

OLIVE TREES

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3.

QUESTIONS OF THE HOUR.

THE CHURCH'S POWER.

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While Christ was in the Mount of Transfiguration a father brought his son, who was possessed with a devil, to His disciples whom He had left below, and they tried to cast him out, but could not. The disappointment of the father was not so great as the humiliation of the disciples. And when the Master had come down and performed the miracle and dismissed the assembly, the disciples asked Him why they had failed. His answer was, they had lost their faith. Their surprise at the explanation was greater than their chagrin at their defeat.

I. *The Church Has Been Endued with Power from Above.* It is a mistake to suppose that the real power of Pentecost was local and temporary. The miracle-working power ceased with the Apostles. But this was only to confirm the divinity of their message, and is of the same value to us as to them. But the real sources of power abide.

1 The gospel of salvation by the death and resurrection of the Son of God. Paul could stand before Rome, which stood at the climax of law and statesmanship, of language and culture, of art and amusement, of wealth and luxury, and say: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to all that believe." It is God's enterprise. He

only knows what is necessary to satisfy the breach of His law and vindicate His moral government. He only can bear the load of infinite guilt. He alone can open the gates of heaven which sin had closed, and close the gates of hell which sin had opened. Only the blood of God's Son can cleanse the polluted sinner. Only the life of God can restore the soul dead in sin. The gospel has the same power now that it had when Paul said: "I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Peter's words are true in Boston to-day, as then in Jerusalem: "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we *must* be saved." But the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are a revelation of the history, nature, ground and purpose of redemption by the death of the Son of God. "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me."

Rev. Calvin B. Hulbert, D. D., in the *Bibliotheca Sacra* for January, 1899, has an article on "The Nature of the Divine Indwelling," in which he contends that as the Spirit and the word are said to dwell in the believer, as he is regenerated by the Spirit and by the word, as he is sanctified by the Spirit and by the word, and as our Lord said, "The words that I speak unto you they are Spirit and they are life," it therefore follows that the Holy Spirit

think the Professorship in Biblical Literature and a congregation beyond the Walkill possible and eligible. . . . We hope to see you among us before winter." But he withstood their appeals, and the Lord blessed His servant and rewarded his fidelity. He was able to close a statement of preparation for the second communion in W. Cornwallis (May, 1845) with these words: "The Lord has done great things for us. Let His name be blessed for ever more. Amen."

Perhaps nothing contributed more to Mr. Sommerville's success, in the way of means and instrumentality, than his resistless logic. When at college one of the professors said to him: "William, you never open your mouth, even in prayer, but you begin to reason." This natural gift, carefully cultivated, made him a master in the art of reasoning. Fine specimens of dialectic acumen may be found in his "Exclusive Use of the Psalms of David in Worship," "Dissertations on the Nature and Administration of the Ordinance of Baptism," and "Rule of Faith," a lecture delivered before the Protestant Alliance at Halifax, N. S. Not unfrequently, when other denominations felt the need of some one to defend the truth against false teachers who had crept in among them, Mr. Sommerville would be invited to act as their champion. On these occasions he could not always resist the temptation to make them feel that they were not fully loyal to the truth themselves. Once at the close of an address in which he had demolished the strongholds of the enemy, he quietly remarked, looking at the baffled forces before him: "You remind me of woodpeckers; they never attack a sound tree." The remark was a two-edged sword. He always laid great stress on the early implanting of truth in the mind as a safeguard against error.

I cannot tell how many were led under

his ministry to espouse the principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. But they were not a few. His great desire, however, was not so much to add members to his own congregation as to leaven the community with the truth. In this he was eminently successful. As a preacher and an educationist his influence is felt to-day not only in the county where he lived, but throughout Nova Scotia and in other Provinces of Canada. Many in all professions will cheerfully testify that their intelligent acquaintance with the truth and their very position in society are the direct or indirect results of his teaching.

On Saturday morning, the 28th of September, 1878, at Somerset, N. S., the end came, and after fifty-three years in the gospel ministry, forty seven of them as a pioneer missionary, this faithful servant of Christ, like a tired child, quietly closed his eyes and passed within the gate.

OUR DEBT TO OUR YOUTH.*

Some of you may remember the dedication of her child made by Saint Elizabeth of Hungary in Kingsley's "Saint's Tragedy," as she brings him to baptism:

"What Thou hast given me, Lord, here I tender,
Life of my own life, the fruit of my love;
Take him, but leave him me, till I shall render
Count of the precious charge, kneeling
above."

