

# A CHARGE

DELIVERED TO THE

CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF QUEBEC,

AT

THE VISITATION

HELD IN

BISHOP'S COLLEGE, LENNOXVILLE,

JULY 5TH, 1864,

BY

JAMES WILLIAM, LORD BISHOP OF QUEBEC.

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Montreal :  
PRINTED BY JOHN LOVELL.  
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QUEBEC, April 20, 1864.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

It having been thought undesirable that the Synod should this year be called together, I propose instead thereof to hold a visitation at Lennoxville on Tuesday the 5th of July and the following days, when I have obtained the use of Bishop's College, where I trust that you will be my guest on the occasion.

That we may not only draw closer together in mutual knowledge through such personal intercourse, and strengthen ourselves by communion of Spirit, but may render our meeting directly conducive to improved efficiency in our calling, I have procured such papers to be written as will, I hope, elicit wholesome discussion. leaving behind it a fruitful deposit of enlarged experience, matured thought, and increased zeal.

The order of proceeding will be as follows:—

TUESDAY MORNING SESSION.

1. Paper. "The Diaconate"—THE REV. J. H. NICOLLS. D.D.
2. "Expediency of an Authorized Manual of Family Prayer."—REV. G. V. HOUSMAN.

AFTERNOON.

"Pastoral Work"—REV. J. H. JENKINS.

EVENING CHAPEL.

Bishop's Charge.

WEDNESDAY MORNING.

1. "Missionary Meetings"—PROF. DODWELL.
2. "Advantages and means of keeping up habits of reading among the clergy"—REV. H. ROE.

AFTERNOON.

"Means of enlisting the sympathies, and employing the services of the Laity in church work."—REV. G. MAGILL.

EVENING CHAPEL.

"Sermon"—REV. S. S. WOOD.

THURSDAY.

Unfinished matter.

J. W. QUEBEC.



## A CHARGE, &c.

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I did at one time think, my Reverend Brethren, that, in our circumstances, the customary form of visitation might fitly be discontinued. We meet in Synod, and there we organize; there we participate mutual counsel and advice. And it is not with us as in an old country, where, in a compact and populous diocese, the visitation is the Bishop's convenient opportunity for personal intercourse with the great body of his clergy. Here, where the clergy are few, and scattered over a diocese some six hundred miles long, the too frequent calling of them from their Missions is burdensome, and it seems but reasonable that the Bishop should make his visitation from mission to mission.

Still, upon a re-consideration, I have judged it better not to pass by an ancient custom, into which it may be easier, perhaps, to breathe a new life and significance, than to find for it a substitute. The Synod is but a partial substitute. On the secular side of our affairs—for the transaction of business—it is undoubtedly a substitute, and something more. On the spiritual side it is considerably less. There may arise many matters within ourselves, of opinion and of practice, upon which a Bishop could with advantage speak freely and confidentially to his brethren; but which, in such an assembly, he would be unwilling to treat. And again, such discussions as we have been occupied with to-day are likely to be more beneficial from the very fact of their being only discussions:—Our decisions being of no compulsory effect, the debates by which we arrive at them cannot engender strife;—or if

we do provoke one another, it is only unto good works. Another reason too has had its influence. Personal intercourse between the Bishop and his clergy might, as I intimated, be maintained by the perambulations of the former, but of scarcely less importance is the fellowship of the clergy with each other. If we are of one body, we should be of one spirit. But how can there be unity of purpose, or of method, without mutual esteem and mutual knowledge? How can we be strong, unless we help one another? How shall we help one another, unless we love one another? How shall we love one another, unless we know one another?

But I need not urge this. I know that you deplore the isolation in which you find yourselves, and from which you can but partially escape in our Synodical gatherings, where, when we meet, we are intent upon business, and when we are at leisure, we are, from the circumstances of the case, separated socially. For these reasons, then, and for some others, I have asked you, my Reverend Brethren, to meet me here, where we may with more convenience take sweet counsel together, and walk in the house of our God as friends. My heart's prayer is that our souls may be strengthened and refreshed—that, by this communion and fellowship, we may establish one another—that we may all be established by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, and by the felt presence of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, that so we may go forth to our appointed stations, whether in the populous city, or on the solitary outpost, braced and toned by a consciousness that we are not alone and helpless in our struggle, but an ordered host, marshalled and disposed as may suit the large wisdom of the directing mind—even of the Captain of our salvation, whose soldiers we are: in full trust upon whom, and in ready support of each other, let us then, my Brethren, fight with good heart, in the sure confidence that the victory at all points will at length be won.

