

Our Contributors.

CONCERNING THE USE OF FORMS.

BY KNOXIAN.

THE trend in the Presbyterian Church on this continent is towards the use of forms in marrying, burying, baptizing, and on other special occasions. The growing practice of using the manuscript in the pulpit seems to bring along with it the desire to use forms in the discharge of other duties that devolve upon the minister. Ministers who cannot be suspected of any leaning towards a ritual who are as evangelical as any man can be, who are quite capable of performing a marriage ceremony or conducting a funeral service in the most appropriate manner, are sometimes seen using a book of forms when they marry or bury. In fact ministers who least need a book of forms are the men who most frequently use one, while some brethren who would be none the worse for using a printed form are just the men who would hardly give a book of forms a place on the upper shelf of their libraries.

Is the trend towards the use of forms a good thing, or a bad thing, or a middling thing? What does it mean? Does it mean that ministers are too busy to prepare themselves to do their work on all occasions reasonably well without printed help? Does it mean that some of them are too nervous to marry a couple before a large audience or conduct a funeral service in presence of a considerable gathering of people many of them from other churches, in such a manner as to reflect credit on their own church? Has clerical inertia anything to do with it? Does the presence of the ubiquitous reporter influence the parson in favour of a form? The reporter, of course, wishes to tell his readers that the marriage or burial was conducted according to the Episcopalian form or the Presbyterian form, or some other form, and if there is no book of forms used, he may say the thing was not done in good form.

Do some of the people hanker after printed forms? Many Presbyterians of course, do not like them and never will. They want to see the minister stand up like a man and do his work in good old fashioned manly style. They like to see him open his mouth as his Master did when he preached the sermon on the mount, and marry and baptize, and bury without the aid of a crutch. If he cannot do that they are very likely to think that he has mistaken his calling. Perhaps he has. We strongly sympathize with the sturdy Presbyterian who looks upon the growing habit of reading sermons and using forms with a considerable amount of suspicion. But still people who want to use forms have their rights as well as those who dislike them. Ministers who prefer to use forms, and people who are willing to have them used should be allowed to exercise their liberty without any harsh criticism. The best kind of a minister is the one who can do his work fairly well with or without forms, and perhaps the best kind of a church is one made up of people who like to have things done in different ways. Ironclad uniformity is the offspring of narrowness and the father of imbecility.

There is not much use in asking whether books of form should be used in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. As a matter of fact, half a dozen or more of them are used now. We know of four, and it is quite safe to guess that there are at least two or three more. Such being the case, would it not be well to have a book of our own. All the books we know of are fairly good, but they are not ours, and there is no reason why we should not make one. There are dozens of hymn books in the world but we are making a new one. Why not have a companion book to be used at marriages, funerals, and on other special occasions. Nobody need use it if he did not wish to do so. Even the most pronounced opponent of forms would find it convenient to have suitable Scripture selections so arranged that they could be used readily on all special occasions. Our ideal of a book of forms would be one made up almost exclusively of Scripture selections. A book of that kind bound in limp covers could be carried in one's inside coat pocket to the graveyard, and used much more conveniently at the graves' mouth than a Bible. The prayers if there are any—the burial service if there is any—need not be used by anybody who thinks that an extemporaneous address or prayer is more suitable.

We have nothing to say to the man who is opposed to making selections from the Bible. As a matter of fact you make a selection every time you read unless you read the whole book.

Nor have we any controversy with the man who says there should be no service of any kind at the grave. To this man we may, however, relate an incident from actual life. Long years ago we attended a funeral in an Ontario town at which the local Presbyterian minister officiated. Because he considered it Popish, or Episcopalian, or for some other reason, the minister did not conduct any service at the grave. While the coffin was being lowered gently down, and the earth thrown in, he stood away back on the outskirts of the crowd. A prominent man in his own congregation looking on was heard to say, "We Presbyterians bury a man like a dog!" Can we afford to have any of our people speak or even think in that way.

Here are a few statistics on education in Canada, which are vouched for by Hon. G. W. Ross, Ontario Minister of Education. In the Dominion, he said, there are 17,054 schools, 23,522 teachers, and 999,474 pupils, besides 4,749 pupils in classical colleges and 4,734 students in our fourteen universities. It costs \$8.54 to educate a child, \$91.28 to keep a prisoner in jail, and \$187 to keep a convict in the Central Prison for a year. Which is cheapest?

