

N.B. churches

Inaugural Discourse:

MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PULPIT AND PEW.

A DISCOURSE DELIVERED IN THE FIRST REFORMED (DUTCH)
CHURCH, NEW-BRUNSWICK, N. J.,

BY

REV. THOMAS C. EASTON, M. A.,

On his Assumption of the Pastorate,

MAY 15TH, 1881.

NEW-BRUNSWICK, N. J.:

FREDONIAN STEAM PRINTING HOUSE, 36 DENNIS STREET.

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INAUGURAL DISCOURSE.

Numbers, 11th Chapter, 14th Verse :

"I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me."

Conscious responsibility in assuming eminent and representative positions must ever be regarded as a healthful and assuring element of character. The commander, in wheeling his armies to the fore front of battle, conscious that upon defeat or victory depends a change of government, yea, the fate of an empire, may well tremble as he decides the evolutions of the host upon the field. The surgeon, as he nears the seat of life, and sees the knife coming close to the very citadel of being, may feel the need of a strong, steady nerve and liveliest sense of his responsibility. An ambassador, bearing dispatches that will terminate hostilities between rival governments, if successfully manipulated by wise, judicious diplomatic genius, may well study his bearing, his message and demands. This must readily be granted. We cannot wonder that he who took the reins of government at a time in the history of this nation, when all was anarchy, revolt and treason, and every Pharos was darkened in the gloom of revolution, besought his countrymen to remember him in prayer. Nor can we have forgotten that when the late Czar of Russia fell a martyr to the atheistic spirit of Nihilism, his son, on ascending the throne, besought his subjects to invoke Divine help for their sovereign.

So Moses, when called to lead forth Israel from servile bondage and the galling yoke of Pharaoh's despotic rule—to be the intercessor, priest and lawgiver, and establish them as God's chosen nation upon the solid basis of loyalty to righteousness, felt his weakness and gave utterance to the text:—“*I am not able to bear all this people alone.*”

Then mark God's gracious answer to his servant :

“16. And the Lord said unto Moses, gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee.

“17. And I will come down and talk with thee there; and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.”

There is such a thing as “cowardly distrust,” which must not be confounded with that higher manly sense of honor that shrinks from assuming responsibilities, because deeply conscious of personal inability to meet all the demands of the place and age. Moses was eminently fitted for the leadership, yet trembled to assume command of that mighty exodus from Egypt.

Standing where I do this hour, with the sacred memories of the past week still fresh in all our minds—standing beneath a glorified cloud of witnesses of departed ones, from the days of 1720, when the eminent Frelinghuysen became the pastor, down to the sainted Samuel B. How, D. D., and through the ministry of Richard H. Steele, D. D., yet living, who resigned in 1880, a period of 161 years, a galaxy of brilliant, sanctified intellect, and feeling how utterly unable I am to equal my predecessors in talent, genius or spiritual power; and also the immensity of the work devolving upon

the Christian ministry in this age, to a great extent ordained to mould the character of future society—the high culture and profound piety that must obtain in personal character, and towering above all else the stupendous fact that my immortal work is to be and appear in souls won to Christ, no words befit your newly-inaugurated pastor so well as these, “I cannot bear all this people alone.”

THEME :

“ The Christian Ministry—its need of Divine Aid and Hearty Co-operation of the Church to Warrant Success.”

At the outset we may take a survey of the peculiar characteristics of our age most likely to create this oppressive responsibility in assuming a pastoral charge.

I need not discuss the axiom that qualifications and fitness are of first moment for any responsible work or profession, whether to construct a steam engine or dispense knowledge as the Chancellor of a University. A truly regenerated heart, enjoying actual communion with God, and assuredly moved by the Holy Ghost to the Ministry is indispensable. No amount of talent or culture will serve as a substitute. There must be a master passion and enthusiasm to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. There must be both literary and classical attainments in order to meet the skilled, masterly, adroit, attacks made upon Christianity by a thoroughly educated scepticism. This is an eclectic age, and above all others we are an eclectic nation. The prominent feature of our nationality is strong-minded, enterprising aggressiveness—a people who dare to think, investigate and proclaim their views on all subjects, civil and religious, ethical and practical. It is a book-making and news-circulating age, and the masses are familiar with men, sciences, knowledges and things. The public mind is on