But, in ready support of each other, we need to stand shoulder to shoulder—we need to be alert and alive, for the foe is mustering and the battle is begun. Already along the line rings the bugle call—and alas, from our own ranks there issues an uncertain sound. I rejoice however to be able to say, that in our part of the field there is no defection. The faith is attacked: the

assault is given. And while some there are within the fortress who favour the enemy, we at least are true to the flag under which we have ranged ourselves. From one or two of the most remote of our Brethren no answer has been received; but I think I may say that the pastoral clergy and the clergy connected with our Church institutions, have unanimously signed what has been called the Oxford Declaration.

The wording of that document may be open to objection. It might perhaps have been drawn more happily. But I don't know. Pledges of united action must very often be wanting in pedantic precision; and for my own part, when I can substantially agree to a man's meaning, I have long ceased to split his words. I should not perhaps have written the Declaration myself, but I am very willing to sign it, indeed I am very glad to sign it, since these are times when we should wear our colours. Some 11,000 or 12,000 of the clergy at home have, as you are aware, subscribed this Declaration. And a great deal of ridicule has been expended upon these 12,000. It has been thought well to rebuke the presumption of poor curates and recently ordained deacons, for having an opinion; and the loftiness of learning looks down with contempt upon this statement of their belief by illiterate literates. But surely all this is beside the mark. Surely you and I, my Brethren, did not fancy that we were confirming the faith when we signed the Declaration,—or adding weight to the authority of the learned names it bears. We simply stated that we used words in a particular sense, because it seems that our position in the Church is unfortunately no longer a warrant that we give them their obvious meaning. It is required of us that we solemnly aver before God, and in the face of the congregation, our belief that “they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.” And surely a modest man, though of no learning, may be so bold as to say that, as he is obliged to use these words, so also this is his belief. And such a declaration from a clergyman is, I submit, by no means nugatory. Since we are now told that a clergyman may, and since it seems that some clergymen do, say these words and believe them not,—in the sense



at least which they ordinarily bear, and in which they would be understood,—since it appears that a clergyman may believe them in a sense which is a literal denial of the words he utters; and that when he says the wicked shall go into a fire which is everlasting, he may mean a fire which possibly, probably, or certainly—according to the freedom of his handling, and the delicate adjustment of his verifying faculty,—possibly, probably, or certainly—will have an end. This being the case, I submit that it is an indication of honesty, not of arrogance, on our part, to announce openly what we mean,—whether we mean the plain English of what we say, or whether we sophisticate.

And, in respect to the other point of the Declaration, surely in these days, when it is the fashion to treat the Bible “like any other book,”—and a great deal worse for that matter,—surely it is pardonable in one who is by his office to expound the Bible, if he adopt a form of words that shall give people to understand that his plan is to treat the Bible with the reverence it has heretofore received; and that he has no “free handling” to dazzle them with;—that the basis of his exposition will be the old-fashioned notion that the Bible is different from any other book,—that it is inspired in a different sense from that in which the works of Milton are inspired; and with an inspiration different from that breathing of the Holy Spirit, silent and unseen, which renews the hearts and sanctifies the souls of the redeemed. In these days, when it is claimed that every man is to be his own inspiration, one may surely profess that he is no prophet without being scolded for his presumption. It seems to me a matter of good faith to our brethren, and to those whom we undertake to teach, to declare ourselves upon these points; and that a great deal of sarcasm (which has a dangerous tendency to rebound) has been very needlessly, not to say recklessly, flung out upon the Declarants.

In regard to the question of Inspiration, there is no doubt that we have a great deal more to do than merely to declare what our views are,—that we have, in our own behalf, as well as in behalf of our flocks, to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; since this paring down of the inspiration of the Bible is the outcrop of a principle which, though to a great

