

THE SYNOD OF TORONTO AND KINGSTON.

THE CONFERENCE.

The conference opened with devotional exercises, in which several of the brethren took part. In the absence of Rev. S. Houston, who was appointed to preside, but who has gone on a visit to Ireland, the Rev. J. Abraham, Moderator, occupied the chair at the first conference. In a few neat and appropriate remarks, breathing a fine spirit, he introduced the reader of the first paper, Rev. J. McAlpine, Chatsworth. It was on "The Importance of the Study of the Word." The glory of God and the well-being of men are to be regarded in the ministration of the Word. It is only as God is made glorious in the conceptions of men that their salvation is possible. And it is only through the Word that God is revealed to men, and, therefore, it must be studied. He quoted largely from the confessions of the different sections of the Church showing that only the Word of God is authoritative over the minds and consciences of men. The exact mind of Scripture must be got and slipshod interpretations not given. The Word must be regarded as God speaking from heaven. Through the divine pronouncement of faith and morals, through the instrument for the conversion of men, it has a divine potency for the regeneration of men. It is the sword of the spirit. Hence the Word should be declared. He affirmed that because a passage of the Bible is taken it does not necessarily follow that the sermon is an exposition of the Word. Many a sermon is such that you would not know it has any relation to the Word of God whatever, and yet that is what is to be preached, and the Word is the Gospel. He showed that the Gospel is to be preached faithfully, earnestly and with an unflinching hold of it. The minister must be learned in the Word, and the key to that is an intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Rev. Robert Rodgers, in discussing the theme, referred to one or two points of the address. He was specially pleased with the advocacy of the doctrine of plenary inspiration. He thought very much that was said by professors arose out of wrong views of inspiration. He believed every word of the book. Many words in the Bible were the very essence of the revelation.

Rev. John McEwan then introduced the subject, "Methods of Bible Study." Method is only second to the importance of the study of the Word, and next to that comes the spirit in which the method should be followed. God did not give His Word in a lump, but He gave it bit by bit, here a little and there a little. In fact and history and providence He gave it, so that we are able to reach the laws of it. Hence, in our study of it we are able to act inductively and not deductively. We have sixty-six books from thirty-six writers that extend over 1,400 years, an ancient record, but not an antiquated record. It is as fresh to-night as when it was spoken on the shores of Galilee. We have nine books of manifestation of God culminating in the revelation of Jesus Christ. We have the application to hearts of men in the historical books, and the experience of the Church in Job, Ecclesiastes and books like these, and we have the outlook in the prophets. The book has one subject, the love of God to a fallen world. It has one purpose to destroy the works of the devil.

Dr. McTavish thought the Bible was a growth. It had in the providence of God grown up like a tree. The Bible is a museum of curiosities to many, and how many other things is it to others? He thought the Bible was to some people like the region of Coboconk, where they had to hold the sheep down to get at the grass between the stones. He liked to get at all the surroundings and historical settings of the various books. When that was done the stupidest man in Lindsay could understand it.

Rev. J. Somerville thought that we might have all this historical knowledge and not see Christ Jesus, who is the all important person of the book. All must see the human and the divine in the book just as we see the two natures in Christ.

Rev. R. P. Mackay gave his own experience in the study of the Bible. He had put between him and the Bible constructions which hindered him from getting at the book itself. "I do myself a positive injustice if I listen only to commentators. I believe in them, but not in using them alone."

At the conference on Tuesday morning, Rev. R. N. Grant, Orillia, presided. The proceedings were opened with devotional exercises. Rev. J. A. R. Dickson, B.D., Galt, gave an address on the use of the Word by the individual. The Word must be in-wrought in our hearts that it may influence the entire nature. There must be a union of the soul and the Word by love. To make a right use of the Word we must have time. There ought to be opportunities for quiet, solitary meditation and study of the Scriptures. We make too much of intellect and reason in our study of the Word. There ought to be more dependence on the Spirit of God for illumination. Rev. Messrs. Robert Rodgers, Wm. Bennett, R. P. Mackay, J. R. Gilchrist, S. H. Eastman, J. Hay, M. Scott, E. F. Torrance took part in the discussion that followed.

The Rev. W. G. Hanna, B.A., of Uxbridge, introduced the next topic, "The Word in the Home." The home is the centre of the Church's strength or weakness. The great importance of teaching the children to love and reverence the Word of God was dwelt upon. The first and most lasting ideas of religious truth are received in the home. Obligation rests on parents in relation to this duty. The truth is to be taught by precept and example. Daily devotions and the devotional reading of Scripture have a blessed influence on the children. The supreme value of careful religious training is seen as it moulds, directs and elevates the lives of those who have enjoyed the privilege. It is a safeguard to the home. Principal Grant, Rev. Messrs. John McEwan, Henry Gracey, J. McAlpine, J. McP. Scott, J. A. Grant, John Somerville and J. Argo commented on the points suggested by the address. It was shown that many of the exactions of modern life are antagonistic to the best development of the home.

