

FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NASHVILLE

One Hundred Years of Service

The Centenary⁴
OF
The First Presbyterian Church
OF
Nashville, Tennessee



THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE.
The Corner Stone Was Laid April 28, 1849, and the Building Dedicated on
Easter Sunday, April 20, 1851.

THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

The Addresses Delivered in Connection
with the Observance of the
One Hundredth Anniversary,
November 8-15, 1914.



1915
Foster & Parkes Company
Nashville, Tenn.



CHAPTER XI.

THE STAYING POWER OF PRESBYTERIANISM.

By PRESIDENT WALTER W. MOORE, D.D.

“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.”—Isaiah 40:31.

These words were written for the encouragement of the Jewish captives in Babylonia. For nearly seventy years they had languished in exile and they were thoroughly disheartened. They were a broken and helpless people. Their deliverance and restoration to their own land seemed an utter impossibility. But the prophet declares that, so far from being an impossibility, it is a certainty, because it has been decreed by the Almighty, and He calls upon them to put their trust in God, the source of all power, and to bestir themselves and march forth in His strength, buoyant, energetic, persistent; for “they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.” What strikes us at first sight as curious about this statement is the order in which these results of faith in God are given—flying, running, walking. That seems to us an inversion of the natural order. We are apt to say, surely walking is easier than running, and running is easier than flying. We should have expected the prophet to say, They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall walk and not faint, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall mount up with wings as eagles.

But he does not say that. His order is not walking, running, flying, but flying, running, walking.

It sounds like an anti-climax. But it is not. On the contrary, as George Adam Smith has well said, it is a true climax, rising from the easier to the more difficult. It is a true description of Christian life and work. It is far easier to mount up with wings as eagles and to run and not be weary than it is to walk and not faint. It is far easier to kindle a blaze of temporary enthusiasm about religion, or make a burst of speed in some new religious enterprise than it is to persevere through difficulties, dangers and disappointments. The most effective servant of God is not the man of ardent feeling or impetuous zeal, but the man of steadfast persistence—not the man who can fly or the man who can run, but the man who can plod. We do need the uplift of enthusiasm, and we do need the dash of energy, but we need still more the power of endurance. A skyrocket is a beautiful thing and by no means without its uses; a bonfire is a joyous thing, and by no means devoid of warmth, but a fire of good hickory logs or hard coals is better. The text describes three phases of religious experience—the ecstatic, the impetuous and the persistent. They are all of value, but the one that counts for most in the long run—the one that accomplishes most in the end—is the persistent.

Flying, running, walking—soaring, spurting, trudging—enthusiasm, energy, endurance—these three, but the greatest of these is *endurance*.

And *that*, my brethren, is the real reason why the Presbyterian Church has done so great a work in the world and has won so great a place in history. No denomination in all the sisterhood of churches has shown more staunchness and steadfastness and persistence and "*patient continuance* in well doing." It is sometimes said that the reason for the great position of the Presbyterian Church in history is its intellectual force. But that is only a part of the truth.

The quality which has given it an influence out of all proportion to its numbers is not primarily a quality of mind, but a quality of character. For, as the *Saturday Evening Post* has said, "Ability never amounts to much until it acquires two more letters and becomes *stability*." And whatever else men may say about you as a church, they all with one accord give you credit for staying power, for steadiness, for perseverance. And they respect you for it. They know that while flying and running attract more *attention* than walking, while the obtrusive things of life win more applause, it's the steady things of life that accomplish more results. A brilliant minister of a sister denomination said once that a Presbyterian congregation was more trying to him than any other because they had so little apparent enthusiasm and looked at everything in such a sober-sided, steady way. "However," he added, "they have some good points, and one of them is that *they will pull on a cold collar*." He meant that like a staunch team of horses, they would do their duty at any time regardless of the state of their feelings. They pull whether they feel like it or not.

