

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

Opening Sermon by the Retiring Moderator, S. M. HOPKINS, D.D.

"Then had the Churches rest . . . and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."—Acts ix. 31.

Rest in the Church on earth, like rest in Heaven, implies the truest activity. With the ceasing of the Sauline persecution, the Churches had rest; but it was not the rest of inaction. It was a rest which implied progress, labor, and growth. Resting, they walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and were multiplied.

The Church's persecutions have interfered with her rest, by compelling her to stand idle; driving her from her work, while the storm lasted. But these interruptions, if sharp, were short, like a thunder-gust in harvest. The great causes which have interfered with the Church's restful activity, have been her own mistakes and vices; the fruitfulness of Ecclesiastical pride and ambition. It cannot be denied with truth, nor confessed without shame, that nine-tenths of the Church's entire force, has been expended in internal contention; and to this, more than to all other causes combined, it is due, that after eighteen centuries, Christianity is still so local, and still so feeble. No wonder that looking at a Church, composed of a hundred discordant sects, men should be disposed to keep outside a house, so perpetually and thoroughly divided against itself.

From a Divine religion we expect concord and unity. But as often as wearied humanity has looked with longing eyes toward the Church and cried, Do you bring us Peace, O Church of Christ? the reply has been, I tell you nay, but rather division.

I do not refer here to those inevitable discussions and controversies, by which the great truths of the Christian system, were disengaged from their related, or simulated errors. Christianity first brought the great questions involved in the fact of redemption, into collision with the human mind; and it was inevitable, that the awakened Christian intellect should occupy itself with a study of the records and their interpretation, with the Christian facts, and their philosophy. A Manichean controversy, a Sabellian controversy, an Arian controversy, a Pelagian controversy, even an Arminian controversy, were in the series of necessary events. Those controversies repeat themselves in the experience of every active and speculative mind. To each inquiring spirit, the question comes, Is this world eternal? or is it the work of an infinitely wise and good Creator? and if so, whence come sin and death? Is God essentially One in Three, or is He eternally One, and Three only in His Creative and Redemptive activities? Are Son and Spirit co-ordinate Deity, or only manifestations of the Father? Is man ruined, or only damaged by the original apostasy? and is he wholly or only partly dependent on Divine Grace, for salvation?

There is no thoughtful mind in which this whole series of controversies does not sporadically originate; and human nature very commonly starts with accepting the wrong conclusion. As old Fuller quaintly says, that all men are naturally Pelagians, and think better of themselves than they ought, so it may be said with almost equal truth, that they are naturally Manicheans, Sabellians, and Arians, and think worse of God than they ought.

I do not refer, therefore, to those controversies by which the Church has been led to develop and define her doctrinal system, in its fundamental articles. I refer to those minor disputes, by which, inside the limits of essential truth, the Theologic mind has kept on refining; and insisted that men shall not only part with the fact, but orthodoxy in the fact.

Illinois.—The death of Hon. Samuel S. May, a Congressman from the Eleventh District, is reported. He was Democratic nominee for Speaker of the Fortieth Congress. Thirteen hundred buildings are going up in Chicago. In Chicago real estate is out of the reach of any but the rich. Four and five miles south of the business centre of the city real estate is selling at from \$30 to \$50 per foot. At Hyde Park, six miles south, small two-story houses on small lots, sell from \$6,000 to \$10,000, and from \$400 to \$800 a year. The Chicago, it says the "workingmen" of that city have \$10,000,000 by their recent demonstration. "Ira, Romish ges and damage done in the riot." "Ira, Evan-Com-Confobia was first sounded, up to April Non-Com-hon be slaughtered in Chicago, it; among the Missouri.—The Kansas City "We come at length, in Johnson and which seem to have been permitted and sprung. "Presence of God to show mean and odious the divisive spirit among Christians may become in its last analysis.

And this has been the occupation of Christians for these three centuries past; a universal intestine melee! Each polemic, fighting for his particular philosophy of the Christian facts; and careless that to gain a vantage-ground against error, he planted both feet on the prostrate body of Charity.

