

DIVINE POWER AND HUMAN AGENCY.

BY PRINCIPAL GRANT, D.D.

The discourse delivered by Principal Grant in Convocation Hall, which has incited Bishop Cleary to reply is as follows:

1. That power belongs to God alone is the consistent teaching of the Old and New Testaments. Again and again we are told that man by himself is nothing, his wisdom, wealth, numbers, all alike nothing. Yet here, between the two Testaments, stands up a man who says, "All power is given unto me." No man before or since ever ventured to make such a claim. And this man had always appealed to the Old Testament, and from Him the New has its life! If He had merely asserted that He had all power in heaven no one could prove a negative. But here is a claim that can be tested, for He asserts that He has all power on earth. To no people would such a claim sound so monstrous as to Jews. To them it was rank blasphemy. From no other man, if he were only man, would such a claim be less expected, for even the popular estimate of Jesus then and now has always been that He was "meek and lowly," the last man in the world to arrogate to Himself anything that He did not possess. And at no other time did circumstances make such a claim so apparently opposed to truth, for when the words were uttered He was simply, in the eyes of the law, a fugitive who had escaped from justice, and one who had

SOMEHOW ESCAPED THE HANGMAN.

Yet He did speak these words. We know that not one of His disciples was capable of inventing them. No mere man could have conceived or would have uttered such words. And the claim has been verified. All power on earth is, we may say, already in the hands of Christian nations. Verily, "the Galilean" is triumphed.

The claim is astonishing. Its verification by history is still more astonishing. But, perhaps, still more astonishing to us is the conclusion drawn by Him as regards the duty of His disciples, in consequence of all power being His. All power is mine; therefore I will do all that is needed, is what a man would have said. What He says is, "The power is given to me, go ye therefore."

But, how divine in its wisdom is this conclusion, though it is the direct opposite of our wisdom! Mark, in what perfect accordance it is with the fundamental law of the Divine Government! That law may be expressed in these words.

ALL THE POWER IS GOD'S, ALL THE AGENCY OR INSTRUMENTALITY IS MAN'S.

Illustrations of the working of this law in the kingdom of nature, in the history of the Church, and in the formation of character, I gave you a fortnight ago, and those illustrations might be multiplied from every department of life. Everywhere we are indebted for enjoyment, or improvement, or the accomplishment of our plans to human agency, and, while giving all the glory to God, let us never forget to acknowledge the agents that He uses. Every man's own business will suggest to him the aptest illustrations, and it is quite unnecessary for me even to suggest others.

We see the law exemplified in the history of the Church, both in Old and New Testament times, and ever since. We are apt to think that everything was done miraculously and abnormally in those days. No view could be more crude and more opposed to the facts. As a rule, everything went on as naturally as events in our day. Miraculous agency was very sparingly used, in accordance with what has been called "the law of parsimony." The Old Testament gives us the history of thousands of years, yet almost all the miracles cluster around two crises in the history of Israel, the first being the epoch connected with the Exodus, when, humanly speaking, it seemed far from improbable that Israel would succumb to the organized power, civilization and religion of Egypt, or degenerate into a mere Bedouin tribe. The second being six or seven centuries later, the epoch commencing with Elijah, when all signs, so far as man could see, indicated that the fate of Israel was to

SINK TO THE LOW LEVEL.

of the surrounding Semitic heathenism. In the Gospel we have recorded the miracles of Christ. It was fitting that miracles should be wrought by Him. Never were miracles so suited to the occasion, so beneficent, so beautifully symbolic of the constant working of Divine power in nature as His. And yet, what does He say? His disciples, immediately after telling them to believe Him "for the very works' sake?" Listen, and if you do not understand, have humility enough to be silent. "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that believeth on me the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do." There are persons who in the name of religion refuse to believe that emphatic promise of Christ. But the promise has been fulfilled. Christ healed the few blind men whom He met on earth, but now, through the wisdom and skill and love that He gives to His people, thousands of the blind are being healed in every land. You say that He healed supernaturally, while we heal in accordance with natural causes.

