

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### GOD'S PROMISE TO THE CHURCH, AND HER DUTY.

SERMON PREACHED AT OPENING OF SYNOD OF HAMILTON AND LONDON, AT ST. CATHARINES, ON THE 13TH APRIL, 1880, BY REV. JOHN MEWMAN, INGLEBOLL.

Isaiah lix. 20.

The apostate ten tribes of Israel are on the eve of being taken as a prey by their powerful eastern neighbours—the Assyrians.

The idolatrous party in Judea is rising in power and influence, and threatens the utter extinction of the few who are walking in the ways of their father David. The fervent, far-seeing and clear-sighted prince of prophets bewails this temporary triumph of iniquity; when "truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter; and the man that departeth from evil is accounted mad;" but the Lord saw it; in His eyes it was evil; and when the enemy cometh in like a flood—the high flood driven by a fierce wind, threatening to burst its banks—the Lord will then interpose and erect His standard in the face of His enemies. The Redeemer shall come to Zion—the ancient symbol and centre of His Church.

This passage, like many of a similar form, rises in significance and widens in its applications to the circumstances in which God's cause and people are placed. It embodies these abiding and undying principles.

1. The supremacy of the living God—"I am Jehovah, that is My name"—against all idolatry, gross or refined—"My glory will I not give unto another, nor My praise to graven images."

2. That God is sleepless in His interest over His faithful ones and His truth. "Behold I have graven thee on the palms of My hands, and thy walls are continually before Me."

3. God will come forth from His seeming absence, and will utterly overthrow the apostate people. "Putting on righteousness as a breast plate, and an helmet of salvation upon His head; and He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak."

4. He will also remember His covenant, and cause it to come forth in great power and fruitfulness. "The little one shall become a thousand and the small one a strong nation; I, the Lord, will hasten it."

5. God will send, and has sent, His Son. "The Redeemer shall come to Zion."

These are the vital elements of the entire Word. Whatever form they take on, eastern or western in its dress, historical or doctrinal, national or ecclesiastical, the facts are alike powerful and precious in this age as in that, proclaimed by a prophet or a preacher, taught in the quiet sanctuary of a home or inculcated in the drill of a school—the source of a nation's greatness, the secret of a Church's power; and the grateful foundation of individual hope. We propose to direct special attention to verse 21st.

#### I. GOD'S ASSURING PROMISE TO THE CHURCH.

"As for Me, this is my covenant." We need not dwell on the important fact of the covenant attitude of the Father in the plan of redemption; in His eternal counsels with His Son, in His relation to the first pair of our race, kept prominent in His delivery of the truth from generation to generation, the covenant attitude is everywhere assumed, and the covenant form of divine dealing is everywhere implied and manifested. In days of darkness and difficulty the trusting yet discouraged soul draws comfort, whispers to himself, "Though my house be not so with God, yet hath He made with me an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure." If, as with David, the covenant cause does not grow as we would desire, the Lord's hand is not shortened, the Lord's ear is not heavy, "Your iniquities have separated us."

"As for Me, this is My covenant." And amid fault and failure on our part, we are encouraged to lay hold of the divine covenant. Assurance and security, certainty and triumph, are the very essence of covenant on God's part. "This is the covenant that I will make with them, saith the Lord, I will put My laws into their heart, and in their minds will I write them." "I will be to them a God and they shall be to Me a people." This expresses the highest form of pledge to personal effort. It also suggests the need on our part of the deepest wisdom; it guarantees the best possible results—the law written on the heart, with the grandest issues.

"I will be to them a God." The text sets forth the promise of the Holy Spirit. "My Spirit that is upon thee," "My covenant with them"—these two expressions are vitally connected in the promise to the Church. The covenant is made with the Redeemer, as coming to Zion, and with the redeemed as given to Him. Even so "the Spirit that is upon thee"—shall we say the representative and anointed prophet, embracing the ideal and faithful Church; but we go higher still, and turn the light upon our text by the historical and triumphant Messiah. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because He hath anointed Me to preach." And as the anointed Messiah He puts His Spirit on His servants and people. "Ye shall be endued with power from on high." "Ye shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming on you." "I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." Let our responding prayer be, "Preserve alive Thy work, O Lord; in the midst of the years make known, in wrath remember mercy."

The presence of the Holy Spirit is guaranteed by the preservation of the Word in the mouth of the Church. "My covenant," "My Spirit," "My words," My kingdom of truth in its dawn and its day before men, its acceptance and rejection among men, mounting up in power and fulfilment in the person of the Redeemer as "the Word made flesh." Hear His words: "I am the truth." "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." In Him is laid up all the treasures of wisdom, and in the living and reigning Christ we have with us the living and abiding Word in these Scriptures of the old and new Covenants put into our mouths, written on our minds and in our hearts by the divine Spirit.

The promise of the abiding truth is supplemented by the pledge of a directing and helping Providence. "They shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor of thy seed's seed for ever." "The Word shall accomplish that which I please, and prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." "The Lord will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations." "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord." "The Lord reigneth, let the earth be glad." The Word of God is not bound, "it shall have free course and be glorified."