And so the work of the Reformation stood still; for three hundred years, true Religion has made no appreciable progress in Europe, and next to none in Heathendom. When we might have built a city, whose walls should encompass the nations, and a tower, whose summit should glow in the perpetual sunlight of heaven, theological pride and ambition confounded our tongues, and we left off to build.

Let us congratulate ourselves, and bless God, that this polemical spirit seems now to have run its course. The sects have all been formed. It must be a mind ingenious in evil, that can devise any new wedge to rend the Church asunder. Throughout the Christian world, there is no doctrinal controversy raging; and we may hopefully affirm that it is well nigh impossible to originate one.

All the great questions that can arise, in regard to sin and redemption, have been discussed and settled. The results of the investigation are embodied in the creeds of the Church. The Arian, the Pelagian, the Socinian opinions, have been convicted and condemned. It is not necessary to fight the battle over again.

In the sixth circle of the Inferno, the crowd of Heresiarchs are seen fastened in red-hot open tombs, from which they vainly struggle, from time to time to come forth—

Qui sunt gli eretiariche / Or lor seguaci d'ogni setta, e molto / Più che non credi, son le tonne carche.

There let them burn, till the marble lid falls down upon them at the day of judgment. They are dead and damned. If in their ignorance of the history of doctrine, they attempt to lift themselves up into the light of the present day, the Church does not gird on her armor and march forth to combat them; she simply replies to the threatening spectre: Back to your sepulchre! you are not alive; but dead. If you do not know it, consult the council of Nice, the Synods of Carthage, and the Westminster Assembly, where you will find you were regularly tried, sentenced and executed, and that no resurrection is possible for you!

And now if we had only some equally convenient arrangement, for those few surviving champions, who think it incumbent upon them, to rush every now and then on the walls of Zion, and rattle the bones of Stapfer or Harnemsen, as a challenge to all comers, we might believe, that the golden age of Christian unity was at hand.

And do we flatter ourselves too highly, when we think it has already dawned! Polemics almost laid aside; the rights of Christian charity vindicated; co-operative revivals bringing Christians to feel how precious are the truths in which they are agreed, above the Shibboleths, about which they differ! Surely we may say: Now have the Churches

rest, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, are multiplied.

The ravage of arms ceases, and the work of edification succeeds. The spirit of peace and comfort returns. The Church's rest from controversy, inaugurates the era of the Holy Ghost, as the Great Peace of Rome ushered in the era of Redemption.

Under these auspicious circumstances, and on this great anniversary occasion, it becomes us to contemplate the wants and duties of our own Church, as the organization through which God calls us, to operate for the advancement of His kingdom. Every Christian of us, especially every one of us Christian ministers, owes a primary duty to his own Church. Unless he is a mere marauder, who has forays into it for plunder, and is equally ready to quit it and forage elsewhere, it is the Church of his convictions and his heart. Its faith and its worship are dear to him. His experience confirms him more and more in the excellence of its polity. He thanks God that the lines have fallen to him in pleasant places, and that he has a goodly heritage; and he is bound to honor and exalt the Church, above every other interest, and above every other communion.

I. I observe therefore that the first duty of the hour, is the cultivation of a healthy and proper Church LIFE.

Confessedly our great lack for many years, was the want of a wholesome denominational life. We were so liberally co-operative, so broadly Catholic, that zeal for our own Church growth was almost unpopular; a mistaken sentiment, which other communions, wiser than ourselves, were not slow to commend, and to take advantage of.

We have happily survived that lukewarm period. A generation has grown up, which loves the Church for itself, and for its peculiar adaptations, to promote the interests of our common Christianity. Our ministry consists in larger proportion of such as are home-born, and who are not troubled with scruples lest they may honor their Mother too highly; but of men who at the same time, love wisely all other Christian communions, and pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Only sectarian zeal is dangerous, and at war with the spirit of the Gospel. When a Church accepts its true position as a part of the general Church of Christ's people, then denominational zeal becomes safe and a duty. Each part is bound to perfect itself to the highest degree for the general ends which Christianity contemplates. To love the Church, in which the Providence of God has placed us, better than we love any other Church; to honor and exalt its principles; to labor in every legitimate way for its prosperity, is only an extension of that love of family, which is the foundation of social well-being.