What a grand thought! Our children must be regarded as dedicated ones, holy to the Lord, consecrated to Him, and our conscious, deliberate, constant aim for them must be fixed on the eternal within the veil, on the treasure that fadeth not away. Oh, that the idea were firmly established in the hearts of all parents that our children are really not ours, but His; His to train, His to keep, His to leave us, His to take back to Himself, the true, the

* Spoken at a popular meeting connected with Synod of Reformed Presbyterian Church at Walton, N. Y., June 8, 1898.

Heavenly Father! How keenly sensitive we would become of our personal responsibility to God for our children, of our duties to them!

But I am not to speak to-night on our debt to our youth "as parents," if I rightly understand the subject assigned to me; I am to speak to you on our debt to our youth "as ministers and elders of the Reformed Presbyterian Church." The Church of Christ spreads its wings over the whole body of the faithful, but in the softest and tenderest manner broods the young. A great trust is committed to the Church; every child is ever attended with the pleasing commission, "Bear a part in guarding him into the way of right, duty, and eternal felicity." None will, therefore, deny that it is the duty of every individual member of the Church to do something, and all he or she can do to discharge the debt that rests upon the whole Church, but certainly a greater responsibility rests upon the officers of the Church, whom I see before me to-night.

You can pay your debt to the youth of the Reformed Presbyterian Church:

I. By instructing the young. The tendency of the age is, I think, too much in the direction of letting things take their course, and trusting in self-development and calling it a trust in Providence. Definite, deliberate, religious training is thought too little of, partly from indolence and indifference, partly from a sort of fatalism, and partly also, I think, from mistaken views of the permanence of natural character and the inheritance of features and instincts which are treated as if they must not be interfered with. Children, I believe, may be made almost anything of, if you begin early, work patiently, train wisely, and pray earnestly. Now, as a rule, Covenanters are faithful to their duty to instruct their children in the scriptures, to "bring them up in the nurture and admo-

nition of the Lord." The "Shorter Catechism" is taught, I believe, in almost every Covenanter home, and the "Larger Catechism" and the "Confession of Faith" in many homes, so that sound theological ideas are instilled into the minds of Covenanter boys and girls. Still the ministers and elders must add to this "instruction in the home" the public instruction in the church. Young Christians should derive knowledge from the public services of God's house, and they must, therefore, attend the services as regularly as possible. Teach the youth at home, from the pulpit and at all other occasions, that the preaching service is the most important of all. It is right and profitable to attend the Sabbath school, it is good and helpful to go to the young people's prayer meeting; but if our youth can go to but one service, the preaching service is the place for them. Let the sermons always contain some food for the young!

The Sabbath school has already been spoken of by another speaker, so that I need not say much about it and its great opportunities for religious instruction. Teach less sacred geography and history, less about the ancient customs and manners, and force home the truths of personal religion! The Lutheran and Episcopal Churches have special (confirmation) classes where the minister gives instruction in Christian life and doctrine. Is there any reason why we should not have the pastor's young people's class to instruct our youth with the definite aim of church membership in view? Gather your young people into such classes, my brethren, and instruct them in the Scriptures, in the glorious history and in the grand principles of the Covenanter Church. In other words, create denominational enthusiasm. "Denominational enthusiasm is akin to family zeal." It is nothing else but love to one's denomination, the persuasion that

the holdings of the denomination come near to divine declaration. Mark well, I do not claim absolute perfection for our beloved Church, nor infallibility, but I claim that we are nearer to the teaching of our Lord than any other denomination. The conviction of the truth of this claim caused me to become a member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and, I say it not boastingly, but humbly thankful for God's help, it strengthens me against the temptations of interdenominational fellowship, of which we hear so much at the present time. "The evil influence of attending services where hymns of human composition are used!" I personally have never felt it, because, while the sounds of the hymns and the tones of the organ reach my ears, my heart is filled with pity for those poor Christians whose eyes are blinded to the whole truth as we have it. Create denominational enthusiasm in the hearts of our youth, and there will be no danger in interdenominational fellowship!

II. Organize the young and give them opportunity for development. There should be a young people's prayer meeting in every congregation, under the full supervision of the session. If you make this a meeting, not chiefly for instruction, but for communion with Christ and for the strengthening of Christian graces by expression, it will become a link between the Sabbath school and the Church, and will be a source of good. Let the pastor and elders attend the meeting as regularly as possible! It is the experience of the past that to stay away altogether is better than occasional attendance. And, my friends, do not try to dictate to the young people, but give practical instruction! Make short remarks, and let their burden be the invitation to accept Christ *now*.