The next subject taken up for consideration was "Teaching the Word in the Sabbath School." It was introduced by Rev. Henry Gracey, M.A., Gananoque, who read a paper in which it was urged that as so many difficulties beset the teaching of religion in our Public Schools it is imperative that the Church should give special prominence to the spiritual training of the children. The paper dealt with the importance of careful preparation on the part of the teachers and the qualifications necessary for the successful work of teaching. The international series of lessons was highly commended. The truth should be brought to bear on the conscience. Rev. Messrs. J. McAlpine, A. Gandier, R. Rodgers, C. J. Cameron, R. D. Fraser, P. Duncan, D. James, J. A. Grant, Dr. McTavish and W. G. Hanna made brief addresses on the topics suggested by the paper.

The afternoon session of the Conference was opened with devotional exercises, Principal Grant presiding. Rev. John Hay, B.D., Cobourg, introduced the first subject for consideration, "Reading the Word in Public Worship." The relative importance of the several parts of public worship should be kept in view. The reading of the Word is of interest and value in the Church service. It is the Word of God. Proper selections for reading should be made. Devotion and instruction should in general predominate. The speaker then discussed the propriety of making comments on the portions of Scripture read. From enquiry he had found that many people do not care for such comments. Our Saviour read the passage in the book, then gave it to the minister of the synagogue and made his explanation. Responsive reading might interest the people, but it is liable to degenerate into formality. Effective reading in public worship should be prepared for. The reader should understand what he reads, read naturally and with feeling. Rev. Messrs. S. H. Eastman, R. Johnston, John McEwan, R. N. Grant, Dr. Kellogg, R. D.

Fraser and Principal Grant made some excellent remarks on questions suggested by the paper.

Rev. G. M. Milligan, M.A., read a paper on "Topical Preaching." Particular forms of preaching prevail at different times. Bible reading was in great vogue some time ago, and sermons were sometimes a mere conglomeration of Scripture texts. Mr. Milligan gave an example of a topical sermon by reading an outline of a discourse constructed on that model. There may be heresy in the presentation as well as in the matter of pulpit teaching. Preaching should have the one direct aim of influencing the souls of men. We must keep in touch with the whole Bible. The topical method imposes an intolerable burden. He considered that all methods of preaching might be properly followed. Why should men be eloquent on the platform and tame in the pulpit? We should study variety. A minister in the pulpit should be like a lawyer before a jury pressing for a verdict. The reading of the paper was followed by brief comments by Rev. E. F. Torrance, R. N. Grant, C. Cameron, R. P. Mackay, J. A. MacDonald and J. A. Carmichael.

In the absence of Dr. Campbell of Collingwood, Dr. Parsons introduced the concluding topic of the Conference, "Expository Preaching." Some texts require topical, others expository treatment. The Word itself bears evidence that it is adapted to all varieties of condition. He considered that expository preaching is valuable because it unfolds the meaning of Scripture. The application of accommodation texts and the dislocation of passages from their proper setting and context were condemned. Expository preaching is growing in favour with Christian people. It also equips them for service. There is special need for this kind of preaching to bring back the Christian Church to the exact words of Jesus Christ. Several of the members afterwards discussed the subject. The Conference then adjourned.

SYNOD MEETING.

After conducting appropriate devotional exercises, the Rev. John Abraham delivered the following discourse, taking as his text Ephesians iii. 8.

Before proceeding to the general business for the transaction of which, according to the constitution of our Church Courts, we are now met in annual Synod, it will not be deemed unfitting to ask your attention for a short time to the qualifications, the functions, the theme and the field of labour of those whose duty it is to preach the Gospel.

In humble dependence on divine aid we shall consider I. The qualifications of the Christian ministry. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given."

We may here observe in the first place that those who are called to this sacred office should be humble. The writer of this epistle was, without doubt, the most zealous and most successful of all the apostles. Yet it was with the deepest sense of his own unworthiness that he spoke of the greatness and glory of his vocation, he counted himself as "less than the least of all saints."