extent latent, may be said to pervade the soil of modern thought and modern sentiment. The tacit assumption that the supernatural must be eliminated from the religion of the nineteenth century, rules the method of the new criticism. And though naturalistic explanations are advanced by those who shrink from shocking others by expressing, and, it may be, shrink from shocking themselves by forming, a conviction, that belief in the supernatural is fast becoming a superstition of the past, yet the antagonism between the two ideas in minds of the modern east, is fundamental. The internecine character of the conflict is sometimes avowed—more often it is insinuated; and the faith is undermined by the prevarication of those who undertake to defend only to betray. Men will explain away the miracles of Moses, out of their desire to build Christianity upon a credible foundation! But what will they do with the superstructure? Is not Jesus a worker of miracles, or an impostor? My Brethren, artful men and able are engaged in this work; and we owe it to ourselves, as well as to those over whose souls we are set to watch, to be wary. The habit of mind which has been induced by nauseating the miracles of the Old Testament, will cling to us when we come to consider those of the New,—which we shall reject, because we shall come to them prepared to reject. Evidence will be of no force; for by that time the mind will despise evidence, and dismiss it with a sneer. And indeed, if sneers were proofs, our most holy faith had been exploded long ago.

But if we are to struggle for our faith, why should we train ourselves for the encounter upon this debilitating diet? Why should we allow our opponents to impose upon us the tactics that may happen to suit them? Every mind has a right to its own method. The sceptics have their way of dealing with miracles. We, if we are wise, shall have another. This question of miracle or no miracle is without doubt the hinge of our faith. If a miracle be an impossibility, then is the Gospel a cunningly devised fable. And our wisest course is to try this issue directly.

The best thing a man can do, when he is invited to discuss minor difficulties, is to turn, before his reason has been tampered

with, to some one of the leading miracles recorded in the New Testament,—to the miracle for example that is the foundation upon which the whole fabric of the Gospel stands—the Resurrection of our Blessed Lord,—and settle that, once for all. It is a fact, or it is a falsehood. It is capable of proof, or it is not. If it can be proved, we need not be over anxious about lesser difficulties. If it cannot be proved, why, we need not be over anxious in that case, I suppose. They are not worth a thought. This or some similar plan that will arm the mind for an encounter with doubt at any moment is essential; for we are challenged at every turn; and we shall err as widely if we attribute the modern tendency to spurn at a miracle to a particular book or two, as if we were to attribute the combustibility of tinder to the spark which ignites it. The cause lies deeper,—in the processes to which material so quick to burn has been subjected.

I do not purpose to investigate these causes. I only mention them to guard ourselves against supposing, when a rash writer has been refuted, or the noise of a startling volume has died away, that the danger has passed. It is not wise to forget that the influences by which we are surrounded are such as engender doubt; which may therefore be expected, when exorcised under one form, to reappear in another. I have indicated what seems to me the best method of meeting it,—the best ground upon which to give battle. It may be well, however, in view of the constant skirmishes with the sceptic to which our faith is exposed almost every time we open a newspaper or a magazine, to equip ourselves with one or two principles of defence, upon which arguments may be received and their temper tried whether they have reason and weight, or whether they be mere flourish and assertion. And with this view, when we find, as we shall find, that the opposition between science and scripture is now and again forced, with no little parade, upon our notice, we should do well to remember that the facts of science are one thing and the conjectures of scientific men another. No little perplexity, no little fallacy, I do not say sophistry, for the mischief seems to arise from a real confusion of mind, no little fallacy is introduced into a man's thoughts by neglecting to distinguish between these. Theories are thrown out by men of science

continually, with more or less of argument to support them, and by the unthinking the crude guesses of eminent men are credited with all the authority attaching to their demonstrations; so that a plain man, who discusses an argument, of the validity of which he is quite competent to judge, is in danger to be set down as a sciolist, meddling with matters above his comprehension. Now an educated man is not to be put off or put down in this way. His knowledge may be limited, but he knows its limits, and within them he will walk at large. He knows that much that comes from men who have made science their study is not science; and, when he hears of the opposition between science and religion, his first look will be to see whether this opposing element be science or something else.

I would next observe, that infidel writers are strong only when they are negative, while they are on that ground we are instinctively with them, for most of us, when we think, put more questions to ourselves than we are able to answer. But after all, even the most sceptical of intellects cannot live by negations. The man who will not, or cannot, believe in the truth of Christianity, feels bound to account for its existence. This is reasonable. Christianity comes before us as a fact. It assumes to be true. It has been taken to be true; and, until some more credible account of its origin and existence is furnished, the presumption is that it is true.

