

## THE FIFTH PRESBYTERIAN COUNCIL.

Punctually at eleven o'clock on Wednesday the 21st inst., the Fifth Council of the Alliance of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System was opened with prayer by Dr. Aspinwall Hodge, Hartford, Conn.; reading of the Scriptures by Principal Caven, and prayer by Dr. Thomas Smith, Edinburgh.

Principal Caven, who preached the sermon at the opening of the Pan-Presbyterian Council, took for his text John xvi. 13: "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you unto all truth; for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come." "It is expedient for you," says the Lord to the twelve, "that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send Him unto you." The dispensation of the Spirit could not begin until the Lord's earthly work was accomplished. Absent to sense, our Divine Master should be constantly represented, and the work of His kingdom carried forward by the Holy Spirit, whom, on His departure, He promises to send. By the Spirit the world should be convicted in respect of sin, of righteousness and of judgment, while to the Church He should fulfil the office of comforter. To this office pertains the function of teaching; of this office, teaching, according to the valedictory discourse, is a prominent part. The Holy Ghost is called "the Spirit of truth" (ch. xiv. 17). Again: "When the Comforter is come whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me" (ch. xv. 26), and our text says: "When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you unto all truth," i.e., the truth referred to in the preceding verse, which the disciples could not now "hear." Whilst He remained with them the Lord was the teacher of His disciples, and now their instruction should be carried on and completed by the Holy Spirit.

This work and office of teaching may be viewed, first, with reference to the apostles, and, second, with reference to the Church everywhere and in all ages.

(1) The primary and direct application of these words is to the apostles, to whom the Lord was speaking. They, who were appointed to organize and teach the Church, to feed the lambs and the sheep, should be led by the Spirit into all the truth. Though the Master Himself had taught them, and they under His instructions had attained to some true conceptions of the kingdom of God, they were not yet ready for their life work of teaching others. In the guidance here promised to the apostles two things are obviously implied: (1) The Spirit should more fully open to them the meaning and contents of the Lord's personal teaching. They had learned much from His lips, but they had not comprehended at the time all that His instructions embraced. In plain words, the Lord had announced that He should be put to death and should rise from the dead on the third day, but His meaning was entirely hidden from them, and, though the resurrection of Jesus had dispelled much darkness, thrown back a strong light on the whole field of His teaching and ministry, many things which He said to them needed to be recalled and elucidated before the truth spoken should stand out clearly before their minds and enter into their convictions and experience. The voice of their beloved Master should now cease to be heard, but another teacher should now take His place, and in leading them over ground with which they should have been familiar, should manifest to their delighted eyes what they had never seen before.

But the Spirit should do more for the apostles than to recall and interpret the Lord's instructions. He should reveal new truths, and also show them all things. The Lord's teaching could not be estimated; "Never man spake like this Man." But there were truths which, as long as their Master was in sight, they could not apprehend; and He must disappear, that the full significance of the very truth about Himself should be manifested. We are not placing human wisdom above Divine—our placing the servant above his Lord—in saying that the epistles contain new truth, and illustrate more fully many aspects of the truth delivered by the Master. Truths so important as the atonement, the nature and method of justification, the constitution and offices of the Christian Church, the resurrection and its consequences, receive more complete statement in the epistles than in the gospels, and things unspeakably precious are announced by the apostles "in the word of the Lord," as direct revelations from the Lord. No careful reader of Scripture doubts that while the New Testament as a whole makes great advance on the teaching of the Old, the writings of the apostles—even in virtue of the fulfilment of the promises here before us—add greatly to the personal teaching of Jesus. The apostles were "led into all the truth," and were enlightened by the Spirit to complete the circle of New Testament teaching. To this teaching no addition will be made till that which is perfect has come, and we shall no longer "see through a glass darkly, but face to face." The highest Christian scholarship, combined with the most exalted piety, will never give birth to any writings which may take their place with the canonical Scriptures, much less enlarge the sphere of revelation in doctrine or in prophecy.

That they might thus more perfectly declare the kingdom of God, the Spirit is promised to guide the apostles. Not merely by reflection of lessons heard from the Lord's mouth nor by exercise of reason in completing a system of doctrine whose main principles were already apprehended, but by direct teaching and revelation of the Spirit should they become qualified to instruct Jew and Gentile to the end of time.

