

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

AN INTELLIGENT MINISTRY.

By request of Manitoba Presbytery the following able discourse, delivered by the Rev. C. Pitblado at the installation of Dr. King as Principal of Manitoba College, is placed before the readers of THE PRESBYTERIAN.

"The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."—2 Timothy 1: 2.

Timothy had been set apart to the work of the Christian Ministry, by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery, of which Paul was a prominent member. The apostle here reminds him that it was a very important part of his work, not simply to preach the Gospel, but to perpetuate the Gospel ministry. It was his duty to provide and train men who would be worthy successors to himself in office. On this direction we found a plea for a pious and educated ministry. Ministers should be faithful and able to teach others. He must not only keep the Lord's vineyard carefully while he lived, but he must, as far as he was able, provide keepers to take charge of it after his death. He must aim, not simply at getting Christian members, but Christian ministers for the Church. The doctrines which Paul had taught him were a sacred trust, that he should not only use well but should commit to worthy successors. He describes these successors as "faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

From this we infer:

1. That ministers should be men full of faith. They should have faith. They should have something to preach, and they should believe what they preach. Their business is to declare their beliefs, not their doubts. They are to proclaim their own convictions rather than other people's opinions. They should be able to say: "we believe and therefore speak." Doctrine with us is conviction as well as creed. Religion is experience as well as theories. Christianity is personal knowledge as well as reliable report. We know whom we have believed. It is because Christ is precious to us that we commend Him to others. It is by living believers that the living faith of Christianity is to be propagated. I know God can use any kind of instruments to accomplish His work. Unrenewed man may be the means of converting sinners. An icicle may focus the rays of light so as to kindle a fire; but we do not usually kindle the fires on our hearths with icicles. Nor do we expect to kindle the fires of love and devotion in the souls of men by ministers with icy hearts. A corpse may hold a candle, but we do not usually illumine our houses or our workshops with corpses for candlesticks. Nor need we expect that men who are spiritually dead should hold forth the lamp of the Gospel, so as to illumine darkened souls. It is only real Christian men that we may expect to make efficient Christian workers. The minister should know experimental knowledge.

2. We infer that a Christian minister should be acquainted with the whole system of Bible truth. He should know what the Bible teaches—not in detached portions merely—but as a whole. He should grasp the system of Bible doctrines—not a few texts. There is a vast difference between gathering a few flowers from the garden and arranging the plants according to a principle of botanical classification. It may do for the visitor to be able to gather the bouquet, the gardener should know how to classify his plants, or he may make the mistake of trying to grow grapes on thorns, or figs on thistles. There is a vast difference between producing a few sounds on the organ and making music. It may do for us to get a few stones, but the builder should be able to arrange his material according to a plan.

Ministers are the keepers of the Lord's vineyard. How are they to systematize in the garden of truth without a recognized principle of arrangement. Ministers are the trumpeters of the Gospel. How are they to make music without a keynote on which to play? Ministers are God's builders. How are they to build without a plan?

Oh! says some one, "You can do it well enough. Systematizing only hampers the gardener. Only for systematic botany he might grow roses without thorns, grapes on brambles, and figs on thistles. Keynotes are hindrances to the musician. Only for the key-note he might make music out of any noise, and tame the tiger by his lays. The plan fetters the builders. Only

for the plan he might make his effort a perfect triumph of architecture. We prefer the organist who has no key-note on which to pitch his instrument. We prefer the builder who has no plan according to which he works."

Thus it appears to us some men act who denounce systematic theology—who sneer at creeds and condemn confessions of faith. And it is no wonder when they work on these principles—without theology, without creed, without plan—that they should spare the weeds and kill the flowers; that they make noise and silence the music; that they gather stones, but never build a house. Now, in order that the minister of Christ may not mistake the flowers of truth for the weeds of error—in order that he may know how to make the Gospel trumpet give forth no uncertain sound—in order that he may choose material wisely, and build skillfully, he should know systematic theology.

3. We infer that the minister should be well versed in Biblical lore. He should be able to read the Bible in the original languages in which it was written. There is a vast difference between going to the fountain head and taking water from other people's pitchers. The minister should be able to read the text, to give some rendering of it, and to look at it in the light of its surroundings, whether those surroundings be custom, geography, biography or philology.

The renderings and laws of interpretation, the facts and theories of criticism, the history and formation of the canon—with these he should have some familiarity. He should know all about the Book which he undertakes to interpret, but he should preach the teachings of the Book itself. In other professions we fully recognize this principle. The physician should know anatomy, else he is not likely to prescribe skillfully for his patient. But we do not expect that he will erect a dissecting table in every sick room. The minister should know the anatomy of the Bible, but it is not necessary that he should make every sermon, or any sermon, an operation in Bible dissection. The telegraph operator should know the significance of the click of his instrument and a great deal about the working of the electric currents, but it is not to be expected that the message he sends me should be a lesson on telegraphy or a lecture on galvanism.