the tip-toe of inquiry and must be satisfied. The ministry that will command respect and deserve esteem is one while possessing piety and integrity shall by learning and intelligence also, spite of all hypercritical conventionalites, bring the pungent truths of the gospel to bear upon every phase of our national character and hold the land for Christ. It requires no close observation, no astuteness of penetrative powers, to perceive that a process of reconstruction is now going forward. The old land-marks of the reformation are disturbed, and apostolic customs that have resisted the tread of centuries are being dug up, the repose of evangelical principles broken, and all the grave questions of morals and religion—the whole system of theologies—are being subjected to new and fiery tests. The trumpet-blast has sounded, and the trampling of the gathering hosts for combat may even now be heard. Geology, Psychology, Neology, Ontology and Ethnology are sounding the challenge to orthodox Christianity. The van is led by such minds as Tyndal, Haeckel, Darwin, Strauss, Renan, Ingersoll, Davis and a host of others. There too is Universalism, with its protean forms of Restorationism, senseless, unscrupulous, debative; Unitarianism, with its polite classic Concord School of Philosophy, spiritless, eloquent; Tractarianism, proud and exclusive; Agnosticism, with its interrogation points of unbelief thicker than the quills upon a porcupine's back; Pessimism, with its dreary songs of all things moving on a down grade to an endless, fathomless quagmire of despair; Spiritualism, fanciful, sympathetic, impalpable; Pantheism, speculative and absurd; while Materialism, gross, confused and sensual, would vote God out of His own universe. Questions of humanity, philosophy, theology and Christianity are all involved, and in their solution from the standpoint of divine revelation, and remand

them to their just status demands a ministry who can rightly divide the Word of God, confound the sceptic, discomfit the errorist, and build up the Church of God upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the chief corner-stone! To be able to subserve the will of Christ in all things by discipline, self-denial, prayer, faith and holy living, and win souls from the thralldom of the Prince of Darkness, calls for men—not drones, nor triflers, nor merchandising speculators, nor sensationalists, but men whose souls glow with the love of Christ and whose lips are touched with the fires of the heavenly altar—men who have vertebral column sufficient to bear and forbear for Jesus, and who will declare the whole, unadulterated Gospel of the Redeemer! Nothing less than all this is demanded of a living, aggressive ministry, and confronting the fact the words leap to the heart, who is sufficient for these things, verily, “*I am not able to bear all this alone!*” But these are the manifest works of a teacher. Beside all these there are the sick beds to be visited, and the guiding hand to be given down to the Jordan, and pour upon the ear of the dying the words of Him who is the Conqueror of Death! There are lonely ones, that sit in orphanage and widowhood, to console and cheer with the glad vision of the Heavenly Eden, and reunion with their sainted dead in the lovely climes beyond the river in the immediate presence of their Saviour God! Then there are the ten thousand nameless anxieties, trials, burdens, griefs, that must be ministered to in the ear of private friendship, as a pastor who can sympathize and have compassion, and, when a man comes to remember that he is a human sufferer himself, who doubts but the thought stirs his anxious soul, “*I am not able to bear all this people alone!*”

A successful pastorate, then, demands three powers to sustain it and guarantee enlarged prosperity, viz :

I.—A DAILY BAPTISM OF DIVINE POWER.

II.—A GENIAL SYMPATHY AND MUTUAL AFFECTION.

III.—A HEARTY CO-OPERATION OF ALL THE FORCES.

Prayer is the fountain of power. Prayer brings down into the field of human activities all the forces of the invisible domain to aid the struggling army of Immanuel. Prayer girds the weakest with fiery zeal and exhilarates the despondent with glowing energy. Prayer incorporates moral omnipotence. God imparts to man His own strength. There is perfected in the human instrumentality the strength of Zion's Lord and sovereign! Prayer secures the penitential effusions of the Holy Ghost, and augments the numerical and moral power of the church. There enters a wisdom and a genius divine that illumines the whole sanctuary, and men feel the glow and burning fervor of the church's piety, and are charmed by the pathos of the messages from Calvary. The living, growing, fruitful church, rich in its gifts, graces and powers, is a humble, prayerful communion. The sacramental host may march to the field, banners flying and keeping step to the martial strains of music, but if the weapons are not tempered in the fires of devotion and prayer, defeat will trample the banner in the dust, and her sons flee like cowards before the Philistines of modern Atheism. When Moses stood upon the Mount and lifted up the rod, Israel's prayer—its silent appeal to Jehovah—victory rested upon the Lord's troops; when the rod went down Amelek prevailed, so Aaron and Hur held up the supplicating arms of Moses until the going down of the sun, and the shout of triumph rolled like a mighty tidal wave from Israel over Amelek crushed and destroyed. Oh, my dear people, the hosts of Amelek are to be confronted and slain—the proud serried ranks of iniquity; Intemperance, that mows down with its triple-scythed chariots—

