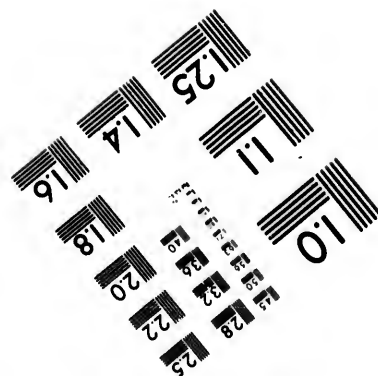
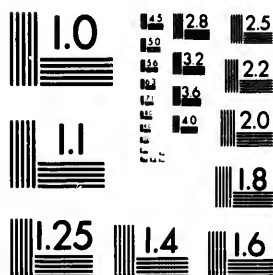


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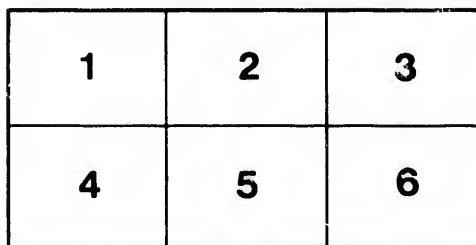
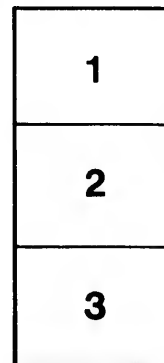
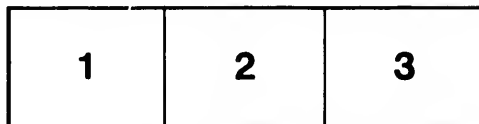
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FAREWELL SERMON

DELIVERED ON SABBATH EVENING,

APRIL 6th, 1884,

BY

REV. J. S. BLACK,

ON THE OCCASION OF HIS RESIGNING THE PASTORATE OF
ERSKINE CHURCH, MONTREAL.



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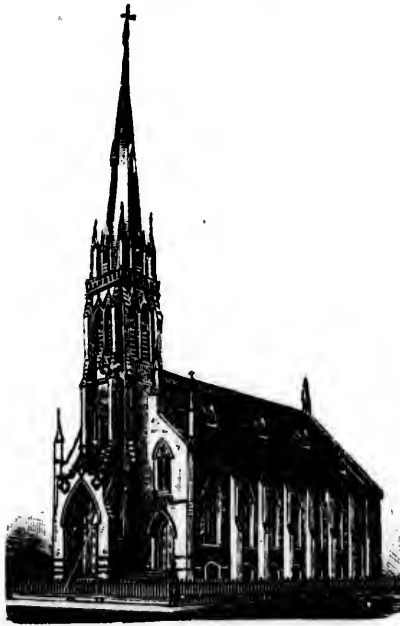
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“ Finally, Brethren, farewell ! Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace ; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”—2nd Cor. 13 : 14

Last words are usually sad words. But sad though they must be, they may also partake of hope and comfort. Ten years seems but a little time to the aged who look backward, but to the young who stand on the threshold of life and look forward, it seems a long time. It is not a small part of the working life time of an active ministry.

The circumstances which compel me to leave you are not of the most cheering kind to me, and I know that I have your kindest sympathy at this time. Even here, however, there is some little compensation. When a minister lays down one charge to take up another, no matter, how evident the guiding providence is, he is necessarily placed in the unenviable position of leaving the old for the sake of the new. We are spared this pain. I go at the call of duty, but I am not influenced by the superior claims, or the greater attractions of another field of labour.

In reviewing these ten years, we have reason as a pastor and people to thank God and take courage. Our admirable system of annual reports furnishes exact *data* of the condition of the congregation when I came among you in the midsummer of 1874. The report for 1873 was the most favorable that had been issued during a time of a great prosperity. But even

then there were two hundred and twenty-two sittings unlet.

In three months all this was changed. A new congregation was formed out of our midst, and although sixty-one members were added to our roll in 1874, the close of the year found us with only six hundred and forty-one sittings let, a net loss of one hundred and twelve.