Certainly. But, the supernatural work was to point out that the power behind natural law is divine. Hence it is that His miracles are

ALWAYS IN SCRIPTURE CALLED "SIGNS,"

signs, that is, of a power that we may avail ourselves of. At Pentecost, three thousand were converted. Last year by the agency of missionaries fifty thousand in heathen lands were converted. In both cases, the power was divine. At Pentecost, men from a dozen different countries heard the apostles tell the mighty works of God, "every man in his own language." Now the Bible is translated into hundreds of languages, and by the agencies at work millions instead of thousands are being reached. And we shall see greater things yet, greater triumphs over nature, greater wonders in the kingdom of Grace, if we only lay hold of Him who holds all the power is His hands.

We see the same law exemplified in the building up of character. You do not grow in any virtue by giving or hearing glowing descriptions of that virtue. Preaching or listening to eloquent sermons will not redeem you from selfishness or from the dominance of any bad habit or the practice of any sin. No, there is no other way for us but the old-fashioned way of diligent practice in the opposite direction. When you know what is right,

"PERFORM THE DOING OF IT,"

is the injunction of Scripture. God, says St. Peter, has given to you all things that pertain to life and godliness, therefore, do you give all diligence to make those things yours, so making your calling and election sure. Work out your own salvation, says St. Paul, because it is God that worketh in you. All the power is God's, but far from that meaning that we may fold our hands and do nothing, it means the very opposite. It means that, therefore, we are to be up and doing without delay, to do with all our might what our hands find to do. There is no other way of growing in knowledge, wisdom and spiritual strength. The observance of ritual, the listening to stirring sermons, learning Catechisms by heart will avail nothing. Tongue fence, arguing with other denominations, clandering your neighbours will avail less. These things tend to foster selfishness and pride. The one thing needed on your part is action. The power is Mine. He says, go ye therefore and do your duty. Do not be afraid of the difficulties in the way. "Wherefore criest thou unto Me," says the living God to Moses; "speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." The consciousness

THAT YOU ARE GOD'S AGENT

or instrument will keep you humble, and at the same time give you the inspiring assurance of victory. "Without Me, ye can do nothing," says the Lord, and then He adds, "ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." In other words, the one thing required of us is to do our duty as obedient agents of our Lord.

2. Let us now consider the next clause of the Great Commission, "disciple all nations." This second *all* is as wonderful as the first. It was opposed to all previous opinion and practice, so much so that it was not understood by the disciples, plain as the language is, for years and decades after the commission was given. According to the wisdom of the ancient world the political existence of a nation was bound up with its religion. The nation could not change its religion and live. Hence Jeremiah asks, hath any changed its gods? Certainly not. Such a thing was out of the question. Neither could it give its gods to any other nation. The practical wisdom of the Roman Empire recognized indeed the necessity of tolerating the religions of all the people under its sway, and, therefore, when Christianity had become a power, place would have been found for Jesus in the Pantheon if that would have satisfied the Christians. The Jews, believing in One God, believed that there

COULD BE ONLY ONE RELIGION,

but, whether they accepted or rejected Jesus, their idea was that all nations must enter into the universal temple through the gate of Judaism, and submit to the ordinances of Moses. In a word all others must denationalize themselves and become second-class Jews.

But the conception of Jesus is as high above the Roman or Jewish ideal as heaven is above earth. Make disciples of all nations. He says. That is, as He puts it elsewhere, preach the gospel to them, be witnesses of Me to them, make them My disciples.

In Him God speaks to the poorest and most sin-stained sinner, saying, "My child, turn from your sin and be reconciled to Me," and there is no land in which that message of wondrous love has been preached wholly in vain. To make a man a disciple of Jesus is to infuse a new life into his nature. It is to create a conscience in man, a new thing to the wisdom of the old world. How new it was we see in the celebrated letter of Pliny the younger to the Emperor Trajan, some seventy years after the great commission was given. As governor of Bythynia, Pliny found the heathen temples deserted and the people all going over to the new superstition called Christianity. He made inquiries and found that the Christians were good people. What was he to do? According to the laws of the twelve tables it seemed

to him that he would have to stamp out any new religion. But he was a wise politician and felt that it would be difficult to take that course.

