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George M. Grant

# The Message of a Strenuous Life



## In Memoriam

The Very Rev. George Monro Grant, D.D., LL.D., C.M.G.

BY  
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"Quit you like men; be strong."

# The Message of a Strenuous Life



A rare thing, a sight impressive and inspiring, was seen in the city of Kingston the other day. The whole city was out of doors. The merchants left their trade, the professional men their offices, the clerks their place of service; men came from the great factories and shops of industry, teachers and scholars came from the schools, and the claims of the home and the social circle were for a time forgotten. The whole city was out of doors, lining the streets as if to receive some royal visitor. But it was no gala day. Over the University and all the public buildings, flags were flying half-mast, the voices of business and pleasure were hushed, and, without distinction of class or creed, men and women and little children stood subdued and reverent as in some sacred presence.

What meant those vast and silent crowds? And why were men of note and distinction in Church and State gathered there from far and near? Principal Grant was dead, and on that day his mortal dust was borne away to its last resting place out on the sunlit hill. What wonder that the city mourned, for he was gone whose citizenship was its proudest boast. What wonder that strong men felt the grief that lies too deep for tears, for he was gone whose strength they needed most of all.

Who was this man? What manner of life was his? Why were men linked to him by bands stronger than steel? What

message has this strenuous life for you and me? These are questions we well may ask in this place, for this church and congregation was a special care to him; here he delighted to preach, and, for a score of years, he was your guide, your counsellor, your friend. Next to Queen's University, St. Andrew's Church had a place in his thoughtful love, because of the helpful and holy past.

We say we knew him well. The members of St. Andrew's Church have good reason to think they knew him as he was known perhaps to no other congregation in Canada. But who that knows anything of the public men of our time did not know him? Almost any of us could pass judgment upon him and write an estimate of his life and work. In East and West it has been done by scores, and might have been done by hundreds more. He was so frank, so outspoken, so unguarded in his self-expression that we think we would be dull indeed if we did not know him. And yet when we stand before the awful fact that Principal Grant is gone we feel that there was something in him more than we had seen, a deeper note we had not heard, a something elusive, undefined, but strong, which half-revealed and half-concealed the soul within.

The outline facts and dates of Principal Grant's life are few and are easily told. He was born in Pictou County, Nova Scotia, of Scottish parents, sixty-six years ago. His education was begun in his native county, and was carried on at the University of Glasgow; and at Pictou Academy, at West River Seminary, and in Glasgow, he displayed those characteristics which marked his after life. At the early age of twenty-five, he was ordained to preach the Gospel, and spent several years in River John, Pictou County, as a missionary, and at Georgetown, P.E.I., his first pastoral charge. In 1863, he became minister of St. Matthew's Church, Halifax, the most important congregation in the Synod of the Church of Scotland in the Maritime

Provinces. Fourteen years afterwards, he was called by the trustees of Queen's University, Kingston, to the office of Principalship of that institution, which office he continued to fill to the day of his death.

These are the main facts of his life as the chronicler reckons facts. But they mean nothing and explain nothing of his life and power. To know him, we should know what Nature did for him, for to the very last he displayed original native qualities, which culture may have tempered and turned to highest account, but which were given to him in that mysterious laboratory of Nature where souls are touched to their distinctive issues and equipped for service which is theirs alone, and endowed with gifts which education cannot confer nor experience acquire. Genius is something more than a capacity for hard work. Something is done in that secret place of Nature which enables one man to do a thing excellently which other men can do but indifferently or not at all. That touch of Nature's magic wand endowed Principal Grant with the genius for leadership, and made possible the kind of man he was and the quality of service he rendered. He had a vividness of imagination, a fervor, an ardency, an enthusiasm, even a recklessness of nature which was matched by a farsightedness, a caution, a managing prudence that kept the abandon of the Celt in check.