distillery, bar-room and brothel—its myriad millions per year—Sabbath desecration, with open galleries of vice, theatres and casinos, ruining the best blood in the land, and bringing up a generation of God-defying and Christ-hating scoffers! Social evils, that generate vileness and only vileness, all menace the camp of God's elect. Does not Moses need the strong united helpful Aarons and Hurs as he pleads upon the Mount for conquests of truth, and righteousness! Yea, verily. We may have depended far too much upon our ordnance and splendid military equipment and magazine—what is the grandest Dalgren gun without ball or powder—yet what is the ball but a huge round, inanimate piece of metal—what is the powder, but a fine nitrous dust that the wind may blow away in a thousand directions? But lay powder and ball inside the cannon where they belong, then wheel the massive ordnance into line of action and touch it with fire, and it will thunder along its own appointed track, securing conquest! Preaching, to have success, must be aflame with the power of the Holy Ghost. Sermons, to win victories for Christ, must be fired with the electric flame of the Eternal spirit. A praying pew creates a powerful pulpit. Prayerlessness in the pew soon results in a barren and powerless pastorate. By unity of supplication for Divine aid revivals follow close upon revivals, and seed sowing and harvest come together, every fifty-two weeks in the year. Then the great attraction of the sanctuary will be the message and not the messenger—the truth and not the preacher—the glorious gospel of the ever blessed God, and not the brilliant rhetorician. Take an illustration of this mutual dependence for Divine aid and co-operative zeal to make the church growing, powerful and aggressive, in the simple law of influence and counter-currents of influence. What magnet, be it ever so strong, if it

be isolated can draw to itself the needle if five hundred magnets of an equal power of attraction, all set over against the one? The isolated magnet may be genuine and loaded, exercising its best power, but the superior subtle influence of the five hundred holds the needle fast. So a preacher may stand in the pulpit, elevate the cross, proclaim the whole truth of God, and seek to draw the souls of his hearers to Christ, but if five hundred magnetic influences of prayerlessness are drawing in an opposite direction, who will wonder if conversions be rare, spasmodic and feeble, if not actually spurious? What is one man to five hundred, all loaded centres of active influence, all drawing against him and his work, and what shall resist if such a mighty current of heavenly power bear down in one direction in favor of the preacher—it must sweep irresistibly all before it for Christ! Said one of the early Puritans, “I cannot preach, for I have lost my prayer-book.” “What,” said one, “do you mean? We never knew you used a book of prayer?” “Ah!” said the devout, sturdy old preacher, who knew how to wield a trenchant blade, “My people have ceased to pray for me, and a prayerless people makes feeble preachers!” Rev. Charles E. Finney, the celebrated evangelist, states that in one of our large towns in Western New-York a preacher enjoyed for ten years a constant revival; all at once the power ceased; investigation was made and it was discovered that a prayer-meeting held at sundown each Lord’s day by the session for the Holy Spirit to attend the word, had been discontinued. Confessions followed; one after another testified that they had ceased secret prayer for their pastor, and then discontinued this meeting. Rev. Edward Payson, D. D., of sainted memory, states almost the same fact at a time when coldness and formality took the place of a vital, aggressive, Holy Ghost

evangelism under his ministry. All of which proves the thoughtful proposition under discussion, that a daily baptism of divine power is essential to the highest success as a church, and in this sweet reciprocal spirit of united supplications comes the anointing of the servant of Christ, and he is clothed and panoplied with all the power of God. In such a case he will feel that he is not alone—that he does not bear the burden of his charge alone, but gratefully realises a powerful stimulus in concentrated devotion, and finding the forces of the supernatural rallying to his aid and confounding all opposition, he will rise to the full majesty and magnitude of his responsibility, saying “our sufficiency is of God.” But, secondly, there must be

II.—A GENIAL SYMPATHY AND MUTUAL AFFECTION.

