

Our Message and Our Mission.

Notes of the Address Delivered by Rev. E. M. Keirstead, D. D., on His Retirement from Office as President of the Baptist Convention of the Maritime Provinces for 1897-98. Pronounced at Amherst, Aug. 20th, 1898.

Mr. President and Members of the Convention:

It is a joy to greet one another in our annual meeting. If as your officer I express this joy at the renewal of fellowship on the part of those who annually gather in Convention, I shall speak with your especial concurrence when I say that it gives us delight to welcome again two of our devoted band of missionaries, the Rev. George Churchill and Mrs. Churchill, who for twenty-five years have, with great fidelity and earnestness, amid keenest trials, ably represented us abroad as they have given the gospel in its purity to the Telugus of India. We all trust that these fellow workers may find help and refreshment among us and we assure them of our continued esteem and of our appreciation of the sacrifices, toils and cares of the brethren and sisters who as our missionaries are zealously laboring in the regions beyond. The Lord bless them all.

For several years your Presidents have forcibly addressed you on the special work of the Convention. If I depart to some extent from the immediate work of the body in its several departments, it must not be inferred that I consider the problems of our Convention in connection with our educational and missionary enterprises have been solved. The future of Home Mission work in these provinces and the strengthening of our work in India, the place of our Associations in our arrangements for our denominational activities, the questions relating to the ordination of ministers, the office and service of the individual church, will demand your best deliberation. Then, while the praiseworthy efforts of the body to increase its funds for the educational equipment required has already met with deserved success, enough remains to complete the task to call for earnest endeavors. As, however, many of these subjects will come before you in connection with reports of Boards and Committees, I wish to use the time allotted to this address in discussing the relation of our body to the Divine Message and the Divine Mission with which it is charged.

Apart from the direct, supernatural work of the Spirit it seems to me a denomination's power may be said to be the power of its message multiplied by its personality. This is what Paul says to Timothy, "Take heed to thyself and to thy teaching. Continue in these things; for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee." As to the personality and individuality of our body, if we may so speak of it, there is already provision for its growth. As in other countries, Baptist principles bear fruit among us. Each member believes in Christ for himself; each has his life with God; each bears his measure of responsibility and so there is formed a marked individuality on the part of many. Then the common bond of an open Bible whence we draw the nourishment for our spiritual life, the common observance of the ordinances of Christ, the voluntary contributions for Christian effort, the uniting force of Christian literature, all tend to give unity to this part of the commonwealth of Israel. The increase of numbers, intelligence, wealth, social and political influence, the manifold activities of our churches give mind and character so that our denomination may be said to have a somewhat marked personality. Whatever message, therefore, it seeks to utter or whatever work it tries to do will have the impulse of a body that is able to receive the large gifts of Christ and to impart them to the world.

Now this organization assembled today, strengthened by united effort for more than fifty years, is not, it seems to me, a mere aggregation of private societies or clubs fitted to discuss some topics of general interest and unite in some efforts for the welfare of mankind. It is more. It is an assembly that holds direct relation, by its intelligent faith and its loyal obedience, to the God over all, blessed forever; by this relation it possesses a divine message which it is bound to declare and the declaring of which gives it existence, life, influence; and it has a divine mission to the world in which it lives.

These propositions are, I believe, warranted by the words of our Lord in his great prayer, when He said, "The words which thou gavest me I have given them," and, "As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world." True these words were spoken to the first disciples, but as He prayed not only for them but for those who should believe on Him through their word, that is for us, so the message and the mission are ours also.

Now when our Lord says, "The words which thou gavest me I have given them," He gives us assurance that words have been given to men which are in their origin and communication eminently divine.

