

JULY, 1876.

SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA.

The General Assembly commenced its proceedings in Knox Church, Toronto, of which Rev. Dr. Topp is pastor, on Thursday, the eighth of June, at 11 o'clock a. m. The body of the church was reserved for the members of the Court, while the public found accommodation in the spacious galleries. Although a large number of the members did not reach the city in time to be present at the opening services, the church, which is seated for 1200 persons, was well filled in every part by an audience evidently deeply impressed with the importance of the occasion.

At the hour appointed, the retiring moderator, Rev. John Cook, D. D., of Quebec, ascended the pulpit, and after the usual preliminary services, preached an able discourse from Ephesians IV, 2-13, of which the following is a brief out-line.

“And he gave some, Apostles; and some, prophets; some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

Commencing with the statement that God has given, for men to study, two books—the book of nature and the book of revelation—reference was made to the ever resulting discovery of new truths from the study of the former—truths, which, though they had always existed, were unknown before even to the wisest of men, and to the opinions held by some who look for some such development and discovery of unknown truths from the continued study of the book of scripture. There are analogies, doubtless, points of resemblance, between those two great books of God,—such as were to be expected in works coming from the same divine author. Is this one of them,

even the capacity of developing new truths to the diligent student: and, as from age to age, men are ever adding to the truths which have been drawn from the study of material nature, may they also be adding to the truths which have been drawn from the revealed word?

It has to be admitted in the first place, that the critical and scientific study of the divine word have seldom resulted in what may be called discovery. They have cleared away some of the difficulties which attach to books written in ancient times, and in languages which have long ceased to be spoken. But no great leading truth, unperceived from the beginning, or which, was not patent to the apprehension of ordinary readers, has by means of them been attained: and when something new has been started, not infrequently error has been made to take the place of truth by the application of unsound principles of interpretation. In the second place, it is to be considered that christianity in its doctrines and principles, has been revealed plainly and fully to the apprehensions of plain men. The corruption of man's nature by sin, the unspeakable mercy of God in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit in renewing and sanctifying the hearts of men, the future life, the future judgment, the future and righteous retribution,—these have been, are, and always will be, the great truths of the Gospel. It is not to be thought that any amount of study will ever evolve from the scripture truths greater than these. No such development of christianity is to be expected. Nevertheless, there may grow out of a more intelligent study of the word of God, what shall, in effect, amount to discovery, in some degree analogous to that which rewards the enquirer into the wonders of the material world, and which may be fitted to tell powerfully on the condition of the christian church. No Protestant doubts that for centuries the church did misunderstand and misrepresent certain passages. Can it be claimed that we are safe from all similar danger? Is it not possible that still we may be under misapprehension of some portion of God's word, on which light may yet be made to shine?

But it is not so much in the discovery and development of new truth, as in the new