OBEDIENCE TO THE LAST COMMAND THE SECRET OF INDIVIDUAL BLESSING AND POWER.*

BY REV. M. N. BETHUNE.

IN the text of the subject given us for our consideration this evening there are two propositions which I shall seek briefly to examine and apply—viz., as relates to the basis and the secret of blessing.

(1) *The last command is the basis of blessing.* This involves all blessing viewed in the broadest sense.

Can any one command be the basis of all blessing? Is not each blessing vitally attached to a command of its own, for which it only can be held responsible? Yes. But one command may be broad enough to include all that we mean when we deal with the idea of obedience.

The last command is. All else is but an outgrowth from this. Properly understood it involves the entire work of the Church, and, therefore, the possibilities of Christian obedience.

Two passages in the New Testament should never be separated. They represent the dual foundation of the Church's existence.

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," etc.—John iii. 16. "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel,"—Mark x. 15. This second finds its enforcement in a third. And when "He is come He will convince the world of Sin,"—John xvi. 8. The "world" is in all these passages. God and the world is the first—atonement. The Church and the world the second—witnessing. The spirit and the world the third—convincing. On these three the dispensation rests. One is yet to follow. That has to do with the termination of the Church's work here. "He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness,"—Acts xvii. 31. Meanwhile the witnessing of grace goes on, until the period of judgment arrives. Go back to the two first mentioned passages for a moment. Viewing them as the twin pillars of the Church, does not the question resolve itself into something like the following. By the first of these the Church is saved, by the second she serves. By the first she receives a title to heaven, by the second an occupation upon earth. By the first she receives life, by the second she enjoys communion. The first is the Church's foundation, the second her commission. She is built upon the foundation, she carries out the commission.

In the book of Acts, the book of the true Kingdom of God, we get this matter glorified by a new light: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth,"—Acts i. 8. These were Christ's last words, and here is the spiritual programme for the direction of His disciples. Witnessing is the work of the Church; Christ is the News, the Holy Spirit of God the Power, and the uttermost part of the earth the Realm. This is final. It is to be until He shall come again, according to the Angelic communication. Thus the base of the proposition given me for introduction is correct. The last command, involving, as it does, the essence of the Church's work, must necessarily be the test of her obedience, and, therefore, the secret of blessing. Let us remember this work is not sectional. It is not any one part of the earth I am to bear this witness to, but to man in general. There is to be no favouring process in one section, with neglect in another. I must not make any distinctions, far less set up petty rivalries. The message is one harmonious, progressive, organic whole, beautifully illustrated by the various sacred writers who speak specifically upon this point. Matthew uses the words "All nations." This is the racial idea, the tribal thought. Mark adds all the "world," the geographical idea, and every "creature," the individual idea. So, in every part of the world to all their manifold peoples and to every separate individual I am bound to send the gospel. Thus I repeat the base of the proposition is correct. This is the work of the Church, this, therefore, is the outcome for her obedience, this, in turn, the secret of her blessing.

(2) *Obedience to the last command is the secret of blessing.* Let our appeal be to the word of God. Where better can we look for an enforcement of this idea than in the incidents connected with the giving of the last commandment itself. That great missionary chapter, the 28th of Matthew, gives us a remarkably full conception of this matter. There the blessings are principally three in number, obedience the secret of them all. The three are. Communion with the Person of Christ, intimation of His Word and Will, experience of His Spirit. Himself, His Word, His Spirit. Are not these the organics of Christian life. May we not say, Lord, by these things men live?

A word or two upon each of these rapidly.

(a) *Communion with the Person of Christ.* Begin at the sepulchre and with Mary. Lovingly she lingers round the place where her Lord had lain, when an angel appears with the words, "Come see", "Go tell". One glance for self, then the passing on of the news. His command is obeyed with the result that Jesus meets with her by the way. Here is communion based on obedience, and such communion. Mark its advance. From the Angel to Christ Himself. From seeing the place where the Lord lay to seeing the Lord face to face. From the "quickly" of the Angel to the lengthening out of the interview as she worships at His feet. Here is advance all through. Advance in character in duration. But the interview is soon

* Substance of address delivered by Rev. M. N. Bethune.

over. Again the words fall on her ear "Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, there shall they see me." The obedience now required is greater, the journey longer, the spirit more absolutely controlled. They go to Galilee, Jesus meets with them and for forty days speaks to them of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. Here is great advance from the few moments by the wayside to the forty days in Galilee.

