

## THE FIFTEENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

— OF THE —

## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA.

After devotional exercises, Dr. McMullen took for his text, Acts xx. 24. "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." Many a "fractured and hotly contested discussion" faith has found herself necessitated to engage in with natural reason. Nor has the latter ever proved a more subtle or formidable antagonist than when claiming to speak with the frank candour of a friend of the faith. It was in this spirit that Peter spoke when our Lord addressed to him one of the most indignant and burning rebukes ever administered to a disciple. "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

The same self-confident natural reason on the part of Peter that would have dissuaded our Lord from Jerusalem and Calvary, would on the part of his fellow disciples, have dissuaded Paul also from persisting further in a course which Divine Providence by accumulating difficulties was, as they thought, so manifestly closing against him. Did not Agabus bind himself with Paul's girdle? saying, "Thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." And when we heard these things, both we and they of that place besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Was not the Holy Ghost witness in every city that bonds and afflictions were awaiting him? True; but the question still remained: What inference was to be drawn from those divine intimations? The inference which Paul's fellow disciples drew was this: Change your field of labour; serve the Lord somewhere else, and thus exercise a wise prudence. How easy and obvious the policy which natural reason is ever ready to recommend, and which she clearly sees to be right, when the interests of truth and duty become encompassed with formidable difficulties.

Remembering that he had been a consenting party to the death of Stephen, and had held the clothes of them that stoned him—remembering how he had made havoc of the Church of Christ, and remembering that the Lord had said, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name sake," Paul, now inspired with a sense of what sovereign grace had done for him, and taking his stand on the commission which he had received from the Lord Jesus, gives to all their reasonings and pleadings faith's rejoinder in the words: "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." In Paul's condensed and sublime ultimatum here announced there is presented for our consideration a most impressive view of the office of the ministry, its special work and the spirit of unhesitating and absolute devotion in which the work should be performed. In the first place:—

(1) The true minister receives his ministry from the Lord Jesus. When the glorified Saviour appeared to Saul the persecutor on the way to Damascus, and in the presence of that overwhelming glory Saul was fallen to the earth, Jesus said: "But rise and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose to make thee a minister"—Acts xxvii. 16.

In his second Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. iii., verses 5 and 6, Paul says:—"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament." And in Ephesians chap. iv., 5, 8 to 12, we read that when Christ ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. And He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ. These and kindred passages of Scripture teach that Jesus Christ and He alone can make the true minister. The apostles could not make an apostle, neither could they make a minister nor could they make a Christian. The Christian is the work of God, so is the Christian minister. God by His grace and Spirit moves the heart to choose the work, and by an inward call leads the chosen messenger to devote himself to the service for which he is chosen. The Church is to judge of the evidence of such Divine call, and being satisfied of its reality, should train the person for the work. If any one should allege that the Divine call precludes the necessity of training, we have simply in disproof of such reasoning to point to our Lord's three years' training of the twelve whom He had called.

Now, assuming it to be scripturally proved and beyond doubt, that the true minister of the Gospel is the work of God, that he is divinely called to the work, and that he receives his ministry from the Lord Jesus, certain important inferences follow, as for example:—

(1) However true it may be that every one who has found salvation through faith in Christ should publish the glad tidings of the Gospel to all the perishing whom he can reach, nevertheless Christ has his ambassadors whom He has invested with office and commissioned to speak in His name with authority, offering peace and salvation to perishing sinners, and inviting them to enter into covenant with God in Christ, and unite with God's covenant people in the fellowship of His visible Church, and in obeying them that bear rule in the Church by Christ's authority, the members of the Church are obeying Christ himself. (2) If the true minister receives his ministry from the Lord Jesus, then this also determines the nature of ordination to the ministry. Ordination is not the giving of office, it is simply the putting of the Church's imprimatur upon one believed to be called to the work of the ministry by the Lord Jesus Christ. Suppose that on this ground, any one should disparage the importance of ordination and refuse to submit to the judgment of the Church the evidence of his alleged call, he would thereby justly forfeit Church recognition and place himself in antagonism to apostolic practice, Scripture authority and Divine order in the Church.