In dealing therefore then with those who call in question the truth of the Gospel narrative, our best plan will be to look into their positive teaching—not to occupy ourselves with their questions, which we can put, and, over and over again, have put, for ourselves, but to consider their answers, and see if they be more credible than our old-fashioned beliefs. When a man, for example, unable to accept a miracle, but unwilling to renounce the Scriptures, would have us believe that the miraculous narratives of the Gospel are not narratives of fact, but the embodiment of ideas, we can, without much trouble, apply this theory to some one of the recorded miracles. It will break down at the first strain; and we shall see that the writers of the Gospel unquestionably intended to pass them off for true accounts of real facts, and succeeded in doing

so. If not histories, the gospels must be most impudent forgeries. But we must read the Scriptures for ourselves. We must take no account of what they are, or what they say, at second hand. This is important. So long as you assume that a writer's representation of Scripture is exact, the plausibility of his argument keeps pace with the ingenuity of his theory; but so soon as you turn to the book, sift his assertions, open out his implications, and investigate for yourself, the thin cohesion melts beneath your eye: and, handling his argument as you grasp for substance, your fingers close upon the impalpable dust of delusion.

One shall, for example, (to consider for a moment one of the late theological importations) one shall, in following the theorist as he manipulates his facts, interweaves his ideas, and draws out the staple of his discourse, one shall, as the dexterous pleader leads him on, feel stealing through the mind a disposition to acquiesce in the doctrine that the writings of the New Testament are not veritable records, but the growth of after-times—not forgeries indeed, nor even pious frauds, in their first promulgation; but the peculiar forms in which the modesty of the times veiled the teacher's obtrusiveness by inculcating its dogmas through the personation of St. Paul and St. Peter, St. John and St. Matthew. So long as you are content to see with the eyes of your guide, all is plausible and smooth; but if you open your own eyes and look for yourself at the writings which have been so plastic in the theorizer's hands, you are astounded at the audacity of his attempt upon your understanding. As well might he propose to convince you that the fossils in your museum, broken, enigmatical, worn by friction, pressure and time, are the constructions by which some professor, *bonâ fide*, and with no intention to deceive, would exhibit to the best of his understanding the actual living forms of extinct organisms. The thing is incredible. Their air of genuineness is either the stamp of truth or the simulation of deceit. They may be fragments of the past, or they may be spurious imitations. They must be the one or the other. If not what they purport to be, they are the fabrications of deceivers.

With these cautions then—(1) to distinguish between the accepted conclusions and the tentative crotchets of science; (2)

to accept no statements respecting Scripture, till we have verified them by personal investigation; (3) to examine calmly whether the Catholic belief touching the Christian religion, or that which the sceptic proposes to substitute for it, be the more credible; (4) to discuss the question of miracles not upon minor occasions, but in relation to some one of the cardinal facts of the Gospel—with these cautions we may pass through the pelting shower of modern infidelity, and find much of it innocuous. Their observance will burnish into brightness that shield of faith wherewith we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

Thus much I have thought it necessary to say respecting those matters in relation to which recent action of our own connects itself with painful proceedings in the church elsewhere, I will now turn to questions not indeed more immediately concerning, but of which the interest is more restricted to ourselves. And herein our thanks are due to Almighty God for that, among us, the church prospers.

Twelve months ago there were four vacant missions and little prospect of filling them. I now see my way to the filling of them all, and filling them well; I have admitted three to the order of the Priesthood, and ordained two to be Deacons; and four Laymen I have licensed as Readers to assist certain missionaries; I have consecrated three churches; I have held confirmations in almost all the missions of the Diocese, with the exception of those in the Gulf. The number of those confirmed amounts to 987. These figures I am not able to compare with those of previous years, but I believe that, in most cases, the numbers have increased: a fact which is matter of thankfulness for two reasons; first, for the sake of the young themselves, confirmation being found, I believe, in the experience of earnest ministers, to be a seed time of the Spirit,—and secondly, for the sake of the church—confirmations being, emphatically, tokens of the future. We cannot see into the hearts of our little ones; but at any rate we can see how many are indisposed to turn their backs upon the covenant of their baptism. We can see in the number of candidates for confirmation, whether the church, in each locality, advances, or retrogrades. And a man may judge, too, in a measure, of his own

work. A matter in which it is possible to be deceived. We enter upon the fruit of our predecessor's labours. This is a condition of life. The congregations to whom we minister, our elders, or our equals in age, these are not the work of our hands. We must look on a few years, till these drop off, and the new generation takes their place; then will be seen the fruit of our labour, if fruit it have. In the mean time, if we really feel that we watch for souls as those that must give account, we cannot fail earnestly to consider this most significant prognostic of our success or failure. Other things, however, are significant in our confirmations besides numbers. The manifest seriousness and devout feeling with which the candidates generally have come to renew their dedication to God's service, could not fail to strike the observer, and to fill those concerned in the administration of the rite with the liveliest hope; which hope has been strengthened by the farther evidence that many of the candidates have given of their earnestness of purpose by coming to taste the fulness of Christian joy in Holy Communion.

