

T H E
GOOD CENTURION,

An Example for Scotchmen in Canada;

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

ST. ANDREW'S SOCIETY

OF MONTREAL,

On Monday, December 1st, 1862,

BY THE

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"He loveth our nation."

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S E R M O N .

Luke vii. 5.—“ He loveth our nation.”

This candid testimony to appreciated worth, voluntarily proffered with the desire of obtaining an important favour for its subject, indicates a case, which, according to our estimation of the circumstances of its occurrence, must have been an exceptional one. It is a tribute paid by Jews to one who was not a Jew, but a Roman,—a phenomenon this, so remarkable, that we at once feel the necessity of some explanation ; and the interest we readily attach to the incident is greatly enhanced by the fulness with which the desiderated particulars may be supplied.

When the Centurion arrived in the country, according to the sentiment of Jewish nationalism which was still strong and hopeful, though much disturbed and embittered, he found himself placed towards its inhabitants in the very unfavourable relation of a Gentile foreigner. On this account, his reception, we imagine, must have been such as the pride of a conscious and exclusive superiority is wont to offer,—cold, suspicious, slighting. But if this circumstance was calculated to excite a feeling of haughty disdain, there was another that was likely to provoke the more formidable passion of malicious hatred, namely, his official military capacity. By this time, the glory of a separate, independent, self-sustaining nationality had passed away from the Jewish people. Their royal line had become extinct, in order that, in fulfilment of Divine purposes, the way might be prepared for the perpetual reign upon the throne of Israel, of King David's Lord, who, as his kingdom was not of this world, was not recognized by a worldly, carnal people, as its rightful heir. The country had been annexed, as part of a pro-

vincial dependency, to the Roman empire Its civil government was such as the subjugating heathen power might choose to dictate, and was conducted by such officials as it was pleased to appoint. It is not in human nature, far less could there be a disposition in the heart of the Jewish people, to submit at once complacently to so humiliating a change, and we may well believe that every circumstance and every functionary, that visibly reminded them of the hated barbarian domination to which they were yoked, would be a most unwelcome presence. All military arrangements for the maintenance of an unwilling subjection would be especially odious, as they supplied the additional demonstration of the utter hopelessness of succeeding in any attempt to regain lost independence and vanished glory, against the immense resources with which the mistress of the world could oppose and punish it.

These facts immediately suggest the magnitude of the obstacles with which the Centurion, who is the subject of the eulogium in the text, had to contend, if he seriously proposed to himself the task of securing the favourable opinion and cordial respect of the citizens of Capernaum, among whom he and his garrison were stationed ; or they show with what unlikelihood any personal good qualities he possessed would produce their natural fruits in so unpromising a sphere, and meet with suitable appreciation and acknowledgment. Yet such was the excellence of his character, and such the urbanity of his conduct, and above all, such the proofs which he gave of his interest in the religion of the Jews and his respect for its ordinances, that these disadvantages were entirely overcome. He won his way to the hearts of a people who were disposed to regard him as an enemy. He stood high in their affectionate esteem. And when an occasion occurred, on which their leading citizens could be of service to him, they spontaneously gave their commendation of his worth.

He seems, indeed, to have been a truly good man, ingen-

uous, humane, generous, and humble. With a mind open to salutary influences, from whatever quarter they might come, he gladly received any benefit that could be derived from his intercourse with the Jews. Instead of using the authority with which he was clothed as an instrument of insolence or oppression, he divested it of its hatefulness by the remarkable forbearance and respectful consideration which he manifested. Instead of standing aloof from his fellow-men, whom he might have seen reason to despise, and waiting only for opportunities of official interference, he actively identified his own interests with those of the place in which he lived and of the people among whom he resided. This course resulted largely to his profit, and he was not slow to acknowledge his obligations in the most liberal manner. These circumstances sufficiently show how, notwithstanding every probability to the contrary, it nevertheless came to pass, that the elders of the Jews spoke to Jesus of this Roman officer in the laudatory terms of the text. He loved their nation. They felt assured of that, and advanced the most notable evidence of it: "he hath built us a synagogue." This destroyed the enmity of their hearts, and yielding to the resistless power of the sentiment they praised, they cheerfully declared that they were sensible of it.

