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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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Religious.

For the Christian Messenger.

The Power of the Pulpit.

No. 1.

During the last few years it has not been an unusual thing to meet in print the assertion that the power of the pulpit is gone.—That, though once a mighty institution, it is so no longer. The belief of the advocates of this opinion is not that the power the pulpit once possessed has vanished, like Bob Acre's courage, at the finger ends of those who

Beat the drum ecclesiastic
With fist instead of stick.

but that it has been transferred to the digits of those who write for the press. Gentlemen of the latter profession are very fond of this idea, and love to give it prominence. Who does not love to exalt his own calling or class, or anything with which he is so identified, that he must in some measure share in its glory? So the opinion that the pulpit has lost its power, and is now the mere shadow of its former self, and that in the present day the press is the chief, if not the sole agency that moulds men's characters, forms public opinion and guides the affairs of nations, is set forth with all the authority of Quarterly Reviews, the weight of London Times leaders, or made ridiculous by the inflated vauntings of some petty newspapers supported by its advertisements, and laughed at for its editorials.

Whether true or false this opinion is worthy of careful consideration. If the pulpit has lost its power, it concerns us to know when and why this took place. But if this is a groundless assumption those are good reasons why its fallaciousness should be exposed.

In seeking to ascertain the truth in relation to this matter, it is necessary for us to commence by deciding upon the area of our investigations. The term pulpit is a very comprehensive one, including the religious oratory of many countries, both Catholic and Protestant, which in this particular have but little in common. No theory for instance, in relation to the historic development or decline of the pulpit could possibly be applicable to both Spain and Scotland, France and Sweden, Italy and England, or Ireland and Germany. Under the term pulpit we may include the fanatical harangues of Italian and Spanish friars, exhibiting relics and vociferously declaiming upon the fabulous miracles and virtues of apocryphal saints, the bewitching eloquence of a French Coquerel or Hyacinthe, the evangelical sermons of an English Spurgeon, or the mingled politics and philosophy, gospel and jokes, of an American Beecher. The term pulpit, in fact is not a definite one, signifying the same institution existing in many different countries, but a variety of agencies by which men throughout a large portion of the civilized world seek to influence their fellow men, for very different objects and in very different ways, alike only in the employment of human speech, and appeals to religious susceptibilities, and therefore, no more identical than a watch and a sewing machine are, because they both have wheels and springs.

It is not probable that those who assert that the pulpit has declined in power, would wish to give so wide an application to the statement as we have indicated. Most likely they would admit that priestly domination is as rampant to-day in Spain as ever it was; they no doubt would acknowledge that while the Emperor of France is not afraid to gag the press he timorously shapes his policy to conciliate the ecclesiastics; neither would they plead ignorance of how much the German preachers have had to do with guiding public sentiment in that great country for many years past, and never more so than at the present time; but would probably explain that their theory is intended to apply only to that part of the world in which the English language is spoken. That it is in these lands, as they think, the power once wielded by the pulpit is now transferred to the press.

There is an admission to be made in relation to this subject which would perhaps be accepted by some as a satisfactory explanation

of their view of it, and may do much to remove misconception from the minds of others. That admission is, that the British pulpit in former times assumed functions and performed offices, which, happily, it has now to a great extent abrogated, and left to the more suitable and efficient instrumentality of the press. This it has done, not in consequence of a loss of power, but from a better conception of its own duties and dignities. There was a time in the history of England when the sermon, it worthy of the name, answered to a great extent the purpose of a modern editorial.—It was expected to contain, and generally did contain, allusions to the most important incidents of the day. Sometimes these references were clear enough, but more frequently the preachers discretion taught him to confine his political leanings and sympathies to covert hints and innuendoes, quaint and often irrelevant uses of scripture, and sly witticisms, the point of which we occasionally detect but oftener miss in these old sermons, whose chief attraction they no doubt formed to many who first heard them. It is not a loss of power, but a holier use of that power which makes the contrast between the English pulpit of to-day and what it was when Dr. Shaw and Friar Pike aided by their sermons at St. Paul's cross, infamous Duke Richard in his traitorous and sanguinary schemes—or when Henry the VIII. sent his preachers to the same place to argue in favor of his divorce—or Mary hers to prove Elizabeth's illegitimacy and the pope's infallibility,—or when Roundheads and Cavaliers, puritans and prelatists employed it for their political harangues; or when Dr. Sachoverell flung from St. Margaret's his firebrand sermon—or when a thousand pulpits united in a chorus of declamation to convince the nation that the French Revolution was Armageddon, Napoleon the devil, and liberty pandemonium. That kind of thing in the present day is left by preachers as a body to the news-paper, Dr. Cummings, no popery zealots and second advent enthusiasts, with no loss of power, but with a large accession of usefulness and dignity to the pulpit. Let it not be hastily assumed that in consequence of the pulpit thus confining itself to its more legitimate functions, it has therefore little influence in affairs not strictly of a religious nature.—If a great statesman was right when he deemed the poets who made a nation's songs more powerful in forming its sentiments and shaping its opinion, than the legislators who made its laws, we may certainly claim some influence, even in secular and national matters, for those, who, as a body bring learning, piety, exemplary lives and zeal to the work of cultivating men's consciences, and declaring and enforcing the relations that right and wrong, God and human beings hold to each other. It must be admitted that if the labors of preachers are not totally ineffectual, by virtue of the affinities of truth, they cannot but have a powerful effect upon every department of life, and be a mighty influence in giving character to social life and laws, and form to national institutions and measures.

