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## GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

The Twelfth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada met in St. Paul's Church, Hamilton, on Wednesday evening, 9th inst. The handsome church, pure Gothic in style, with appropriate and ornate decorations, brightened by a tasteful display of flowers and plants, was filled to its utmost capacity. Many members were present at the opening service, and the audience was increased by a large number of residents of the city.

Principal McKnight preached an able and comprehensive sermon from Matthew xiii. 52:

Then said He unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasures things new and old.

Dr. McKnight first showed that ministers were scribes of Christianity, and said they had in this verse their instruction for preaching. There were some who demanded that in preaching all should be old, and others who demanded all should be new, but they had the Master's word that they should bring forth things new and old. They could not add to this, but it might be profitable to observe its application. He divided the subjects to be considered under three heads, things old, things new and things both old and new, and proceeded.

### I.—THINGS OLD.

Suffice it to say under this head that the preacher must tell the old, old story of Jesus and His love. The story was not old when the words of the text were spoken, was not yet fully framed, for Calvary was yet future. But it was old in promise even then. It is an old world story now. It has come down to us through the mists of centuries—has been told from father to son through sixty successive generations. The preacher must set forth law and Gospel—must speak of sin and judgment and redeeming grace. God commendeth His love to us in that whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He died for our sins and rose again for our justification. In the tenderness of His compassion, as in the beauty of His holiness, He is the chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely. Other foundation can no man lay. It is the Rock of Ages.

### II.—THINGS NEW.

(1) New methods of presenting the truth—teaching by parable was an innovation. Not that the use of parables was unknown to the ancient Hebrews, but the parabolic method of Jesus was a conspicuous departure from the custom of the scribes. Metaphor, simile, parable and allegory afford a boundless field for the exercises of sanctified ingenuity in searching out acceptable words, and giving an air of novelty to old truths. The familiar facts of nature shadow forth the laws of the kingdom of grace, and although we may hesitate to affirm that the laws of the two realms are identical, we need not hesitate to recognize a fundamental ground of similarity between them, inasmuch as the same supreme mind is author of them both.

(2) New methods of presenting the relation of different truths to one another. Take, for example, the relation between creed and life, or between faith and holiness. The ordinary strain of evangelical preaching half a century ago was to this effect: Salvation is wholly of grace. The sinner, by believing in Jesus, obtains forgiveness of sins, escapes hell, and when he dies goes to heaven. For these blessings—peace with God here and hope of heaven hereafter—he ought to be grateful, and gratitude to Christ, who suffered and died for his salvation, should urge him to do the will of Christ and walk in His steps. A godly life is thus a fitting corollary to the exercise of faith and hope. Now all that is good and true as far as it goes, but it is not the whole truth. Consecration of life is not a mere pendicle to faith in Christ, but enters into its very essence. He is named Jesus, for He saves His people from their sins, and not merely from their punishment. To take hold of Him as Jesus is to take hold of Him as our deliverer from sin—from its fascination, its debasement, its defilement, its tyranny, as well as its doom. He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. When we accept an interest in His work, we accept the purposes for which He wrought it. We surrender ourselves to Him to be saved from sin here and now. We say to Him, Rabbi. In other words, true faith implies repentance, or, as some old writers put it, it accepts a whole Christ—Christ in all His offices—Christ to rule in us and over us, as well as to die for us. The Gospel has its categorical imperative as well as the law, though the yoke of obedience is lined with love. To serve Christ, and find our happiness in serving Christ, is not a mere optional expression of our gratitude to Him for saving us. It belongs to the very nature of the salvation for which we come to Him. To withhold this service is breach of covenant; it is failure to be saved.