The same presbytery which dismissed my predecessor gave this new congregation its separate existence I came amongst you at a critical time. A depleted membership, empty pews, and the recollections of a discussion which had not been to edification, were the plain facts which stared me in the face. To my surprise I was not long in learning that there were some whose consciences would not let them leave the church on account of the organ question, but who were very far from being reconciled to the new order of things.

The original debt on the building fund was \$7,700 when I came, but this was substantially increased by the alterations and repairs of 1874, not being wholly met by the current subscription to defray them.

Dr. Taylor, on whom I relied much for council, sympathy and support was spared to us only two years after I came, and during this time was not able to be much in this pulpit.

Not long after I assumed the pastorate one of the most serious times of commercial depressions which this continent has ever known came upon us, and I discovered that sometimes when men lose their money, they lose their interest in church matters.

The outlook was far from encouraging. What has been the result? By the good hand of our God upon us we have prospered.

The debt has been paid. Attendance at worship has never been better than it is to day. Our financial record has been the enviable one of current income meeting current expenditure. During these ten years four hundred and sixty-seven names have been added to our roll in equal numbers by profession of faith and by certificate from other churches.

This means no small amount of change in the congregation. Many of the fathers and mothers in our Israel have fallen asleep. Of our twelve elders, eight have been set apart to their honorable office since I came among you. Of the then nine members of the Board of Trustees, only five now are of our number. Three have died and one is now resident in Scotland. Of the present Board of Managers I have admitted five into the membership of this church, four of them being by profession of faith. Of the present office bearers of the Missionary Society, I have seen six enter our fellowship, four being by profession of faith. One-half of those who are at present teaching in the Sunday School have entered into communion with us during these ten years.

These statistics of those who hold office in the church are very suggestive and indicate far more clearly than can any other method the great changes which a comparatively short period of years brings about in every congregation.

Far be it from me to take to myself the credit of the peace and prosperity which have characterized these

years of my pastorate. Your readiness to aid in every good work has been a continual pleasure to me. Most gladly do I bear my testimony to the fact that I have never presented any good work to you to which you have not responded most generously and cordially.

It is on the whole a happy circumstance, that in accordance with the time honored custom of this congregation, your minister has not been brought much in contact with the Managers in their administration of that part of the life and work of the church with which they have to do. but no small part of the prosperity of this congregation is due to the faithful and diligent manner in which they have discharged the duties devolving upon them. With the kirk session my relations have always been of the pleasantest.

Although much of the best work of the faithful elder does not appear upon the surface, and indeed may never be known to the general membership of the congregation, you may rest assured that the prosperity of every Presbyterian church depends to a great extent upon the character and activity of its session. In the visitation of the sick, and in the caring for the poor, I have found much aid and encouragement in my fellow workers of the eldership. I part from them with unfeigned regret.

To you, dear friends, of the congregation in general, let me again say that nothing save evident duty and providential leading and guiding would part us. You have been kind and forbearing. In effect I succeeded two ministers, to either one of whom it was no easy matter to be a successor. It was simply impossible for a young and comparatively inexperienced minister, to

give you that personal visitation and ministration to which you had been so long accustomed. The pulpit ministrations of one man can never have the freshness and diversity which can be given by two men dividing the work between them. Being fully sensible of this, I appreciate all the more your courtesy and kindness to me and mine. I take away with me a treasury of pleasant recollections. I leave with good wishes and heartfelt prayers for all of you. With all of you I have had pleasant, social intercourse; with many I have been in your hours of sorrow and bereavement.

The links that bind together a pastor and his people are many and various, and, thank God, going away does not, cannot sever all of them.

It has been matter of regret to me that I have not been able to do as much work in the Sabbath School as I desired, but the Sabbath School and the Juvenile Missionary Society of this church, have always been very near my heart, and I have rejoiced, and do rejoice in their prosperity.

To us as a congregation there is a sense in which the decennial period now closing has been very uneventful. We have had no dissensions, no heated debates, no stormy meetings. The even tenor of the way of fair prosperity must of necessity be a time of calm and of rest. There is however another sense in which we have been making history for ourselves, and I question if another ten years will bring as many notable events.