Environment as well as heredity did something for Principal Grant. He was born in comparative obscurity, with little of this world's goods as his early lot, and required by sheer necessity to live plainly. It was so with all those early settlers in Pictou County. They fought against hard conditions and because they overcame, caring more for the spiritual things than for the carnal, the name of their county suggests to thousands in all Canada a race of men of giant mould, and their sons have gone out into all the earth, touching to new activities the intellectual forces of the world. The land was not fertile, but the sea was

there. And to men of imagination and emotion the sea is a great educator, an influence making for the highest culture.

The college and the university did something for Principal Grant. His ardent temperament and eager mental faculties were disciplined and made obedient to the purposes of his life. Nor must one forget the personal influence of the great Scottish preacher under whose ministry he sat, and whose friendship he enjoyed. Preachers in university centres seldom understand or appreciate their opportunities and responsibilities. Within the sound of their message are the young men from the universities and colleges who are to be or who might be the leaders of opinion and activity for a whole generation. They are strangers in the churches, but on the temper and quality of the preacher in the pulpit the direction and purpose of their lives depend. It is not out of place to say that this pulpit, throughout nearly the whole history of St. Andrew's Church, has been a potent voice in the lives of many students, calling them back from sin, saving them from unbelief, challenging them to duty. In my own student days, there came to this church a dozen or a score of men from the universities and the colleges who were drifting helplessly on the trackless sea of doubt, or were in danger of being castaways on the dark sea of sin. They were recovered and redeemed and quickened, and to-day they stand erect in life's storm and stress, some in this city, some in the far West, some in the farther East. And what D. J. Macdonnell was to some Toronto students of twenty years ago, an accuser for righteousness' sake, an inspirer to unselfish living, an example of the Christ life, that, and no less, Norman Macleod, of the Barony Church, Glasgow, was in those early student days to George Monro Grant.

But all those secret influences and those early touches of home and college and personal friendships, what they were and the greatness of their power, are best understood as seen illustrated in the after life of Principal Grant. What he was and

what he did, as he went about among men, revealed, to those who could understand, what the forces were by which his life was moved.

His Halifax ministry gave him prominence before he reached the age of forty and he was ranked among the foremost preachers in the Church. He revealed, too, those marked tendencies toward wider public activities which were fully developed in after years. He was active in advocacy of the Confederation of the Provinces of Canada, and many of his early sermons were colored by the public questions of current interest. At the time of the union of Canadian Presbyterianism in 1875, he was, although a young man, moderator of the Synod of Nova Scotia, and his courage, independence and masterful way won for him the soubriquet, "The lion of Halifax." Had he remained in the pulpit and had he devoted his great gifts to preaching, I doubt not he would have stood out distinctly as the greatest Canadian preacher of his generation. Some of his sermons, as those of us who knew St. Andrew's Church in the olden days can testify, were among the strongest and tenderest and most impressive we have ever heard. Some here will remember his discourse on "The Elder Brother" or the one on "The Glory of the Latter House" or the one on "The Waste of the Ointment," or the great missionary discourse on "Go ye into all the world." I heard that missionary sermon more than twenty years ago in the Metropolitan Methodist Church and to this day I see its vivid pictures—the little Apostolic Church to which that command was first given, so small that a boat on the Sea of Galilee could hold it and a sudden wave engulf it; the persecuted church of Nero's time; and the great wealthy influential church of to-day. I see it all still, and I still ~~hear~~<sup>a/8</sup> that lion voice ring out the challenge of all these centuries of Christian history to the Christian Church of to-day, with its power and prestige, to measure the Master's claims and to face the problem of the world's evangelization.

