

# REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

## FIRST GENERAL PRESBYTERIAN COUNCIL

*CONVENED AT EDINBURGH, JULY 1877.*

WITH RELATIVE DOCUMENTS

BEARING ON THE AFFAIRS OF THE COUNCIL, AND THE STATE OF THE  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

Printed by Direction of the Council.

EDITED BY REV. J. THOMSON, A.M.

EDINBURGH: THOMAS AND ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE,  
PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN, AND TO THE UNIVERSITY.

EDINBURGH: THOMAS AND ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE,  
PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN, AND TO THE UNIVERSITY.

1877.

with the constitution of the Council itself. The Committee also had under consideration the remit from the Council as to a motion which might be submitted for adoption as a practical finding following upon the discussion of the fundamental principles of Presbyterianism. The Committee are of opinion that the exceedingly able and valuable reasonings under this head may properly be accepted by the Council, but that it does not appear needful or even desirable that any formal motion accepting or approving of these principles should be passed by the Council.

"As to the order of Business for to-day the Committee recommend that the motion submitted by Mr. Taylor Innes be taken first, and that after that the printed programme be entered upon. The Committee further recommend that the Rev. Dr. Plumer be requested to address the Council at the meeting this evening on the mission work of the southern Presbyterian Church among the coloured population of the Southern States. They also recommend that a Committee be now appointed to collect the general statistics of the Presbyterian Churches throughout the world, and to report at the next meeting of Council."

The Council having accepted this Report, adopted its recommendations, but declined to give leave to Mr. Taylor Innes to prefix his proposed preamble.

The motion of Mr. Taylor Innes being thus in order, was submitted without the preamble to the meeting, and adopted unanimously, and it was remitted to the Business Committee to nominate the Committee therein appointed.

#### COMMUNICATION AND GIFT FROM DR. DUFF.

Dr. BLAIKIE (Clerk) said he had to intimate that he had received a letter from the grandson of Dr. Duff, in which he said that, being unable to be present at the meetings of the Council, Dr. Duff had published an Address as his contribution to the discussion on missions. Copies of this Address had been forwarded by Dr. Duff to the members. The Address formed a little work called "Missions: The chief end of the Christian Church." Dr. Blaikie added that they had a longer communication from Dr. Duff which would be presented to-morrow, because it bore upon the subject of Foreign Missions; but it seemed desirable that this communication should be made to-day, in order that members might find for themselves their copy of the book

mentioned, so that they might have an opportunity of looking into its pages before the discussion on missions came on.

#### DAILY PRAYER MEETING.

Dr. BLAIKIE intimated that a daily prayer meeting was held from 10 to 10.30 morning, in one of the class rooms in the quadrangle adjoining the hall.

#### THE ANTIQUARIAN MUSEUM.

Dr. BLAIKIE stated that a letter had been received, on the part of the Society of Antiquaries, intimating that the Antiquarian Museum would be opened that day and to-morrow, as well as the other days during the meetings, to members of the Council on presentation of their tickets. The Museum was not usually open to the public on these days, except on certain conditions.

The following Paper was read by Dr. HOWARD CROSBY of New York, on

#### PREACHING, AND THE TRAINING OF PREACHERS,

INCLUDING THE RELATION OF PREACHING TO WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS AND OTHER PARTS OF CHURCH WORK.

THE word *preaching*, as representing the verbs *κηρύσσειν* and *εὐαγγελίζεσθαι*, strictly speaking, is applicable only to the proclamation of the gospel to a lost world, but the present use of the word makes it also a representative of the verb *διδάσκειν*, and so applicable to the continuous teaching of the pastor or teacher. Indeed, this is probably the idea conspicuously present to the mind in the modern use of the word. The Church of Christ certainly has these two distinct offices to perform,—to extend its bounds by presenting the glad tidings to those who are without, and to edify itself by means of the written Word; and those who represent the Church, especially in these two several offices, require different qualifications, and must use different methods. The evangelist meets an ignorant and often rebellious audience. He must deal in first principles, and have a ready wit to encounter and overcome the various forms of opposition. The pastor, on the other hand, has before him a people who know God's Word with more or less proficiency, and who are ready and desirous to know more. These docile hearts form the bulk of his audience, while here and there

among them there may be an untutored or sceptical mind.

