

Canadian Pulpit.

No. 15.

The Sufficiency of Christ.

SERMON PREACHED IN ST. DAVID'S CHURCH, ST. JOHN, N. B., ON
SUNDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 1ST, 1893.

By REV. GEORGE BRUCE, B.A.

TEXT—John vi. 67. "Will ye also go away?" The only great building of imperial Rome that has escaped complete or partial destruction is the Pantheon, and the special care that was extended for its preservation during a period of almost universal vandalism is connected with a very interesting tradition. The structure is circular in form and is surmounted by a magnificent dome which is cast in concrete and springs from the walls without central support or lateral thrust, completing a noble edifice at a height of about 150 feet. In the centre of this dome is a circular opening of about thirty feet in diameter, and it is said that Pope Gregory the Great interposed his authority for the preservation of this building among all the relics of Pagan Rome, although it was the symbol and shrine of idolatry, on the ground that this opening to the heavens symbolized the one conception of the true God in the heathen mind and set forth in its imperfect manner the turning of the thoughts of the worshipper from the shrines of the temple to the invisible God. When the apostle was in Athens he found among the superabundant shrines and the peerless representations of their numberless divinities an altar to the unknown God.

Dr. Norman Macleod in his report of his mission to India tells in his own graphic and touching way how, when in conversation with an educated and highly cultured Hindoo, he ventured to ask him how it was possible for him, with all his intelligence, to worship the idol standing at a little distance from them. The gentleman smiled very pleasantly and expressed in turn astonishment at his ignorance. "I do not worship the idol," he replied, "but through the idol which I do see I worship the God which I cannot see. I use the idol to help me in a difficulty which I fancy you will acknowledge, that of fixing my thoughts upon an object which is unseen. The condition revealed by these references is the deep and unquenchable desire of the human heart for something which it cannot supply or discover for itself. The dominant Roman, in his magnificent temple, felt, as he cast over it the majestic dome, that after all, the supreme power dwelt not in temples made with hands. The refined and cultured Greek was lonely in spirit and weary of soul amid all the glory of his art and the splendour of his shrines. He felt, after all, that God—the very God—was unknown. And, after eighteen centuries, the educated and subtle-minded Hindoo cheats himself into his idolatry by saying 'God is not there, but I worship Him through the sensuous idol form.' It is to meet this need of the human heart that Christ was revealed and came to the world. A need universal as the human race! A need which is felt and acknowledged by every one in his own way and by his eager lifelong struggles to satisfy it. A need which no religious system or education or acquisition can ever satisfy. It is the loneliness of an orphan spirit, the hunger of a soul perishing for the Bread of Life. Our text brings before us in a striking manner the way, or at least one way in which Christ reveals Himself to those who have trusted Him; by permitting or causing everything else to fall away so that the choice must be made between Him and everything besides.

The deep thirst has been felt unquenched, while the spirit drank at other streams; and now that it has come to the fountain the preciousness of the water of life will be revealed by causing it to drink of that alone while every other gratification is excluded. First it seemed to be everything else but Jesus. Now it is Christ and nothing besides. The first proved the necessity for Christ, the second reveals the sufficiency of Christ alone, and both together work the completeness of the soul's salvation through a living faith in the Son of God. Let us dwell for a moment upon two, or three of the elements of this text by which Christ reveals to His disciples at once. His preciousness to them, and the faith divinely wrought by which they are united to Him.

I.—Note, in the first place the separation of the world from Christ by which Christians are compelled to choose between them. God or man; Christ or the world. We understand that this is the condition of a godly life, but the actual experience is often painful. When the disciples saw the multitudes coming to Christ their spirits rose and they were glad, but when the tide turned and the listening crowds broke up into groups of discontented, frowning, angry men, they became anxious, and when those who had continued longest broke away with deeper displeasure because of their longer forbearance and the disciples found that they were left alone, it seemed as if hope almost died within them, the whitening harvest had been snitten to the ground. How few they seemed now, those twelve men! contrasted with the throngs which have swelled larger and larger day by day. And it is the same to-day. There is much in the religion of Jesus Christ to commend it to a world already enjoying unacknow-

ledged so much of its beneficent and elevating influence. There is much to attract men, as the blindness and the lameness of social and commercial life are healed, and the foul leprosy ulcers are cleansed, or some Lazarus is raised from the dead. But the same voice that calls the dead forth commands to roll away the stone, revealing the condition of the unsaved soul; and the true followers of Jesus will soon have a chance to learn why they follow Him, as they stand against the discontented and indignant people who turn away from Him.

