

THE UNION SEMINARY REVIEW

VOL. XXVI.

JULY, 1915.

No. 4.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 1915.

BY THE REV. R. F. CAMPBELL, D. D.,

Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Asheville, N. C.

As one grows older Assemblies seem to grow younger. It takes one who has passed the meridian of life some time to adjust himself to the thought, expressed by Wordsworth, "The young are old, the old are in their graves."

It has been pithily observed that "fifty is old age to youth and youth to old age." The first impression received from looking on the Newport News Assembly was the youthfulness of the commissioners as compared with those sent to the Assemblies of earlier years. It is true that one saw here and there, and with rather startling frequency, the "good gray head" of a contemporary, but the shock was mitigated by the counter-suggestion that this canescence was premature. The cumulative effect, however, of looking out on so many hoary heads day after day for a week, made it next to impossible to regard them as just so many precocious crowns of glory, or as a select gathering of old heads on young shoulders. Precocity ceases to be precocity when it becomes the general rule. The apparent youthfulness was evidently a sort of optical illusion—the eyes that looked were not quite as young as they used to be.

The Assembly of 1915 was not absolutely younger in its make-up than the Assemblies of one or two decades ago, but only younger relatively to the age of the generation that attended its first Assemblies in those days. "Why not confess yourself an old man?" asks the Latin poet, Martial, "be content to seem

THE GRANDEUR OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY.*

"Paper read before the Presbyterian Ministers' Association of St. Louis.

BY "TIMOTHY KILBOURN."

The wealth of the Apostle Paul's conception of the Gospel ministry as expressed in his Epistles, and the poverty of our language to express the content of his thought and passion for it, is nowhere better illustrated than in a single phrase in the Epistle to the Romans. The authorized version reads thus: "I magnify my office." The Revised version says, "I glorify my ministry." Arthur Way says in his "The Letters of St. Paul," "I insisted upon the grandeur of my function," Weymouth, "I take pride in my ministry," and Moffatt, "I lay great stress on my office." Each one of them must be conscious of his failure to fully express the content of Paul's heart and mind. No one of them alone expresses it, and it takes all of them together to indicate the size which this ministry bulked in the mind of Paul.

He refers his zeal in the prosecution of his Apostleship to a desire to awaken in those of his own race a spirit of emulation

*In 1914 there came to my desk a manuscript that gripped me hard as I read it. The Triumphant Ministry was the title. Long before the last chapter was read the decision was reached to urge the board to publish the volume. The manuscript was read by Rev. J. Ross Stevenson, D. D., President of Princeton Seminary, and by Rev. Charles R. Erdman, D. D., Professor of Practical Theology in Princeton Seminary. Dr. Stevenson was enthusiastic. Dr. Erdman was glad to write an introduction, whose closing words were, "To spread such a message is certain to make the ministry ever more triumphant and to hasten the coming and kingdom of our Lord." Then Dr. Erdman ordered three hundred copies for his own students and friends.

Later, one thousand copies were ordered by the Presbyterian Board of Education for the students under its care.

"Timothy Kilbourn" was the name on the title page of the manuscript. The author thought it was better to use this *non de plume*. However, he has consented to the use, in later editions, of his own name, Rev. R. Ames Montgomery, D. D.

When the book was written Dr. Montgomery was pastor of the First Presbyterian church, of Ottumwa, Iowa. A few months ago he accepted a call to the Tyler Place Presbyterian church, of St. Louis, Mo., where he is continuing his "Triumphant Ministry."—John T. Faris, Editorial Superintendent, Presbyterian Board of Publication, Philadelphia.

and interest in the Gosepl. By exhibiting the wonderful blessings of the Gospel to the Gentiles and by a faithful proclamation of his message, he hoped to awaken in them, his own flesh, a desire to possess that Gospel. His zeal in his vocation to the Gentiles was largely explained in his love for his own race.