It is the work of the *pastor*, as a preacher, which we propose to consider in this paper.

We may very readily divide the subject into three parts, having reference respectively to the aim he has in view; the means he has to use; and the manner in which he is to use them.

*First*, The *aim* he has in view. This aim should be no other than that for which the Head of the Church commissioned him, and this we find clearly stated in Eph. iv. 11, 12: "And he gave some to be apostles, and some to be prophets, and some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, with a view to perfect the saints unto a ministerial work, unto a building-up of the body of Christ." All the forms of Christian ministry, then, have the one aim: the rearing of the spiritual and only true Church of Christ, to its full proportions, as they shall appear in the final day of glory. The evangelists gather in from without, and the pastors and teachers use the material thus gathered, with whatever the Church itself furnishes, in strengthening, enlarging, beautifying, and unifying the whole structure. We have interpreted this passage of the *spiritual* Church; first, because the body of Christ is a spiritual body, according to the Scripture (1 Cor. xiii. 27), "Ye are the body of Christ," where no reference is had to an outward organisation; and secondly, because the perfecting of God's saints or holy ones is a spiritual process, the author of which is the Holy Spirit, whose work cannot be marked by man-drawn lines. The moment we lose sight of this spiritual character of the Church, we introduce other aims than the perfecting of the saints and the edifying of the body of Christ. We then strive to establish forms; we seek to exalt parties; we magnify trifles; and the builders, instead of working together to complete the common structure, are tempted away into by-plays and fancies that often even exhibit antagonisms. Where there should be a going-up of the walls of Jerusalem, with a united heart to the work, there will be something of a Babel confusion and frustration. The great errors which have so rent and torn Christendom, and brought reproach on the name of Christ, have largely arisen from substituting a formal and external for a spiritual and invisible Church. The Papal enormity has all its power from this source, and exactly as Protestant believers have conformed to this vicious principle, have they lost

the health and vigour of normal Christianity. The sanctification of believers is a process, and not a new birth, as is conversion. The young plant is to be watched and tended. There is the blade and the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. Pastors and teachers are God's husbandmen to care for this. This is God's order for bringing the crop to the harvest. There is no short cut to the desired end, as some would have it. There must be experience, and experience takes time. No man can wish himself or believe himself into the results of experience. His effort will only end in a vain conceit, and put him out of the order of a true growth. The two favourite symbols of the spiritual life, as given us in the Scriptures, are the building mounting higher and higher toward completion, and the plant growing larger and larger from the seed. Now, this spiritual life, thus advancing, must not be confounded with aesthetic and intellectual culture. In this way Christianity is confounded with civilisation. While it is very true that spiritual life must civilise men, it is very far from truth that civilisation Christianises men. Greece, in her Periclean day of art and philosophy and literature, was a debased nation, or cluster of nations, in her religion. The age of Italian culture under the Medicis, was an age of rampant vice; and the Olympus of Louis Quatorze displayed very few features of Christianity. The aims of the Christian preacher is not to civilise man, however naturally such a result may follow his faithful activity. He does not teach agriculture or the fine arts. He wishes man to receive God's revealed truth, which makes wise unto salvation. He deals altogether with that truth, because he acts simply as God's messenger and agent, to build up the soul in godliness or godlikeness. Many a Christian minister has apparently forgotten that man was a sinner, and needed to be saved from his sins, and that he was ignorant and needed to be instructed in righteousness, and accordingly has ceased to perfect the saint, while he gave his attention to adorn the citizen. Perhaps the most insidious enemy of the truth is in action when culture takes the place of religion, and the minister of Christ becomes the social or political philosopher. As against, then, the mere establishment of ecclesiastical organisation, or the mere regard for man's temporal welfare, the aim of the Christian preacher is the development of the life of Christ in the individual man, and so in the community. For this end only he has

