

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

INTRODUCTORY SERMON.

Preached before the Central Baptist Association, at Chester, on Monday, June 20th, 1864:

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"That ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." Jude 3.

[The Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Baptist Association, held its session at Chester, fifty years ago, in June 1814, at which time the Introductory Sermon was preached by Rev. Thomas Ansley, from the above text of Scripture.]

The Gospel is a message of peace, such were the predictions that it should be; "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that published peace." It was said of its founder, "He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets." The angels, who announced his advent proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace." He himself, when He taught, pronounced his blessings on the meek, the mourners, the persecuted. He taught us to forgive our enemies, to suffer wrong. The Apostles tell us that the wisdom that cometh from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, that the servant of God must not strive, but be gentle with all men.

Yet, side by side with these declarations, are others of a far different character. The second Psalm is a description of Messiah's reign. How vivid the picture of the conflict! How it rings with the sound of war, and with what exultation is raised, the shout of victory! So our Lord himself tells us, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth, I came not to send peace but a sword." So the record of the early labors of the Apostles. What tumults were caused by their preaching at Jerusalem, Damascus, Philippi, Ephesus, and other cities. They were called men that turned the world upside down, troublers of the people, perverters of the ancient ways, and so God's people have been a fruitful cause of commotion ever since. Trace the history of the Church, from that time to the present. Does it not seem as if its normal condition was one of strife and conflict. When this has ceased, has it not too often been replaced by dead orthodoxy, dull stagnation, or the blinding delusions of superstition and error.

Now, we can all understand that there is no real discrepancy between the avowed objects of christianity, and the incidental results of its teaching. Many can bear witness to-day to a present peace which the gospel has produced in their heart. Communities have been formed in which peace reigns, men have learned by its sacred influences, to love one another, as God for Christ's sake hath loved us, and it still points with unerring finger to the time when all shall see eye to eye, when all hearts shall be united, and strife shall be known no more. But in the mean-time the conflict must rage. Holiness and sin, light and darkness, truth and error, are so opposed that one cannot live, save by the extinction of the other. There can be no truce, no compromise, and in every country, in every city, in every village, the contest must go on. We have no way of preaching, no method of presenting truth by which wicked men can receive it into their hearts and remain wicked. As the word received produces strife in the soul, which can never end, save by submission of the whole heart to God, so in the outward world wherever truth is presented faithfully, firmly, although ever so kindly and courteously, opposers will be found, who in some way or other war against its influence. Therefore it is that the Gospel is a message of peace and also of war, therefore it is that we are called upon to be followers of the meek and lowly Jesus; and good soldiers of the cross. Therefore the Apostle in the text, although he prays that mercy, peace, and love may be multiplied to them also, manfully exhorts them "earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." In this blessed strife we all have a share. In this glorious contention, no christian ought willingly to be deprived of his part. In this battle we are called upon to take to ourselves the whole armor of God.

In considering the words of this passage, we are first presented with the object for which we are so earnestly to strive. The Apostle calls it "the faith once delivered to the saints." The word "faith" is here used to denote the system of christian doctrines, the gospel, the christian religion. It is used in the same sense in Acts vi. 7; "and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith," i. e. embraced the gospel. He had opened "the door of faith unto the Gentiles,"—access for the gospel, Titus iii. 15: "Greet them that love us in the faith:" that is, in the gospel, as christians, and a number of other passages which might be quoted in confirmation of this use of the word. This gospel is a free gift from a merciful God, to a lost and guilty race. It exhibits the only method of salvation, and requires the reception of its truths into the heart to make that salvation effectual. Thus viewed, it must be considered a most sacred deposit. Lofty claims are often set up by pseudo-christian communities, that they are the depositaries and the only depositaries of God's will. They have the keys and the orders, the communication of the Spirit, and are the Apostolic succession. We make no such claims, but we do claim that every child of God redeemed from the power of sin, and walking in the light, has entrusted to him as a sacred deposit the living oracles of salvation, freely to communicate to others, and thus to make known the mercy of God.

This system we are to hold in its entirety. We are not at liberty to select that portion which is most congenial to us, and reject another. The doctrinal, the preceptive and the emotional parts are indeed so interwoven one with another, that they cannot really be separated; yet attempts are often made to disjoin one from the other. Certain doctrines, distasteful to the fastidious, repugnant to worldly men, and humbling to human pride, if held