It would not be difficult to find in every true minister a similar interest in the people to whom he ministers and by which he is incited to the work. But there is in them as there was also in Paul, deeper springs of motive and conduct; namely, the love and adoration they have for Christ, to whom they are inseparably attached by His love for them, by the work He has done for them, which they could not do for themselves, by the immemorial hope which He has put within them, and the inheritance of life to which He has brought them. The deepest springs of motive are not human, as applied either to the minister or the people for whom he ministers. The deepest and strangest motives that move him are not manward but Godward.

In the study of Paul and his vocational history there are four outstanding considerations which I wish to bring to your attention as explanatory of the phrase to which reference has been made.

1. He Magnified His Ministry Because it Was God's Call to Him.

The opening verses of each Epistle of Paul lays this emphasis down for us. "Paul a servant of Jesus Christ called." Romans 1:1. "Called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God." 1 Cor. 1:1. "Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." 2 Cor. 1:1. "When it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by His grace to reveal His Son in me that I might preach Him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." Gal. 1:15. And so on through all the Epistles, to use an expressive word of a butcher with whom I talked last summer, he tells us how he was "vocated" to the ministry of Christ.

While I hold tenaciously to the importance and sanctity of the ministry as a vocation, its unique excellence and separateness from other professions is not in the fact of a call. Other men are called to other work as much as the minister is called to his. The call is God's invitation or command to men to follow and serve; it may be in the ministry; it may be to farming, to teaching, to law, to medicine, to business. God needs workers in various places, and He calls men to serve in those various places. The grandeur and glory and triumph of service in any place in life comes to him who has the consciousness of a call to that service.

The great body of men do not believe this and go at life blindly accepting its accidents and trying to make the most of them, with no conscious leading, no great surrender, no constraining love leading them on. No wonder the world is cursed with misery and mediocrity. The men who have arrived have had a call to be something, to do something, to accomplish something, to be somebody. They have heard an enchanting voice, a voice that could not be stilled, that awakened them out of a sleep and challenged their wills to follow whither it would lead. Artists like James Turner, statesmen like Gladstone, soldiers like Gordon or Stonewall Jackson, discoverers like Morse, missionaries like Carey, evangelists like Moody, preachers like Spurgeon—men on the mountain tops—did not go up by accident. They were called up.

So with Paul. God spake to him and said I have a plan for you better than all you can make for yourself, why kick against it? Come and I will show you—not a soft snap, not an easy berth, not a pension sufficient to maintain you in your old age, not great honors nor big pay—but—how great things you must suffer for my sake. And accepting the call Paul found himself in the ambassadorship of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Brethren, my heart often yearns for the choice young men I meet on their way to other work than that of the ministry of Jesus Christ; but unless they have heard the voice they would only bungle the business of the Kingdom if they got into it. It may be that we may make our contribution toward the al-

lurements by quickening our own consciousness of the call that has sounded in our ears and by a more valiant improvement of the opportunities God has put before us in serving. If we can isolate the voice in our own person from the noise of the street and the clink of the coin and the invitations to ease and wealth and pleasure and preferment—the sweetness of its music may charm some sensitive souls and lead them to a service in the Gosepl of Jesus Christ far grander than we may be able to give.

2. *The second reason for Paul's magnifying his ministry was the magnificence of its message.*

It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. I have no doubt many times Paul was challenged on this point and compelled to tell how he knew it was the power of God, etc. To such a challenge he had an irrefutable, unfailing reply, "I know because I have experienced it. I have seen it at work. I have faced the results. On my way to Damascus breathing out threatenings and slaughter against those of that faith I was suddenly arrested, and I heard a voice speaking to me, and felt a power dealing with my soul, which when it was done, took hatred and murder out of my heart, selfish ambitions out of my life, and gave me a sense of unspeakable love for Christ and my fellowmen, a new access of power and life within. And from that very hour, gathering together all the emoluments of office, all the advantages of influence, all the glories of ancestry, all the pride of birth and race, I burned them all on the altar of Christ and counted their sacrifice a gain. I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation, I tell you, unto every one that believeth. And for this reason I magnify mine office of proclaiming it." Now, men, that is the privilege of the ministry and the secret of magnifying it. You know what you are talking about if you have experienced the Gospel which you preach.