However diversified the views promulgated from the pulpit on some points, there is a remarkable unanimity on others. It would be impossible to find elsewhere as many important truths maintained by the same numbers, and intellectual and moral weight, as those which receive the adhesion and support of nearly the entire modern pulpit. The disagreement of sects upon many points of theology are neither few nor unimportant. But apart from these there is a vast body of moral and practical truth. Take the most bitter sectarian preacher, and give him some moral or social topic, and in most cases his views will not essentially differ from those held by his very antipodes in theological sentiment. In all places it is the common practice to assemble upon the platform ministers of every denomination, assuming as a matter of course their entire agreement in the advocacy of practical christianity, and any of the measures or institutions it creates for the benefit of mankind. One has only to reflect upon the number of these, and the degree in which they depend for support upon the personal exertions of ministers, to be convinced that in one great and most important department of life that which includes all its philanthropic enterprises and social improvements, the pulpit has great power.

Tangible evidences and those too of the kind most likely to have weight with the class disposed to depreciate the pulpit, may be readily quoted in proof of the greatness of its influence. Nothing strikes like a fact, and with some people nothing like a pecuniary one. The smallness of the average salary of ministers is in striking contrast to the immense sums raised through their efforts for religious and benevolent purposes. What the press might do alone in this respect it is impossible to tell, for it is always assisted in its benevolence by the co-operation of the pulpit; but what it can accomplish thus aided we can easily ascertain. The London Times is the mightiest newspaper in the world.—More than once it has put forth its whole power to arouse public sympathy on behalf of some benevolent object, or in connection with some pressing exigency. It would not be difficult to find many occupants of the pulpit whose solitary exertions in a similar way have been attended with a success far surpassing any that has crowned the spasmodic philanthropy of the great Thunderer. Men now in their prime can remember the Disruption in Scotland, when 400 ministers for conscience sake left the Established Church and cast themselves upon the religious sympathies of their country. Since that day the Free Church has raised and expended upon chapel building, ministerial support, education, and missions, a sum total of millions of pounds sterling. Last year in addition to all other religious and benevolent contributions in the United States, no less than four million dollars were given for the endowment of denominational Colleges. A recent calculation was made that the whole amount raised in England for Home and Foreign enterprises was about twenty million dollars per annum. More than a quarter of a century ago, Guizot counted in London alone over five hundred philanthropic institutions entirely supported by voluntary contributions. It cannot be doubted that the immense sums bestowed in the instances quoted, would have taken a very different direction if it were not for the success of ministerial efforts to elicit and guide christian liberality.

M. A. H.

For the Christian Messenger.

Pen Sketches.—No. 4.

DECEIVERS.

What a large amount of deception is practised in the world. That there are persons in the world bent on deceiving their fellow-men is a lamentable proof of man's depravity. Who are they, and how do they deceive?

There are deceiving talkers. They have an ambiguous way of talking, speaking in such a manner that makes an impression upon the mind foreign to the truth. Some act as though they were your personal friends, but it is done for an unworthy purpose.