(3) If the true minister receives his ministry from the Lord Jesus, this also settles the whole question of what is commonly known as apostolic succession. No minister of the Gospel who has received his ministry from the Lord Jesus is outside of the true succession; and every so-called minister who has not received his ministry from the Lord Jesus is outside of the true succession, no matter what the nature of the imprimatur may be which the Church has put upon him. If he has not received office from Christ, he has not received office at all, for no other power can confer the office or make the true minister. If to this it be replied that Christ confers the office through the regularly constituted Church authority, we answer, All that Church authority can do is to give recognition to what is believed to be a divine call of the person to the ministry. As the making of a person a Christian by the regenerating work of the Holy Ghost and the Church's recognition of that person as a Christian by admitting him into full church fellowship, are radically distinct, so are the inward divine call to the ministry, and the Church's recognition thereof expressed in ordination. And if so, then He who walks amid the golden candlesticks and holds the seven stars in His right hand, continues, guards and maintains the true succession of faithful ministers in His Church, each one of whom feels more deeply the responsibilities of his office, the more willingly endures hardness as a good soldier, and amid all discouragements renews his devotion in the work because he can say, The ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus."

(2) The special work of the ministry, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God. (1) The Gospel is the glad tidings of salvation and is the very marrow and essence of both the Old and New Testament

Scriptures. Christ is the Alpha and Omega of divine revelation—the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and the Gospel is the everlasting Gospel. It is no afterthought in the divine plan. The covenant of grace is the eternal covenant, and all the covenants which God made with mankind from the days of Adam were exhibitions and developments of the covenant of grace, or subservient and tributary to it. Even the law was again, the promises, but was designed to shut men up to the faith, and serve as a tutor to bring them to Christ. Hence it follows that the law should ever be preached with a Gospel aim; if not, it is not used lawfully. And as the law, when lawfully used, serves and honours the cross of Christ, by shutting men up to the method of justification by faith, so does the cross of Christ honour, establish and magnify the law, both through the satisfaction of the great surety, and the new obedience of his people. The cross of Christ and the cross alone can supply the motives which are sufficiently powerful to win men to obedience. "Preach more morality and less doctrine," is the counsel and cry of not a few critics of the present day. This is the wisdom of men which is foolishness with God. If the heart be not subdued and won through the doctrine of the cross the love of sin holds the throne and reigns defiant of the law's threatenings, including even the terrors of hell. The carnal mind is enmity against God, and the natural heart is desperately wicked. If such a heart is ever to be subdued into submission and surrender such change can be effected only through the doctrine of the cross, which, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, is the power of God unto salvation. And inexplicable as it may appear to mere human reason, nevertheless the strange paradox is true, that never does a man begin successfully to cultivate good works until he has abjured them as the ground of his hope. Never till then does he become fired with a holy ambition to make his ways pleasing in God's sight, because never till then does he come under the constraining power of the love of Christ, leading him thus to judge that if one died for all then all died, and that he died for all that they who live shall not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again. (II. Cor. v. 14, 15) "Thou bleeding Lamb the best morality is love of Thee." Yes, it is the Gospel of the grace of God, the Gospel that bestows salvation as a free gift, and that Gospel of grace alone which can bring man to holiness and good works. Observation, experience and the testimony of Scripture, all combine to disprove the hope that any amount of mere logical argument can ever prove this to the reason and judgment of the natural man. To his mind it is clear as any conclusion can be that if you abolish the fear inspired by the laws condemning power, you take away the grand motive to holiness and to diligence in all good works. Insist that love is a mightier power than fear—that fear has achieved anything noble—that all that is grand and sublime in human history has been achieved under the inspiration of love, that love of hearth and home, of kindred and country, love of liberty and of the sanctuaries of God has fired the patriot and the soldier with a spirit of heroic daring that under God has achieved marvels, commanding the admiration and enthusiasm of all succeeding generations—and what is the natural man's reply? He will tell you that the cases are not parallel. And why does he give you such an answer? For the very obvious reason that the love of Christ has never got possession of his heart. Christianity is a religion of love from first to last, love on the part of God in giving His Son to be the Saviour of lost man, love on the part of Christ the Son in giving Himself a ransom for us, love on the part of believers to God their Saviour, to one another and to all mankind. And being a religion of love, it is apprehended by the heart, not by mere cold mathematical reason. A man might as well attempt to judge of music or beauty, or patriotism by the logical faculty alone as to understand or appreciate Christianity by pure reason alone. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love. With the heart man believeth unto righteousness. Let Christ be enthroned in the heart, and then Christ has possession of the person and reigns in that person by the sweet constraining power of love. And obeying from love such a person can say with David, I will walk at liberty, for I seek Thy precepts.—Psalm cxix. 45.