Such a man is more or less isolated from the current discussions, and philosophies, and theologies, and criticism of his time; in which other men, becoming involved, lose the sound of

the voice that called them to the ministry of Jesus Christ. Such a man is not turned aside to try some new thing to draw the crowds to his auditorium or for healing the distresses of his city and people. The masterful and abiding conviction of the man who has experienced the message is that only one thing will ever stay the gaunt, grim spectres of the soul; only one thing will destroy those beasts of poverty, sin and shame that haunt our streets; only one thing will stay those outlaws that murder the peace of the world, and that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His spirit and life in the hearts of men.

Such a man has no interest in what Mrs. Besant, Mrs. Eddy, Thomas H. Hardy, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, Winston Churchill, David Starr Jordan, President Elliot, or anybody else may say, who want us to snatch the crown of deity from our Lord or strip the Captain of our Salvation of His rightful insignia and reduce Him to the ranks. Such a man knows to do that is to emasculate the Gospel of Jesus Christ of its power and make ministers mere hucksters of cultural influences and performances in the midst of the world's wretchedness and woe. He will remember when the Greek and Roman world had done all they could do—though "right gloriously they had wrought—all their greatness sank into ruin and all their glory paled, and one thing they could not do, they could not satisfy the longing of the human soul for the eternal, for God." He will remember when physical and intellectual culture had failed in Greece and Rome, then it was, a little, insignificant "Mean in bodily presence" Jew, came on the scene with a message, the power and influence of which he had experienced in his own life, and preaching that Gospel, saw such a conflagration for purity, equity, justice, and hope started, as has not yet been put out.

Brethren, it is just the same today—the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation—to souls in sin, to society in sin, to industry in sin, to capitalists and capitalism in sin, to nations in sin, to races in sin, to all in sin—the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth. And it is due to the proclamation of this that we have been set, not to politics, literature, ecclesiasticism, agriculture or social reform.

3. *Paul magnified his office because it challenged his manhood as nothing else in all the world.*

I have read there was a time when people believed if a lad gave no promise of physique or alertness, had no surplus of virility, he should be trained for the ministry. Many things have contributed to this conception. The great novelists have done little or nothing to counteract it and many of them have contributed to strengthen it. A few recent fiction writers—hardly to be classed as novelists—like Gordon and Wright and Dawson and Ian McLaren and a few others have made an effort to focus the ministry at the front of their canvas; but their men lack something that ought to be found in ministers that live. Either they are men who are more worldly wise than spiritually wise, or they die early in the fight or they fight a losing battle. Some of the great novelists have apparently never known a real fine specimen of a man in the ministry and they put “pious and painful preachers,” or slothful ugly bookworms, or soft incompetent nobodies in the midst of their human conflicts for whom men can have no more respect than they do for the opinions of a petty, frivolous woman. All of us have contributed to this belittling of the ministry of Jesus Christ by dividing the male membership of the church into minister and men and altogether the youth of the country have been impressed often with the idea that only nobodies hear a call to the ministry.

But God never called a mollicoddle to the ministry. I am not saying there are none found there. I am saying I do not know but very few who thought they heard the call and tried to follow. The newspapers and magazines of the country have given much publicity to some of them, and an opportunity to tell of their mistake and their effort to escape the consequence of their folly, and we have read their story on “Why I Left the Ministry,” or some like theme, but when you finished you could generally thank God for the riddance. They had no soldier stuff in them. They had no endurance. They lacked grace, grit and gumption.

The men who have been called, and for sufficient reasons in

the providence of God, are compelled to quit, are not talking about it. They have gone aside to mourn the end of the day and the loss of strength to make the struggle and the combat. They are walking softly and in humility or they are waiting patiently and prayerfully for the evening to come and the reckoning the Master of the vineyard will make at the end of the day. But they are not contributing to the impression that the ministry of Jesus Christ is a slim chance or poor pay for the fourfold man. These men know and we all know, the ministry of Jesus Christ challenges the rarest qualities of force and vigor of physique, of strength of personalty, of depth of sympathies, of wealth of vision, of patience, resolution, and all the resources of heart and mind and will to be found in the best man.

