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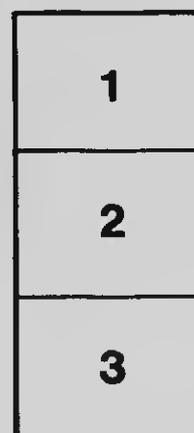
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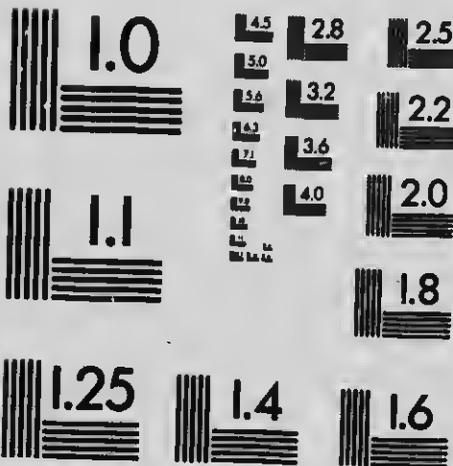
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Herridge, William
T.

- A SERMON -

PREACHED IN

St. Andrew's Church, Ottawa,

ON

SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 25th, 1902,

-BY-

REV. W. T. HERRIDGE, D.D.

Published by Request of the Kirk Session.

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"He thanked God, and took courage."

Acts 28:15.

For the last few weeks, as you all know, there has been presented before me the problem of choice between two alternatives, both of which have much to commend them. I feel honoured by the enthusiastic call which has been addressed to me by one of the most promising Presbyterian Churches in the British Islands. I have been attracted by the character of the people there, by the measure of relief which change of setting tends to afford, by the almost certain prospect of steadily growing influence and usefulness, and by the stimulus, intellectual and otherwise, of the many-sided life of London. On the other hand, though my work here is arduous, it is most pleasant and inspiring. I have never felt for a moment that nothing more remained to be done. And no language can express how warmly I am attached to the members of this church and congregation.

In view of these strong arguments on either side, one might well pause before deciding hastily; and perhaps, I would not have been able to make a definite statement so soon, had not another argument emerged with unmistakable distinctness. This argument has been furnished by yourselves. A few weeks ago, at a congregational meeting, the first large and representative one during my pastorate, both those who spoke and those who were silent evinced a depth of genuine sincerity which I value more than words can tell. Since then, a resolution, couched in very strong terms, and carrying a solemn pledge with it, has

been presented to me, and signed by a large number of those who do the work of this congregation. Some, on account of sickness or absence, have not had the opportunity. Others have made known to me, directly or indirectly the reasons why their names do not appear, reasons which I quite understand and appreciate. So that it may be truthfully said that this whole Church, with a degree of unanimity which I deem most remarkable, has given no uncertain verdict in this matter. I do not need to read it in resolutions. I know it and feel it in my inmost heart.

In addition to this, I have had cordial messages from a large number who, from time to time, attend the services of this Church, from old members of it who have removed to other places, from fellow-citizens, Protestant and Catholic, and from valued brethren in the ministry, all urging that I should continue the work which I have tried to do for this Church, for Presbyterianism, and for Canada. I regard it as a unique honour—this fine response of yours to my eighteen years' ministry; and I should be callous indeed if I were not moved to the very depths of my nature by so many evidences of esteem and affection. I think it too sacred even in this place to mention what many have said to me concerning their personal regard, and the effect which my work has had upon them; but I thank God for it. I cannot but believe that the tie which unites us as pastor and people is too strong to be severed without pain and injury on both sides, for which there would be no adequate compensation; and therefore, having given the whole matter the most earnest

thought, and having sought the Divine guidance in order to choose aright, I now announce that I have decided to decline the call to London, and remain amongst you. You have loyally said, to quote from the resolution: "We will uphold him to the best of our ability by our love and esteem, our help and sympathy, and our co-operation in the work of the church." Let me, in turn, promise before God and this congregation, to give you in the future as in the past, my best strength of brain and heart, my earnest prayers, my warm affection, and the blessed Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And may He who is able to keep us from falling, and to confirm every good purpose, grant us grace faithfully to perform our solemn vows.