The Union of all the Presbyterian churches of this Dominion was a happy event in our ecclesiastical history as a nation, followed as it has been by a union among our Methodist brethren of equally good omen.

This edifice was peculiarly identified with this event as the old Canada Presbyterian Church met here, and then after the consummation of the union on the historic fifteenth day of June, the united Assembly or rather Synod, for that Assembly was also synodical, met within these walls.

In the following year, that is in 1876, the death of the Rev. Dr. Taylor was an event of no ordinary importance in the history of this church.

The introduction of our present system of finance is also worthy of note. A system which is theoretically perfect, and which practically has done well. But my friends remember that the very excellence of our system requires a rare amount of conscientiousness to make the practice be at all equal to the theory.

Our Jubilee services of last year, and the commendable way in which we did honor to the event by laying our offerings at the feet of Him who giveth all, will ever be remembered by me with peculiar satisfaction.

If to these four outstanding events we add the introduction of the instrumental aid to praise, and the more recent adoption of the Hymn Book which will mark an era in the service of praise of our church in Canada, you will all admit that these years of quiet have not been without their notable land marks.

Passing beyond congregational and denominational lines, let me say with how much regret I leave this good city of Montreal. It has become my home. Since, as a lad, I went to college, I had never lived more than four years in any one place until I came here. I feel like being torn up by the roots, and it

hurts a little. It would be hard to find a city in which a more fraternal feeling exists among all the Protestant clergy, and among the churches which they represent. If the wars of words which characterized former days and days not too remote to be within the recollection of many of you, have passed away, it is not because we are latitudinarian in belief or indifferent to principle. We have learned that the character of the revelation of the constitution of the human mind are two factors, both unknown quantities in certain essential particulars, which will give diversity of results until the grand equation has been reached. Meanwhile if we are tolerant, it is because we respect each other's honesty, and moreover, because we believe that the way of peace is the high way to union.

Enemies can never argue convictions into each other's heads. Friends will come nearer to each other by the attraction and affinity ordained of nature.

In point of numbers the Protestant part of Montreal is better supplied with churches than any other city of its size on this Continent, and I think it will be some time before another ten years witness as much activity in church building. Three Episcopal, two Baptist, two Methodist, two Congregational and three Presbyterian. Twelve in all :—this has been the decade of church building. If it appears to some that the supply may exceed the demand, let us remember, that we are building for the future, perhaps building better than we know.

But, dear friends, at this solemn hour I am not forgetful of the sacred nature of the pastoral relation. Hitherto I have been speaking of the more general

concerns and incidents of my sojourn among you, of what I may call the externals of my official relation to you. But I have had the care of souls and my heart asks me what progress I have made, how faithful I have been. Believe me I use no vain form of words, when I humble myself and confess to lack of faithfulness and to lack of diligence. Alas! who can review such sacred work as a Minister's is, and feel satisfied with the work or with himself. But let me ask you how have you heard the proclamation of the Gospel? How shall we testify concerning each other on that great day. I hope and pray that I may see many of you in the years to come, but many of us may not meet again until we stand before God, or until we rally round our King and gladly sing "The Lord is come." Let us realize that it is never too late to undo whatever is wrong if the power be ours, and it is never too soon to make the attempt. Have any of you been resisting the spirit, and hardening yourselves against the Gospel? Then I charge you to plead for mercy now. Have any of you been neglecting your obvious duty? Then I beg you to begin now to redeem the precious time. Have the appeals of the preacher occasionally made you feel as if the Saviour were knocking at the door of your heart, but hitherto you would not listen to his gentle voice? Then, this night I pray you, open the door and let this waiting Saviour in.

FINALLY BRETHREN, FAREWELL. The severance of the pastoral tie under our church polity is attended with uncertainty and anxiety to both pastor and people, but it is not unmixed evil.