Professor Upham has said that there are two classes of Christians—those who live chiefly by emotion and those who live chiefly by faith. The first class, those who live chiefly by emotion, remind one of ships that move by the outward impulse of winds operating upon sails. They are often in a dead calm, often out of their course, and sometimes driven back. And it is only when the winds are fair and powerful that they move onward with rapidity. The other class, those who live chiefly by faith, remind one of the mighty steamers which cross the Atlantic, which are moved by an interior and permanent force, and which, setting at defiance all ordinary obstacles, advance steadily and swiftly to their destination, through calm and storm, through cloud and sunshine. Those who depend for inspiration on the state of their own fluctuating feelings or on external

conditions will be strenuous or slack in their work, according as the outlook is promising or unpromising, but those who wait upon the Lord, those who trust fully His unchanging wisdom, power and love, will work steadily on regardless alike of their feelings and their circumstances.

We have an English colloquialism to describe a thing that starts well and then fails. We say it *peters out*. Dr. Denison has suggested that the expression is derived from the name of that impulsive, boastful disciple who in his earlier career was always making such a brave start and then failing to make good. Peter did this so often that that sort of performance had come to be known by his name. We say of a man who acts that way that he peters out. He lacks constancy, steadfastness, persistence. Now, your ideal Presbyterian is certainly not a quitter. He sticks to it. He sees the thing through. He works at it steadily. He bends all his powers to it as though the whole success of it depended on him. And yet he says, and says truly, that the whole success of it depends on God. Indeed, he so magnifies the sovereignty of God in salvation and in all religious work, he so insists that divine power alone can accomplish real results, that superficial observers sometimes accuse him of fatalism. They say, "You Presbyterians stress the sovereignty of God so much that you destroy the sense of human responsibility, you cut the nerves of human effort, you say God does everything, then there is no occasion for man to do anything, you put a premium on sloth." Well, the answer to all this is historic fact. It is precisely the people who have so exalted the sovereignty of God that have always done the most strenuous and persistent work for His Kingdom. And that is the teaching of our text. Wait upon the Lord, mount up with wings, run, walk. It is a trumpet call to faith in the sovereign power of God, who increaseth strength to them that have no might, and it is a trumpet call to the most intense and persistent self-exertion—flying, running, walking.

The combination that God has ordained in order to the best success is trust and toil—absolute dependence on Him and manly self-dependence. And this is the combination that has made our people so great a force in human affairs. I am, of course, very far from claiming that Presbyterians have a monopoly of this combination. We honor it equally when we see it in our brethren of other churches. But we may claim, I think, without immodesty, that no denomination has exemplified this combination more signally than ours, and that as a consequence none has shown more staying power in character and work.

There are three features of the Presbyterian system which have contributed powerfully to the making of this intelligent, steadfast, dependable type of Christian character: First, the Presbyterian polity, or mode of church government; second, the Presbyterian type of worship, or forms of service, and third, the Presbyterian creed, or system of doctrine.

THE PRESBYTERIAN POLITY.

1. In its polity, or method of ecclesiastical organization and government, Presbyterianism is republican in its form and spirit. Its fundamental principles are personal liberty and constitutional organization.

A personal liberty such as is involved in the Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, bringing every man face to face with God, and teaching that each individual "must for himself realize the priceless benefits and dignities of redemption," gives to every man personal worth, and cannot fail to put a premium upon the best development of all his powers.

The other principle is constitutional self-government.

Presbyterianism holds that church power rests not in the clergy but in the people, and that church government is administered not by a single individual, which would be monarchy, nor immediately by the people, which would be

democracy, but by representatives of the people, chosen by the people, and sitting in constitutional assemblies. These representatives are of equal rank. Presbyterianism asserts not merely the parity of ministers, but the parity of Presbyters, the teaching elder and the ruling elder have equal authority in all the courts. It is popular government by representative majorities. In short, the Presbyterian Church is an ecclesiastical republic.

Now, the very first necessity of a successful republic is general intelligence. Presbyterianism has thus been compelled by the genius of its organization, even by the instinct of self-preservation, to promote the education of all its people. A system which teaches that church power rests in the people and is administered by representatives of the people is of necessity the friend of the education of the people. This is the ground of Bancroft's statement that Calvin was the father of popular education, the inventor of the system of free schools.