Sacerdotalism has been the bane and curse of the Church of Christ in all ages. It fostered every bloody persecution in the earlier days of Christianity. It made breach after breach upon the good order of society, and instead of winning souls to the Redeemer and fulfilling the song of the incarnation, peace on earth, good will to man, wrought out revolutions and the destruction of empires from a lust of power and greed of gain. Sacerdotalism is the parent, the mother-beast that has given birth and fattened to monstrous proportions the revolutionary agencies that threaten to lay prostrate every throne in Europe, and destroy every sovereign. Nihilism, in its atheistic fury, is the revolt of ignorant masses who have been the oppressed slaves of monarchs and priestly despots. Socialism is the animus of a Christ-hating Rationalism in its extreme disgust at the ceremonialism of a church held up by the State at the expense of the sweat, toil and taxation of the masses. The Commune element of France is the legitimate child of papal sacerdotalism that in its growth would stab to the heart all faith and lay in ruins

all worship. Now, can we hope for anything better upon these shores if the same causes prevail? Certainly not. We are not priests, but men and servants for Jesus Christ's sake! We are not state diplomats, but preachers of a crucified Redeemer, and in the bonds of a common sympathy as one in the primal curse, one in the great redemption, one in the hope of a heavenly inheritance, we belong to no sacerdotal line of priestly princedom, but ministers of the glorious Gospel of the ever-blessed God. Upon this plane he who fills this pulpit will meet his people, and may tongue and hand be alike smitten with eternal paralysis when he shall arrogate to himself any functions not such as Christ would exercise were He to minister personally to this people. We are from this day forward to be ONE in interest, in honor, in reputation, in labor, in rewards, and sharers in the final inheritance! Socially we are to meet each other on this plane, and officially only your servants for Christ's glory, and so long as this prevails there will be harmony and prosperity. There can be no loving sympathy where men preside as "lords over God's heritage," and devoid of sympathy and heart to heart fellowship, there can be no trust reposed in the church, by either pastor or people, and perfunctory professionalities will only prevail and soul hunger rage! Who cares to uncover his wound to a heartless physician? What heart can tell its plaint to a cold, stolid, marble-visaged visitor? What need where all is unsympathetic and formal? How shall the most tender-hearted surgeon draw the wounds together and then stanch the bleeding, if the sufferer hides his pains and needs and conceives a dislike to his best helper? So there must be a mutual sympathy between a pastor and his people to do them good in the hours of their pain and anguish, when loved hopes are all crushed and the heart's idols are buried in a grave,

and the gloom of troubles yet to come mantles the sky. I do not crave to be the recipient of all your burdens, nor to have all your plans and purposes conveyed to my private confidence; but God forbid that the time should ever come when I shall not be able to rejoice with you in all your rejoicings, and weep with you in all your tearful experiences, and by that same bond I will feel that God has not called me to bear all this people alone. The decline of sympathy will be the dawn of a hypercriticism. The declension of love always precedes censorious judgments. Love whets the appetite for the truth and takes it without criticism, whether it be served up in a silver salver of rhetoric or a plain-looking dish of blunt Saxon. Take an illustration of what I want to impress upon your minds as to sympathetic relations between preacher and hearer, and as indicating the status spiritually of the church. We enter an observatory, the night is clear and beautiful, and looking through the telescope we look only to adore at the magnificent creations of the Almighty, and wonder at the power that scatters his worlds like grains of sand—we lose sight of the instrument and the observatory, and revel upon the glories of the celestial scenery! But when the night is cloudy, the stars hid and all is dark, then we curiously examine the lenses, the wheels, the tube, the machinery, and criticise the work of the instrument. So when devout souls have through the devout preacher a sight of Christ as man's Redeemer dying in man's stead—Christ upon the throne of intercession—Christ in heaven with all his saints, they "see no man but Jesus only," and the speaker is lost amid the effulgence of the gospel. But when the fires of holiness burn low in the heart, and worldliness throws its chill over preacher and hearer, then the man becomes the object of conversation, the instrument is then discussed, the manner