And now my Reverend Brethren, whilst I am discussing the evidences of efficiency in our calling, it will be as well, perhaps, to enter a little into the causes which contribute to that efficiency. In so doing I shall mention but a few, and even these we shall only be able to sketch, without fully depicting. I will confine myself then to three elements of ministerial efficiency, and consider the clergyman's:

1. HABIT OF STUDY ;
2. HIS POWER OF PREACHING, and
3. The SPIRITUALITY OF HIS CHARACTER.

These are essential; for the Priest's lips must keep knowledge; the minister of the gospel must be apt to teach; and if he have not the Spirit of Christ, he can be none of His.

The clergyman should be a man given to reading. To teach is his calling; and when a man ceases to learn, he is no longer fit to teach. Time was when it was esteemed that the study was the clergyman's workshop, in which he becomingly spent the greater part of his working hours. No doubt this was carried a little too

far in opinion and in practice; and the active duties of a clergyman were in those days, too much overlooked; but unless I am very much mistaken the pendulum has now swung quite as far in the opposite direction; and there is a danger lest the pastoral should choke the growth of the studious element in the clerical character. In truth neither the one nor the other can be neglected without loss of power. If the clergyman do not go to his people, they will not come to him; and if his mind be not enriched by reading, and cultivated by thought,—his sermons will inevitably become stale and wearisome; or, if he aim at variety, he can only accomplish his purpose by becoming watery and jejune. But I shall go no further into this matter now, since we shall have an opportunity of discussing it to-morrow; when the subject will be introduced by one whose competence to deal with the problem cannot be questioned; he being known to you all as a man second to none amongst us, either in learned research or in pastoral activity. I pass on then to speak for a few minutes upon preaching.

And here I may observe that sermons, as I have no doubt, would be more effective if they were not so numerous;—but I do not see that we can make them less numerous. The exaction of many sermons is too imperious to be withstood. Doubtless it were better if people would come more often to the house of prayer for prayer's sake. But if they will not come to pray, unless they can hear sermons, in God's name let them hear sermons. It is not, you may readily suppose, from undervaluing the ordinance of preaching, that I speak thus. No, I magnify mine office. But quality is before quantity. And with a view to secure that our preaching be effective of its purpose, it is both interesting and instructive to note the ebb and flow of spiritual tone, the growth and decay, the vigour and the decrepitude of theological thought, as they stand registered in the sermons, which reflect the religious life of the past. To go no further back than a century, the style of preaching which prevailed a hundred years ago was cold, we find, and imperfect as a statement of truth. The distinctive doctrines of the gospel were not exactly denied, but slurred. Men's duties and responsibilities were mainly dwelt upon. These indeed, were plainly and forcibly inculcated. With the rise however of the Evangelical



School came not only an accession of fervour, but a keener perception of the value of doctrine. When earnest men are possessed of a truth which is not appreciated, they press it home. The greater the resistance—the more vital the truth, the greater is the danger of its being exaggerated, the more likely are we to lose of the symmetry of truth. And so penetrated were these men with the momentous importance of the doctrines of the atonement, of grace, of justification by faith, that all else sank into comparative insignificance. The extreme results of such preaching are the neglecting to look for the fruit of belief in the life of the believer, and the passing by as inconsiderable trifles, the necessities of order. In reaction from this state of things, rose what may be called the ecclesiastical style, protesting against the exaltation of doctrine over morality, and insisting upon the efficacy of the Sacraments and the authority of the Church.