There are as many arguments in favor of pastorates of reasonable length, as there are for life pastorates. The practical success which has attended the Methodist church proves that even very frequent changes can be so arranged as not to interfere with the spiritual life of the congregations. God uses means, and it is simply an impossibility for any one man's method and cast of mind, and trend of thought, and grasp of the truth, to be equally acceptable and adaptable to all men. It is foolish for one to say "I am for Paul, and another I am the follower of Apollos, and another I am of Peter." Foolish it may be, even wicked at times, but we have to take human nature as we find it, and make the best of it. I thank God for the proof of my ministry which he has given me, and for the fruit which I have lived to behold, but the new voice which God in his goodness will send to you, and the fresh thought, and the altered methods, will call forth new powers and activities in you.

BE PERFECT, not as if you had already attained, nor even as if you could attain to unclouded perfection in this present mortal state, but it can be your goal as individuals and as a congregation. The perfect day comes to all those who are waiting for it.

BE OF GOOD COMFORT.—"Parting is such sweet sorrow." It is pleasant to know that you are missed, pleasant to know that kindly thoughts and good wishes go with us. A place in your memories and in your prayers is very precious to me. But this parting is one of the many events which teach us that the church of God is a grand edifice, a vast temple and the most useful or most prominent member of it, is only one of

the living stones. The grand army of the Lord is on the march, here a common soldier and there a leader drops out of the ranks, but the army marches on. How often in the history of a congregation, as a pastor or saintly office bearer, or generous giver, or active worker is laid aside, do we find ourselves wondering as to what we shall do without them, and as to whom the Lord would raise up to fill their places. But the work goes on, because it is God's work as well as man's work. Keep, I pray you, in quick sympathy with the spiritual side of your church life and work, and God will lead you, and you will be "of good comfort."

BE OF ONE MIND. Communion depends upon union. The fellowship of kindred minds is one of the essentials of success. On the eve of one of its greatest successes we read that the church was "with one accord in one place." You are entering upon a phase of congregational life in which it is very essential that you should cultivate the grace of being "of one mind." This can be accomplished by the exercise of much mutual forbearance. Remember that the church is the purest democracy on earth. One is your master even, Christ and all ye are brethern. But just because every one has the right, let all gentleness and wisdom be exercised in the asserting of it. I do not counsel indifference. The one mindedness that is secured by the energy and determination of the few using the indifference of the many is fraught with danger, but that which is secured by our fulfilling the law of Christ in bearing each other's burdens is fruitful with blessing.

LIVE IN PEACE.—Even when you cannot be of one

mind, it is possible to live in peace, but the peace of mutual forbearance is always in danger of being disturbed. The peace that is born of one mindedness is the crowning glory of any congregation. But let us remember that of being of one mind does not mean that there shall be neither variety of thought nor difference of opinion. Living in peace does not mean that principle is to be sacrificed for the sake of any false peace. On the other hand let us never forget that one mindedness and peace can be cultivated by every congregation, and never so much need to be cultivated as when in the Providence of God, there is no official head and guide and leader.

AND THE GOD OF LOVE AND PEACE SHALL BE WITH YOU. This is a gracious promise. Take it to yourselves, I pray that you may have a rich experience of it. It is something that God is in His church, and with His church. The high priest may die, but the altar fire need not go out; the high priest may depart, but the daily sacrifice need not cease. Nay, the Christ himself may go away, but the comforter comes when he goes. The departure of a pastor is of little consequence so far as the ultimate prosperity of the church is concerned, if the God of love and peace be with you. May he be with you in fullness of blessing.

Finally, brethren, farewell! To the aged a long farewell, for it is not possible that we shall all meet again on this side of the grave. To you who have been my compeers and fellow workers, farewell. In God's providence we may meet again, and shall we not be glad to greet each other when that meeting time shall come. To the young, especially to those who have

begun the christian life under my ministrations a kindly and loving farwell. To hear good of you will be my joy. I most earnestly pray that I may never hear of any of you bringing disgrace or shame to your church or to your homes. I am persuaded better things of you.

I go, but thought is free, and often shall fancy carry me back to the noble mountain and the great broad river, and the pleasant homes, and the genial friends of this good city, and in the very heart of all of these pleasant things must ever be this church and this pulpit.

If there were no sad partings there would be no glad meetings.

I go supported by the hope that I may meet many of you in the future. Even if there is to be no meeting on earth, there will be one in Heaven. Amen!