But now, let us not forget, that besides the relation which he thus improved and adorned, the Centurion sustained another which was an older and a stronger one. He was a Roman by birth. His native home lay somewhere within the limits of the Imperial State; a spot that was surely fairer in his estimation and dearer to his heart than any other upon earth. Sojourning in a remote dependency, thither, throughout the period of his separation, his thoughts would often turn. The beauty of Judæan scenery might minister delight to his spirit, but sweeter and deeper would be his gratification when recalling the land of his sires and the surroundings of his childhood. Animated

with a generous love to the Jewish nation, his heart still glowed under the power and purity of patriotic sympathies ; in fact we may recognize in the latter the natural stem upon which the former was grafted, for he who loves his own country well will ever be ready to share and encourage the sentiments of the patriot in every land. Between the identification of himself with local interests and his home-born attachments there was no incompatibility, but a beautiful and noble consistency. He was moreover a Roman by allegiance, specially sworn and commissioned to assert the rights and uphold the dignities of his government, whenever they were endangered or opposed. This was a relation the claims and responsibilities of which were of necessity always present to his mind. But he found he could both carry the sword as Cæsar's representative and promote the wellbeing of the community in which he lived. In truth, whether he made it a matter of study or not, he pursued the very course which was at once the dictate of patriotic inspiration and the most likely means of securing respect to his authority, submission to his government, and reconciliation to their altered civil relations among his Jewish fellow-subjects.

Hear then, My Countrymen, in the character and conduct of this noble Roman soldier while fulfilling his appointment to a term of provincial service, we have an admirable exemplification of what may be called, the proper deportment of patriotic colonists, such as we this day publicly avow ourselves to be. And if, following the sketch which I have given of it, we have remarked any points of resemblance between our own situation and that of the Centurion, let us not be ashamed to take such practical suggestions as they offer, in regard to the due upholding of the relations we sustain, the interests involved in them, and the responsibilities which they impose,—ever remembering that if the dear old land, from which we or our fathers have come by voluntary expatriation, has peculiar claims upon our lifelong love and

dutiful commemoration, the land in which we live has also claims upon us which we can neither wisely nor safely neglect. We are not patriots because we are Scotchmen ; but if there dwells in our bosoms the true spirit of Scottish patriotism, which rejoices in the progress of social virtue, manly independence, enlightened civilization, and all the humanizing arts of peace wherever they are cultivated, then not Scotland alone, much as we love and have reason to love her, but also Britain, and especially this great dependency of the British Crown, will occupy an exalted place in the loyalty of our hearts, and in the honest, upright, judicious, and, let me say, prayerful endeavour of our lives. We may therefore profitably advert to a few of the more general similarities alluded to.

I. Our situation is one of separation from the Fatherland. At the call of duty or from some less disinterested consideration, such as a romantic love of change or a desire to improve our temporal condition, we have transferred ourselves hither from the place of our birth. All the leagues of the Atlantic lie between us and the realities of our first, most unrestrained familiarity. That which it was once the office of sight to do, it is now the function of memory to perform ; and the exercise is sometimes grateful, sometimes sad, as we recall the scenes of former days, when the family group was yet unbroken by death and unscattered by change, and live betimes in a sort of reflective absorption upon the natural objects and social institutions with which our first-begotten associations are connected. We still feel interested in the companions of our youth, our mates at school and competitors at boyish games, often rejoicing at the eminent usefulness and illustrious distinction to which some of them have attained, and as often wondering how it has fared with others in the pilgrimage and battle of life. A gush of tenderest emotion swells our bosoms as we let our spirits dwell on more sacred things—the hallowing stillness of the Scottish rural Sabbath, when all the noise of