My Brethren, we can dispense with none of these, which have been perhaps each in their day, too exclusively the topics of preaching. Certainly we can dispense neither with doctrinal statement, nor with the enforcement of duty. Further, we must propound these in their relation to each other, and always doubt the soundness of our doctrine if it do not produce holiness of life. And again, he who is ashamed, or afraid, upon fitting occasions, and in due proportion, to preach the Church, is her unworthy minister. Our people ought to be at least as well instructed in our principles as those who dissent from us are in theirs. Dissenters always know what it is they object to in our system. They know why they dissent; and we ought to know why we do not. There seems a strange misapprehension on this point in many men's minds. What is only fair and legitimate in others is bigotry in us. We must not fear this. If we are in the right, let us know it; if we are in the wrong, let us know that; and let us put into the mouths of our people an answer to this question, "Why are you a Churchman?" One who is not a Churchman would be very much affronted if you supposed he had no answer to the question, "Why are you a Baptist?" "Why are you a Methodist?" or "Why are you an Universalist?" We only claim for ourselves what all others claim for themselves. Well then we

cannot dispense with any of these elements, of duty, of doctrine, or of Church principles, from our teaching; but, my Brethren, we shall make a fearful mistake if we substitute any, or all of them for Christ. He must be the Sun of our system. The light from His Person must irradiate all our teaching. Its warmth must be felt in all our discourses. Neither sacrament nor dogma must be suffered to obscure its rays. They are lamps to hold the light. Woe be to us if we fall down and worship them as though they were the light. Christ is the Light: Christ is the Life. To lead the soul to him, is the final cause of Church, and Sacrament, and Dogma: worthless, worse than worthless, are all these, if by stopping short of, they keep the soul from Him; or, rather, worthless are we, if we so misuse and pervert them.

Now, the use of sermons being mainly to awaken, or to edify, they must in the former case address themselves mainly to the feelings, in the latter case to the understanding; or, by another treatment of the feelings, win to the practice of, whilst they point out the way to attain, the Christian graces.

The former kind are undoubtedly the most popular with an uneducated people; the latter are apt to be dull, at least if the instruction be sufficiently elementary to be useful to those who most need it. Not that I admit the justice of the common cry against the dulness of sermons. The common fallacy on this point is to compare the ordinary clergyman with the brilliant barrister, and in this way, of course, a pretty strong contrast can be attained. But I have not been able to perceive so striking a difference when the men were fairly matched. Of the few eminently eloquent men of an age, the fair proportion, it seems to me, are, and have been, ecclesiastics. And I have seen nothing tending to show that if all the occupants of the back benches of the court-house were required to produce two original compositions, upon a limited range of subjects, for the same audience, for the rest of their natural lives, I have seen nothing tending to show that these productions, viewed as literary performances, would be any way superior to the sermons now usually delivered.

But there is a cause of the dulness of sermons which it becomes us to look fairly in the face. Systematic instruction is always tiresome to

those who have no eager desire to learn. By systematic instruction I do not here mean doctrinal argument,—which has always been popular when popularly handled,—nor do I mean exposition, which is also popular, and might be introduced into our preaching with advantage,—but that connected statement, and again and again repeated inculcation of first principles, which we call grounding. And yet systematic instruction such as this cannot be dispensed with. I believe we suffer both from its introduction to and its omission from our sermons. There are many, it must be recollected, whose religious knowledge is confined to what they hear in Church. And though children should certainly be grounded in the faith at home and in school, yet many are not; and he whose office it is to preach the Gospel to all, must contrive somehow to suit his public ministrations to the capacities and attainments of all.

The state of the case seems to be, that the continuous formal address which we call a sermon, is, in these days, though a powerful, yet but an imperfect preaching of the Gospel. The problem before us then is to find the proper complement of the sermon. And he, I think, will have made the nearest approach to a solution of the problem who has made the best use of catechetical instruction. For thoroughness there is no teaching like catechetical teaching, (save the employment of the pen, which may in some cases be very well combined with it). As a lever of emotion it is not comparable indeed to a continuous address; but for winding into a subject,—for indoctrinating a man, for giving him a firm grasp of first principles,—for elucidating the intricacies of details,—for adaptation of doctrine by expansion and contraction to the variety and peculiarities of mental calibre,—there never yet was a method so efficacious as the method of instruction by question and answer. It imports into teaching the advantages without the attendant disadvantages of discussion. Difficulties are cleared, objections answered, the whole matter is sifted—looked at all round; and what a man learns in this way he knows well, and remembers long.

With children there is of course no difficulty in, and indeed there is an universally felt necessity for, using this mode of instruction.