at all, are held very loosely, if preached are preached, with many guards and palliations,—not brought out with distinctness and plainness they require, so with regard to the preceptive part. We are not at liberty to choose some commands and reject others. To make a distinction not authorized by God's word between essentials and non-essentials, but rather to adopt the language of him who said, "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right;" remembering the words of warning with which the canon of Revelation closes, "If any man shall take away from the words of the Book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of life, and out of the holy city and from the things which are written in this Book." Neither are we called upon to hold a faith with additions, such as the Church of Rome has made, and other churches have in some degree attempted to make. Their tendency is to make the word of God of none effect by their traditions. More importance in such a mixture is often attached to the human than the Divine. The expression "once delivered," may be rendered in this and some other passages, "once for all" and, so rendered, gives additional force to the position we maintain. The doctrine of development as it is called has had a most pernicious effect on the Churches of the mother country; the truths of the Bible are regarded as germs of truth, rather than the full statement of all that is to be believed, and, thus considered, every man is at liberty to develop for himself a system of doctrines in accordance with his own wishes and desires. The old Pauline theology it is urged was well suited for the times in which it was written, but the progress of civilization, the advancement in knowledge of all kinds, the vast additions made to the range of human thought, as they have made imperative a reconstruction of all our systems of Science, so in the domain of Religion, the old truths which our fathers believed, demand a reconstruction, an enlarged view; require to be developed with the march of intellect, and the advancing spirit of the age. Now all this is very plausible, but it is not true. The great founder of our faith never left it, or any part of it, to be changed, enlarged, diminished or altered in accordance with the shifting caprices of the human mind, or the whims and fancies of unregenerate men. While in many things we may be in advance of our forefathers, in religion we stand upon the same ground. Forms of expression may be altered, new modes of delivering truth may be advantageously adopted, new discoveries in Geographical or Etymological research may shed some light on passages of Scripture hitherto obscure, but with regard to the truth itself, we stand upon the same unaltered basis. God's truth, as God's Son, is "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." There is great force in the following sentences from the pen of a man who certainly cannot be considered strait-laced or bigotted. "All Divine truth is recorded in certain books, it is equally open to all who in any age can read those books, nor can all the discoveries of all the philosophers in the world add a single verse to any of these books, a christian of the fifth century with a Bible is on a par with a christian of the 19th century with a Bible, candor and natural accuracy being of course supposed equal. It matters not at all that the compass, printing-press, gunpowder, steam, gas, electricity, and a thousand other inventions which were unknown in the fifth century, are familiar to the nineteenth. None of these discoveries and inventions have the smallest bearing on the question, "Whether man is justified by faith alone; or, Whether the invocation of saints is an orthodox practice." (Lord Macaulay's Review of Ranke's History of the Popes.)

This system thus unchanged we are to hold in its practical bearing. A system of opinions merely is not worth contending about, it these opinions have no effect on the heart or conduct. A child may be taught parrot-like to repeat his creed and catechism, (and these are not without their use,) yet he has no conception of their meaning. He may go further, and as he advances in life, attach certain ideas to the formularies which have been instilled into his mind. He may become very zealous indeed after his fashion in maintaining their truth. His life also may be moral, and upright in view of the world, yet is it a system of faith that only forms such characters as these. Is it such a system of faith that we are contending for? Not by any means. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." An orthodox creed is by no means to be despised, yet with an orthodox creed, a man may go down to hell unreconciled to God. True faith is an operative assent to the Divine testimony. The system which aims at the root of all sin which humbles the sinner in the dust before God, which is satisfied with nothing short of the regeneration of the soul, which not only holds but insists upon spiritual agency and develops itself in the every-day life of the man in all benevolence, zeal and sincerity, which brings before all the startling alternative of complete redemption or utter ruin. This is the truth, this is the living power for which we plead. Creeds cannot make men christians. Catechisms have no converting power. We need the Holy Spirit to breathe upon these dry bones and bid them live. The faith, then, once delivered to the saints, in its practical aspects, in its eternal results, is that for which we are to contend, and against which we are to expect the assaults of the adversary to be made. It is evident that the aims of such a system must be to the exclusive possession of man's whole nature. Every one brought under its influence is released from the slavery of the world, and Satan. If the Son shall make you free ye shall be free indeed. It is simply impossible that a man should serve two masters whose views conflict. The friendship of the world is enmity against God. The whole influence of the world, the flesh and the devil, is ever against a pure Christianity, something of the name they will tolerate, a perverted and corrupted gospel will find helpers and admirers in unregenerate men. Even a dead orthodoxy which satisfies itself with prophesying smooth things, with dwelling on abstract metaphysical topics, may be tolerated, but the truth which saves the living-piercing discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, excites anger and opposition." This is a hard saying, Who can hear it? This opposition will manifest itself in various ways, either by active relentless open hostility, by cunning craftiness, or by a passive yet determined resistance. The faith has foes which are not to be despised for strength, and whose malignity is excited

and kept in action by the fierce spirit of him who yet exalted himself against God. It is true that the days of persecution in our own land have ceased. This form of hostility, whether it be the open crushing tyranny, or the petty galling spite, is found in these times and in many places to be a mistake, producing oftentimes the very results it aimed to counteract; but the foes are none the less deadly because the mode of attack is altered. The truth itself is resisted in the very outset by the heart of man. Were all other opposition to cease, we should find the ruling power ready to meet us there. And while our assaults are thus directed against the heart, there also the enemy prepares and plants his engines of defence. In this conflict the author of all evil is the prime mover. "We wrestle" says the Apostle, "not against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