received the commission from his Lord, and in this aim only can he expect the Lord's presence: "Go ye and disciple all nations" is the commission; "Lo, I am with you alway" is the promise. We cannot disjoin the two. The discipling to Christ is clearly defined as promoting and maintaining the union of branches to the vine—a life union by which much fruit is developed through the vine's force. "I am the vine (says our Lord), ye are the branches . . . severed from me ye can do nothing." "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." Bringing souls to Christ, and confirming them in Christ, this is discipling, this is the Church's work through its representatives especially wrought, and in this work the Lord's prospering presence is pledged. The pastor's especial part of this work is the confirmation of the discipleship, and to this end his preaching is to be mainly directed. In this duty we consider,

*Secondly*, The means he has to use. As the end is a spiritual one, the means are neither material nor carnal. The use of physical force to build up the Church of Christ might be treated simply as an absurdity, if, alas! the theory had not crystallised itself into fearful practice, staining the earth with the blood of its victims, and bringing the name of Christianity into reproach and contempt before the world. While Protestants are not likely to consider the sword as a means of grace, although in the past their record is by no means a clean one, yet, even among Protestants, who would loathe the thought of a propagandism *vi et armis*, there may be a violence of public opinion, a tyranny of dogma, which would make uniform creed and practice at the expense of conviction. Such a method of evangelisation has the spirit, if not the letter, of physical force. It is a disguised form of Popery; it is eminently human, and not divine. If man's will is to be enfranchised, it is the truth alone that can make it free, and not a majority power by threat or otherwise. So all appeals to partisan feeling, to national pride, to personal advantage, to philosophic symmetry, are but the use of carnal weapons, which are never mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin and error. To bring a soul into union with Christ, or to establish a soul in this heavenly alliance, is so exotic to all natural thought, that nothing can be found in the natural apparatus of man for the work. God only can furnish the means, as he alone has revealed the aim. His Word is the

spiritual weapon. It is "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It is the entrance of that Word that giveth light. It is that Word which is the truth that purifies. It is that Word which regenerates and makes wise unto salvation. It is that Word in which the Spirit dwells, and with which the Spirit acts upon the heart of man. There is no other agency which shares the honour with the Word. It is the only lamp for our feet, the only light for our path. It is a jealous Word, as God is a jealous God. It will have no partner in making wise the simple, and in converting the soul. It is from God. All else is from man. It is that Word, therefore, which the preacher is to wield, in the administration of his high office. All truth is susceptible of illustration, arrangement, and comparison, and can be pressed on the attention by argument drawn from its own character. This fact suggests the true range of the preacher's addresses to his people. He is never to lose sight, or let his hearers lose sight, of the Divine revelation. Each effort of his mind and tongue is only to make God's truth more apparent in its relations and applications. If he turn to erect a philosophic scheme, the result of his own speculations, he is no longer a preacher of God's Word. If he become a mere counsellor of worldly wisdom, though he may be a very useful citizen, he has laid aside his distinctive calling. If he seek to amuse and delight his audience with elaborate rhetoric, he has abandoned his holy work. Whatever will turn the attention of his hearers from God's Word to man's word is false preaching, however favourably it may be considered by the community. Very different from all this is the fact that the preacher must use his tones, his look, his action, in full sympathy with his theme. The rhetoric, as well as the philosophy and wisdom, that legitimately flows from the power of God's Word in his own heart, partakes of the holiness of its source, and is not to be confounded with that wisdom of words which the Greeks seek after. The man who speaks God's Word is a living man with his own marked individuality, and not an automaton—and hence the forms of his deliverances must partake of his idiosyncrasy, but these are only forms, and if natural, or if even cultivated with godly purpose, will not mar or hinder, but rather fitly present the truth of