On the Lord's side all is sunlight and certainty. On Christ's heart all is secure and cloudless. "He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." See Him stand forth in the great consummation: "Of all Thou hast given Me I have lost nothing." "Here am I and the children God hath given Me"—a Church redeemed by the blood of Christ, cleansed by the Holy Spirit through the Word, for whom all things have wrought together for good under God, "a glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing."

#### II. THE CHURCH AND HER ABIDING DUTY.

We emphasize the strong old word "duty"—full of power from gratitude within; permanent in obligation because of the revealed truth—duty, that makes the Church "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." These promised and grand results are wrought out in conformity with, and a helpful use of, a wide system of means—a divine arrangement of methods in work; an adaptation of character and fitness for the ends to be reached. Take the last first. The promise is realized by them that turn from transgression to the Redeemer come to Zion. Conformity to the will of God, and being animated by His Spirit, gives insight to the prescribed methods of work, and guides in a wise marshalling of means and a true use of them, enabling us to define clearly the distinction between the agencies and institutions bound up in God's cause and the divine life flowing in them and through them for the realization of His covenant. The glory of the divine side of this covenant, when long or exclusively dwelt upon, is apt to lead us to undervalue or overlook a humble class of duties, or means of work and of power, as too trifling to be weighed with such issues. There is difficulty in distinguishing the outlines of objects in a dimly illuminated room, especially when the eye has just been adapted to the glory of the noontide. Details of duty and humble methods of important work become indistinct, and caution is not uncalled for, inasmuch as our text is largely conditioned upon apparently unimportant duties. While it is all sunlight on the divine side, it is nevertheless largely a problem with us, needing clear discernment, even the wisdom that cometh from above, "having understanding of the

times and knowing what Israel ought to do." Let us not blindly or blunderingly refuse to conform ourselves to the whole realm of means, but cheerfully enter every path of promise and hope; let us not perpetuate the complaint of Christ's day, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." To be in accordance with God's plans in His covenant, to minister, and to have ministered to us in a wise manner, all the appointed means of God's cause, is no small privilege, and involves no ordinary or common-place responsibility. These appointed means for the fulfilment of God's covenant, and covering our field of duty, are: A healthy and health-giving influence; true and thorough instruction; a clear and direct proclamation of Jesus Christ, embodied in three well-recognized institutions—the family, the school, the pulpit. In every age God has honoured the work of these institutions.

*The Family.*—This is the sanctuary of constant influence; rooted in nature as it came from the divine hand; the most controlling institution in race life, and in nurturing a godly seed; honoured with covenant engagements and crowned with a special class of promises. "I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." "My words shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed from henceforth and forever." "These words shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children." Let the influence of these words and of this teaching "be in thine house and by the way, when thou liest down and when thou risest up." Home life and influence with Jew and Gentile, in the land of the Orient, have been and are far more potent in their influence than with us, and it is not the least of our drawbacks that they have been overshadowed by the competing claims of business and public life. Home life has been secularized by the strong materialistic tendencies of the age. These everywhere present and active tendencies do more to mould character and give tone to the spirit than any prescribed and spasmodic specifics. To fulfil its mission in connection with the covenant of God, the atmosphere of the home must be pure, quiet, healthy, strong in the true and the right, in the good and the generous, orderly and regular in its concerns, patient and persevering in its lofty purposes, earnest in the execution of its resolves, bent on leaving successors more worthy of the cause and of God. "Bring up this child for Me, and I will give thee thy wages." No Church, by its formulated doctrine, stands on a higher vantage ground for doing its duty in this regard than the Presbyterian. And our text specially emphasizes the covenant relation of the children of believers as part of the great system of means set up in the kingdom of God.

*The School.*—We use this term not as applying to a public school or a Sabbath school, but as describing a necessary and distinctive department of work in the duty and development of mind; the appointed place for instruction in wisely detailed and consistently connected outlines of truth and duty. Without this department of work, prosecuted patiently and skilfully, we cannot conserve and transmit the most hallowed influences of the home. School work is called for by a necessity of spiritual growth, and as adapting ourselves to a fundamental fact in our nature.

Human obligation implies a doctrine to be received and a person to be obeyed. You may consider this doctrine on its natural basis as applied to the secular school, or you may bring it into the higher realm of religion and regard it on its supernatural foundation; and it will be felt to be important in the natural or the religious as a divinely implanted fact in the historical realizations of God's plans in His covenant. Or, to present this truth in another form, the doctrine, or the truths, or the facts to be received and the person to be loved and obeyed *must* be presented, if you will, must be implanted in the minds, not merely by the informal, but pervasive power of an influence; but also these verities must be unfolded in an orderly and adapted form to the mind of the instructed, whether it be a child or a man, if abiding results are to be reached. The mind must be trained toward these verities, and trained in them, and animated by them. To do this according to true and hopeful methods of work is school life, school principles—just what the Church has not sufficiently realized thus far. And we cannot cease to regard it as an essential factor in the accomplishment of the lofty purposes of our text. Hence school life and its special form of work are of immense power in the plans of God, and in-