The ground of this self-abasement the readers of this epistle knew without the necessity of Paul writing it to them. There was a dark passage in his past history. It was that of which he made such humble mention when he wrote to the Corinthians: "I am not meet to be called an apostle because I persecuted the Church of God." The memory of the malignity and rage with which he had opposed the faith and persecuted the followers of Jesus weighed heavily on his conscience. So soon as God revealed to him the infinite excellence and love of Christ, the sin of rejecting and blaspheming such a Saviour appeared to him so great that he could never forgive himself. The memory of that passage in his former life tended ever to keep him humble, and at the same time led him to magnify that grace which had called him "to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Has there not been much in the early life of most of us to warrant the self-same sentiments? And not only in our earlier life alone, but also in our riper years? How often have we thought and spoken and acted as neither men nor Christians should have done? The remembrance of this should make us humble, and lead us to magnify the grace of God which has called us to the ministry and accounted us worthy "to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Another qualification of a minister of the Gospel is that he be called to the office. "Unto me is this grace given." The manner of Paul's call was strikingly supernatural. The glorified Saviour appeared to him on the way to Damascus, and when the persecutor was fallen to the earth Jesus said: "Rise and stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose to make thee a minister." And to all, as well as to the apostle, the commission to preach must come from the Lord. It must be so. The honour of God's name and the interests of His Church are at stake in the appointment of His servants, and it would be strange if He suffered His right to be interfered with or acknowledge as His ambassador any one who had taken upon himself the office of the ministry without a call from the Lord.

We do not think that in ordinary circumstances we have any right to expect such a personal commission and divine revelation as Paul received. Yet when, after much prayer, God by His grace and Spirit moves the heart of any one to enter the ministry, and by an inward call leads him to consecrate his life and talents to preaching the Gospel, he may rest assured that God will bless and prosper him in his work. Each man should be satisfied of his own call to preach before he enters the ministry. He should be satisfied in his own mind that in making his decision he is not actuated by worldly motives, and should examine himself strictly as to the singleness of his aim, and his earnest desire to promote God's glory and win souls for Christ.

Another qualification of a minister of the Gospel is that he be personally a subject of its saving power. He who would be a winner of souls must know by experience what it is to repent of sin and put it away at whatever cost. He must have turned his own feet away from evil paths before he can be eminently successful in converting others from the errors of their ways. It is not denied that God may, in the exercise of His sovereign pleasure, employ the tongue of the unconverted preacher to convey saving truth to the soul, just as He employed Balaam to communicate the most glorious truths for the benefit of the Church in all ages. A man may impart light to others who does not himself see the light. He may stand as a finger-post on the road where he neither leads nor follows. Still this does not invalidate the general truth that conversion is indispensable to ministerial success. If a man is not impressed with divine truth himself there is little likelihood that he will impress others. It is not to be expected that he will cordially recommend religion to others if he is himself destitute of it, nor will he be anxious for the salvation of others if he is altogether unconcerned about the salvation of his own soul.

An unconverted, unrenowned man, destitute of personal piety, is utterly unfit for the sacred office of the ministry he can have no authority to fill. He may be a learned theologian and able controversialist. He may be able to picture virtue in her fairest robes, and exhibit vice in its most repulsive garb, and yet if there be no saving and sanctifying faith in his own soul, he can only be the unconscious courier bearing tidings he does not understand and cannot enjoy.

Thou must be true thyself
If thou the truth wouldst teach;
Thy soul must overflow
If thou another soul wouldst reach.
It needs the overflow of heart
To give the life full speech.

What the Church needs most is not men of great intellects, pro-

found scholarship, rare accomplishments—though these have their value—but men full of faith and the Holy Ghost. There is a resistless potency in the earnestness and fervour which arises from deep conviction and personal experience which nothing else can impart. Heated iron, though blunt, will pierce its way, even when a much sharper instrument, if it be cold, cannot penetrate. So if our ministers be filled with the Spirit, who is like fire, their message will pierce into the hardest heart where the sharpest wits cannot find their way.

II. The functions of the Christian ministry: "That I should preach." Preaching is one of the principal instruments used by the Holy Spirit in making known the will of God for the salvation of men and the advancement of Christ's cause on the earth. The Scriptures emphasize preaching as the minister's highest act. Christ was "anointed to preach the Gospel to the poor." To this He ordained His disciples, bidding them "preach the Gospel to every creature." This they did after they received the Holy Ghost "they taught and preached Jesus Christ." In the apostolic writings great importance is attributed to preaching, and the identity of its subject is maintained. Respecting himself, Paul affirms that Christ sent him "not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel." He affirms that when the world was lost in the mazes of its own supposed wisdom, "God was pleased by the foolishness" or simplicity "of preaching to save them that believe;" and he esteemed it his highest honour "to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." "Woe unto me," saith he again, "if I preach not the Gospel," and he charged Timothy before God and in the immediate view of the judgment seat of Christ to preach the Word.