The two great principles which characterize Calvin's system, viz: personal liberty or the worth of the individual, and republican organization or constitutional self-government, are both derived directly from Scripture, and it is in these two principles that we find much of the potency of Presbyterianism as a maker of character, a maker of men, a maker of citizens. It teaches that all men are the sons of the Lord Almighty, that all are equal and all are kings; that every soul is of infinite value and dignity and that each individual mind may be in direct communication with its Creator. With such a conception of man there can be no despotism in church or state. No prelate or king can be lord over another man's conscience.

The historic opposition of Presbyterianism to all tyranny in church or state is therefore not an accident. It is no accident that Presbyterianism has furnished more martyrs to Christianity since the Reformation than all the other

churches combined. It is no accident that Presbyterianism has taken a leading part in all those great movements which have secured the religious and civil liberty now enjoyed by the foremost nations of the world. These things have sprung naturally and inevitably out of the Presbyterian estimate of the worth of the individual and the Presbyterian theory of government by the people. "Civil and religious liberty are linked together. In whom does church power rest? In the people or in the clergy? When you settle that question you decide the question also of the civil liberty of the nation. If you decide that the power rests with the clergy, then you establish a principle which, by an inevitable analogy, associates itself with the principle that the civil power rests in kings and nobles." Hence the remark of Lord Bacon that "Discipline by bishops is fittest for monarchy of all others. But if you settle, as Presbyterians do, that church power rests in the people, in the church itself, then from this principle springs the other, that civil power rests in the people themselves and that all civil rulers are the servants of the people." If there is liberty in the church, there will be liberty in the State; if there is no bishop in the church, there will be no tyrant on the throne."

Hence it is that modern tyrants have with one consent recognized that Presbyterianism was their natural enemy and have hated and feared it accordingly. Charles the First of England, whose inability to tell the truth and keep an oath cost him his head, did tell the truth once at least when he said, "The doctrine (of the Presbyterians) is anti-monarchical," and he added that "there was not a wiser man since Solomon than he who said, 'No bishop, no king.'" James the First, born and reared a Scot, spoke what he knew when, at the Hampton Court Conference, he said, "Ye are aiming at a Scot's Presbytery, which agrees with monarchy as well as God and the devil." History has demonstrated that the views thus expressed by the Stuart kings were absolutely

correct. Presbyterianism has not only placed a premium on self-culture by its doctrine of personal liberty and its estimate of the worth of the individual; it has not only placed a premium on general intelligence by its republican polity, which rests the power of government in the people themselves and administers it through representatives of the people, but, as a natural consequence, it has in every age been a chief educator of the people in the principles of civil liberty and has in every land reared heroic champions of human freedom—Admiral Coligni in France, William the Silent in Holland, John Knox in Scotland, and William the Third of England, whose victory at the battle of the Boyne saved the British Empire and America, too, from the blighting rule of Rome. As to our own struggle for national independence, it is well known that the revolt of the American colonies was spoken of in England as a Presbyterian rebellion. When Horace Walpole said, “Cousin America has run away with a Presbyterian parson,” he was doubtless referring particularly to Rev. Dr. John Witherspoon, President of Princeton, whose speech in the Colonial Congress swept the waiverers to a decision in favor of the Declaration of Independence, and who was the only minister of any denomination who signed that immortal document; but Walpole’s remark might well have been made with the whole body of American Presbyterian ministers in view. They instructed the people in their rights. They called them to arms in defense of their liberties. They sat in the councils of state. They endured the privations of the camp and the fatigues of the march, and they fought beside their parishioners on the fields of bloody strife. It is not too much to say that the American Revolution could not have succeeded but for the Presbyterian ministers. While some denominations were opposed to war under any circumstances, and therefore preferred submission to armed resistance, and while the clergy of some other denominations sup-

ported the crown and bitterly opposed the movements for independence, the Presbyterian ministers throughout the whole country, from New England to Georgia, gave to the cause of the colonies all that they could give of the sanction of religion, and wherever a minister of that denomination was settled, the people around him were Whigs almost to a man. This is now gratefully recognized by our brethren of all denominations, and whatever the indifference or shortcomings or hostility of their own ministers to the people's cause in the Revolutionary struggle, they all now alike honor the Presbyterian ministers who denounced the oppression of the mother country, and fired the hearts of the people to resistance, and fought and suffered to secure the freedom in which all alike rejoice today.