God. There appears often a virtual distrust of the power of God's Word in the preaching of our day. A Christian minister thinks he must meet the enemies of the truth on their ground and not on God's. He must argue with the Materialist or the Pantheist on purely scientific or metaphysical grounds. He must enter the lists as a geologist, a biologist, or a linguist. He must talk learnedly of the stone age, and pre-Adamite man, of protoplasm and natural selection. In order to this he must read all the philosophers and scientists, and become a cosmical Humboldt, while the book of God must be proportionately neglected. Well, Satan gets him down into the world's arena and is satisfied. He'll not convert souls or edify saints in that region, but he'll get many a commendation in the newspapers. We desire to protest against this perversion of preaching. We insist that the preacher is uttering a revelation from God, and not acting a philosopher of the schools. The Bible furnishes him with quite strong enough weapons for any form of infidelity. The battle can be fought out on the grand principles enunciated in the Word, and need never be carried into the detailed technics of a speciality. If a preacher knows his Bible well, he is ready for any opponent from Porphyry to Strauss. God made his revelation a complete one for its purpose of saving man, and there is a dishonouring of that revelation when the imaginations of men are deemed a necessary *addendum* to it. Men's affections, not their intellects, are the hindrances to God's truth, and accordingly if the contest can be brought into the intellectual field, and so relieve the heart from the pressure of spiritual truth, men are satisfied. Argumentation can go on for ever there with much plausibility, the unbeliever being perhaps more thoroughly acquainted with scientific facts which he can dexterously manage to his advantage, while his heart is unassailed and unmolested in its godlessness. The Bible is God's attack on the heart, and preachers lose all their vantage when they prefer man's attack on the intellect.

God's Scriptures being then the preacher's material, we consider, *Thirdly*, The manner in which he is to use them. First, negatively, in no way in which he may mar their force. Any putting of the man before his message is a detraction from the majesty of the Word. A direct egotism in dogmatic assertion or an indirect egotism in the parade of learning on the part of the preacher, is an obscuration of the Scriptures. His manner

of dealing with the sacred oracles should show him a receiver as well as a distributor. He should act as the disciples who took the loaves from the Master and distributed them to the multitude. His humility would point the hearer to the common source whence he as well as they derived their spiritual food. It is not what Dr. This or Professor That says which edifies the Church, but what the Holy Ghost saith; and every one who occupies the high position of a teacher in the Church should beware of a species of blasphemy, equally in uttering human *dicta* as the Word of God, and in uttering the Word of God as if it were human *dicta*. If egotism be a grievous fault in preaching, still more grievous is the transmutation of instruction to amusement. To rob the Word of its solemnity, to associate the great themes of sin, judgment, repentance, pardon, the Cross of Christ, and eternal life, with merriment and laughter, is an outrage upon the truth and a woe to the Church. The trifling jest and low wit that sometimes disgraces the pulpit must, we may believe, send a shudder through the ranks of the attending angels who watch the movements of the Church on earth. The eccentricities of the pulpit, as these buffooneries are euphemistically called, are but new wounds inflicted on our Lord in the house of his friends, causing deep grief to spiritual minds, and hardening careless hearts against all the approaches of the Divine grace. Loose-minded men flock to such preachers: and their churches are Sunday theatres, not for edification, but for titillation. A rough or careless manner in preaching may mar the delivery of the truth, suggesting a mere perfunctory performance, and so, we may say, taking the heart out of the service. This is an error all too common. The minister goes through his duty as though it were the turning of a crank or the working of a pump. His matter is most mechanically arranged, and his manner matches his arrangement. Many lean congregations derive their emaciated condition from this sort of tending. Instead of a shepherd, the minister is no more than a hireling, and careth not for the sheep. He gets his pay, and, then, alas! has to perform his task. Now, in direct opposition to all this, we say, secondly and positively, that the manner of the preacher should be earnest, natural, and solemn, and the preaching should be simple, clear, and fresh. Earnestness becomes the awful importance of the truth conveyed. Where eternal life or death is at stake, anything short of earnestness is mockery. A soul