And just application of the Apostolic dictum, will warrant us in saying, that he who provides not ecclesiastically for his own, has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel. The man who should pretend to love every other woman as well as his own wife, and every other flock as well as his own children, would be justly suspected of a very low grade of morals; and the minister who is so intensely Catholic, as to feel no enthusiasm for his own Church, nor pride in its history, no passion for its success, will come nigh being thought little better than a Laodicean.

If my words might have any weight therefore with the younger members of our ministry, I would beg them to cultivate a love for the Church, and a zeal for its growth and influence; leaving our brethren of other communions, with a hearty God-speed, to cherish the same sentiment towards the Churches in which Providence has placed them. Most of them are not backward in this respect.

The government, wisely attended to their own interests. They have obtained from hybridizing themselves names of the systems; and the consequence

Indians.—The subject has been characterized by an anecdote at Fort Leavenworth which proper limits is not latter have him, but it is directly expressive of the spirit of our people.

On board to achieve all the false cant of a chari-represents every other people so much, as to have no reflections or activities for the home circle. These sentiments are thought to be in favor of "Churchianity," it is at least true that we are far enough at present from any such vice. The tendencies of our system are by no means in that direction. We can cultivate a Church spirit industriously for some time to come without hazard of excess; without reaching the point where it becomes necessary to ask, if we are not loving Christ's institution more than we love Christ himself.

If the second duty of the hour is Church unity, I approach a subject my brethren, on which you have all reflected anxiously and prayerfully, and on which you will naturally expect me to speak. I cannot hope to suggest anything, which has not already occurred to your own minds. If I can interpret your views, and in this public and official way, sum up the sentiment you generally feel, I shall have contributed my part toward an end dear to all who love our Zion.

You have not failed to notice with profound interest, the tendencies toward unity, throughout the great Presbyterian body, both in Europe and America. We cannot disguise from ourselves the fact, that the free vigorous life which our theology nourishes, has proved in many cases, too strong for the cohesive power of our polity. And the great material principle of Protestantism, which we exalt, and which renders political despotism intolerable, has led us in too many cases to revolt against the control even of our own mild government. The rights of the individual conscience have been so dear, that we would not consent to an outward union, which required the sacrifice of even the smallest religious scruples; and so we have divided and subdivided on questions more or less unessential, until division has come to be looked upon as the remedy for the simplest inconvenience.

It is the peculiarity of our Church, as compared with Episcopacy on the one hand, and Independency on the other, that it equally insists on the theological principle of justification by faith, and the political principle of Church unity. Congregationalism which ignores the unity of the Church, and is nothing better than a system of ecclesiastical atoms, can hold the doctrine of justification by faith, without much risk of minister subdivision. Episcopacy on the contrary, holds strongly to the authority and unity of the Church, but feebly to justification by faith. Its theology has no disruptive force, as against its polity. It is the ecclesiastical weakness of one of these systems and the theological weakness of the other, that prevents their dividing. Presbyterianism embodies, like the universe, two antagonistic principles; a polity which requires unity, and a theology which insists on the right of private judgment; and the reason of our divisions is, that much as we honor the authority of the Church, we have been taught to honor still more that great foundation truth, by which the Church stands or falls.

It is in the land of John Knox, indeed, that this extreme assertion of individualism has run its most disastrous career. But we have not been without sad experience of its working in our American Church. Twice have we been rent asunder. Impartial history will affirm that neither of those divisions was necessary or justifiable.

In the case of the first schism, while all were ready to subscribe the same standards, there is supposed to have been a slight difference of theory, as to the mode of subscription. There were tendencies in the conduct of the Revival; extraneousness and violations of order on the part of News-side ministers. But there was nothing that really endangered the life of the Church.