And where children can be catechized in the presence of their elders these latter may learn a great deal which it is good for them to know. Still in a country mission, where there is usually but one service, this is often impossible, and indeed, where attainable, it is, so far as adults are concerned, but a make-shift, poorly supplying the lacking elements in modern preaching. Happily, however, it is possible to approach the adult understanding, directly, with systematic teaching. Bible classes are fortunately interesting. If a clergyman will take a portion of Scripture, and preparing himself by careful study, go through it verse by verse, avoiding no difficulty, questioning his class, encouraging them to state their difficulties, and tender their explanations, he will find them willing enough to learn. And when he has once inaugurated the practice he may vary the application of the method, so as to convey whatever instruction he may think needful. Instead of a book, for instance, he may take a subject; and, by a judicious arrangement of his questions and references, lead his class through it. He may exhibit a doctrine, or trace the growth of an institution. And over and above the greater fulness, clearness, and accuracy of knowledge which the method will impart, there will be this advantage, that his hearers will be in a condition to follow with interest sermons of a more solid description than he could otherwise venture to offer them. His discourses may become less hortatory—more didactic; and with manifest advantage. What is to come of this continual exhortation? Is a man to be always beginning his religion over again: ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. Is it enough to convince? Is there no such thing as edification? Or must we reverse the Apostle's direction, and be ever laying again the foundation of repentance, never going on to perfection?

But after all the most powerful element of preaching, the most persuasive, and most instructive, is the spirituality of the preacher's character. The most eloquent of sermons is a holy life. It is useless to preach the Gospel unless we live the Gospel. I speak not simply of the effect of example; what I mean is that if the utterance of the mouth is to be effectual, it must proceed from the fulness of the heart.

Now there are dangers incident to our position which we shall be unwise to ignore. Universally, familiarity deadens the freshness of feeling. The tendency to subside into routine pervades all professions. In some it is tolerable: in ours it is fatal. The adroitness of the adept which accomplishes the complicated and once toilsome process with unconscious celerity and mechanical accuracy, is in some professions more than an equivalent for the waning of that enthusiasm which is the companion of novelty. Not so in ours. Our calling is no trade. Our religion must be vital throughout. Every process must be instinct with life—freshness of feeling—the felt reality of the truths we utter is of the essence of our function. And the very magnitude of the interests with which we deal brings us in danger of insensibility to them. Day after day we tell of Heaven and of Hell, of souls lost and saved. We declare the Incarnation of God in the Man Jesus; we announce the person, describe the influence and operation of the Holy Ghost; and the weight of awe attaching to these amazing mysteries by frequent repetition stuns the soul. So stupendous is our regularly recurring theme, that the mind grows passive under its pressure. Here, my Brethren, is our danger. By custom of handling holy things we risk the loss of spiritual tone. We minister the words of consolation to the sick and the dying. We use language of the deepest feeling—we call upon the Lord Jesus by his Agony and Bloody sweat, to deliver us. The wail of our supplication rises and falls, and swells again, and repeats itself, with all the intensity of a soul pleading in the very presence of God—pleading for deliverance from the burden of sin, which is intolerable—calling upon the Son of God—the Lamb of God—to hear our prayer—to grant us peace, and iterating in every form, the piercing cry for mercy—

Lord have mercy upon us,  
 Christ have mercy upon us,  
 Lord have mercy upon us.

Now, my Brethren, is it not the case that these words often go beyond the reaches of our soul? that we read them without feeling that compunction—that longing for peace and holiness—which

they express? And oh! what a falling off is here! If these forms of passionate entreaty are used merely as the cold expressions of propriety—what foolish forms they are! Foolish! they are worse than that. It is impossible that we can so use them without having our souls seared as with a hot iron.

And yet the inevitable tendency of constant repetition is to produce this unconscious and mechanical performance of our most sacred duties. The tendency is inevitable. I do not say what the result is—God forbid. I suppose that your experience will give you knowledge enough of the tendency of spiritual exercises to degenerate into forms. And I know too that your experience will tell how this deplorable issue may be averted; that you are wont, by secret prayer, and by all the unuttered thoughts of the life which is hid with Christ in God, to replenish your lamps with the oil of God's Holy Spirit—which alone can feed the flame of true devotion. That we may assist one another in this respect is the principal cause of our presence here. And I do trust that this, our few days fellowship, may be life long,—aye eternal—in its issues—that there may be an outpouring of the Spirit upon us; that by its overflow the flame of the divine life may pass with lambent light from soul to soul, and that we may be all one by communication of spiritual gifts—knit together in one communion and fellowship in the mystical Body of Christ our Lord—that with brotherly love and quickened spirituality, we may walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called—that we as a church may enter into the joy of the Prophet's benediction: "Arise, shine, for thy Light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."