I think you will now see why I took the course of consulting you, my people, on this matter. It seemed to me not only the courteous thing to do, but the only fair and rational thing in order to enable me to reach a correct decision. At the same time I would scarcely have dared to do so, had I not felt that, in spite of many imperfections, no one in this Church could truthfully say that I had neglected my duty, or been false to the promises I made when, in the inexperience of youth, on that hot August night which some of you recall, I was inducted to labour amongst you. And yet any man, in any position, no matter how faithfully he has tried to discharge its offices, might well be proud and thankful over such testimony as you have given concerning your minister. I could ask for nothing better when my earthly work is done.

At first sight, perhaps, the motive of my appeal to you was liable to be misunderstood, and in some cases, with the best intentions, may have been misunderstood. I suppose that no one can discern so clearly as the minister himself how much his happiness depends on the good-will of his congregation, how easy it is for them to help him, and how easy it would be, if they were so disposed, for them to hinder him. As long as conscience approved my actions, I have not been too morbidly careful of what others might think of them. Whatever else the preacher lacks, he must have backbone and courage. He must insist upon it that, within the limits which his tasks prescribe, he shall be allowed the exercise of individual liberty. And yet this will not make him indifferent to the tone of public opinion. I confess that I am by no means devoid of sensitiveness to the surrounding atmosphere. I can feel an east wind as quickly as most men. Of course, no one need be disturbed by occasional misunderstandings, or even by positive hostility. This is inevitable anywhere; and unless it asserts itself in forms which are a menace to the general welfare, is best met in a patient and forgiving way. I never could have accomplished what I have done amongst you, however little it may be, without the consciousness of your cordial sympathy. Your generous temper has not only been grateful to me, but it has reacted upon yourselves, and helped to make my ministry more effective and more beneficent. I have always felt this amid the varied changes which the years have brought with them. I never felt it more strongly than I do to-day.

United, then, even more closely than we have ever been, we may well look forward to the future with hope and confidence. I have my limits, as you have yours; but, helping one another, and forbearing one another, who shall say what larger blessings God has yet in store?

I wish it were possible for me to see more of you in your homes. But if you want me to preach to you, there seems no prospect of being able to do it. Most of you, I imagine, do not need to be persuaded of this. And besides, visitation, under ordinary circumstances, is more of a luxury than a necessity. When you are in trouble, I invite you to let me share it with you. I would not exchange the grateful thanks of those who have passed through deep affliction, and to whom I have been able to render some service, for the transient applause of a vast multitude. I have conducted my pastoral work with reference to nothing else than what I conceive to be the relative needs of my people; and if I have been more to some than to others, it is because they have made it possible for me to be more. If anyone tells you that I am not a pastor, go to those who have been sick, to those who are worried over worldly affairs, to those who have lost loved ones, to those who are vexed by some besetting sin, and let them be the judges of the matter.

After all these years, it seems to me that I have more yet to teach you than I have taught already, and that is one reason why old sermons would be more pleasant, perhaps, for you to hear than for me to deliver, unless they were so recast as to bring them up to date of my religious con-

sciousness. There is much new light yet to break forth for all of us from God's holy word. Under favorable conditions of health and circumstance, my best preaching days are all ahead of me.

And as to church growth, there are two ways in which a church may grow: extensively and intensively, in numbers and in character. The prospects of extensive growth amongst us are not so great as in a new congregation, though our limits even in that way are not necessarily reached if we determine otherwise. But the growth which the true minister appreciates most is the growth in zeal, in charity, in broad understanding of truth, in loyal illustration day by day of the teaching of Christ Jesus. In this direction, in the direction of developing our utmost Christian resources, and bringing them to their highest estate, the most earnest and devoted amongst us cannot but feel that we have not yet exhausted our possibilities.