In speaking of Presbyterians it is generally quality that is considered rather than numbers; when the world estimates their services it does not count, it weighs. Bishop Candler, of the Methodist Church, says: "There is only one objection to the Presbyterians, that is, there are not enough of them." Yet in mere bulk and number, as well as in influence, they contributed more than any other strain of our people to the Revolutionary army. One-third of the whole population of the colonies at that time was of Presbyterian stock and they were then, as always, the kind of people who did not put their hand to the plow and look back.

The Presbyterian polity, then, has been a mighty promoter of the intelligent and steadfast type of Christian patriot. By its fundamental principle of personal liberty and the worth of the individual it has strongly stimulated self-culture; by its fundamental principle of representative government, with its inevitable demand for general intelligence, it has strongly stimulated popular education; and, growing out of these two as naturally as a tree springs from its roots, it has developed a strong type of manly

character, hatred of tyranny and love of liberty in the state as well as the church, and, we think, has become one of the best promoters of ideal citizenship that the world has ever seen.

THE PRESBYTERIAN WORSHIP.

2. A second thing which has contributed to the staying power of Presbyterianism is its type of worship. As Dr. McPherson says, its forms of worship, like those of the New Testament, are usually simple and non-ritualistic. In view of the dangers of formalistic and spectacular services the common Presbyterian custom has been to follow an order which is plain and reasonable, and perhaps occasionally austere. Often defective in beautiful ceremonies which appeal to the aesthetic instincts, sometimes deficient also in the enthusiasm which warms the feelings, Presbyterianism has steadily made its specific impression upon the mind rather than the tastes or the emotions, appealing to ideas and convictions more directly than to the sentiments or the external senses. Accordingly, Mr. Froude, who was certainly no Presbyterian, has said, "When emotion and sentiment and tender imaginative piety have become the handmaids of superstition, and have dreamt themselves into forgetfulness that there is any difference between lies and the truth, the slavish form of belief called Calvinism in one or other of its many forms has ever borne an inflexible front to illusion and mendacity, and preferred rather to be ground to powder like flint than to bend before violence or melt under enervating temptation."

This is, in great part, a result of the robust thoughtfulness of Presbyterian worship. "In particular, Presbyterianism has always exalted the sermon as a leading part of worship, and thus emphasized the teaching function of the minister to the extinction of the priestly. The high themes of the Christian pulpit in the hands of trained and earnest men have supplied a measureless educational force. Popular

ignorance scatters like mist before the sun in the presence of able, convincing and persuasive sermons.

“In view of this uniform importance which Presbyterianism has attached to the didactic vocation of the pulpit, it naturally produces a peculiar type of experience and character in its worshipers. If they are reserved in the expression of passionate fervor, if they come short in artistic sensibility, they are as a class highly developed in the substantial elements of intellect, judgment and conscience. They are trained to think, to reason, to weigh and to decide for themselves. They can generally give a reason for the hope that is in them. They follow common sense and appoint themselves detectives of humbug, and they are remarkably free from visionary whims, caprices and vagaries.” They have staying power.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CREED.

3. The third reason for the staunchness of the Presbyterian type of religion is its creed or system of doctrine.

There is not time to amplify this point, so I will simply cite the testimony of three eminent witnesses, neither of whom is a Presbyterian.

The Rev. Dr. Curry, an able and distinguished leader of the Methodist Church in America, says of the Westminster Confession of Faith: “It is the clearest and most comprehensive system of doctrine ever framed. It is not only a wonderful monument of the intellectual greatness of its framers, but also a comprehensive embodiment of nearly all the precious truths of the gospel. We concede to the Calvinistic churches the honor of having all along directed the best thinking of the country.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson laments in the following language the effect of New England’s lapse from Calvinism to Unitarianism: “Our later generation appears ungirt, frivolous, compared with the religions of the last or Calvinistic age. The religion seventy years ago was an iron

belt to the mind, giving it concentration and force. A rude people were kept respectable by the determination of thought on the eternal world. Now, men fall abroad, want polarity, suffer in character and intellect."