But the meaning of these words is not exhausted in their application to the apostles. All God's children are taught of God; the Spirit is given to teach the entire body of Christ and every individual

member thereof. Without His teaching a true knowledge of the kingdom of God in its doctrines, principles and powers cannot be attained. The primary truth even that Jesus is Lord is not known by the Holy Ghost. All that we know of sin and holiness, of regeneration and sanctification, of brotherly love, of the deeper principles of Christian morality is taught us by the Spirit of God. Our knowledge of spiritual things is precisely measured by the heavenly teaching received. Without the Spirit's leading no soul can find the way from the darkness of nature into God's marvellous light, nor, after regeneration, advance a single step in the knowledge of Him "whom I know is life eternal." "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned;" nor can the spiritual man grow in the knowledge of God except as the Spirit carries forward his instruction. All this is certain from Scripture, and is believed by all God's children.

It is not meant that in the process of teaching the Spirit reveals to us any truths not contained in the written Word. The Word receives no supplement, for it is sufficient for all purposes of the Christian life. The teaching promised to disciples and enjoyed by them consists rather in the living application of truth which is clearly set forth in the inspired record, and not all in fresh revelations. "He who caused the light to shine out of darkness, shines into our heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Unless we hold fast to the sufficiency of Scripture, error and false sentiment cannot be excluded; but not the less is it true that we can know God only as He Himself directly teaches us.

But we wish to speak more particularly of the promised guidance of the Spirit in its bearing upon theology; so far as theology consists in the scientific investigation of the facts and doctrines of Scripture and the characteristics of Scripture itself. Here, not less truly than in the life of the individual believer, all real and assured progress is through guidance of the Holy Spirit, and unless He shall direct and govern theological research and activity, only error and failure can result.

It is not necessary to vindicate theological studies. Wherever the great problems which they present are felt to be important, they must receive attention. Men will earnestly enquire into the structure and characteristics of the Bible as a whole, and in its several parts. They will ask, Who wrote this or that Book of Scripture? Under what circumstances was it produced? What was the writer's aim and object? How has he sought to accomplish that aim? What are the distinctive features of his thinking and style? How stands his work related to other parts of the sacred volume? Have we this production as it left the writer's pen, or has it undergone changes of more or less importance?

Then there are large and vital questions touching the degree of authority pertaining to all canonical Scripture. Are the histories and narratives of the Bible authentic throughout? Would their religious value remain unimpaired should their authenticity be—in part, at least—discredited; or must we hold authenticity essential to canonical authority? Are the ethical teachings and decisions of Scripture in all places of such a character that a Christian man may confidently use them in the direction of his life; or has morality been a development—thus requiring that the earlier teachings at least should be received with discrimination? Is the Bible the one absolute rule of faith and practice from which there is no appeal, or are there other authorities of equal rank? Are the Scriptures inspired throughout, and does inspiration carry infallibility? If infallibility is involved, is it to be predicted of the substance of the teaching or of the entire contents of Scripture?

But our investigations will necessarily extend to the great topics of which the Bible treats, and to the revelations therein made. Questions regarding the characteristics and history of the Bible are merely introductory to the study of its doctrine. And here the deepest and most difficult and most important things which the human mind can entertain come before us. God and man, sin and salvation, life and death, are the momentous centres around which our investigations revolve. Unless man's intelligence and spiritual nature were both exact, these topics must retain their unequalled interest. Something far higher than the gratification of scholarly tastes or philosophical curiosity presses us forward in the study of the things. Our aim is intensely practical. We are seeking for life; we are seeking to know God.

In our theological enquiries it is essential that we shall proceed by the right road and in the right spirit. Proceed we must; but how shall light that cannot mislead be made to shine upon our path? How shall our eager thinking, our strenuous conflict, become not safe only, but salutary and fruitful? The answer is not doubtful—the Holy Spirit must guide us into all the truth. In this province of theology, as in the saving apprehension of the Gospel truth, the Spirit's guidance is indispensable.

In regard to doctrinal theology, especially in its more spiritual parts and aspects, it will hardly be disputed that the Spirit's help is required. The moral attributes of God, the nature of sin and holiness, regeneration and sanctification, e.g., are topics of prime importance in theology; most obviously the Spirit must illuminate and guide, when we handle matters like these. To give insight into such matters the best intellect and scholarship, though associated with natural reverence, will not suffice. If, in the treatment of such topics, the unspiritual man should even avoid serious error, it is merely because, for reasons more or less honourable, he echoes the sentiments of others. You cannot have the earnest, vital statement of truth which has not been apprehended by the soul—which is seen only as a dim reflection of the life and thinking of preceding enquiries. Intellect, scholarship, fairness of mind, are all of great value in theological investigation, but all combined will not enable us to dispense with the Spirit's guidance or make it any degree the less necessary.

