard so long and that has done so



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