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## Religious.

### THE WORK OF THE CHRISTIAN PREACHER.

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(Concluded.)

#### BOLDNESS OF SPEECH.

The preacher should speak with becoming boldness. Let him not be alarmed by the cry against dogmatism that has grown to be so loud in these "latter times;" for rightly speaking, to dogmatise only means to assert positively, — to speak with unwavering confidence. An arrogant declaimer the preacher should never be; but the timidity that hesitates, the doubt that stammers in the presence of the people, and the caution that can do little more than apologise for the Gospel, should be far from him. The prophets cried, "Thus saith the Lord;" and the apostles said, "What we have seen and heard declare we unto you." They gazed, and saw the Divine visions; they listened and heard the Divine voice; and therefore spoke with confidence and authority. May we not do the same? Have we never heard a voice, or seen a vision of truth, in the Bible, in nature, or in our own consciousness, of which we can speak with unwavering confidence, and even dare to dogmatise? If not, then preaching is not our vocation; but if we have, we are bound to use "great plainness" and "boldness of speech." A mincing, affected style of speaking, accompanied, as it generally is, with common-place thinking, educated vanity, and dignified dullness will neither convert the world, nor edify the Church; but the clear, thoughtful, bold, ringing words of an earnest man God will bless. In the ancient times "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," and there is a power corresponding to this manifested in the history of the Christian preacher. There are seasons when all the faculties of his mind are enlarged; his spirit is bathed in a heavenly light; his heart yearns for the salvation of men; his faith is changed into vision; his love is kindled into a bright consuming flame; and his whole being seems permeated by a mysterious force which belongs not to him at other times. The promise of the Bible is fulfilled in him—he is "baptized with the Holy Ghost and with power." "The hand of the Lord" is upon him, and he quivers under the awful touch. At such a season as this he should not permit the conventionalisms of public worship, or any supposed dignity of the pulpit, to restrain the Divine affluus. God has chosen him, for the time, to be a medium between Himself and his Church. On one side of his nature he is in contact with heaven, on the other he touches the congregation; and he should yield himself to the power that is working in him, and allow the life-giving current to flow freely to the people. You may trust yourselves in these bright hours; for every word is living, every sentence burns, and every utterance is melodious when you are "moved by the Holy Ghost." You have then reached the nethermost springs of music, therefore play on; and minds shall be enlightened, hearts shall be subdued, souls shall be saved, and evil spirits shall be chased away by the lofty strains of your inspired song. Will you let me make this remark? It is a common mistake with English preachers, if there be a great movement in the depth of their heart, to keep it back. Why, sir, God put it there; He put it here that you may let it flow forth. Do not quench the Holy Spirit; do not restrain the Divine affluus. If He answers your prayers, and a movement passes through your spirit like the cooling breeze on a hot day, then let it pass on. Speak as you are moved. Believe in the Holy Ghost. He is still living; He is not a mere report; He is not a mere history. Let us believe in our own prayers and in the spirit of God; and when He comes down upon us, let us use the liberty He intended us to use.

#### PREACHING EXPERIENCE.

The preacher should not fail, at the right time, and on the proper occasion, to give expression to his own experience of the power of the Gospel. This will apply more especially to ministers who are not young. Young ministers sometimes make the great mistake of telling their experience:—they have not got any experience to tell. The people are interested, not only in the truth which he has to teach, but also in the effects which that truth has produced upon him. We read poetry in order to understand how men have been impressed with the mystery of life. Great books have power over us, not merely because of the truth they teach, but also on account of the emotions they express. Everybody wants to know what others have felt. Like mariners meeting in mid-ocean, we inquire of each other how things have gone with us. But we are most concerned to know what people have felt on the highest subjects: God, Christ, life, death, eternity. Men who, like Moses, have tumbled in the presence of Jehovah; or, like Isaiah, have been overwhelmed by the Divine glory; or, with Paul, have been caught up into Paradise; or, like John, have beheld the visions of God—the words of such men are ever welcome to us. And why? Because they have seen more than we have seen, and felt more than we have felt. Again, the experience of others is a real help to us. Minds are sympathetic. Heart moves heart; love creates love; faith inspires faith. The story of your sorrow will aid me to bear mine. The knowledge of your courage will make me brave. And the warmth of your religious emotion will melt the hearts of your people; while the more logical statement of truth will leave them cold as a winter midnight. In reading the epistles of St. Paul, we must admire the riches of his doctrine, the strength of his argument, the elevation of his thoughts, and the marvellous power of expression which he possessed. But the element in his sayings and writings which we feel most deeply is the spiritual experience and the profound emotion which they manifest. "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I received of the Lord Jesus to testify the grace of God. What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." These verses are embodiments of the love, faith, courage, aspirations, and hope of the great apostle; they pass into our spirits like warm sunbeams into a cold atmosphere, and bring summer into the soul.