HE ADOPTED A COMPROMISE,

and wrote the Emperor on the subject. He did not seek out the Christians or institute a general persecution, but if any were brought before the tribunals, they were ordered to sacrifice to the gods and the statue of the Emperor. If they refused they were immediately punished. Whether they were good or bad, "it was quite clear to Pliny that nothing but an absurd superstition" and "inflexible obstinacy" had threatened the fundamental principle on which the state was based would prevent any one from obeying the mandate of Rome. The Emperor approved of Pliny's policy, and made it the law of the Empire. And so war was regularly declared. On the one side the disciples, apparently helpless as sheep, on the other side Imperial Rome, to oppose whose power seemed about as sensible as to oppose gravitation. The war lasted for more than two centuries after that, and we know how it ended. The Christians went on making disciples, until heathen Rome became Christian Rome.

"Go ye, and disciple all nations." In obeying this command, see how the law to which I have already referred, "the power God's, the agency man's" has been exemplified. The gospel has gone as far as man has gone with it, so far and no farther. Angels have not been sent to preach to the heathen. The Lord has appointed men to be his agents. If they are disobedient, He sends no substitutes. I do not find anywhere in Scripture that angels were sent to preach the gospel. Jesus would not summon angels to his own aid when the hour and power of darkness came upon Him, neither would He send them to share the work that the disciples had to do, nor will He send them now. He imposes the responsibility on us.

HE GIVES US THE HONOUR.

He trusts His cause to us, and, oh, shame! how unfaithful to the trust we have been! Sceptics ask, if all power is in the hands of your Master, how is it that He allows thousands of millions to die without hearing of the great salvation; how is it that two-thirds of the inhabitants of earth have never heard His name? That fact alone, they say, is proof that Christianity is not of God. It is a startling fact, but the reason is still more startling. For wise reasons that we can partly understand, He left the work in the hands of the disciples. They did their duty, but we, their successors, are playing with the work. The blood of our brothers is on our skirts. It cries to Heaven against us. Can the heathen be saved if we do not send the Gospel to them, it is sometimes asked? That, said Mr. Spurgeon, to his congregation, is not the question for us. That is a matter for God. He will do what is right, no doubt about that. But the question for us to ask is if we do not send the Gospel to the heathen, can we be saved, for, he added, I very much doubt if we can. Suppose the disciples had disobeyed the command. Would their Lord have excused them? Certainly not. How, then, can we expect Him

TO EXCUSE OUR DISOBEDIENCE?

Do I mean that this great commission is given to us as directly as it was to the first disciples? Yes. Is not the need as great? Is not the Lord still living? Do we not profess to be His disciples? To each one of us this command is addressed.

BE VERY SURE OF THAT.

There can be no doubt whatsoever of that. Do I mean that all of us are to go abroad as missionaries? Certainly not. But all of us can make disciples of Christ at home, and all of us can take part in the work abroad by our faith, our prayers, our gifts and sacrifices. When a nation is at war every citizen does not put on the red coat. But every citizen is interested, and all contribute to the cost. The mother that buckles the sword on her boy, the sister of mercy who prepares lint or serves in the hospital, yea, the street arab who cheers the soldiers as they march past, all help according to their nature and their capability. And Christ's Church is at war, though many of us seem hardly to be aware of it, and some of us seem to think it hard that God should lay such a burden upon us. What have we done in this great war for man's liberty and man's blessedness? How much have we striven, how much have we suffered, how much have we paid? The sum contributed by the Church universal for foreign missions, would, I am told, pay the drink bill of Great Britain for two days, and of the United States for three days! Is it wrong to say that we are playing at the work?

Make disciples of all nations. For the first time in the history of the world, since these words were spoken, there is no real difficulty in the way of obeying them. Miracles! Are we blind to the miracles that Providence has wrought in our own day? Must a known law of nature be contravened before we can see that God has again given a "sign" to His Church? Then, if we had lived in Christ's day we would have been blind to his miracles. We, too, would have shouted, "Not this man, but Barabbas."