There is always a touch of pathos about the examination of old documents, especially if they are of a personal character. I have been looking over the call which came to me in the month of July, 1883. Of the 270 members of the church who signed it, no less than 50 have gone over to the great majority, and 50 more are scattered in different places, or now enrich the life of newer congregations in this city. Of those who have joined the church during my pastorate, about 100 have now removed, or have finished their earthly labours. This means that, during these years, at least 500 fresh names have been added to our

membership ; and the same measure of change appears among our adherents also.

Nowhere is the skill of Christian comradeship more clearly shown than in the way it learns to utilize new material. All honour to the founders of this Church, and to those who gave it their warm support in the days of its comparative weakness ! All honour to those who, through the whole term of my pastorate amongst you, have never swerved in their loyalty to the church's highest interests. It means something that their names should appear in the original document which brought me to you. It means infinitely more that their names should appear again after all these years, pledging themselves once more to co-operation and sympathy. I thank God that so many of them are still with us, and I pray that they may long be spared to the church they serve and love so well !

But, in order to the maintenance of our strength, we must be quick to welcome every fresh addition to our numbers. Any church would soon die otherwise. We were all new once. And when we are all gone, it must be the new ones who gradually lay hold of our work and keep up the succession of enthusiasm,—our children and children's children, and all others who may join with them,—it must be these who preserve the best traditions of the Church's past history, and make it a ever-growing power throughout this city and this land. I rejoice in the mature wisdom and long-tried fidelity of many amongst us. I rejoice also in the host of fine young men and young women, some of whom I have baptized and re-

ceived into church fellowship, all of whom, as some of them know, I love so well ; and, while they are with us, I have no fear for the future of this congregation.

Far be it from me to encourage a false pride amongst us. But I do want us to feel that proper self-respect which enables us to discern our opportunities and gladly to fulfil them. The lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places. We have been able to equip ourselves with facilities for carrying on our work without any personal sacrifice. I am sure we appreciate these advantages, and that, so far from making us slothful, they will stimulate our desire not only to increase the efficiency of our own organizations, but to do still more in the interests of the church at large.

The position which we hold as the mother-church of Presbyterianism in this capital city of the Dominion, ought to deliver us from any spirit of narrowness or parochialism. Much is rightly expected of us. We stand at a local point, a kind of cathedral of Presbyterianism in Canada. We can make our influence felt, if we will, throughout the length and breadth of this land. We can show an example of reverence in worship, of zeal in service, of breadth in charity. We can be a strong force in helping to heal ecclesiastical strifes, and in bringing into clearer prominence those great underlying truths which, beneath all minor divergencies, bind the followers of Christ together. And in order to this, we need intelligence, fearlessness, and a loving heart in the pulpit, and we need also statesmanship in our counsels, so that, while matters of detail are not neg-

lected, a large view is taken of our tasks and our responsibilities, and the best gifts of the best men and women amongst us consecrated to the service of the house of God, and to the perpetual increase of that earnestness and that faith which shall make her a refuge for the oppressed, a joy for the desolate, a strength for the tempted, a meeting-ground for all the noblest activities, a great, wide, roomy home where one is our Master, even Christ, and all we are brethren.

I am confident that this brief period of strain and uncertainty, bringing out as it has done our mutual sentiments, will be followed by a genuine revival of zeal in every department of the Church's operations, and I trust also by a fresh resolve that, in all our tasks, we will illustrate more clearly day by day what it means to be a Christian. You have shown in a way which might well rejoice the heart of any man, your good-will towards your minister. I, in turn, continue my work with good-will towards every member of this church and congregation. After these years that I have lived amongst you, no one will expect me to be the slave of any idle caprice, or the victim of any needless handicap. But I cheerfully devote myself to your service, and I trust in you with assured confidence to assist my labours, to stimulate my energies, and to enable me to realize the best that is in me.

God alone knows the future. We may have our dark days as well as our bright ones; but we will share them both together. We do not stand in a mere technical relationship as minister and people, but in the more intimate relationship of tried and trusty friends. Our hearts are united

by memories of the sanctuary, by words of mutual counsel and cheer, by scenes of gladness and scenes of gloom, by a common gratitude for what the past has given us, and a common hope for the days that are to come.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all! Amen.

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