

SYNOD OF TORONTO AND KINGSTON.

The Synodical Conference opened in St. Paul's Church, Peterborough, on the evening of Monday, the 9th inst. At the first meeting Rev. R. N. Grant presided. Opening devotional exercises were conducted by Rev. S. Houston and others.

The first paper on "The Nature of Sin" was read by Professor McLaren. It was brief, yet clear, able and comprehensive. It was common enough to hear sermons on sins, but not so common to hear discourses on sin, the real fountain of all moral defection. To understand it aright we must have a clear conviction of the existence of a personal God. There can be no sin where there is no moral law, unless there is a personal God and Lawgiver. The nature of sin can be understood only when viewed in relation to the moral law of which it is a violation. In the constitution of man's moral and spiritual nature God gave him a revelation of moral distinctions and moral law. Conscience still discriminates between moral right and wrong. Sin involves always two things: a sense of demerit and deterioration, and a sense of ill-desert or of just exposure to penalty. The connection between sin and law pervades Scripture. The extent or range of the law's requirements must also be known before we can decide what partakes of the nature of sin. The seat of morality is the will. In its broader sense the will is taken for man's entire voluntary nature, his desires, habits, dispositions and those elements that lead up to decisions of the will. The Iago view of sin, which narrows the functions of the will, and consequently presents a shallow and inadequate view of sin, has been rejected by all the great historical Churches. It does not take cognizance of the permanent habits, inclinations, or tendencies of man's voluntary nature. The theory of Pelagius is opposed to the teaching of Scripture and the instinctive judgments of mankind. Sin, therefore, does not consist merely in a succession of bad acts. It is a moral disease. The true Biblical conception of sin sets aside all the theories of sinless perfection. None of them recognize the extent of the law's demands. There are only two ways in which the law of God and man's life can be brought together. Either man's life must be brought up to the divine standard, or the requirements of the law lowered to man's imperfect nature. The law of the immutable God cannot be lowered. The true view of the nature of sin shuts us up to the grace of God in Christ Jesus. In Him only is there complete redemption from sin.

Rev. B. Canfield Jones, of Port Hope, introduced the next topic, "The Consequences of Sin." First he looked upon the consequences of sin in the world. One looking upon the world, he said, saw it was not a happy one, but one of sin and misery. The world was full of disease, sin and death. The innocent suffered as well as and because of the sin of the wicked. The world was full of sin and crime. This state of things was not due altogether to the actions of men to-day, but, because of the conduct of their ancestors, it was their heritage. Through Adam's disobedience sin entered the world and death by sin. For the purpose of the conference he would not look upon the consequences of Adam's sin upon his posterity—which were three in number, guilt, depravity and penalty—but would consider the penal consequences of sin. Sin was followed by its own punishment. In the physical world there was no forgiveness of sin, and nature required from him who broke its commandments an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. How much of the sickness was the consequences of sin. The speaker also considered the consequences of sin upon the mind, as seen in the case of Judas whose remorse caused him to go and kill himself. Then he went on to consider the consequences on the power of the will. There remained with man after the fall a power to resist sin. Sin tended to destroy the strength of the will, and he said this process of ruination of the will would end in the disappearance of the will and the giving over of the will wholly to the work of Satan. They saw, too, the consequences of sin in its power over affection. They saw a man forsake his home and all those once dear to him for the gambling house and the brothel. Mental culture, he pointed out, did not free a man from the consequences of sin or redeem him. He then proceeded to refer to the eternal consequence of sin and its punishment. If there was no hell, he said, argument for or against its existence would long ago have ended. There was nothing for the man wholly given over to sin but a continued increasing depravity. The lost soul would ever sin and ever suffer. Where there was endless guilt and eternal sin God must punish with eternal punishment. In closing he referred to the free gift God had made for the sinner and the preaching of the far-reaching consequences of sin. There was need in this easy, luxurious age for the preaching of the eternal punishment of sin. The paper was exceedingly well and carefully prepared.

THURSDAY.

After devotional exercises, Rev. R. D. Fraser, Bowmanville, delivered an address on "Present Day Manifestation of Sin in the Church." The Church is composed of ordinary people, just as it was in the days when Christ sent the epistles to the seven Churches in Asia. The state of the seven Churches may be taken as an epitome of the Church of all ages. Smyrna and Philadelphia are not blamed. Two out of the seven are praised. Ephesus, Pergamos and Thyatira are partly praised and partly blamed.

Sardis and Laodicea are not praised, but blamed. Ephesus had failed in the maintenance of love to God and man. Times of controversy are not conducive to the exercise of Christian love. Antinomianism was also one of the sins of the early Church leading to sinfulness of life. Worldliness and outward formality prevailed then and prevail now. The errors of the Church were more errors of life rather than of doctrine. The sins of the Church in the present day are the tendency to entertain loose views on the authority of Scripture and the binding obligation of the Sabbath. Formalism and worldliness were also prevalent. The last, especially in spirit and methods, were very difficult to eradicate. It could only be cast out by a deeper spiritual life and giving Christ the supreme place in the affections of His people.