II.—In the second place we may observe how the doctrine of Jesus tests our faith in Him.

As the disciples stood among the people passing away they could scarcely help recalling the words which had made such an unfavourable impression upon them. And human nature in Peter and John and the rest of the disciples was the same as it was in the men who were hurrying away with dark brows and low mutterings of anger. Was it necessary that Christ should speak so plainly? Was it wise to press these doctrines so far? Would it not have been better to be a little less pointed, to have taken timely warning from the dissatisfaction which had been plainly spreading? To have trimmed the sails before it came to this? Such questions in such circumstances shape themselves with equal facility in every language. And, to tell the truth, are not these declarations about sin and grace and the atonement rather strong for any of us? It is well to hold orthodox views, and to be prepared to uphold them in a controversy, but when God translates them into the language of my own humble pride and selfishness, when the theology is built up of the fragments of a broken heart, I may indeed endure it, but when I have learned this lesson I shall know what Christ is to me as I never knew before.

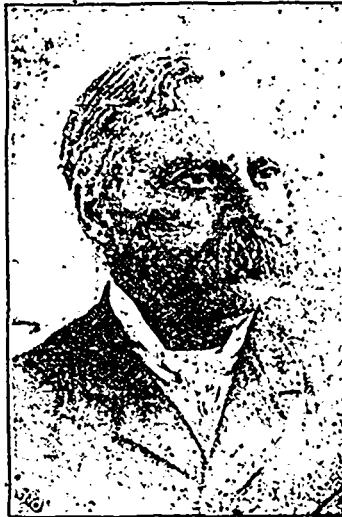
III.—In the last place, there is a test the most searching and severe in the very words of Christ, "Will ye also go away?" Taken with the evident tone and expression of countenance of the Saviour, the text must have been, indeed, most searching.

This is not the time for the command "Follow me." Not now are the words to be spoken, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." These men have come to Jesus. They have heard Him and known Him; and now the time has come to prove what He is to them; and this is to be done, not by pleading words but by putting their attachment to the test. We have seen that Christ stood out here and challenged the verdict of their love as between Himself and the world. We have noted that love to Him personally must prevail against the comfortable acceptance of His teaching, humbling and painful as this must be, this issue between Christ and self. And now—supreme test of all—He stands motionless, reminding us of His delay when Lazarus died—of His silence and strange words to the Syrophenician woman. And the question is, Can you do without Christ under any conditions? Think of the significance of this appeal! See Christ, as He stands calmly, giving no sign, you can almost hear the thrum of the tightening strands of the cable which has its hold on their inmost heart's core. As they take one swift glance round the wide horizon and realize how drear the world would be without Jesus and how precious He is to them—as He stands alone. And hear the words of Peter, as the decision forms itself in every heart, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." Have you

ever known this test? Have you ever looked up trying to see the face of God, as you knelt in prayer through the hours of the night, alone in the darkness—getting no sign—tempted with the deepest, darkest doubts, with no response—no comfortable consciousness of His presence? Prayer gathering as a load unbearable, till you sought a leather pillow, while Christ only seemed to say, "Will ye also go away?" Ah, how your heart felt the strain! And why? That you might know Jesus, and Jesus alone—that you might know Jesus and Jesus only—the world and self, and even spiritual comfort apart, that you might know Jesus in Gethsemane—Jesus on the cross, dearer than all.

THE Bible is first of all a record of historical facts, called doctrines. The first and fundamental doctrine is that of a personal Creator. The second great doctrine is man's creation in the likeness of His Maker, thus becoming morally responsible, and subject to God's holy law. The doctrine of sin is simply a statement of fact concerning man's conduct and subsequent condition. The centre of the system of doctrines, is that of redemption. It begins in Eden, where the promise is given that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, and culminates with the cross, when Christ says, "It is finished."

Nor only is there a tendency to make excuses for not going into the mission field, but there is a danger of resisting, to some extent, the inward impulses of God's Holy Spirit. It is quite true that God's people shall be willing in the day of His power to obey His call. It is quite true that the voice of the Spirit, when heard as at Antioch, is obeyed both by churches and individuals, but it is equally true that the first whisperings of the Spirit ought to obtain earnest and prayerful attention, lest they should not be followed by a direct, clear, loving summons to holy work. It was in the darkness that Samuel was called. What is to be dreaded is least, when conviction possesses us concerning the state of the heathen world and our obligations in reference to it, we should in any measure stifle that conviction.—McCORMICK.



REV. GEORGE BRUCE, B.A.