When we have young people's prayer meetings in every congregation let us organize "Presbyterial Young People's

Societies" as far as possible, yea even, were it possible, a Synodical Society. Yet let us not organize these for the purpose of selfish seclusion from other denominations, but that in large meetings of our own youth we may kindle the fire of denominational enthusiasm, so that we may be able to bear testimony to our distinctive principles with enlarged strength in the great interdenominational gatherings!

III. Deal justly with the youth. There are to be discovered in the Christian these two paramount virtues—holiness and love. In the officer of the church, holiness, through natural temperament, through circumstances, through temptations of the devil, might be excited to a degree of severity, impatient of the common follies, frailties, and infirmities of youth. In such a case the heart of the young, turning with abhorrence from religion clothed in the garb of severity, will readily open to the fascinations of the world. On the other hand, love may be perverted to licentious indulgence, so that elders and ministers, themselves grounded in the faith of Christ, permit the irregularities of the youth to abound and suffer them to go on unchecked in the course of evil, like Eli of old, until the frailties and vices of youth, hardened into the crimes of age, leave no hope of mercy behind. If you are too severe or too indulgent with the youth of the Church they will soon seek their pleasures as far away from you as possible and will be lost to the Church. Treat them, therefore, as reasonable beings, not as irresponsible children!

Encourage the young in every way possible! Do not try to keep them in seclusion; it is impossible, and will cause a great loss to the Church! Do not let all your teaching be negative—"Don't do this; don't do that." Develop the young on the positive side and give them sound and pure and healthy tastes! There should be

no scolding, no hint of blame, unless there is sure ground to go upon. For, if the young are stung with a sense of injustice, they are apt to think that they may as well do the things with which they are credited!

And lastly, let your hearts glow with love to the youth of the Church and with affectionate gratitude to God for the pleasing and solemn commission He gave to the ministers and elders—the commission to guide the youth into the way of right, of duty, and of eternal happiness.

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SYSTEMATIC BENEFICENCE.

SCRIPTURE LESSON.

How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God!—Mark 10: 23.

How hardly! Thanks be for the adverb “hardly.” It is loaded with a double value. It warns against a dreadful danger, and it sheds a gracious light upon a perilous path. How hardly! Not altogether impossible, but exceedingly difficult! The camel *can* go through the needle’s eye (the side gate for passengers on foot), but it must have all the burdens removed, get down on its knees, push with all its might, and endure a *hard* squeeze. Possible, but by no means easy.

How thankful are we that in heaven shall be found princely Caleb, and Barzillai, and Barnabas, and Nicodemus, and Joseph, and a multitude of others who were intrusted with earth’s wealth, and with active mind, large heart, and heroic will, nobly guided the industries of the world! Their riches could not shut them out of the Kingdom of God, for in God, not in gold, was their trust.

Wealth in itself can exclude none from heaven. It is a gift, a trust, a power, to be used for God and with great results for good. The danger arises, not directly

from itself, but indirectly from its effects upon the mind. The possession of riches rapidly breeds thought. How shall they be handled? How increased? How secured? How enjoyed? The mind becomes absorbed. It has little room for God or aught else. Religion dies from want of place and breath; it is choked to death, like the good seed with the luxuriant thorns.

The Lord does not admonish men against acquiring riches. It is as much the duty of those who have been gifted with business qualities to be wealthy as it is the duty of him who has good digestion to be healthy. Let each use the powers God has given, and increase in the possessions that come therefrom. The world needs the strong men that can get riches aright, and use them aright. The Church needs them, the Missions need them. They are very necessary on this little planet. And God has wealth to give them. The silver and the gold are His. The great branches of industry also are His. Manufacturing, commerce, transportation, agriculture; these are His industries for the supply of the people. He therefore needs the mighty ones of earth to employ His capital in His work. And we do not know any reason why He is unwilling to distribute the capital largely among His own people, except it be that He finds not grace and conscience strong enough to bear the responsibility; accordingly He distributes the wealth where there is neither conscience nor grace to be lost.

There is no admonition against getting rich. But the rich are warned against the prevalent and terrible effect of riches upon the mind. Let them be ever on their watch against that baneful, fateful “trust.” No trust so injurious, so much to be dreaded as the “trust” in riches. It robs God of His glory, and despoils both rich and poor. Let wealth be used with a