Discussion and comment on the subject of Mr. Fraser's paper were made by Dr. Parsons, who spoke some pointed things as to the unchristian methods sometimes pursued by business men who are professed Christians. He was followed by Rev. J. McD. Duncan, J. McEwan, Rev. S. H. Fastman, J. McAlpine, who thought there was a large degree of unfaithfulness to the Word of God in the Church, and that there was sin in making public worship an exhibition. When this is done the spirit of true worship is driven out. Rev. R. N. Grant, J. B. Fraser, who remarked that there was a tendency to substitute the sensuous for the spiritual in the Church. Rev. Dr. McTavish and Rev. J. Neil spoke of some of the faults found in ministers themselves. Principal Grant remarked that sin has a blinding influence. It is easy to see the sins of a former age, not so easy to see and rebuke the sins of the present day. Rev. Robert Hamilton spoke a few words, and was followed by Rev. J. McInnis.

After devotional exercises the afternoon session was opened by Rev. J. Somerville, M.A., Owen Sound, who read a paper on "The Importance of a High Spiritual Life on the Part of Christian Workers." There is but one standard for all, the perfect will of God as revealed in Christ. There are, however, different degrees of personal responsibility. Those must be clean who bear the vessels of the Lord. It would be a sad day for the Church if the people ceased to expect a high standard of Christian life in the ministry. It is the principal condition of an efficient ministry. They must have a living experience of God's truth. Prophets and apostles began their work with a vision of God. The Christian worker must maintain a high standing of spirituality for the sake of the people among whom they labour. We must study the whole Word of God. We must study the Word for ourselves. We need medita-

tion. The other help is prayer. Prepare for all kinds of Christian work. Prepare to meet God.

Rev. J. Gilchrist, Mr. Drummond, Centreville, spoke. Rev. R. N. Grant spoke of the influence of the one-man power in small congregations and mission stations. That influence may be good or bad according to the character of the man. Such influence is not always for good on the spiritual life of the congregation. He also spoke of the injurious influence of spurious and pretentious revivalists. Rev. Messrs. John Neil, J. Carmichael, Norwood, W. Frazell, D. D. McLeod, J. B. Fraser, L. F. Torrance and M. Scott spoke on the subject under consideration.

Rev. S. Houston gave the concluding address on "The Attainments in Holiness Possible in this Life." It is not always easy to estimate spiritual life, yet its manifestations make its existence known. There are two extremes to avoid. The position of sinless perfectionism, and those who think the Christian ideal so high that they are content to live in comparative indifference on the lower level of spirituality. There are several ways of testing in spiritual attainments. Is there a deep-felt want in the Church for a higher and purer spiritual life? The various societies are active and useful, but are they, on the whole, helping their members to live holy, spiritual lives? Means of attaining to a higher spiritual life are study of the Word, prayer, seeking to know our own weakness, guarding against besetting sins, self-examination, cultivation of greater tenderness of conscience and true humility. There is no limit to the ideal standard after which we ought to aspire. May we never be satisfied with anything less than the full ideal God's Word set before us.

Remarks on the subject under consideration were made by Rev. Dr. Parsons, Messrs. A. Wilson, M. Scott, Professor McLaren and J. McAlpine.

The Moderator was accompanied to the pulpit by Rev. Dr. Parsons and Professor McLaren, who conducted the preliminary devotional exercises. The Rev. R. N. Grant, retiring Moderator, took for his text Acts xvii. 16, from which he preached the following discourse:—

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, etc. Acts xvii. 16.

At Athens Paul was on classic ground. For ages the city had been the centre and source of all that was greatest in art, in science in poetry, in philosophy and in eloquence. On every hand there was something to remind the Apostle that he was now in the home of philosophers, artists, poets and orators.

It is reasonable to suppose that Paul was to some extent impressed by such surroundings. I cannot accept the conclusions of those who tell us that the Apostle was so spiritually minded that he saw no difference between Athens and any other city. A scholar himself he could scarcely help feeling some interest in a city renowned for its learning. A teacher himself he must have looked with interest on the Lyceum in which Aristotle lectured. The logician who reasoned out the argument of the Epistle to the Romans must surely have looked with interest on the Academy of Plato. Quoting from a minor poet in his sermon, are we to suppose that he felt no interest in the land in which Homer sang? The orator that almost persuaded Agrippa and made Felix tremble must have been stirred at least a little when he trod the ground on which Demosthenes thundered. It is not necessary to exalt Paul's spirituality at the expense of culture. To be thoroughly alive to the spiritual, it is not necessary to be stone dead to everything that is beautiful in art, that is pleasing in poetry and inspiring in eloquence. Eminent as a Christian and pre-eminent as an Apostle, Paul was still a man, a scholar, a cultured man. I like to think that Bible heroes such as Abraham and Moses, and David and Daniel and Paul were men in many respects like ourselves. Had they not been human the benefit of their example would be lost. Had Paul been an archangel, or even an angel, his example would be of little use to members of this Synod. From an angel at Athens we could learn little; from Paul the man, Paul the Christian man, Paul the preacher, we may learn much.