Principal Grant however was by nature and choice something more than a preacher. Or rather, one might say, his preaching took that wider sweep, as did the preaching of Amos, and touched directly the whole life of the nation. It was therefore a very easy thing for him to find a place for himself in education and to relate himself to the great political movements of his time. One does not need to recite the story of Queen's University during the past quarter century, how it rose as if from the dead and became a distinct force in the intellectual and moral life of Canada. Nor does one need to tell again how Principal Grant made himself felt in the public life of the Dominion, shrinking not from taking positions which inevitably exposed him to censure and interesting himself in the great political questions, both national and international, agitating the country. All this is familiar to everyone. What one desires, however, is to ascertain his standpoint. What general idea organized his thinking and his service?

It is important, and indeed necessary, if we would understand the man and his message that we know his point of view. How did he regard men and things about him? Answer questions like this and you know what manner of man Principal Grant was. You may not agree with him, but you must sympathetically understand his point of view if you would know him and see his life in its true proportion and perspective.

Looking at Principal Grant's life as a whole, and taking account of the general trend of his public teaching, one might say, I think, that he was interested not only in individuals but in men in the mass, that his outlook was broadly sociological rather than narrowly individualistic, that he conceived of men in society rather than as isolated units. By this, it is not meant that he was "careless of the single life." Indeed, very far from that, for he related himself very closely and very sympathetically to individuals, as his old students in all parts of

the country know full well. One could tell of case after case in which the personal influence of the Principal was the saving of students at the University. There are some who remember the grip of that left hand on their shoulder, and the straight words of rebuke followed by the tender words of prayer and the wise words of counsel. That is all true, but it is also true, and this was Principal Grant's distinguishing feature, that his interest in individuals was lifted up and unified in a larger interest. He felt more keenly than most men do, that no man lives to himself, that the community life, the atmosphere in which a man lives, influences him and is influenced by him in return. He strove to improve the relations of man with man, of class with class, of province with province, of country with country, of nation with nation. In all his work as preacher, as teacher and as publicist, he sought to touch life in these wider relationships. He had the imagination which saw things, not in parts but in wholes, and he conceived of the individual in relation to the community and not by himself apart. That is to say, his outlook was broadly sociological rather than narrowly individualistic.

He saw life steadily and saw it whole.

That this was Principal Grant's point of view was made plain in his preaching. He held to the great doctrines of Confessional theology but, in his preaching, he dealt more with life than with creed. He was more interested in the life of the Church than in the details of doctrinal formulation. Indeed, his general attitude was not unlike that of the Prophet Amos whose life he studied with growing interest and whose message he made his own and preached to this generation of Canadians with true prophetic fire.

This large view of men and of life made him an early and a consistent advocate of Church Union, both the union of Presbyterians in 1875 and the larger union of all Christians for

which he prayed but did not live to see. His mind grasped the whole situation and he appreciated the waste and weakness which division has wrought. For this reason, he held himself back from no movement, however unpretentious, that made for the unity of the Church both in spirit and organization. His hope was for a Canadian Church, catholic enough in doctrine, elastic enough in polity and varied enough in life to embrace all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and are pledged in devotion to Him. He little valued uniformity either in creed or in ritual, and through his whole life he stood against all shackling of the living present by the outgrown traditionalism of the dead past. For himself, he made no departure from doctrinal orthodoxy, but his plea was for liberty. Not for toleration, for the idea of mere toleration was offensive to him ; but for liberty, the liberty of honest enquiry, and for a fresh and a first hand study of truth in the fullest and whitest light. The assured results of such study were not to be merely tolerated, but welcomed, and, what was good, held fast.

In education, too, the same conception of unity and liberty was the organizing principle of his work. He saw our educational work as a whole and he sought to have it organized and made vital in all its parts. It is true he opposed the large scheme of university confederation, but that was partly because of conditions at Kingston and partly because he feared the uniformity of type which, he thought, the confederation scheme might produce. During his whole Principalship he labored to bring Queen's University into close relations with the educational system of Ontario while he safeguarded the independence of its teaching and life. When the time came and the Queen's type had been definitely and deeply fixed, and Queen's University had become the university of Eastern Ontario, doing work of such quality and magnitude as made its position and claims unique, he made that last great venture, making the University

wholly and absolutely undenominational, making it by statute as well as in fact a Provincial institution. This was not a contradiction of his life-long theory, but rather the outcome of it. To him, education was one of the great forces making for the true life of men, and what he was as a preacher he was as a University President.