worldly toil is hushed, and the air is filled with the glorious harmony of pure sweet notes, with which it is nature's prerogative on the holy day to express her charms and improve her admirers, as she celebrates her Creator's praise—the house of prayer to which a parent's hand first conducted us, and where our earliest impressions of the reality and importance of religion were, through the solemn administration of word and ordinance, realized—the old churchyard where the dust of bygone generations is heaped, and where the ashes of dearest friends and nearest relatives repose. Diverting our recollections to another track, we minister to our instruction by summoning before us those hoary monuments of the stirring events of Scottish history, with which every corner of the land is enriched; or find pleasure in the mental rehearsal, now of the legends and traditions which have been floated down the current of story from ancient times, and now of amusing anecdotes which have originated with the real celebrities of modern days. Nor do we fail to think with satisfaction and reverence of the valuable contributions which some of Scotia's sons, eminently gifted with the resources of genius and the spirit of industrious application, have made to every department of literature, science, and art, thereby communicating a wholesome and elevating tone to the higher educational institutions of our native land, and even exercising a most beneficial tendency upon the thoughts and sentiments of the population at large.

Under a combination of manifold influences such as these, our love of country was born and bred. We may not be able to assign a date to the first movements of the principle within us. Unconsciously, it may be, it took shape, acquired expansion, and matured its growth; for, like other sentiments and capacities of our nature, it is the better off, if it does not need, a time of trial to prove its existence and determine its character. As with the youth going forth into the world from his father's house, so with the emigrant

quitting his native shore, he may never have realized how much he loves it until the hour of parting comes. As to the result, it need hardly be doubted that among the great mass of settlers in this new world, notwithstanding the admission of numerous advantages from the change, there is a more intense love of country than among those who remain at home. Many illustrations of this fact readily occur to us all. It is this which leads to the formation of such Societies as that whose anniversary we are celebrating—not the need of an institution to remind us of our origin and preserve our nationality, but the desire for an opportunity of uniting together in the expression of our common feelings of attachment to the mother country. How often does the home-sick immigrant, who has been scarcely a day among us, bitterly regret the course of events which has brought him hither! How often does the colonist, even after many years of prosperous settlement, sigh for an opportunity of visiting the place of his birth, believing that if he only saw once more its hills and streams, he could live more contentedly and die more peacefully! How few are thoroughly reconciled to the prospect of never again treading their native soil! How great and prompt is the power of occurrences which in other circumstances would be deemed most trivial—the naming of an old companion, the meeting of fellow villagers, the hearing of a Scottish song or proverb—in stirring our recollections and feelings about home.

And if parting furnishes the trial by which the strength of our attachment is discovered, continued separation enables us to judge of the extent to which it remains and the manner in which it is affected. Our love for the Fatherland is not only not diminished by a long absence from it, but it also asserts its supremacy over all predilections subsequently acquired, in spite of the most favourable comparisons. Though we are prepared to avow of the lot which has fallen to us, that it is both goodly and pleasant; though we look upon a clearer sky and breathe a purer air; though we have richer fields and more majestic rivers; our preferences still

unmistakably cling to the country whence we come ; and whatever be the arguments and demonstrations we may have occasion to resist, none of them can equal in force and eloquence the simple reply with which we meet them all—"it is our own, our native land."

II. Our situation is one of advantage to our social and personal interests. There are some respects in which we have lost nothing by the change. Our position, rights, and privileges as British subjects are not impaired. Our expatriation has not removed or estranged us from the Empire of which Scotland is territorially but a little part. We enjoy all the unspeakable advantages of civil and religious freedom, and the fault will be our own if we do not transmit them in their integrity to our children. We have easy access to the purest and most substantial productions of literary effort ; we can avail ourselves of all the applications of the discoveries and developements of modern enterprise to the useful and liberal arts ; we are blessed with an abundance of educational institutions of every grade ; we lack none of the facilities for cultivating and perpetuating the amenities of social life. The inhabitants of this Province, whether native-born or otherwise, are our fellow-subjects, and we have reason to congratulate ourselves on the prevalency amongst them of a sentiment of loyalty that vies with our own, in the characteristics of enlightenment, soundness, and determination. The British Government generously extends to us the patronage of its favour and the shield of its protection, while devolving upon our own shoulders the responsibilities connected with constitutional authority and local legislation. Victoria—whom may God preserve "long to reign over us !"—is our Queen, and we need yield to none of her subjects as regards the place which she holds in our merited admiration, fond affection, and prayerful wishes.