Suppose only the venerable and conscientious men who composed the Old-side to have said: Presbyterianism transplanted to this fresh, new world,

with its sparse but rapidly growing population, must necessarily undergo some modifications; we cannot expect nor desire to procure all our ministers from British universities. In promoting the great works of God, we must expect some disregard of order, and exercise forbearance toward well-meaning though ill-judging preachers; by laying hold strongly of the Revival ourselves, we may hope to guide it to blessed issues, and gradually to counteract what tendencies there are to enthusiasm;—if edged, the fraternal overture, the frank acknowledgment, the candid concession, the courtesy and deference, that marks the manners of Christian gentlemen, the mutual sympathy that speaks through voice and eye,—all this, tends to dwarf minor differences into their true proportion. It seems the easiest thing in the world to step over the flimsy chevrons of France, which busy polemics on both sides, those wonderful sappers and miners of the Christian army have erected, and mingle in a mutual embrace of brotherly affection.

But with the great body of the Church who have not shared in the softening influence of such personal intercourse, the old issues retain all their original consequence. The front ranks are clasping hands and saying with moistened eyes: Why should we contend, we are brethren while the rear ranks are brandishing their arms and shouting their ancient war cries, ready to go to death for leavened or for unleavened bread in the Eucharist. It is not to be expected of course, that so great a measure, as the reunion of our Church, involving historical facts and theological variations; involving some matters of principle, and many of feeling, and drawing in its train a multitude of practicable re-adjustments, should secure unanimous concurrence at once. The embers still smoulder under the kindly ashes, with which time has begun to cover them, and there are not wanting "idle hands," to pile on fresh fuel for an auto da fe of Christian charity.

There are veterans scarred in our former wars, whose wounds still bleed and smart, at the return of this anniversary; There are literary and theological giants, whose nervous irritation which they cannot stifle, still lingers; And there are faithful guardians of the Church's unrest and disorder, to raise their note of warning, at the approach of any herald of peace;

But notwithstanding all this, and in spite of the numerous difficulties of detail, which may make complete unification a work of time, I conclude that this benign result, is written down among those "determined things," which, under the good hand of God, will hold their way to destiny; and that, for the following reasons:

First. The actual differences, greatly exaggerated by those passions which always see their objects through a fog, and which separated us thirty years ago, have almost entirely disappeared. Our children, our intelligent laity, even our younger brethren in the ministry, ask: Pray what is the difference between this Branch and that Branch? They both grow on the great central stock of Presbyterian Church principles. They are alike in their broad foliage, their beautiful blossoming, their golden fruit; and they both toss their tops towards the North, and wrestle with the great gales of freedom. Only the practical eyes of Theological savans, are able to point out certain minute differences of leaf and fibre; and they sometimes put their finger on the wrong spot.

To the view of outside observers, we have long been substantially one. An able but unfriendly critic, has said of us, "The two Presbyterians are not distinguished nor distinguishable. They are sailing after the same chart, and in the same direction; and every thing is arranged so much alike, that when seen together, without artificial badges of distinction, one cannot be told from the other." This was said near fifteen years ago; and since then the attractive tendencies of the system, have been drawing us closer and closer together. It is true that we are sailing by the same chart, and in the same direction; and we are not sailing on the asymptotes of a circle where we may approach forever without meeting. Already we hail each other across the narrowing space, with: Brothers, what cheer? and the answering hail is: Brothers, all's well.

Second. The tendencies of the age are all in the direction of Church unity. I need not instance these eccentric and sporadic attempts at union on the basis of mere ritualism, in utter disregard of the claims of true doctrine and worship. But among Evangelical Christians there is ample evidence of yearnings for harmony. The heart of Christendom is sick of controversy and schism; and the long labor of dead peace-makers, the sowing of so many Irenicums, Plans of Comprehension, and Formulas of Concord, seems at length about to burst into a harvest. After fifteen hundred years of division, we are at length coming to accept the ancient plan, *In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*. Presbyterianism throughout the world, longs for that union which is strength. Our brethren across the seas set us an example, and send us words, that Christianity as a mere development of nature, warn us by concentrating for more vigorous efforts. When heretics conspire, it is time for Christians to unite.