What a splendid task it is! What toil, what struggles, what intercession, what binding up and healing of the wounded, the broken hearted! What recovering of the lost, and what renewing of the hope falls to the ministry of Jesus Christ! "Many a course is changed, many a soul is set in motion, purified, redeemed by contact with the living man and the influence spreads from mind to mind like circles in the water."

The need of the present hour is a new appraisal in the mind of youth of the ministry of Jesus Christ. We need to bring to the foreground the tremendous contribution to human history ministers have been, and the devotion which they have given to their calling. The roll of great names might be profitably read on any day—Peter, and Paul, and John Huss, and Savanarola, and John Wesley, and William Carey, and Henry Martyn, and Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Spurgeon, and Joseph Parker, and Philips Brooks, and Alexander Whyte, and John Hall, and John Jowett, and Dwight L. Moody and Billy Sunday. It needs to be brought to the attention of the youth of today that no circus ever showed, no baseball or football gave ever gathered such crowds as a preacher of the old fashioned gospel of Jesus Christ is gathering in this country at the largest centres of population today. And furthermore that it is such a challenge to his physical man that he keeps a trainer at hand and

other experts of the physical man in close touch that he may be physically fit to meet the tremendous task the ministry of Jesus Christ has laid upon him. Men and brethren, if God has done nothing else for us, through Billy Sunday, than bring religion to the fore and the tremendous impact of the ministry of Jesus Christ on the common consciousness of the day, it would have been worth while. But he has done much more. The one thing to speak of now is the obligation laid on every minister of Jesus Christ to put more man into the business of preaching, shepherding, and ministering, than we have done before. The ministry challenges the whole man.

4. *Paul magnified the ministry for the hope it puts in the heart of mankind.*

There is hardly a week that you do not have to stand beside men to whom the night has come. Your business is to put heart into them—to challenge and inspire them to up and try again, to turn from their wicked way and back to the Father's house, to be resigned and strong. He was just past the half century mark when I knew him first. The panic of '93 had swept well-nigh everything from his hand. Once worth a million and a half, he now hold only the lot in the cemetery on the hill. His high sense of honor led him to resign the presidency of the bank he had organized and built up, and certain directorates in great corporations lest their credit might be impaired by the presence of the man who had not been able to turn the assault made upon his personal possessions. He took a little room at the back of the great building in which he had sat as president of the bank and tried again. After some years he started to climb to affluence and power and to pay off some of his debts. But sickness, disease and death stalked in at the critical hour. Day by day his strength slipped away. The news came to me in a distant city, and I wrote occasional notes to cheer and challenge this man whose soul I had claimed for God. When the end came his wife and daughter wrote to say how much my letters had helped in the fray and that he had carried them until the envelopes had worn out and had put

them under his pillow where he could easily get them through the many lonely days before he went home. Now, my friend, every man of you has done that. It's the business of all ministers to put heart into men.

And it is their privilege to have it put into them. For fifteen years he had preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ with acceptance and power. Then the white plague came and he had to lay the tools aside. A wife and four children went with him to seek recovery in a more favorable climate, but without success. Poverty stared them in the face. As the days shortened he longed for the face of familiar relatives and friends and they returned. I met them in Chicago on their way for the fellowship of one hour. When I went in he held up his poor thin arms and pulled me down for just a moment's embrace. Before long I said, "My boy, I must go and before I leave let's have a word of prayer." His voice was as steady and joyful and full as he in turn commended me and my ministry to Jesus Christ. And when in the midst of my grief I said "I am so sorry we had only an hour," he said "Never mind, before long our visits will not be interrupted by coming trains," and with that he waved me a smiling farewell. God had put heart into him and kept him putting heart into other men down to the end.

He is an old man languishing in a Roman jail. I do not know the circumstances surrounding him there. I cannot understand the limitations of those four blank walls nor feel the chill of its chains or its cold. It is dark and dreary and full of discouragement for men who can be mastered by those things. But there's a lad of his in the faith, to whom he writes a challenge to follow in his steps, and you can hear no note of death in that. Timothy, my lad, I am now ready to be offered, the time of my departure is at hand, I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge, will give me in that day: and not to me only, but unto all them who love His appearing—Timothy, follow on.