The pleasures of the world, its pursuits, anxieties, honors,—these case men's souls in triple adamant against the demands of God. Not only so, but many of the tendencies of the present age must be met and grappled with as foes; the restlessness, the gain-seeking, the tendency to display, the multiplication of all kinds of literature, sensation newspapers, novels, and poems; the arena of political action; the desire for excitement of all kinds, even in religion itself,—the craving after stimulus; the mind and body wearied, and jaded, ever seeking something startling to rouse it from its torpor. And above all the war spirit, which some once thought forever quelled, of late years is developing itself again with fierce activity. All these, to some extent peculiar to the present time, are foes, mighty against the Gospel of salvation. But not only so, man must have a religion of some kind. Many reasons might be named to account for this desire. In ancient times it was and now is, in Pagan, Mahomedan or Popish countries it is deemed sufficient to supply this craving with some monstrous form of superstition which satisfies the great majority; but where the mind is enlightened, the taste cultivated, and, above all, where the truth is preached, the enemy is wiser. The refined intellect is disgusted with the monstrosities of superstition, and desires something of a more rational character; and the demand is well supplied. Doctrines which are called reasonable are preached. Openly to oppose the Bible might be too rash and hasty, but its foundation truths are quietly put aside. The atonement, the Divinity of Christ, the necessity of regeneration, the power of the Holy Spirit, are denied, and some system of error, gratifying to man's pride adapted to leave him in sin while professing to make him better, and such doctrines are presented and gladly received. Thus we have the various delusive systems of Unitarianism, Universalism, Rationalism and many others; the mode of attack is changed, but the enemy is none the less deadly. Of late years attacks on Inspiration have been multiplied, and one most striking peculiarity of these attacks is that they come from the sworn defenders of the faith—"wounded in the house of His friends." Even false doctrine, attacks against Christianity are to be expected from our enemies. Celsus might compare the miracles of Christ with the work of magicians, it was not to be wondered at;—Celsus was a pagan, zealous for the old idolatry. Voltaire might cry, "Crush the wretch." Voltaire was a bold, bitter, blaspheming infidel. The mischief resulting from such attacks is great and baleful; but, less baleful, less of mischief, than we may anticipate when one of the Bishops of England's Church is found assailing the Book of God. When men wearing her garb and deriving their support from her revenues are seen to be denouncing her most important tenets, denying the authority of Revelation, sneering at the doctrines of the Cross. "For it was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it, neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him. But it was thou, a man, mine equal, my guide and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company." The opposition then which the friends of truth have to encounter in the present day is peculiar, differing from that of previous ages, and requiring never-ceasing diligence, constant watchfulness, and all the resources which the Church can bring to bear against the great Adversary. He seems to know his time is short. His malignity and cunning, his Protean aspects, are adapted, if possible, to deceive the very elect; and were it not that God yet reigneth we might well cry, We are undone.

This brings us to consider in the third place the manner in which we are to contend for the faith.

(Conclusion next week.)

To the Editor of the Christian Messenger.

We do not remember to have seen the article to which the following refers, and think that number of the Record could not have reached us. We have no knowledge of the circumstances which have called it forth. As it contains nothing of an offensive nature we give it insertion, merely to oblige the writer, a respectable gentleman. It might perhaps to some parties seem more appropriate for it to have appeared through another channel, but it may possibly reach those for whom it is intended equally well through our columns.

Sir.—A few days ago, I saw a copy of a periodical containing a letter touching the affairs of the congregation of Musquodoboit in connection with the Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces, to which I wish to give a passing notice, not because it contains a statement of facts demanding explanation, but for its spirit of meddling in things with which the writer had no concern, much less a right to drag officially before the public. I refer to "Presbyter," in the Kirk Record.

He undertakes to put the church right as to the merits of a transaction long past; indirectly judging of the procedure of a Church Court in reference to Musquodoboit congregation, and in which court are men of uprightness and integrity, equal at least to "Presbyter," better acquainted with Church order, and, I imagine, more thoroughly conversant with the necessities of the congregation, and the circumstances out of which arose the dissolution of connection with the former incumbent. At the same time he arraigns the integrity of the congregation, and on the testimony of "outsiders." Delicacy to a sister church should have prevented "Presbyter" from stirring up the slumbering embers of strife, and irritation, fast dying out, even if there were no higher motive. Proper feeling should have suggested "non-intrusion," even if he had the means of forming a correct opinion, which I, unhesitatingly, assert he had not, and could not have, without access to the records of Presbytery; and his own reference to "outsiders" says little for the spirit of justice.

The whole transaction was the procedure of a Presbytery of a church, over whose action I had no right to sit in judgment, much less parade that action in *ex parte* light before the public, dragging back to-day the ghostly skeletons of lurid feuds. There are men, yet living, who cannot but feel aggrieved by this flippant, wholesale condemnation of their conduct, by, to use his own language, an anonymous "nobody." There is now in the congregation (the immediate successor of the Pastor removed) a laborious minister, on reference to whom "Presbyter's" expression of "something new," would lead to the suspicion, either, that the principles of the people had deteriorated, or, that, the existing