There are some respects in which the apparent disadvantages of expatriation are relieved. In this land the Scotch-

man has frequent opportunities of meeting with countrymen, and so, of enjoying in grateful converse his recollections of the past, and of lessening whatever may be disagreeable in his present lot by the interchange of common sympathies and mutual encouragements. Wherever he chooses a home for himself he generally finds a considerate disposition to welcome and assist him, on the part of those whose experience qualifies them to act as advisers ; and it gratifies him to see the readiness with which colonists of every origin strive to make common cause with him, in the novelty and strangeness of his situation. Another alleviation is the actual proximity of Canada to Britain. We are really not far away from home—not farther, in point of travelling time, than some parts of Scotland were, not very long ago, from one another. Such is the efficiency and frequency of our postal communication by various lines, that we can have letters from friends and acquaintances much oftener than we have the time or care to answer them ; such is the practical application of that most marvellous of modern discoveries, the electric telegraph, that we receive all public news of any interest when only a few days old ; and such the enterprize, energy, and capital devoted to the provision of an inexpensive and comfortable sailing accommodation across the ocean, that it is fast becoming as much an affair of pleasure as of business to pass from shore to shore, and there are few but feel that, whether to gratify a desire or obey a call of duty, we might easily and speedily revisit Scotia's strand. These are facilities which have a powerful effect in reconciling us to separation, whensoever we may be tempted to regard it as a hardship ; and as we reflect upon the amazing progress with which in recent years they have been furnished, we are prepared to consider them as but the beginning of manifold greater achievements with which the future is pregnant.

There are some respects in which our separation is a positive gain. With the vast multitudes who annually

reach our shores as immigrants, the principal object is the improvement of their temporal estate ; and in the case of honest, steady, and industrious Scotchmen there is no doubt that, saving it may be a little temporary hardship at the commencement of their career, disappointment is but the exceptional result, while of many it is true that they have risen to circumstances of comfort, independence, and even affluence, of which they had no expectation in their brightest visions of worldly success. Thousands of our countrymen have thus, with the blessing of a beneficent Providence, benefitted themselves and their families much more abundantly than they could ever hope to do in their native land. There is also an intellectual and moral gain which most of us will cheerfully acknowledge. Emerging from some limited sphere, breaking loose from the hampering routine of unchanging pursuits, casting off the yoke of ordinary commonplace ideas, and then, as it were, stepping out into the great world and coming in contact with its enlarged realities, there has been a consequent expansion of the mind through personal observation and independent effort, there has been a more thoughtful realization of the significance of human relationships, there has been a freer exercise of the great sentiments and sympathies of a benevolent interest in the frailties, needs, and strivings, which mark the progress and affect the destiny of our common brotherhood. And to these I do not hesitate to add an actual gain of a spiritual kind with a religious tendency. For who that thinks of it, and it is a thought which frequently recurs to reflecting minds—that this self-expatriation disturbs the delusive idea of an abiding home, which the more settled conditions of old country life are apt to encourage,—but is ready to testify with those of old who “ confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth ”—an experience this, which should serve to check all inordinate attachments to things and places here below, and give to our better desires a steadier aim towards the celestial home of eternal union, purity, and bliss ?