For if the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit—cannot discern these things—how should he be qualified to handle them in their depths and scientific relations? The wholly unspiritual man is not prepared to treat such parts of doctrine at all; and he who would treat them well—treat them better than predecessors—treat them so as to promote the progress of theology—requires large help and special direction from above.

That spiritual illumination is necessary to the successful cultivation of doctrinal theology is abundantly attested by the history of the Church from the earliest time to the present day. If we may not in proof, instance the writings of the Apostles themselves—seeing that their case as inspired men was unique, and also that the books which they penned have seldom the form of theological discussion—the statement may be confidently made that all real advance in the apprehension of Scripture doctrine has been connected with religious quickening, and that times of genuine revival were the times when theology received its largest benefits. Truth being the instrument by which the Spirit works in souls, the time of revival has necessarily been a time when some important element of divine truth was clearly and vividly apprehended; and thus the way was prepared for giving such element its fitting place and prominence in the theological system.

Illustrations are abundant, but we may refer to the times of Augustine, of the Reformation and of the revival of last century in England and America. In each of these instances spiritual quickening is connected with and leads to fresher and more satisfactory statement of vital doctrine. Augustine's conversion, following his previous life, prepares him to enunciate with great depth and spirituality the doctrines of human depravity and victorious grace. No penetration and compass of intellect could, without his religious experience, have enabled him to handle these topics as he has done to work them into the consciousness of his age, to expound and defend the truth concerning them so that it became a possession forever. Still more conspicuously is the Reformation at once a revival of spiritual life and a renewal and advancement of theology. The men raised up to direct that movement were men of profound piety—of deep experience in divine things. The greatest feature of the Reformation is not the vindication of the right of private judgment in religion (though this was involved), but the quickening of souls into a new life and the exchange of superstition and formalism for an enlightened, evangelical religion. But never since the lamp of the early Church began to grow dim were the Scriptures so well understood and the truth of God so clearly set forth. This is a great era of theological construction and reconstruction. Never before has the doctrine of justification received treatment so profound, complete and Scriptural. Justification by faith alone, the sinner's acceptance on the sole ground of the Redeemer's merits—"who died for our offences and rose again for our justification"—his great doctrine takes its place for all time in evangelical theology—"the article of a standing or falling Church." After the heat of the conflict was over the theological results of the Reformation were presented with great elaboration and in more systematic form, but it was the deeply religious character of the movement itself which led men to discuss the truth with new eyes.

The revival of last century may seem at first sight to be an entirely spiritual phenomenon and to have little theological significance in any way. And yet, assuredly, it had. For what is its distinguishing teaching—its keynote? It emphasizes the necessity of regeneration for the individual soul. Is not this an essential Christian doctrine, a vital part of theology? And if this doctrine still held some place in theological writings, it was sadly absent from the Church's consciousness and had little prominence in her teaching. Preaching and theology were both under blight. But now the nature of the new birth, and its indispensable necessity to all who would enter the kingdom of God are placed under focus. Theology, in an important manner, profits by the revival and is refreshed. Let this be willingly allowed even by those who may find the teaching of some of the evangelists of the period defective, or even in error, in certain matters. This doctrine of regeneration, vitally expounded, by Calvinist or Arminian, is great aid to theology, for in theology the thorough, scriptural enunciation of individual elements of truth, as well as the congruity of the several elements in the unity of a system, must be taken into account. To deny that a writer or teacher who has powerfully presented some cardinal truth has rendered service to theology merely because something to which objection may properly be taken, finds place in his teaching were ungrateful and foolish. Let the error or defect be spoken of as it should, but give thanks to God for the clear utterance of truth.

That our great creeds have come from the heart of a revived Church is a familiar statement. They are testimonies to God's truth, which the Church can bear only when her pulse is strong and steady. Times of weaker faith and less vivid experience can, at best, do little more than retain what has been handed down to them. The reason is that here adduced, the Spirit who gives the purity of heart by which we "see God" must direct all true progress in the apprehension of doctrine.

But what shall we say regarding that branch of theological study which deals with the characteristics and history of the Bible? Is not this so much a department of general literature that literary skill alone is concerned in its treatment? Why should the guidance of the Holy Spirit be required in discussing the authorship and literary qualities of the Books of Scripture, or in comparing one part of Scripture with another? That in the elucidation of the language and literature of the Bible, or its history, topography, manners and customs, much has been accomplished by men, who, alas, will not permit us to regard them as believers, may readily be admitted. Material of biblical illustration gathered by secular hands may, when applied by men of different spirit, prove of real service to religion. The gold and silver of Egypt may be devoted to sacred uses. But consider the danger to