But though Paul must have been impressed by the associations and the sights of the "eye of Greece," it was the spiritual condition of the people that impressed him most. He saw a city full of idols, and the sight threw him into a paroxysm, for that is what the word means. He could not look with indifference, or languid interest, on perishing men. He knew that there was but one living and true God, and his whole nature was roused when he looked upon a city in which there were as many gods as men. His soul was thrown into paroxysm when he saw immortal men bowing before gods of marble. And I think the paroxysm was all the more acute because the men were so cultivated. Could Paul help thinking what a power for good these Athenians might be if they were all regenerated and sanctified? Could a missionary like him help seeing what a splendid centre a Christian Athens would be to send the Gospel from over the surrounding country? Perhaps he thought of what a mighty argument a Christian Plato might have made on justification by faith. Could he help thinking of how well a sanctified Socrates could teach theology? Could anybody help thinking what a preacher Demosthenes would have made had the Gospel touched his heart? The paroxysm that seized the soul of the apostle was no doubt all the more violent because the men around him had such splendid possibilities within their reach but were still on the highway to eternal ruin. The saddest of all human wrecks is the wreck of a talented man.

Coming back to the facts we have now before us a great preacher in a paroxysm at the sight of a city covered with idols. Standing in his presence we may well ask what effect the sight of sin produced upon ourselves. It may be urged that there is no idolatry in Christian Canada. Are you quite certain of that? What is an idol? An idol is anything that takes the place in a man's heart that Christ ought to have. Between gold minted into the form of a dollar and gold moulded into the shape of a calf, there is little or nothing to choose. The worship of one is as degrading as the worship of the other. Are there no idols in the state that we might call Place, or Power, or Pelf, no idols in society that we call Fashion or Amusement? Can we be quite certain that there are no idols even in the Presbyterian Church? Taking the word idolatry in the wide sense of anything or any person enthroned where Christ alone should reign, there is any amount of idolatry in countries the most Christian. Dr. Joseph Parker says there are more idols in London, or New York, or Paris, than any Athenian ever dreamed of. There may be more idols in Canada than some of us ever thought of. Brethren, does it stir our spirits to see something enthroned in the human heart where Christ alone ought to reign supreme? We hear much—not too much—about the idols of India, and China and Japan. How does it affect us to look upon the idols of Canada? Can we look on complacently, or at best with a languid interest, when our Lord is dethroned and idols of a hundred forms put in His place?

Are our spirits stirred when we see sin in any form—when we see the Sabbath profaned—when we hear God's name taken in vain—when we see men staggering drunk on our streets—when we see rascality triumph and right trampled in the mire—when we see "truth on the scaffold and error on the throne?"

Do we burn with patriotic indignation when we see the name of our fair young country besmirched by those who should keep her honour untarnished and her record clean?

Do we blush with shame when we read that men calling themselves British subjects and supposed to have British blood in their veins are willing to sell their votes for a dollar apiece?

Are we quite unmoved when we learn that some of our people can easily find dollars for election expenses, but experience some difficulty in finding an equal number of cents for colleges and missions?

Did we learn with untroubled composure a few weeks ago that our Home Mission Committee were almost compelled by lack of funds to cut down the little salaries of some of our hardest worked ministers and were saved from the necessity of doing so by a bequest given by one whose good deeds bear ample fruit in this community? Have we come to such a pass that the dead must support Gospel ordinances for the living? Is the graveyard to be more liberal than the Church?

How does Foreign Mission work affect our spirits? Are they stirred into a paroxysm, as Paul was, when we think of the millions who have never heard the Gospel? There are more heathen in the world to-day than existed in Athens from the time the city was founded down to the day Paul preached on Mars' Hill about sixteen hundred years. And he remembered that some of the heathenism of to-day is very much more degraded than the heathenism Paul saw in Athens. We may not see it as Paul saw the idolatry in Athens, but we know it exists just as well as if we did see it. And we know that one of the last things our Master said before He ascended was: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Two thousand years have passed and the Church has not yet done what our ascending Lord commanded. Can we look upon that sad fact with indifference or with nothing more than languid interest? Should we not be so stirred by this work that we would need to pray for special patience when we have to argue with those who plead the Church's failures at home as a reason why she should not try to do her duty abroad?

How does our Home Mission work affect our spirits? God has given our young Church one of the most promising Home Mission fields in the world. How do we feel when we look at it?