Henry Ward Beecher, Congregationalist and extreme liberal though he was, says: "There is no system which equals Calvinism in intensifying to the last degree ideas of moral excellence and purity of character. There never was a system since the world stood which puts upon man such motives to holiness, or which builds batteries which sweep the whole ground of sin with such horrible artillery. Men may talk as much as they please against the Calvinists and Puritans and Presbyterians, but you will find that when they want to make an investment they have no objection to Calvinism or Puritanism or Presbyterianism. They know that where these systems prevail, where the doctrine of men's obligation to God and man is taught and practiced, there their capital may be safely invested. They tell us," he continues, "that Calvinism plies men with hammer and chisel. It does, and the result is monumental marble. (Some) other systems leave men soft and dirty. Calvinism makes them of white marble to endure forever."

Such, my brethren, are some of the facts in regard to the value of the Presbyterian polity, worship and doctrine in the making of strong Christian character and in the doing of substantial Christian work. Let no one suppose that these facts are mentioned in a spirit of mere self-praise. There is surely no harm in recognizing gratefully any gifts and graces God may have bestowed upon our branch of the church. Nay, there is positive spiritual advantage in doing so, for the contemplation of such a record is fitted to humble us for our own shortcomings, and to fire us with a new zeal for the great scriptural system which enabled our fathers to render so mighty a service to the Kingdom of God.

That system is our heritage. But there are some ominous signs in our time that we are not all holding this heritage intact and that the proper attitude for us is not self-complacency, but self-examination. For instance, if the people choose the church officers whom they wish to have charge of their organized religious work, and if we allow all manner of voluntary and irresponsible societies to virtually displace the session and other church courts and to determine the method by which our work shall be carried on, regardless of the chosen representatives of the people, are we protecting the people in the rights which belong to them under our Scriptural republican polity, and will not both officers and people suffer loss of power?

Again, if we substitute for our simple New Testament forms of worship an elaborate ritual which appeals to the senses and the artistic sensibilities rather than to the mind and the conscience, and which relies on ceremonies rather than ideas, can we hope to continue to produce the staunch and thoughtful type of piety which has been the glory of our past?

Again, if we substitute for the strong theology which teaches that there is one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves, that there is a sovereign God of absolute power to help, to save, to perform, to carry out His will—if we substitute for that the idea of a God incapable of foreseeing the future, subject to mistakes, wrestling with an unmanageable universe, whose providence, instead of moving with the definiteness of Omnipotence, is “like a drop of water trickling down a window pane,” uncertain where it will run next*—do we not dim the inspiring vision of faith and weaken the uplifting assurance of victory—do we not cripple high endeavor and render patient continuance in well-doing almost impossible?

No, my brethren, if we would still continue to make

*Biblical World, xlv., 238.

Christians who can not only mount up with wings as eagles, and who cannot only run and not be weary, but who can also walk and not faint, then we must still stand by our free polity, our simple worship and our stalwart creed.

Dr. Charles E. Jefferson has said with truth that "we have today flocks of flying Christians, quite too much in the air. We have also racing Christians, a breed who run with fury and raise a deal of dust and disappear. The Christian man most needed is the man who will quietly walk through the years, day by day loyally doing his task, loving the church with a passion which does not sputter or die down, and serving the church with a fidelity which knows no shadow of turning. He is the man who is a pillar in the temple of our God, and he shall go no more out forever."

In this flighty, hasty, superficial age of ours there is surely need for the solid, staunch and persistent type of Christian character and work. There is need for it in your city as well as elsewhere. And I pray God that this venerable church which for a hundred years has stood for these ideals in this community, may abide by them steadfastly through the years to come. Wait on the Lord. Mount up with wings as eagles. Run without weariness. Walk without fainting. God give you this uplift of the soul, this readiness for His service, this patience in His work!