And in like manner, he viewed the country's life as a whole and gave of his best for the country's sake. He had no patience with those who talked of some things being secular and some sacred. To him, the educational and political affairs of Canada were truly religious, and in the spirit of religion he identified himself with the great political movements of his time. To him, politics was the science of Government. If by "politician" is meant a man of "policy and cunning" then he was not a politician. His outlook was far beyond the next election. His care was for the life of the country, and thus he was in the truest and best sense a "statesman." But in it all, he was true to himself and to his guiding principle of life. He stood for unity and liberty. It was so in Canadian Confederation. He opposed Legislative Union which would have hampered the individual Provinces, but was a strong advocate of a federation in which the autonomy of each was sufficiently preserved. He stood for one Canada large enough in its life to embrace all the races within its borders, but he resolutely opposed the absorption of the lesser by the larger races. He rejoiced in the traditions and the ideals of the French-Canadians, and repudiated the wild and wicked race and creed cries which some English Protestants too often raised for party ends. And his statesmanship embraced more than even this half-continent, for he was among the first to preach the doctrine of British Imperialism. He saw the rise of that Greater Britain, and for long he called almost in vain to his fellow countrymen to take their place in that world empire that was to be. To the

very last, he insisted on Canada being in truth and reality a part of the British Empire and bearing her full share of imperial burdens, although he would not rush into new relations without first absolutely safeguarding the interests of the country against encroachments upon Canadian autonomy within the Empire. And he took the still wider view. To him the unity of the race was a living and abiding truth. His outlook was indeed sociological, but the social order he conceived had

“neither East nor West,  
Border nor Breed nor Birth,”

for the race to him was one, and the things that divide were doomed to pass away. A characteristic declaration was made from this pulpit at the time of the Venezuela affair: “The situation is difficult,” he said, “but one thing is settled, there must not be war.”

Of such sort, as it seems to me, was Principal Grant, a man of unusual natural gifts, full of energy and high enthusiasm, versatile in his genius, broad in his sympathies, intense in his devotion, designed by Nature’s law for leadership, and with all his thought and service organized by one idea and dominated by one purpose. So he lived and so he died, acknowledged by all to be one of our greatest men, and mourned by thousands of old and young in East and West as a friend, the like of whom we shall not know again. His was indeed a strenuous life, and its message rings out clear and strong to all who hear and can understand.

What is the message of this strenuous life? Such a man being dead yet speaketh, but what is his appeal?

1. There is surely encouragement in this man’s life for those who, like himself, have heavy odds to face. His life began in “low estate,” and the chances seemed against him. Others of his companions weakly yielded and were content to

run the common round. He resolved on higher service, and even the accident which cost him his right hand only spurred him on to sterner effort. Loyal to the high purpose of his life, he made "by force his merit known." From obscurity, he rose to the highest point of prominence, and all things worked together for his good because he sought the best things for others, and not for himself. His message to the young men of Canada is an appeal for courage. To those who faint and grow weary in the long delay, he calls back still, as he often called in days gone by: "Quit you like men; be strong."

2. Not for courage only, but for consecration also, does this strenuous life appeal. How he gave himself to his work! Whatever he had in hand—preaching, teaching, writing, debating, work or play of any kind—received not his time merely or his thought or his money, but, emphatically and very literally, himself. He gave himself. He consecrated himself. And this is his message to you and me. We give to our work, to our public service, to our business, to our industries, to our enjoyment, and most assuredly to our benevolence, only a part of ourselves. He gave himself. Because of that, his preaching was inspiring, his teaching vital, his writing virile. For the most part, we are too cautious, too calculating, too sparing of ourselves; we talk prudently of taking care of ourselves, lest we burn out. He lavished himself, his very life, pouring out the rare wine of his life without stint or measure; and that giving of himself was in very truth the ransom of many of his students from intellectual and spiritual death. We hold our work apart from ourselves, a thing which costs us no love and no blood. His work was a living thing, throbbing with his heart's blood, and for it he lived and died. What wonder that his work was great! It cost greatly. Our life-work will be no greater than our life-sacrifice and our self-devotion. Nothing great has ever yet been done in the ministry or in education or