Let me draw a little picture here not from imagination, but from actual Ontario life. See that group of Presbyterian people taking their Bibles out of their pew and leaving the old church for the last time. They leave with heavy hearts, for that old church brings up many tender memories. At a turn in the road, with moistened eyes they take their last look of the house of God in which their children were baptized and beside which, perhaps, their fathers and mothers sleep until Jesus comes. Next day we see them gathering at a neighbouring railway station and take their seats in the colonist car, bound for the North-West. We follow them through a thousand miles of forest, and see their train run out on the great prairie. Leaving the railway, they drive to their new home just as our fathers drove from these Ontario lake ports to their homes in the forest many years ago. Sabbath morning comes round, but there is no church, no minister, no public worship. What a long, lonesome Sabbath it must be.

But that is not by any means all. Sickness comes, but no minister of God enters the sick chamber to read and pray with the sufferer. Death comes, but no kind pastor bows by the bedside and commends the departing spirit to the God who gave it. The funeral day comes, but that fellow-member of ours, that old neighbour, perhaps, that man born and bred and baptized in the Presbyterian Church, is buried on the lone prairie without a prayer.

This is no fancy picture. I fear such things have occurred more than once. If they occurred only once, they occurred once too often.

We need not go back to Athens or around the globe to India or China to have our hearts stirred. There is quite enough in our own beloved Canada, quite enough in our own Church to stir any heart that is capable of being stirred. Any one of us may see enough in the locality in which he labours to stir his spirit. There are two factors, the heart and the causes, that should stir it. One of the factors is always present.

We have now before us an apostolic spirit roused, and the next point I wish to make is that it was

ROUSED TO ACTION.

It was stirred to do something. The paroxysm did not exhaust itself in pious platitudes. Paul did not sit down in despondency and moralize on the wickedness of the city. He did not give up in despair and say: "What is the use in one man fighting against all this idolatry? Nor did he say: "I must have some help—wait until Silas and Timothy come from Berea." No, he began work at once, and single handed, and preached to them.

JESUS AND THE RESURRECTION.

He well knew that no matter what progress they might make in science, in literature, in philosophy, no matter how refined and cultured they might be, they must remain idolaters until Jesus was enthroned in their hearts. So he preached unto them Jesus.

He knew that neither Socrates nor Plato had ever clearly answered the question: *Shall the dead rise?* He also knew that one of their schools of philosophy denied the immortality of the soul, and he preached unto them the resurrection. His stirred spirit instinctively laid hold on the greatest person and the most important fact of the Gospel. Great souls though they never discuss small subjects. "Preach on the great themes," says one of the Alexandrians in a book not as much read now as it ought to be. That was exactly what Paul did. He preached on Jesus and the resurrection.

And be it remembered that in preaching on these themes Paul did not ring the changes on one or two truths and tell the Athenians that was the whole Gospel. After the most skillful introduction in sacred or secular oratory he discusses a whole body of fundamental truth. He showed that the God he preached created the world and all things that are therein—that He preserves and governs the world, is near to every one of us, and that in Him we "live and move and have our being" that this same God calls upon men everywhere to repent and that He has appointed a day in which He will judge the risen dead. Creation, Providence, Repentance, Reconciliation, the Resurrection and the final Reckoning are all here.

Brethren, are we, remember I say, careful to preach a full, well-rounded, full-orbed Gospel?

We have now before us a great spirit roused and in action. The next thing I notice is that the action is

SKILLFUL ACTION.

The tact of the preacher is seen in the first sentence. In Jerusalem he would have begun: "Men, Brethren and fathers," or "Men and brethren," but he is in Athens now, and he begins like Demosthenes. "Men of Athens." Some canting Jew might have shouted: "He's accommodating himself to the Gentile customs," just as some amiable people nearer home always raise a cry if we do any proper and useful thing that some of our denominational neighbours do. Paul would have answered, if he answered at all: "The right thing to say in Jerusalem is 'Men and Brethren,' the right thing to say here is 'Men of Athens.' I fail to see any brethren in the audience, and I am not going to allow these Athenian philosophers to have a laugh at the expense of the Gospel."

There is great skill and tact displayed, too, in the method of his teaching before he delivered this formal address. With the Jews he disputed in the synagogue, and no doubt proved from Moses and the prophets that Jesus was the promised deliverer. To meet the wants of the Greeks he went daily into the market-place and reasoned with them as Socrates or any of their own teachers would have done. In the good sense of the term he became all things to all men that he might save some, and he did save some.

There is inimitable skill, too, in his selection of a topic. Our translation does not do the Apostle justice when it makes him say: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious." Paul was too skillful a preacher to begin a sermon by unnecessarily rousing his hearers. "Men of Athens," he says, I perceive that you are a highly religious people, for as I passed along