alive to the transcendent character of Scripture themes will speak so that men will fain hear, and any personal defects of the speaker will be forgotten in the impression made by his fervency. The seraph has touched his lips with a live coal from off the altar, and that is enough. He has an eloquence far beyond the schools. Ay, the school eloquence he will avoid. He will shun it as the wisdom of this world, which is not to be mingled with the gospel of Christ. He will not be thinking how he should accent this syllable or round that sentence, ever looking in a glass as the elocutionists do, but he will be himself, while forgetting himself, and speak out of the fulness of a godly heart. This was Paul's way. This will be his way. His naturalness will thus be a necessary accompaniment of his earnestness. Equally necessary will be his solemnity. He speaks about God, before whom the angelic host will veil their faces, and he speaks about human sin and misery and agony, and he speaks about a cross all bloody with the drops of expiation, and amid such thoughts he can only be solemn. The Bible is a solemn book. It brings a solemn message. Its proclaimer must be a solemn preacher. His preaching will be simple, because he has to deal with youthful or untrained minds, and because the gospel in Jesus Christ is a simplicity (ἡ ἀπλότης ἢ εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν). It is adapted to the young and illiterate, because it concerns the development of the affections and not that of the noetic powers. Preaching above the heads of the people is correctly noted as a grievous error in the Christian ministry. The effect upon the congregation may be imposing, but it is not edifying. They may admire the learning of the preacher according to the law "*omne ignotum pro mirifico est*," but there is surely no pasture for the sheep of the Covenant in all this. For like reasons the preaching should be clear, not intertwined in its argument, or choked with tropes, or Delphic in its allusions, or careless in its connections. Clean definitions, plain arguments, incisive language should be used by a distinct and expressive voice. With this the preaching should be ever fresh. This can be the result only of faithful and continual study, a constant searching of the Word, and an eye trained to see its illustrations and adaptations. The preacher who depends upon old preparations becomes dull, monotonous, commonplace. To the thorough student of the Bible all nature and life become reflective of its glories, and the divine illumination thus penetrates the

universal frame of things, till everything gives forth a holy light. But it is only the Bible student, with heart sanctified in his work, who can so mount from nature to nature's God. Nature's infinite variety will minister to him in illustrating the Word. Moreover, a careful habit of study will place the truth itself in a hundred different phases and positions to the mind, the knowledge of which (like the varied views of a statue) gives roundness and relief to the subject.

Now, if our view of the aim, means, and manner of the preaching be correct, we can easily draw the conclusion that the *training* of preachers should be pre-eminently a Biblical training. The theological seminary should be a Bible school. Text-books on theology should have a secondary place to the books of exegesis. Exegetics should be a more prominent chair than systematic theology. Or rather, the systematic theology should be resolved into an exegetic theology, gathered and constructed by the students directly from the Hebrew and Greek under the skilled guidance of Biblical scholars. The great defect of some of our theological seminaries is that they do not teach the Bible. They teach about the Bible, but they do not teach the Bible itself. The power of the Church for the truth will be greatly increased when every minister goes forth to his high vocation thoroughly charged (like an electric battery) with the Word of God. In this brief paper I have been obliged to restrict myself to one line of thought, the most important line connected with the subject. Hence I have said nothing of the way to construct sermons, or the way to deliver them, whether from manuscript or not, or of the length of the sermon, or the kind, topical, textual, or expository; nor have I spoken of personal appearance and manner in the pulpit, or a preacher's mode of life among his people. All these subjects, full of interest and importance, and belonging to our theme, must be omitted by reason of the shortness of the time—twenty minutes—allowed to each paper. I cannot, however, conclude this sketch without emphasising the fact that for the preacher, as we define him, the first of all qualifications is a consecrated heart. If the aim, the means, and the manner of the preaching be spiritual, surely the preacher is to be a spiritual man. Heaven's message must come from one in close relations with Heaven. He that speaks the oracles must possess the *afflatus*. Any other agency will distort the trust. Let him that speaks for Christ see to it that his life is hid with Christ.