But this is not all. This interview ends likewise by the wider command of our Saviour. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations . . . and lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world." Now the communion is complete. The forty days gives place to the "always," but on what grounds. I answer a contemporary obedience upon their part. If Mary had not obeyed the Angel, would she have met Christ? No. If the disciples had not gone unto Galilee, would they have enjoyed his presence for forty days? No. Must it not follow then if the Church does not go to the "all nations" she cannot have His presence "always"? The tendency in all these blessings is to ripen to perfection, but only in proportion as the Church absorbs and carries out His will. And I believe that communion with Christ in the deepest, fullest, sweetest sense cannot be enjoyed except in unison with the purposes of God in the world.

(b) *Intimation of His Word and Will.* Just a word upon this. This follows naturally in the path of communion. Very much of our communion with Him is occupied with the intimation of His Word to us. It has two sides here—doctrinal, practical.

Doctrinal.—To Mary at the Tomb is revealed the truth of the Resurrection. Full of her mission she hurries to tell the news, when Christ meets her and discloses the doctrine of the Ascension, in the words, "I ascend unto My Father." Here is advance. It remains but to show that upon the slopes of Olivet, and at the last moment, angels appear and disclose the doctrine of the advent. Here is perfect intimation, as before we saw perfect communion. For these three things, His Resurrection, Ascension and Advent are the organics of the Person of Christ as communion, intimation and experience of His Spirit, are of every disciple of His. These truths were revealed part by part, and made in perfect accord with the receptivity of the Church in becoming absorbed in His Will. Between these latter two the plan for evangelization was disclosed, and even here in consulting the sacred narrative we find an enlarging view, for Matthew gives us "Evangelization and Organization": "Go" "teach" "baptize." Mark is occupied with "Results": "These signs shall follow" Luke with "Qualification": "Tarry ye . . . until ye be endued with power." John with "Authorization": "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. . . . Whosoever sins ye remit. . . . Whosoever sins ye retain."

Practical.—Just a sentence or two. To Mary at the way side. In Galilee in convention. In Jerusalem waiting for the Spirit. There, and onwards, making known His name. In each of these places, according to appointment, He met them. Would He have done so if they had failed to keep their engagement. The answer is in the negative. The same is true to day. He reveals His Word and Will to us as we are carrying out His already received command.

(c) *Experience of His Spirit.* Let me ask why should we change the principle when arriving at this point? And this is the very essence of the matter, practically face to face with us. If communion and intimation are conditional upon obedience, and only mature to perfection as the obedience becomes controlling, why should we suppose that the fulness of the Holy Ghost in all that the expression may imply as the experience of "the promise of the Father" can be enjoyed by the Church except on the basis that the last command of Christ be fully carried out.

I must confess looking at this matter in the light of the underlying principle guiding the administration of the blessings already touched upon, the conclusion seems inevitable. Perfect obedience now will mean perfect power as then it meant perfect communion and intimation.

Let us consider this matter to-night. The fulness of blessing comes in with the fulness of obedience. Have we as a Church given Christ this obedience yet? The result to the Church at large, would, it appears to me, be obvious. It would mean a copious outpouring of the Spirit of God upon the churches at home. And this is just what we need, and the lack of which we are continually deploring.

I believe this blessing in its completest sense cannot be expected until the "uttermost part of the earth" has been witnessed to by us. This is the limit of His Word and the secret of Power. Reaching this we may infer the fulness of blessing would be enjoyed, and in sending the Gospel abroad all the churches at home would receive their equivalent part in the descending shower of grace.

In more senses than one we require to return to apostolical times. That little pre-pentecostal prayer meeting in Jerusalem might well serve as a guide to our attitude in regard to this matter.

"They were all with one accord in one place." Here is unity: unity of three characters. "All"—unity of numbers. "With one accord"—unity of sentiment. "In one place"—unity of locality. That was the primitive Church's spiritual condition as the foundation of reception in this matter. What was this unity in reference to? The command of Christ, and the promise of the Father. The evangelization of the world, and the descent of the Holy Spirit. It is unnecessary for me to say that the "promise" was kept, when the "command" was obeyed. The Spirit came. Might He not so come again?