(3) New elements of truth. The Christian revelation is now complete, and it might seem out of place to suggest the possibility of substantive additions being made to our knowledge. But the Scriptures have to be interpreted; and the cross-lights thrown by science and revelation on each other may lead to a juster apprehension of both. As regards interpretation, whilst the main outlines of saving truth stand forth bold and clear, so that he may run that readeth them, there are large portions of Scripture that are more or less obscure, and require for their exposition all the resources

that exegetical science can command. From the application of these resources no startling revelation need be apprehended. Yet the contrast between the present and the past, as regards the volume of interesting and edifying thought gathered from the study of the Scriptures, justifies the expectation of still further gain for the future. Compare the evangelical literature of to-day with the Christian writings that have come down to us from the second century. The authors had the same books of the New Testament in their hands that we have. The books were written in their mother tongue, so that they did not need to toil over grammar and lexicon and the usages of contemporary literature as we do. Yet the study of these writings, as a whole, is extremely disappointing. We come to them expecting at least a firm grasp and coherent statement of the leading principles of evangelical religion. But the expectation is scarcely realized. The leading facts of the Gospel history—those enumerated in the Apostles' Creed—are distinctly affirmed. But their doctrinal significance seems to be imperfectly appreciated, or, at least, we fail to obtain those models of skill in exposition and of comprehensiveness of doctrinal statement that we should have expected to find in the writers of the primeval Church. For historical purposes they are invaluable. Every genuine addition to them is worth its weight in gold. But their interest depends on their antiquity. Apart from that, and viewed simply as presentations of religious truth for the edification of the reader, the Christian literature of the second and third centuries is hardly worth reprinting. The controversies of the intervening ages have cleared the air, and brought into relief the points of vital moment, so that a modern exposition of the way of life presents a distinct and conspicuous advance on anything we have from the pens of apostolic or post-apostolic fathers. The Church has made real progress in the knowledge of the Scriptures, and there is no obvious reason why that progress should be arrested at the present stage. One idea may be specified as coming into unwonted prominence. The history of revelation is the history of an educative process. God revealed Himself to men as they were able to bear it. The idea of progress is not novel. The germ of it is contained in the initial statement of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that God in sundry portions and divers manners spoke to the fathers by the prophets. For its further expansion we must look to the science of biblical theology, meaning thereby not the theology of the Bible as a whole, but the theology of the several books as compared with those of earlier or later date. Allusion was also made to the progress of physical science. We have been indebted to astronomy for larger conceptions of the power of God; the microscope has given us further illustrations of His wisdom. Science is pushing its researches in all directions with unwonted success. Theology will reap the benefit. There need be no fear that the Word and the works of God will contradict each other.

(4) New applications of truth. The Christian principles of equity and humanity have already been brought to bear with effect on some large problems, as those of slavery and the position of woman. The increasing magnitude of industrial and commercial enterprise creates new problems that await solution. The tyranny of capital has to be abolished without destroying capital; the tyranny of the strike has to be abolished without destroying the freedom of the workman. Many other questions await the further exercise of Christian thought and Christian effort, as the abolition of war, the management of pauperism, the suppression of intemperance. It gives the charm of freshness as well as serviceableness to the teaching of the Christian scribe, where it deals immediately with the needs and dangers of the age. And this service lies not out of the proper scope of the pulpit, for the Gospel is given to mould our lives here as well as to prepare us for the great hereafter.

### III.—THINGS BOTH OLD AND NEW.

Old in one aspect and new in another. One instance will suffice. Death is old for the race; new for the individual. No saying was more trite than "Man is mortal," yet it caused each individual sad surprise when death struck down one near and dear to himself. The shafts of death had laid low some among their own number. Carrying out the lesson of the text, and remembering that the end of each might be nearer than he knew let them work while it was yet day.

At the conclusion of the sermon the congregation joined in singing "Lead, Kindly Light," which brought the service to a close.

The Moderator, after constituting the Assembly with prayer, referred to the losses sustained by death since last meeting, among them Dr. McGregor, Halifax, Dr. John Ross, formerly of Dalhousie College, and Rev. J. W. McLeod, Missionary at Trinidad. He concluded by thanking the Assembly for the honour conferred on him, and calling for the nomination of a successor.

Rev. Robert Campbell, M.A., in cordial and graceful terms proposed that Rev. J. K. Smith, M.A., be appointed Moderator for the coming year.