4. We infer that the minister should be acquainted with the history of doctrines. This knowledge will enable him to recognize ancient errors in their modern dresses. There is far less new in the field of heresy than some people imagine. Sceptics, notwithstanding all their boast of freshness, often smell of mould. Their theories, in their essence, are only ancient heathen speculations with English faces or German garments. Pantheism is nothing new. It sprang up and grew vigorously on Grecian and Indian soil. Empedocles enunciated it as clearly and dressed it up as beautifully in Greek, as Hegel has done in German, or Carlyle in English. Democritus and his followers handled materialism quite as successfully as Comte or any of the leaders in the modern school of positive philosophy. Epicurus was just as sound and thorough a utilitarian as Stuart Mill or Herbert Spencer. Even the development or evolution theory was distinctly enunciated and defended by Thales, Anaxamenes, Heraclitus and others, more than twenty-four centuries before Darwin and Huxley were born.

The field of vision widens as we go forward, but the great riddles of creation remain essentially the same as they were thousands of years ago. The diameter of the light of knowledge has lengthened but the circumference of the surrounding darkness has increased. Illusions and delusions have been dispelled from our pathway, but the old mysteries that puzzled the sages of antiquity remain still unexplained. The air is full of sounds and signs that find an echo and a meaning in the recesses of the soul, to which men can scarcely help listening. The water in all lands becomes a mirror reflecting the heavens.

Astronomers have immensely extended our ideas of space and moving worlds, but they are no nearer the origin of motion than were the ancient astrologers, who connected the movements of the stars with the dispositions and destinies of men. And what was their science but a detailed and practical application of that law which sees man potentially in star dust or declares that the forces which guide the farthest star in the realms of space, are all that control man in his actions? It is the attempt to make man a wheel in the mill of destiny. Chemists have vastly increased the

number of simple substances, and the facts connected with their combinations; but they are no nearer the origin of life and the transmutation of metals than were the old alchemists who believed in the elixir of life, and the philosopher's stone. And what was this old search but the modern attempt to manufacture protoplasm and transform gas into gold? It is the search for life in dead matter.

Anatomy and physiology have united in making an encyclopædia of knowledge about the structures and functions of life, but they are no nearer an explanation of the soul of man, than were the old investigators who dissected swine, to find out the structure of the human body. And what was this ancient method but the modern endeavour to confound species and seek man's origin among the brutes? It is feeling for man among lower animals.

Geologists have gone far beneath the surface of things, and added millions of epochs to the age of our globe, but they are no nearer the origin of matter, force and law, than were the philosophers of old who traced all things to fire, air, earth and water. What were these ancient theories in their essence but the modern hypothesis of atoms, heat, and cosmic gas to which evolutionists point us? It is explaining creation by itself. Modern inventors work almost miracles by harnessing the forces of nature to their mechanism, but they are no nearer the heaven of perfection than were the ancient sons of toil. And what is our modern devotion to machinery, but the revival of an old attempt to build a tower of Babel, by which we may without either morals or religion reach the heaven of human progress? It is the hunt for happiness in condition rather than character. The modern soldier has made war a science, in a sense in which it never was before, by displacing the ancient weapons with Gatling guns, rifles, and infernal machines, but he is no nearer mitigating the horrors of the battle field, than were our ancient progenitors who shot their arrows and wielded their swords. And is not every new slaughter machine employed by the soldier, just the old attempt to make brute force mightier than moral suasion? It is muscle against mind, and the odds for muscle.

And so, if you enquire closely, you will find that there is not a question of any importance that has been raised by modern investigation, but has in its essence been discussed and answered in the ages gone by. And by the light of history we can see scepticism moving round the weary circle of mere repetition carrying the accumulating facts of science on its back or trampling them beneath its feet. Christianity accepts the facts and makes them reflectors to set behind the lamp of the Gospel with which to intensify its light. It rejects the theories because they are opinions that have not been proved. The minister should be able to detect ancient speculation in its modern disguise. He should know the history of doctrines.

5. The minister should be able to use the truths of science and philosophy to support and illustrate religion. He should be able not simply to defend the truth, but to rob his enemies of their weapons. Every Goliath of error has a sword with which we may behead him if we can only seize it manfully and wield it skillfully. Nearly all error is supported by some truth, and if we can only take away the prop of truth the error falls of its own accord. Thus we can interpret history, not simply as the account of the working of social forces, and man's will, but as the record of God's Providence, in which man's failure to reach heaven is illustrated and God's purpose to bring man to Christ is shown. Profane history can be made to confirm divine prophecy.

Philosophy, while it digs a grave for all superstition, may be made to prepare a garden in which to scatter the seeds of Christianity. Antiquarianism while searching for proofs of man's antiquity may be made to furnish proofs of the comparatively recent origin of the human species.

Philology, while working out the problem of the development of language, may be made to bear testimony to the unity of the race and the common origin of speech. Irreverent enterprise, digging in the sepulchre of ruined cities weapons with which to destroy revelation, may resurrectionize buried witnesses of the past which support the narrative of the Bible.

Astronomy, while it explores the mechanism of the heavens, may be made to furnish the grandest evidence of a great designer. Chemistry, while battling with the secret of life and the correlation of forces,