By all means let us preach the law to the sinner, but with the special aim of convincing him of his need of the Gospel and of shutting him up to the method of faith. And by all means let us preach the law to the believer as a rule of duty in the hand of Christ, the law without its penalty; but let us never rely on the law's penal threatenings to bring the believer to a higher degree of conformity to God. That were to reverse the Divine method, for, says the Apostle, sin shall not have dominion over you for ye are not under the law, but under grace. And if the fulfilling of Paul's course and ministry consisted specially in testifying the Gospel of the grace of God, then this testifying the Gospel of the grace of God is a grander and nobler function of the ministry than that of bearing rule in the Church or exercising oversight. And is not the soundness of the view confirmed by the Apostolic injunction, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." The honour due to the minister in his character as bishop is not so great as that which is due to him in his character as ambassador of Christ, testifying the Gospel of the grace of God. This is simply another way of stating what we hold to be the manifestly correct view, viz.: That the presbyters of Scripture were bishops and the bishops presbyters. If not, then there were no presbyters in the Philippian Church, but only bishops, for the epistle is addressed to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons. A plurality of bishops manifestly existed in the City of Philippi, but this plurality in one city is inconsistent with the diocesan theory, and further if the presbyters of Philippi are not the bishops, then there were no presbyters in the Philippian Church. But that the presbyters were the bishops, and that the two terms are used interchangeably is proved by Paul's sending for the presbyters of Ephesus and when they were assembled at Miletus and he commenced to address them, he called them bishops, saying, "Take heed to yourselves, therefore, and to all the flock in which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops." (Acts xx. 17, 28.) The function of bishops or of bearing rule in the Church is therefore an incidental and subordinate function to that of preaching seeing that to the latter even more is to be given than the double honour accorded to ruling well, and further, even the Apostle Paul in describing the fulfilling of his ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, lays the emphasis upon, and gives the preference and prominence to preaching or testifying the Gospel of the grace of God.

And never was there a time when the standard of demand on the Christian pulpit, or the strain upon the intellectual energies of the ministry, was so severe as now. We live in times in which every position in life is more difficult to fill than it was some years ago. Specialists who devote their whole time and energy to one branch of their profession are everywhere pushing to the front. In the mechanical arts, in science, in education and in professional life generally, this is more and more coming to be the rule. The standard of general information has, within recent years, been immeasurably advanced. This advance is an incalculable gain to the cause of Christianity. But if, as a result of this, competition is keener and every position more difficult to fill than formerly, is it not obvious that the same rule applies to the Christian pulpit, and that the intellectual strain on the ministry is more severe and testing than ever before. The colleges of the Church have a more difficult demand to meet than ever before, and a stronger claim for generous consideration and liberal support, and if the pastorate is surrounded with more precarious conditions, and the pulpit subjected to a more severe strain than formerly, then the more obligation rests on the spiritually-minded members of the Church to hold up the hands of the pastor and be loyal and true to him.

This leads us to observe in the third place: 3. The spirit of a noble devotion as evidenced on the part of Paul, in which the work of the ministry should be performed—But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself. So intensely was

Paul's heart set on fulfilling this course, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, that in comparison with the importance of that one grand aim he took account of nothing, not even life itself, as dear to him. That Paul was right in maintaining that the Holy Spirit's witnessing in every city that bonds and afflictions awaited him, was no proof that it was the will of God that Paul should change his plans and abandon the purpose of going up to Jerusalem, is confirmed by the word of the Lord spoken to Paul subsequently in Jerusalem. A tumult took place in connection with Paul's presence at the temple. He was arrested, but was permitted to make his defence before the excited multitude. Next day he was brought before the Council. The night following, the Lord stood by him and said (Chap. xxiii. 11). "Be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." Thus the Lord honours Paul's perseverance, fidelity and devotion in going up to Jerusalem, even when confronted with divine predictions of bonds and afflictions awaiting him. Certainly, if suffering is no reason for abandoning a divine commission, or refusing to comply with the call of a Christian duty. Nay, even God seems to be working against the commission given to us, we should bear the trial in the spirit of the great Apostle when he said, "None of these things move me."

Many and unanswerable are the reasons that may be urged for a hearty, self-forgetful devotion to his work on the part of every Christian minister. That selfish forethought dictated by our carnal reason, which plans to evade sacrifice or suffering in the Lord's work, has only served to impress more deeply on those who have tried such unworthy expedients, how true it is that the wisdom of men is foolishness with God. Peter, in the exercise of a prudence which was the dictate of mere natural reason, followed his Lord afar off; John never thinking of self, stood by his Master in the Judgment Hall, and on Calvary. Trouble and suffering befell Peter at every step. His shrewd forethought and wisdom proved to be foolishness. John never thought of escaping danger; in his decision to sit by his Lord he forgot self, and no danger came to him. The other disciples forsook Christ and fled to escape danger; John never thought of fleeing, and yet he outlived them all. The happiest man in the ministry is the man who thinks least of his happiness and most of his Master.