in public service except at the cost of some man's life. The vicarious element runs through all service. Queen's University lives to-day because Principal Grant is dead. This supreme lesson He taught us who came not to be ministered unto but to minister. And Principal Grant had so learned Christ. How is it with us? Are we willing to die that our work may abide? This is the message of his strenuous life: "Quit you like men; be strong."

3. Again, his message is that we should give ourselves wholly, unreservedly, even lavishly, but only to the best. First things first, was his appeal. He gave himself to his students and to his university and to his country, but not to their material interests alone. He rejected the gross view of life "by bread only." He did not believe that a man's life consisted in the abundance of the things which he possessed. Nor did he regard money as the chief thing for a university, or material wealth the first element in a country's greatness. He knew of universities that had succeeded in securing great endowments, more money than they knew how to use, but there might have been some chance for their intellectual and spiritual life if they had failed. And he feared, too, lest Canada should come to think that a half-continent of country, or vast areas of agriculture, or limitless resources in mine or forest or sea can make a nation great. He was among the first to proclaim the wealth of this Northern Zone, but one of his last public utterances was a warning against materialism and mammonism and blood-red militarism which are beginning to canker our national life. We smile at public crimes and political corruption, and think because our pile of pulp-wood is the biggest and our mines the richest that our future is secure, not knowing that our material wealth will be a weight to drag us down if once our moral worth is lost. His message is to play the part of men while we bear their form, and like men, not beasts, to put first things

first. And this again is his appeal : "Quit you like men ; be strong."

4. And once more the message of this strenuous life comes home to us, and it has the clear ring of his own unfailing faith. He bids us hope. He says it's all for the best. He was indeed an optimist, sunny as well as strong, smiling as well as strenuous. What a ring was in his laugh ! And his optimism was not a thing of an easy-going temperament, an affair of the nerves, a happy sentiment born of a cloudless summer sky. He knew life's seamy side, he felt life's smiting sorrows, and he faced life's stress and storm. His optimism was a more enduring thing, a thing of faith. He saw and felt the burdens of the world, but he believed in God and in Jesus Christ. He was confident that this is God's world, and he was willing to wait the issue. Had he not known God in Jesus Christ, the burden of the world to a man of his imagination would have been intolerable ; had he not believed in the increasing purpose of the ages, he must have given up the struggle. But God to him was very near. How reverently he prayed ! How conscious he was of One in whose life the souls of men find life ! How sure he was that that One was love ! He wrote these words to the medical students from the hospital : "Ten days ago, one of your professors told me to look into the Kingdom of Darkness. I did so steadily, and found nothing to terrify." He was not afraid, because he believed. And that optimism of faith never failed him. When the last hour came, knowing that it was the last, he looked up into the face of his only son and smiled the same bright, sunny smile as when his strength was firm. O men and women, hear the message of this strenuous life. It is not that you should bandage your eyes and creep past the sorrow of life and the spectre of death. Nor is it the light-hearted word of one who does not understand. No, it is the life-message of the man who loved life and tasted its best ; and from the place where only the real things count he calls back to us that all is well.

And so I gather up into one word the message of that strong heroic soul. It is a word of warning and appeal and reassurance. Having lived a good man's life, he was not afraid to die. He lived that life by faith in the Son of God, and if from the unseen holy he regards us in this place to-day, this is his message to our fainting hearts: "Quit you like men; be strong."