the Scriptures—nay the exceeding injury which they have actually sustained—from biblical scholarship divorced from faith and an evangelical temper. At every step in biblical study opportunity is presented of ministering either to faith or unbelief. Even in the parts of this study which seem most remote from vital contact with religion and piety, the presence or the absence of the right spirit will be instantly felt. All true study of the Bible involves questions of deepest significance—questions as to God's relation to these writings; so that spiritual discernment and the guidance of the Holy Ghost are made indispensable to the student. In discussing, e.g., the question of the text of Scripture how different the temper and manner of critics. One proceeds with utmost care and loving reverence, for he has learned to regard the Bible as the word of God; another applies his hand without restraint, for the Bible is to him merely a human production. How perseveringly unbelief has sought to undermine revealed religion by discrediting the documents in which the divine word is delivered.

The spirit in which biblical questions should be considered is the same with which we should approach the study of doctrine; and heavenly illumination and direction are as necessary in the one case as in the other. Nor is it the utterly unspiritual man only who may err in biblical scholarship; a true believer, should he forget to put away self-confidence and faithfully to commit himself to the Spirit's guidance, may go far astray, and so wound the faith and peace of many.

Now, theological study in all its branches must still be prosecuted. At one time study will be predominantly expended upon doctrine, at another upon the criticism of the Bible. At present this latter department engages especial attention. Questions which previous ages were thought to have settled are re-opened, conclusions which had gained nearly universal acceptance are found unsatisfactory, a keener and more critical spirit is brought to the examination of every topic, in every branch of biblical scholarship. Many are alarmed, and are anxiously enquiring what we shall do if the foundations are destroyed. Nor can we wonder, for the prevalence of unbelief and rationalism to so great an extent, even within the courts of God's house, cannot be witnessed without deep concern. The Church in many places has to stand for her life, and not untroubledly to combat those who should be her ornament and defence. "It was not an enemy that reproached me: then I would have borne it; neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me: then I would of hid myself from him; but it was there, a man mine equal, my guide and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked into the house of God in company."

It may be that in punishment of our sins God may permit still greater darkness to fall upon the Church's path. If persecution had its work of purification to accomplish, it is possible that a great conflict with unbelief—greater than has yet been experienced—awaits the Church. Many may fall away from the Christian profession, as some have already fallen away. Many may be sorely tempted, the heart forbidding them to renounce faith in God and the Bible, while their intellectual relations to the truth are confused and sorrowful. Others, still, whose personal faith is unshaken, may fear for the world as they behold the flood of unbelief sweeping over all lands.

But, though in the meantime damage may accrue to many, there is no good reason for despair, or for apprehension as to the ultimate issue. Could we see that the Lord is in the ship, even though apparently asleep on a pillow, we should know how to dismiss alarm. But the Lord is in the ship, for He hath said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Through the indwelling Spirit He makes good His promise. This Comforter, this Teacher, ever remains with us. By His presence piety is protected and guaranteed, and the truth will continue to be preached and theological problems to be thoroughly but reverently investigated, because He shall guide into all truth. Here is our hope and assurance.

But the Church needs, we all need, more earnestly to realize the fact that the Spirit is not less necessary to theology than to the origination and development of the love of God in individual souls. No believer, surely, can utterly forget the necessity of the Spirit's guidance in the study of divine truth—the scientific study of that truth; and yet how often we allow ourselves to speak as if the Spirit's presence were not our main dependence. Looking abroad upon the uncertainty that so much prevails, the half-hearted reception which many parts of the creed so frequently meet, the inability of many earnest and believing minds to harmonize their thinking and to place it on foundations quite satisfactory to themselves, the weak front, therefore, which is necessarily presented to the assaults of unbelief—many, I say, having respect to all this, are longing for some great theological genius to arise—some greater Augustine, to recast our theology, solve its problems in apologetics, dogmatics and criticisms, settle the controversies between science and the Bible, and bring spiritual rest to a weary age. But we should ever remember who is the Teacher of the Church and the interpreter of God, and render honour to Him. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." Men such as Augustine and the Reformers are valuable gifts of the Church, and if it shall please the Lord to send us again men like these, or to send men greater than any of these, He will doubtless be glorified in His servants, and the Church will be grateful. But let us not dictate to God. To prepare the way for the adhesion of scientific and philosophical minds to religion it is not necessary that men of transcendent intellect should arise and perform work which none but they could accomplish. So far as difficult theological problems need to be solved, or work of adjustment between science and philosophy on the one hand and the Christian faith and Scriptures on the other requires to be done, it may not be the Lord's purpose to employ men of extraordinary genius and attainments. We cannot tell; and the whole matter must be trustfully left in His hand. We should cease to think of man, and