

**SERMON AND OTHER EXERCISES AT THE
ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION OF
ALEXANDER MCKENZIE, AS PASTOR OF
THE SOUTH PARISH CHURCH, AUGUSTA,
MAINE, AUGUST 28, 1861**

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Sermon and Other Exercises at the Ordination and Installation of Alexander McKenzie, as
Pastor of the South Parish Church, Augusta, Maine, August 28, 1861 by George Richards

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GEORGE RICHARDS

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August 28, 1861.

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SERMON

BY

REV. GEORGE RICHARDS

OF

LITCHFIELD, CONN.

S E R M O N .

ISAIAH, xxviii: 10.

PRECEPT* UPON PRECEPT, PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT; LINE UPON LINE,
LINE UPON LINE; HERE A LITTLE, AND THERE A LITTLE.

THIS is the language of complaint. These Hebrews are finding fault with their religious instruction. It is too monotonous; too repetitious; the self-same lessons over and over.

Does not the preaching of our day provoke the like criticism with the prophesying of that day? Facing as we do, Sabbath after Sabbath, essentially the same congregation, speaking from the same book, educing from it topics, one very like another, is it not fair to conclude that some among our hearers, at least mentally, adopt the language of the Text?

I propose to treat of the repetition incident to all genuine preaching: the grounds of it, the precedent for it, the advantages from it.

I. The Grounds.

The very structure of the mind seems to require this reiteration of instruction. We have a strange facility in

*The verb is wanting in the Hebrew.

losing the impressions made upon us. Either they are obliterated altogether, or they become vague and imperceptible to consciousness. The tablet of memory would soon become a blank, at least so far as recollection goes, were not great pains taken to hold back and call back the facts and truths recorded, from the oblivion toward which they ever tend. For lack of such studious retrospection, a large part of our mental acquisitions come and go like the shadow of the cloud on the standing grain, leaving no footprints. Religious impressions, above all, are liable to be thus evanescent. Whether because we are more willing to part with them, or because we are less able to retain them, certain it is that we must give earnest heed to the things which we have heard, or we shall let them slip! Instead of being "graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever," they seem "writ in water." See we not then a reason in our intellectual constitution for traversing the ground over and over, reviving the faded impressions, cutting anew, letter by letter, what would else become illegible and unintelligible?

Again, outward exposures afford occasion for such renewal of impressions. Were the mind never so retentive in its own nature, it is subjected to the wear and tear of external influences. Religious impressions especially are liable to this abrasion. The world we live in is not friendly, but adverse, to serious things. There is always friction and chafing whenever they are brought in contact. However carefully you have trained your child and striven

to fortify him against coming dangers, you dread the hour when he must leave your protecting roof and when your unwearied efforts to imprint upon his susceptible heart the teachings of this Book must undergo the ordeal of ungodly associates and associations. Gladly would you keep him near you, and, day by day, repeat your pious toil. But, no! He, like you, is on probation and must submit to its tests, doubly "blessed" if he "endure" them. So Sabbath-day impressions, at the fireside, in the Sanctuary, in the Sabbath School, must encounter the rude antagonism of week-day resorts and pursuits. Could we only make every day a Sabbath! But we cannot. "Six days shalt thou labor." The world has its rights and will assert and maintain them. What is left us, but to counteract this obliterating process, continually to renew what is so continually effaced? Each Lord's day owes a service to all its predecessors, to do their work over again. Minister succeeds to minister, the heir to his responsibilities, "filling up that which is behind" of his unfinished toils: "one sowing, the other reaping, that he that soweth, and he that reapeth may rejoice together." We are an "Apostolical Succession" in the Apostolical sense: no man's task complete; each to be an Old Mortality, with hammer and chisel re-etching the weather-beaten characters, trimming out the gathered moss, scraping away the accumulated stain, if so be the industry and zeal of other days and other hands may not be fruitless.

Again, the incessant fluctuation in human affairs re-

quires old truths in new forms. Society is like "the sea when it cannot rest," and individual lives are its heaving and tumbling billows. No century, nor year, nor day, nor moment, is the exact duplicate of any other. Hence truth, to answer its ends, must adapt itself to this perpetual mutation. New truths will not answer; we must have the tried, the tested, which long experience has passed upon and approved. Old forms will not answer: like antique armor they have served their purpose; are objects of curiosity and out of date. As the quaint Saxon Chronicles have to be translated, the type recast, the words respelled, to accommodate them to our modern eyes; so must the sterling ore of God's word from time to time be stamped over in the mint of his providence, if the coin is to pass current. The precise questions, for instance, that arose in Moses' day, or in Paul's, are not likely to recur in ours. But the principles then settled were established for all time. Casting the two into the crucible, we must eliminate the essential from the non-essential, the permanent from the transient, then apply the former to the vexed problems of our time. We are not to go back into the past to torture facts existing then into a forced identity with, or semblance to, facts existing now; but we are to go back to it, and point back, for those eternal rules of right which are of universal application, and are the best possible directory in every possible emergency. We cannot repair too often, nor lead others too often, to a wisdom incapable of amendment, perfect at the outset,

whose record is here, and which has always light to shed on whatever concerns us or ours, our family, our neighborhood, our country, or mankind.

II. We have great precedent for such repetition of instruction.

He who made the mind and must be presumed to understand it, thus deals with it. He does in Nature. This ever open volume, whose pictured pages alike instruct and delight us, is as old as the world. Its literature is periodical. Spring with its bursting buds, Summer with its ripened harvests, Autumn with its garnered stores, Winter with its pall of snows, march by us in single file, and utter, each in its turn, its word of wisdom, its parable of beauty and significance. The rear of the procession is scarcely past before its head appears again, and the same recital is gone over. What is lost in variety is gained in vividness. The Creator might undoubtedly have made every season unlike every other, and thus satisfied to the full our hankering after novelty. He preferred things as they are. "The old is better." It is the old, statedly renewed, revived, readorned, but still the old.

As with the works and the ways of God, so with his word. Consider how the Bible repeats itself. The earlier Testament is the preface to the later: the later the appendix to the earlier. Prophecy is the anticipation of history, history the realization of prophecy. The ten commandments of the first dispensation are condensed into the