In apostolic times wonderful changes were wrought in the world. In the language of that day, "the world was turned upside down." Heathen oracles were silenced, and heathen customs, hoary with age, were overcome. Thousands and tens of thousands abandoned those superstitious forms of worship in which they had been brought up and turned to the service of the living God. All history, secular and sacred, attests that the agency through which this stupendous revolution was accomplished was neither philosophy nor civil power—for these were in direct antagonism to religion—but it was accomplished by the simple, earnest and incessant preaching of the Gospel. Nor has preaching lost its power. Potently, wisely and surely it is doing its good work in the salvation of souls now, and in leading believers into ampler domains of truth.

The great business of the pulpit is to teach Bible truth. Paul's charge to Timothy is always timely: "I charge thee before God preach the Word." Preach it, and not some weak dilution of it. Proclaim it and trust the Holy Spirit to make a way for it into the hearts of men. "Feed the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood," said Paul unto the elders of Ephesus. As it is the office of a shepherd to provide proper pasture for his flock and to lead them to it, so it is incumbent upon the minister of Christ to make provision for the nourishment of the souls of his people. And as it is only Gospel truth which will sustain and strengthen spiritual life, he ought, therefore, to "feed" them with wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus and the doctrines which are according to godliness.

It is the minister's duty to preach Bible truth, and not busy himself in suggesting doubts about it. His utterances should be positive and not negative. Many sermons on scepticism only advertise sceptical opinions. The best way to preach down error is to preach up truth. Said one of old: "Give us your convictions, as for doubts we have enough of our own." Mr. Spurgeon says: "It may be a great thing to doubt, but it is a greater thing to keep your doubts to yourself until you get rid of them." Dr. Pierson says: "He who will preach the Gospel, the plain Gospel, the straight Gospel, carries the war into the enemy's country, and gives the enemy all he can do to take care of himself." And an eminent English historian declares: "Once a week, at least, I like to hear a man who believes what he says, as though he felt the Lord Jesus Christ just at his elbow." The Gospel assurance, the "I know" and "I know" of John's Epistles always awakens the thought and concern of the hearer. "We believe, and therefore speak," is a sure token of victory to the soul-winning soldier of the cross.

Christ said not to His first conventicle: "Go forth and preach impostures to the world," but gave them truth to build on; and the sound was mighty on their lips; nor needed they, beside the Gospel, other spear or shield to aid them in their warfare for the faith."

III. The theme of the Christian ministry. "The unsearchable riches of Christ." The expression "riches of Christ" is a Pauline phrase and may mean either the riches and blessings Christ bestows upon His believing people; or the riches and glory He possesses in Himself. These "riches" are called "unsearchable," not because nothing is revealed concerning them—for they constitute one of the chief subjects of revelation—but because they are too vast and glorious for human mind or archangel's intellect fully to grasp or understand. They are inexhaustible as a mine, whose treasures can never be fully explored. And yet the apostle evaded not the mighty subject, but considered it the highest honour to be permitted to declare to the world that there were such riches in the Redeemer.

Here then the apostle presents in terse and striking terms the one grand subject of Gospel preaching. He never thought of appearing before perishing souls to make fine speeches, or give eloquent orations, but to preach the Gospel of Christ. He preached the divinity of Jesus, proving Him to be the eternal Son of God, in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"—the plenitude of all divine glories and perfections. He preached the perfection of our Lord's humanity, who left the home of His glory and became a man, "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh" and was "tempted in all points like as we are." That He the Son of the Highest dwelt on earth in human form, went about doing good and made it His meat and drink to do the will of Him that sent Him. He preached the atoning sacrifice Christ offered on Calvary, declaring that He suffered for sins, but not His own. "He suffered the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." That He took not merely our nature, but also our place, our state, our legal responsibilities, that "He died for our sins," and paid the full price for our redemption. And as he preached Christ a Saviour on the Cross, he also preached Him a Saviour on the throne, where as our Great High Priest "He ever liveth to make intercession for us" and "is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." He preached the Holy Spirit, whose province it is to lead men from sin to holiness and back to God. He preached the preciousness of salvation and the freeness of the Gospel which is offered to all "without money and without price." He preached the resurrection, showing "that as Jesus died and rose again, even so they also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." Nor did he fail to warn sinners of God's hatred of sin, His determination to punish the impenitent, the terrible doom of all despisers of divine grace, and then earnestly beseech them "by the mercies of God that they present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, unto God."

O for more preaching like Paul's at the present day! O that ministers would preach the "unsearchable riches of Christ" and that alone! It is easy for men to speak much about the Saviour in their sermons, and yet, not properly preach Christ. Yea, they may preach Christ, so far as the matter is concerned, and yet not do it for Christ, but for themselves, and thus make Christ and the precious doctrine of the Gospel only subservient to the advancement of the grand idol, self.

We are not to be understood as implying that every discourse should set forth the entire scheme of redemption. But, we do say