Third. The young and vigorous heart of the Church on both sides, is bent on re-union. A generation has arisen, which is a stranger to the controversies that divided us thirty years ago. They have been trained up in the modern co-operative revivals. Their talk is classic Christian, and not polemik. They do not mean to expend their lives and energies in disputes about unleavened bread; and what these sovereigns of the future have determined, that will be.

Fourth. The necessities of the great Home Missionary enterprise, demand this re-union. The two bodies of our Church are wasting their strength in competing for the possession of the land. There must be two sets of agents, two missions, two churches, where only one of each is required. We are foolishly repeating in Evangelical Protestantism the blunders of the "Babylonish Captivity;" when Christendom groaned under two Popes, two bodies of Cardinals, duplicate sets of Papal machinery, till at length the people rose up indignant, thrust aside Popes and Cardinals, and said, if you will not restore peace and unity to the Church, we will. But this leads me directly to speak of the other great duty of the hour, viz:

III. HOME EVANGELIZATION. Our country presents the most remarkable instance of successful colonizing in the history of the human race. Upon the stagnant or ebbing nations of two continents, and eventually of the third, America opens like a New Atlantis; and the tide of emigration begins to flow across the interposing oceans. Religion leads the way; and lifts the cross in Latin or in Saxon hands, from the Northern lakes to the Floridian peninsula. Divine Providence is busy in developing the agencies which shall fling the Christian, the Romish, the half-heathen, and the mere heathen populations of the rest of the world, upon these shores; Religious persecution, civil wars, oppressive governments, famines, to drive them; Perfect freedom, vast space, cheap bread, dear labor, free education, and immeasurable mineral wealth, to attract them.

And these heterogeneous elements, swept together from Europe, Africa, and Asia, no sooner touch this soil, consecrated to a new national life, than through the subtle alchemy of freedom, they assimilate and fuse together into the most restless, irrepressible, indomitable aggregate, the world has ever seen. If the nations must look to the brute tribes for their armorial emblems, the Eagle is still our fittest symbol; keen-eyed, sharp-taloned, broad-winged, gazing in the eye of the sun, wheeling his flight aloft to the stars.

But no sooner had the Commissioners returned home, and the terms on which reunion was to be effected, same to be canvassed by the body of the clergy, than a storm of fanaticism broke out, which swept away the work in an instant. What! tolerate the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist! Purchase the restoration of unity by admitting the obnoxious *filioque* into the creed! Save the Empire from overthrow, by agreeing that Christians may fast on Saturdays. Sooner fall Constantinople to its foundations! Sooner the Sultan's moons glitter

over the towers of St. Sophia! Unity is dear but the faith of the holy orthodox Church is dearer; And so the last hope of union departed; and the shadow of doom fell dark over the city of Constantine. It is almost impossible to bring together a body of Christian men, who have been separated by accidental causes, while still one in faith and order, without their finding that re-union is both more desirable and practicable than they had before imagined. The fraternal overture, the frank acknowledgment, the candid concession, the courtesy and deference, that marks the manners of Christian gentlemen, the mutual sympathy that speaks through voice and eye,—all this, tends to dwarf minor differences into their true proportion. It seems the easiest thing in the world to step over the flimsy chevrons of France, which busy polemics on both sides, those wonderful sappers and miners of the Christian army have erected, and mingle in a mutual embrace of brotherly affection.

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And now the task which God assigns to the Church of America, and pre-eminently to our own Church, is to lay hold of the swelling tide of life, that continues to pour in upon us, and imbue it with the principles of pure-Christiety. It is safe to say, that the work of Home Evangelization, has never yet risen to its true relative importance in the mind of the Church. Acting under that false rule, which measures ethical obligations by geometrical and arithmetical standards, we have almost universally agreed to subordinate the Home to the Foreign Missionary work. America is but a quarter of the globe and contains but a fraction of its population. The "missionary enterprise" in our view, has been preaching the Gospel in Asia or Africa; never yet risen to its true relative importance in the mind of the Church. 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