Into the depths of that mysterious process and transaction wherein the Father gave words to the Son I cannot of course enter, and therefore cannot ask you to follow me in seeking to unfold its nature. Something profound there surely was in it. Back of all that is phenomenal is God. And in Him, the source of all things, originated

this message—our Lord Jesus Christ says this. What deep significance in that. Let your thoughts go back as far as possible—to Him who originates, sustains, controls all things—and in that Being is the origin of this message. There is sublimity to begin with, and a basis in harmony with our deepest thinking—truth, like nature, is from a personal God.

But these are not only divine in origin but also in their communication. "The words which thou gavest me I have given them," says Jesus. Here again we are on holy ground. Of old the prophets came with their messages saying, "The word of the Lord came unto me," but now the Word Himself, the *Logos*, the Manifested God, comes and delivers His own messages.

On one side He was in heaven; on the other side He was among men. On the one side He was divine and received directly from the Father the words of truth and life; on the other side He was human and unfolded to His disciples the words that had been given Him. So we have divine teaching, divine in origin, divine in communication.

So, brethren, we do not get all our truth by induction and from the lips of our fellow men. We indeed prize most highly the wisdom that comes from every human source, whether we derive it from the study of words of a language long unspoken that tells of our ancestors of primeval days, or from the evidence of buried cities now recovered, or the teaching of men of science of whom the world was not worthy, or from the heart songs of generations that have faded away like streaks of morning mist, or the philosophic musings of Plato and kindred spirits. We are profoundly grateful for the books bequeathed us, the precious life blood of master spirits treasured up unto a life beyond.

But it is ours who boast a spiritual descent to lift our eyes away from this stream of knowledge up to Him who sits in the heavens, and to behold in Him the real source of our highest and best knowledge—that which is universal. "In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," so the light about inspiration has deep meaning. The "words" of which our Lord speaks include those He had already spoken; and as He promised the inspiration of the Spirit to guide those disciples into "all the truth," I understand the words coincide in extent with the New Testament—the inheritance of our race indeed.

"And so the Word hath breath and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds,
In loveliness of perfect deeds
More strong than all poetic thought,
Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
Or builds the house, or digs the grave,
And those wild eyes that watch the wave
In roarings round the coral reef."

As to the doctrines taught in this Book, I cannot even name them, so limited is the time; but we all believe it contains the religion necessary for men of all generations. But this truth is to be apprehended only with all saints; it is to be developed in its application by the disciples under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Its apprehension by men has been marked by distinct stages. It is thus the task of the disciples of any age to unfold the truths of revelation into the thoughts of their own time. It is not enough to speak a message which is the result of the religious thinking of a former generation in the words and forms of thought of that generation. The words of Christ are spirit and life and to have genuine power they must come in the thought of today. We must think with our time and for it, so that the message may not only come unto us, but also come out from us winged with whatever earnestness and power we possess. We are to receive of this divine message which is life and give it to our fellow-men. Every Christian thus mirrors his Lord however imperfectly.

"Only that which made us,
Meant us to be mightier by and by,
Set the sphere of all the boundless
Heavens within the human eye,

"Sent the shadow of Himself the boundless,
Through the human soul;
Boundless inward in the atom,
Boundless outward in the whole."

The Christian has his value by virtue of the message he is thus able to bear. As the thousand tiny stalks of the field of wheat tremble under the weight of grain they bear and fear, so to speak, as they are blown by the winds lest their strength will fail before the life of the past harvests which they bear, and which has the promise and potency of all succeeding harvests, has been gathered, so we may tremble under our responsibility to this message, which is the essence of all past centuries, and which has in it the promise and potency of the life of generations yet to be.

Our work is not done until our message has been uttered. "We must know that our mission is to supply thought that shall enrich the life-blood of the world."

Ruskin mourns that with all our machineries of civilization, our railways, telegraph, newspapers, and societies, we have so few thoughts of worth, so little of life worth sending over these means of communications. It is well for us to build houses of worship, to organize for service, to equip our churches; but of what use is all this if we have no great message, no deep knowledge of

God, no currents of lofty life, no streams to make glad the city of God? If we know our opportunity we shall not want for power thus to develop our truth.