Rev. S. Lyle, B.D., in appropriate terms seconded the nomination, which was made unanimously. Mr. Smith was conducted to the chair by his proposer and seconder.

On assuming the chair, the Moderator thanked the Assembly for the high honour conferred upon him and proceeded to make a few very appropriate remarks, as to the urgency of the work to which the Church is called. The young men had special claims, and the evangelization of the masses required the

Church's special attention. There were great encouragements to go forward, and there ought to be fervent desires for a larger baptism of the Holy Spirit.

## THURSDAY MORNING.

The Assembly met at eleven o'clock, and the first hour was spent in devotional exercises, in which the Moderator, Professor McLaren, Rev. James Gray, A. B. McKay, Principal Forest, W. S. Ball and R. F. Burns, D.D., took part.

In the afternoon the Assembly, after being constituted, appointed committees on reception of ministers from other Churches, the retirement of ministers, and the reception and licensure of students.

## ELDERSHIP TERM SERVICE.

An overture from the Synods of Hamilton and London, recommending a five years' term service in the eldership, was read.

Rev. S. Lyle, B.D., spoke in support of the overture, urging that the present method does not favour the utilization of all the available talent in the service of the Church. Many, who would hesitate to accept a life-long term, might readily agree to serve for a limited time. An unsuitable elder would thus have an opportunity to resign. Elders re-elected would feel their position strengthened by the endorsement of the people. John Knox urged time service in the eldership; and the American Church has adopted it, and he did not find any scriptural argument against time service. He concluded by moving that the overture be sent down for consideration by the Presbyteries, and reported on at next Assembly.

Mr. J. C. Munro, elder, seconded the motion. He spoke of disagreements between congregations and elders, instancing the Scott Act as such a cause of disagreement in some congregations.

Mr. Walter Paul, Montreal, thought if there were differences of opinion in congregations now, there would be many more, were there frequent elections of elders.

Mr. William Cole was of opinion that if this was a scheme to get rid of bad elders, there would require to be a plan for getting rid of bad ministers.

Mr. R. C. Smith spoke in favour of maintaining the existing usage of the Church as to the length of service in the eldership. He thought that ministers did not exercise that degree of charity toward the eldership that is desirable.

Mr. R. McQueen did not think that the proposed change would obviate the disadvantages arising from a life eldership. He feared that it would bring in greater and more serious disadvantages. Even if there was a want of harmony between a congregation and its session, it might be found that the elders were acting for the best interests of the congregation. There is sufficient unrest in congregations now, without adding to it by frequent elections of elders.

Mr. D. W. Beadle stated that term service as it existed in the American Church was simply permissive. It was optional with congregations. He desired a full discussion of the subject by Presbyteries and sessions.

Mr. Eckford strongly urged the continuance of the life service.

Mr. Hodgskin felt that before the question could be intelligently discussed it was necessary, from the confusion at present existing, that the function and status of the eldership should be more accurately defined. He too thought the subject ought to be fully discussed. The overture relates to more than it expresses.

Rev. R. Murray, Halifax, in a few remarks proposed an amendment to the effect that the Assembly see no sufficient cause to take any action with regard to the terms of office of the elders of the Church, therefore resolve to dismiss the overture.

After a brief reply by Mr. Lyle, the vote was taken, when 108 voted for the amendment, and eighty-four for the motion. The amendment was accordingly adopted.

## MARRIAGE QUESTION.

Principal McKnight, in a short speech, submitted a deliverance based on the returns of Presbyteries to the remit sent down by the Assembly of 1884, concluding with an instruction that hereafter marriage with a deceased wife's sister be not regarded as a matter for the exercise of discipline.

On the suggestion of Principal Caven, a committee was appointed to draft a deliverance and report at a subsequent sederunt.

Principal McKnight willingly withdrew his motion. Mr. W. B. McMurrich presented the report of the Hymnal Committee, and submitted the treasurer's statement, which, on motion, were received and adopted.

An invitation from the ladies of MacNab Street Church was extended to the members of Assembly