(2) But rising above such very subordinate considerations as those connected with our own personal comfort, if we would not be chargeable with the appalling criminality of testifying the Gospel of the grace of God in such a manner as to contradict our own words and make infidels of our hearers, let us stir up the gift of God that is in us, and preach with heart and soul, as well as with our lips, as we discourse of sin and salvation, the cross of Christ, eternity, heaven and hell. True, our best efforts must fall immeasurably short of doing justice to our subject, for God's gift of His Son is unspeakable and can never be fully told, the love of Christ "passeth knowledge," and much more does it transcend any statement in words; the peace of God which keeps the believing heart "passeth all knowledge," even on the part of him who has it. How inadequate then the most fully chosen words must be to set forth the grand mysteries of the faith! But all the more need is there that the spirit and manner of the preacher should reveal what his words can never express, and that the melting pathos of a soul filled and fired with the love of Christ and the love of souls, should put ten-fold power into common words. In this address to the elders of Ephesus, Paul speaks of serving the Lord with many tears, and of warning every one night and day with tears. Paul regarded it as a Gospel worth dying for, a Gospel dearer to him than life itself. So the noble army of martyrs believed. So our Presbyterian fathers, in the days of fire and blood, testified as they witnessed for it to the death. No branch of the visible Church has a more thrilling record of heroic suffering for the faith than the one with which it is our distinguished privilege to be identified. The apostolic spirit set forth in the text was, by the grace of God, reproduced in our Presbyterian ancestors, and they counted not their lives dear unto them. Their noble example commands lasting admiration. Truly it may be said of them, "There were giants in the earth in those days." If we are to sustain the splendid record of the Church of our fathers, and prove ourselves the worthy sons of such noble sires, then must we with jealous vigilance, guard the blood-bought heritage of Protestant liberty which they so nobly won, and of which we are the inheritors and guardians. Judas bargained with the chief priests regarding the betrayal of the Saviour, and said, "What will you give me, and I will deliver Him unto you?" (Matt. xxvi. 15.) Our lot has fallen on times in which the spirit of political partisanship is asking the same question, and in its straits and struggles, would, Judas-like, barter to the old traditional foe of our heritage of Protestant liberty, and the strange coincidence has been brought about that the Pilates and Herods of contending political parties, formerly at enmity among themselves, have been vying with each other as to which should appear the more hearty in the same policy and agreement. At such a crisis, a spirit of stern, unbending principle is needed to arrest a policy of truckling political expediency, that, bit by bit, would surrender what our ancestors bled and died for. If the Constitution of our country is so faulty and un-British as to provide an open way for aggression on our Protestant rights and liberties, then be it known those rights and liberties are dearer to us than the Constitution.

When those who leave God out of the reckoning, and precast the future from the political outlook exclusively, and when the faltering and faint-hearted point out to us that formidable and complicated difficulties bar the way of hopeful advance, be it ours to reply in a spirit of self forgetfulness and devotion to duty and to God. None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself.

We have been referring to the heroic sufferings of our Presbyterian ancestors, and to their sublime devotion to Christ and to His cause, as an inspiration that might well rouse us to a holy ambition to be found faithful in our day, and to perpetuate the old apostolic spirit in fulfilling the ministry which we have received of the Lord Jesus. But we must not fail to give the chief place to the highest of all motives, and the most powerful of all arguments, the love, the dying and deathless love of Christ, who gave Himself for us and who will by-and-by take us to Himself. When we have that which is painful and trying to endure, let us each one say to him self, "I am hearing this for Christ." When we meet with coldness, or it may be opposition, on the part of those whose co-operation we were entitled to expect, let us remember how He, when deserted by His friends, stood true to us, that He trod the wine press alone and of the people there was none with him. Nay, in addition thereto, and above all, let us remember that being made a curse for us, He endured judicial forsakenness on the part of the Father; and although He complained not of the terrible torture of the nails that held him transfixed to the accursed tree, yet he did cry out under the terrible consciousness of that desertion, saying, "My God! my God! Why hast Thou forsaken me?" The darkness that reigned from the sixth to the ninth hour may indeed be regarded as mute nature's tribute of homage to her suffering Lord as she spreads the black pall of mourning over the Calvary scene; but in a deeper sense it was expressive of that still more terrible horror of great darkness which enshrouded the soul of the suffering Saviour when His soul was made an offering for sin; for the suffering of His soul was the soul of His suffering. Then was the mighty ransom paid, then was the penalty of a violated law exacted of the great Substitute—then was the sting of death taken away in the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of Himself, then was the death of deaths effected in the death of Christ.

But this is not all. The pains of death were loosed because it was impossible that He should be holden of it. His risen life, of which His very enemies who guarded His tomb, as well as His apostles and disciples were witnesses, was life on the other side of death, and the sample and pledge of ours. He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. And He gave some apos-