What deceivers there are in business, by false representations, trying to impress purchasers that the articles for sale are of a superior quality, and not obtainable elsewhere at such self-sacrificing prices. By the way, how long will people be gulled by the numerous advertisements of articles being sold below cost? Are such tradesmen so generous as to favour their customers with so much of their property, and pay rent and taxes out of their own pockets? Does it look reasonable?—There may be some exceptions, but they are few, very few. Are there not deceivers in other professions, palming off the productions of others for their own?

Others have a great show of piety, of intense zeal for the cause of Christ, but it is only for effect, their heart is not in loving sympathy with spiritual religion.

Then there is not a small class of deceivers in sacred things—teaching for doctrine the traditions of men, putting forced constructions on portions of the precious word of God, by plausible arguments seeking to support a system of error.

Many deceive themselves by foolishly imagining that they are clever, smart persons, whereas the very act of deceiving is a proof of a small mind, a base heart, and dishonourable conduct. Let all deceivers remember that there are such words as the following, and they are terribly true:—

Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. JOHN.

For the Christian Messenger.

A Reminiscence.

Dear Brother,—

Fifty years ago this day I was ordained pastor of the Baptist Church in Dean Street, London. The record of the transaction, contained in the Baptist Magazine for June, 1818, states that "the Rev. Thomas Thomas commenced, by reading the Scriptures and Prayer. The Rev. Thomas Griffin delivered the introductory discourse, describing the Constitution of a gospel church; and asked the usual Questions. The Rev. Thomas Cramp of St. Peter's, Thanet, (Mr. C.'s father,) offered the ordination prayer. The Rev. Dr. Newman gave the charge, from 2 Tim. ii. 15. The Rev. Timothy Thomas addressed the church, from Rom. i. 11, 12; and the Rev. Dr. Rippon concluded the interesting service with prayer. The hymns were read by the Rev. Samuel Brawn, of Loughton, and Messrs. Coombs, Reynolds, Green, Pope, and Clarke, students at Stepney."

The Rev. Thomas Thomas was not at that time a settled minister, but preached occasionally. Some members of his family conducted an educational establishment at Peckham, near London, under his superintendence. He died a few years afterwards at an advanced age.

The Rev. Thomas Griffin was pastor of the church in Prescott Street, formerly presided over by the venerable Abraham Booth. His latter years were spent in the service of a country church. He died a few years since, having reached the age of eighty-two.

Of my father, it is not necessary to speak. He was then in his prime, being forty-seven years of age. He died Nov. 17, 1851, in the 82nd year of age, having been a preacher of the gospel sixty-four years.

The Rev. Dr. Newman, my revered Tutor (we did not use the word "Professor" in those days), whose very solemn and appropriate Charge was listened to with great satisfaction by all present, died Dec. 22, 1836, in the sixty-third year of his age. He had been more than forty years pastor of the church at Old Ford, Bow, near London.

The Rev. Timothy Thomas was pastor of the church in Devonshire Square, where the celebrated William Kiffin laboured in the days of Charles II. He had held the office upwards of forty years when he died, July 5, 1827, in the seventy-fourth year of his age.

The Rev. Dr. Rippon was pastor of the church in Carter Lane, where he succeeded Dr. Gill, in 1774. A number of the members being dissatisfied with the choice withdrew, and formed another church, choosing the Rev. William Button for their pastor. It was my lot to be his successor. Dr. Rippon died Dec. 17, 1836, having been pastor sixty-two years. He was in his eighty-sixth year—Mr. Button died in 1821.

Both places of worship, that in Carter Lane and that in Dean Street, were pulled down to make room for the approaches to the South-Eastern Railway. The Carter Lane people built a new place of worship in New Park Street, where Mr. Spurgeon commenced his labors among them, previous to the erection of the "Metropolitan Tabernacle." The Dean Street people built in Trinity Square, a mile or so from the old site.

Six of my fellow-students read the hymns on the occasion. Three of them are dead.

The Rev. Benjamin Coombs laboured successively at Ross, and at Bridport. He died Feb. 4, 1850, aged 50. He was of a weakly constitution, and seldom enjoyed good health. His intellectual qualifications and endowments were above par. He was a respectable poet.

The Rev. John Reynolds, a plain, solid brother, thoroughly well-principled, settled at Isleham, Cambridgeshire, and died there, Nov. 25, 1842, in the 56th year of his age.

The Rev. Edmund Clarke was a very acceptable preacher, and much esteemed for his affectionate earnestness. His labours as pastor of the church at Truro were greatly blessed. Painful and long-continued disease wore him down, and he died July 8, 1839, being only forty-two years old.