more than the matter, and the spirit of God is grieved, and the prince of darkness suffers no loss! Sympathy with the truth—a full-orbed gospel, a gospel not of poetic sentiment but of eternal verities—a gospel that can thunder God's anathema over human wickedness, as well as a gospel of love that can weep its bitterest tears over impenitence, is the sympathy needed to give the preacher to feel that he is not bearing this people alone. It is the dead lift that ruptures, and it is the burden of unresponsive and unappreciative hearers of the gospel that breaks down the ministry! Not always does the fat salary serve as a panacea, for there are a thousand things that money never can touch. Love is wealth. Sympathy is gold. Trustful affection is more precious than the diamonds of Golconda's mine! For by the access made to hearts, and hearts won to Christ, is the real grandeur and prosperity of a church.

III.—A HEARTY CO-OPERATION OF ALL THE FORCES.

Aggression is the price of prosperity. An army that always stays behind its defences is virtually a beaten army. An army always digging trenches will be likely soon to lie down in the ditch. There must needs be action—evils to be overthrown must be assailed. The axe must be laid at the root of the deadly Upas if the poison, shadow and taint is to be destroyed. The knife must cut to the core if the ulcer is to give place to sound and healthful conditions. Philanthropies must be fostered, missions must be sustained, and all the agencies of ameliorating the condition of the masses flourish in the future as in the past under the benign influences of the Christian Church. Is it not a problem well worth solution, why is it that all the systems of religion that stand divorced from the doctrine of the Deity of Jesus Christ and atonement by the blood shed on Calvary are non-aggressive and fail to lay hold of the conscience or

take compassion on souls enthralled in heathen darkness? By our unity and co-operation to advance the Kingdom of the Christ shall we prove ourselves to be the true sons of the Reformation and defenders of "the faith once delivered to the saints!" An ancient historian relates how an army went forth in his day in solid columns, and so close did shield press on shield, and spear press on spear, that it seemed a solid rampart of steel, and when the lightning descended from the thunder-cloud, it ran like one living stream over the whole host and charged every soldier with electricity! So when we stand thus before the world we shall be invincible, and our unity will draw down from the throne of God a living flame of intelligent power and the glories of a new pentecost will follow in its train. This is the consummation we crave—a baptism of the Holy Ghost that will make the weak among us as David, and the House of David as the angel of the Lord!

Dearly Beloved, by these three factors is our future success to be secured, and prosperity as a church made permanent; divine aid to uphold a clear, full-orbed gospel, living sympathy as the bond of our unity, and aggressive work by each and all. All at it, and always at it, and all our laurels laid at the cross. Have I mistaken my theme for the hour? It cannot be, for it will be mine if spared to welcome your pledges of affection, your children to all the blessings offered in baptism, and introduce them as covenant heirs of Christ to the Church; it will be mine to join your households and loving hearts at the bridal altar, and rejoice with you in all these scenes of happiness; it will be mine to minister by the couch of your dying, and pour upon the departing ones the promises of God, and see them victors crowned in the Kingdom above; yea, when back from that lonely Gethsemane you come to your lonelier homes, in deepest

affectional sympathy, will it be mine to lay over the wounded hearts the balm of the Gospel! It will be mine, I trust often mine, to weep with the penitent and sing with the convert, and be as a son of consolation to all the weary and heavy laden ones. And when this ministry which begins to-day shall close, may it be with joy and not with grief to hail my own dear blood-bought flock around the throne of God in Heaven, to be as jewels in the starlit diadem laid at the feet of Jesus, my Saviour and King!

“If grief in Heaven might find a place
And shame the worshipper bow down,
Who meets the Saviour face to face,
’Twould be to wear a starless crown.

“To find in all that countless host,
Who meet around the eternal throne,
Who once like us were sinners lost,
Not one to say—‘You led me Home.’

“Oh may it ne’er to us be said,
No soul that’s saved by grace divine,
Has called for blessings on thy head,
Or linked its destiny with thine.”

But rather let us be of that number who shall be wise to win souls, for “*they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they who turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever!*” Amen.

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