III. Our situation is one which devolves upon us all very grave responsibilities and duties. It is not required of us to attempt the impossibility of forgetting the land of our birth ; but, while preserving a grateful and affectionate remembrance of that land, and cherishing an undying interest in whatever concerns her national character and affects the welfare of her people, we ought not to enervate our energies for present usefulness, by giving way to the foolishness of a mere romantic doting. There are considerations sufficiently legitimate and powerful to animate us to a wiser course, and to direct and stimulate our endeavours to follow it. That our lives may be truly profitable, we must circumscribe the range of our activities within manageable limits. The wider relations we sustain are most honourably upheld by a faithful attention to such as are more immediate. If there be anything in the position and character of our nation to justify in us a feeling of honest pride, let us demonstrate our sense and appreciation of it, by cultivating here a strict adherence to the principles of honour and virtue which constitute the only true foundation of it. If we have any faith in the distinctive characteristics of Scottish individuality, let us be jealously watchful against whatever may tend to impair them or throw discredit upon the name we bear. If we have been taught to revere all noble and manly qualities, let us not nullify the instructions of our youth, by giving way to indiscretions and follies in maturer years. If our love of country has been nurtured to robustness amidst wholesome influences, let the fruits it should be producing now be as the seed which, by its fall, propagates the goodly plant. The land in which we live and the community of which we are members are the field which shall hereafter show, to what, if any purpose, we have imbibed the spirit of patriotism, and improved the legacy of a generous self-reliance inherited from our fathers. This country has claims upon our devotion to its weal which we cannot dare to repudiate, without proving ourselves to be unworthy of our origin. Here, the bountiful God whom we

worship, the God of our Fathers, has visited and blessed us with many tokens of his favour, and it is but the part of filial dependence and gratitude to acknowledge our indebtedness, by acquitting ourselves in every way most likely to glorify his name, and promote the well-being of our fellow-citizens. This is the birth-place and home of our children, and for their sakes we should feel the importance of such an exemplary discharge of all life's duties, as they may have pleasure and profit in imitating. In the mingling of nationalities and the diversity of creeds, by which the present state of this country is singularly characterized, there is room for the exercise of a respectful Christian forbearance, but such is the degree of amity that prevails, that there is nothing to shake, but much to warrant, the expectation of speedy and enduring results for the public good, from the maintainance on the part of individuals of all that is best in human character. Whatever be the direction and way in which these varied circumstances open out to us the path of duty, let us follow the course which, with the approval of our consciences, they indicate to be the worthiest; let us do so with a temperate and prudent zeal for all the interests involved, social, moral, civil, and religious; and so, it shall be seen by the generations which are to come, that Scotchmen have not lived in Canada in vain, but that they have wisely co-operated with other nationalities in shaping and forwarding the progress of Provincial prosperity.

Finally, if your love of country especially prompts you to be interested in the welfare of your countrymen, let me remind you that from year to year many of these land upon our shores but poorly qualified for the difficulties and hardships of the settler's life. It is a good and blessed work to direct and assist them in their laudable project of self-improvement, to send them rejoicing on their way to the place of their destination in the vast interior, and thus be the means of causing them to feel that they are not thrown altogether among strangers, but that the sympathy of their countrymen is ready to extend to them an encouraging

welcome and a helping hand. That, together with the relief of the Scottish poor resident in this city, is now the principal, as it is certainly a most appropriate object of the active operations of this Society. During the last year, as your Charitable Committee has reported, "The St. Andrew's Home" has been of essential service in the accommodation, for longer or shorter periods, of many persons who would otherwise have been exposed to much suffering and temptation, and, thanks to the generosity of its numerous friends and benefactors, a very large amount of pecuniary aid has been dispensed in connection with it. Let me earnestly commend to your continued regards and liberal support this active and valuable charity, which is entitled to our fullest confidence because of the care and judiciousness with which it is conducted. And if, in pressing this matter upon your attention, I may take any other argument from the history of our Institution since last Anniversary, let it be the impressive fact which the altered state of our membership presents, for an unusual number of deaths for a single year has occurred, occasioning the removal, from a list by far too small, of the names of some of the earliest friends of the Society, and some of the most unostentatious but liberal contributors to its funds. Like them, we all must soon resign the post of usefulness and duty to other occupants. While now we have the opportunity and the means, let us honour the claims of a patriotic, Christian benevolence.