A great student of Comparative Religion tells: The religions of Persia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, have come to an end; having shared the fate of the national civilization of which each was a part. The religions of China, Islam, Buddha and Judaea, have all been arrested and remain unchanged and seemingly unchangeable. Christianity alone of all human religions, seems to possess the power of keeping abreast with the advancing civilization of the world. As the child's soul grows with his body, so that when he becomes a man it is a man's soul and not a child's, so the Gospel of Jesus continues the soul of all human culture. It continually drops its old forms and takes new ones.

Christianity blossoms out into modern science, literature, art, children who indeed often forget their mother and are ignorant of their source, but which are still fed from her breasts and partake of her life. Christianity, the spirit of faith, hope and love, is the deep fountain of modern civilization. Its inventions are for the many not for the few. Its science is not hoarded, but diffused. It elevates the masses, who everywhere else have been trampled down. The friend of the people, it tends to free schools, a free press, a free government, the abolition of slavery, war, vice, and the melioration of society."

II. The Divine Mission.

Let me turn now from this divine message to the divine mission. As the Father sent me into the world, so I also sent them into the world.

Into all the meaning of this passage I will not try to enter, but trace a few points only in reference to our immediate purpose. As He prayed for us so He sends us into the world.

1. It is a fact we are sent by Christ. If it were not for this as soon as we have believed He would take us home. When Paul was converted he was on the way to Damascus to persecute the Christians. He asked what the Lord would have him do, and he was told to go into the same city only now he was to preach Christ. So is every Christian sent of God into the world to bear witness for Christ.

2. As Christ was sent into the world to become one with us, so we are to be one with our fellow men. How deeply He took on him our nature—the incarnate God—bearing our nature forever, taking part in our shame, hanging there on the cross with us, one with us for better or worse—all worse. Now of course it is not in our power to give ourselves in this unique way in which Jesus gave Himself. But He does let us follow in his steps. When Tyndall visited Carlyle, as the great seer was 'turning again home' and asked for some final word, Carlyle said: "Give yourself royally." That is the message of our best literature:

"Nearer in hold of God who gives,
Than of his tribes that take,
I must believe."

3. Christians are sent into the world to exhibit the typical moral life of the world. Not from the teachings of science, valuable as these are, but from men and women moved by the divine spirit and enlightened by the divine word, must come the ethical life of the world. The springs of life are ethical, and Jesus gives a new and divine impulse, as well as a new ideal.

4. Christians are to exhibit something of 'the divine. This is to some a hard saying. They can take a few particles of matter about them, and so unite them as to make an explosion that has almost superhuman power; they can create a current that seems next thing to omnipotent, so near are divine forces to the control of man. The poets can see the vision of God in the flower, in the "crannied wall," yet many can see nothing of God in God's own children. Still the work of God is seen by anointed eyes, and is always effective. Christ sent forth the apostles who builded better than they knew, "who built the Nineteenth Century." And Christ's power was not exhausted in the apostolic age. We have a divine message and a divine mission.

5. We have not applied this message fully to all the conditions of life of our time. The significance to us of the demands of socialism, and kindred doctrines, is that we should seek to put an eternal reason back of all organization of society and every administration of justice.

We have not developed the doctrine of God too fully; but we have left almost untouched large portions of the doctrine of man; we have not had too much theology, but too little of sociology; we have done right in preaching love to God, but have not set forth enough the love required to man; we have need of the best devotional standards, but still more perhaps of ethical standards with a revelation of ethical power; justification by faith is necessary, but justice among men is most desirable also; we have our hearts inspired at sight of the preacher's sacred desk, but we must learn also that the merchant's desk is sacred; we know that men must be saved as individuals, but society as such must also be pervaded with saving energy of truth; we have, as some are pointing out, the Saviourship of Jesus, but we need to complete that gracious doctrine, the Kingship of Christ to preach; we must have the best heart worship,