#### THE SPIRIT OF THE GOSPEL.

Our preaching should express the spirit of the Gospel, as well as declare its doctrines. There is more in a great work of art than the forms and colours which you see, more also than a special style of painting and grandeur of conception; for it has a genius of its own, which proves it to be the work of some celebrated master. It is impossible to define or describe this; we cannot tell what it is, or in what it consists; but we know that it is there, for we feel its power, are hushed by its presence, or if we speak at all it is in low subdued whispers. So there is a genius of the Gospel which makes it unlike all other systems of religion. There is nothing werewith to compare it in the transcendentalism of the East, the mythology of Greece, the religion of ancient Rome, or the philosophies of modern Europe. It is like itself only—pure, tender, sorrowful, human, divine. This genius of the Gospel is an element of power which all may feel. There are thousands of Christian people who have not, and cannot, study the evidences of our re-

ligion, who have but small knowledge of its doctrines, and have never confronted the intellectual difficulties which cause so much confusion to others; and yet the spirit of it has reached their hearts. A child who has never read a book on chemistry can understand that honey is sweet. You may feel the power of mountain scenery without being learned in geology. A man ignorant of all botanical classifications may enjoy the fragrance of the summer fields. We may know nothing of the science of astronomy, and yet admire the immensity and splendour of the open heavens. In like manner, people with very slender knowledge of theology are able to feel and appreciate the power of the Gospel. They are influenced by its spirit, transformed by its genius, and comforted by its tenderness and love. What I am trying to say is this: It is not enough to have a good sermon, well thought out, logically constructed, firm as a granite rock; you must have the genius of the Gospel, the tenderness, the love—that unnameable something which you feel the moment it is mentioned.

#### NO SUBSTITUTE FOR THE GOSPEL.

Men can discover no satisfactory substitute for the Gospel. Some adopt infidel theories, and try to content themselves with the assertion that all religions are false. But mere negation cannot give us rest. The mind may prove its own blindness by constructing the clumsy theory, but the heart can find in it no satisfaction. Some one who would not, or could not, receive the Gospel spoke thus: "I seem affrighted and confounded with the solitude in which I am placed by my philosophy. When I look abroad, on every side I see dispute, contradiction, and distraction. When I turn my eye inward, I find nothing but doubt and ignorance. Where am I? What am I? From what cause do I derive my existence? To what condition shall I return? I am confounded with questions. I begin to fancy myself in a very deplorable condition, environed with darkness on every side." The result of his philosophical infidelity was to produce a sense of loneliness which made him feel that he was without God in the world. There was no burning bush, as in the solitude of Horeb; no angel of the Lord, as in the quiet of Mamre; no sense of the presence which made the inspired writer say, "Thou hast beset me behind and before;" and no "finger of a man's hand" writing on the thick darkness, in letters of flame, GOD IS. No wonder that the man was affrighted and confounded with this solitude. His words are a wail of sorrow mingled with despair, and prove, if proof be necessary, that philosophical infidelity cannot meet the wants of human nature.

#### THE POWER AND WEAKNESS OF SCIENCE.

Physical science is supplying the world with marvellous facts in these latter days. It is revealing the affinities of matter, the adaptation and harmony of Nature's laws, and the unspeakable beauty of her manifold words. Why not, then, make a religion of science, and worship the Cosmos, and cause our souls to delight in the order and grandeur of the universe, and rest content therein? We cannot. Science does not move our hearts deeply enough for real worship, and the facts she supplies do not meet our spiritual wants. A writer who is a great authority in physical science has lately published these words:—"I say that natural knowledge, seeking to satisfy natural wants, has found the ideas which can alone still spiritual cravings." And the ideas which he puts forth as possessing this wonderful charm are the following (which I give in my own words, not his):—"The universe is practically infinite in its extent, and practically eternal in its duration; the earth is only an infinitesimal fragment of the universe; man is but one of the many forms of life now existing on the globe, and the present existences are but the last of an immeasurable series of predecessors; there is a definite

order in the universe, called the laws of nature, and faith in changes other than such as arise out of this order is weakened. These ideas are familiar enough; but the difficulty is to see how they still our spiritual cravings. We long for a personal God; and are told that the universe is old and large. We are conscious of sin, and feel the need of pardon; and are informed that there is a definite order in Nature. We shrink from death, and yearn for eternal life; and are assured that we are the last of an immeasurable series of predecessors who have all perished, and whose fossil remains are "with us to this day." If you can still your spiritual cravings with these ideas and the like of them, you have discovered an art which is utterly unknown to me.

#### PHILOSOPHY FAILING TO SATISFY.

Philosophy speaks of the Unconditioned Being; the Uncreated Essence; the Absolute Existence; the Substance that is infinitely extended, living in all life and energising all power; the All-Perfect, which was, is, and ever shall be. Can we not, then, convert speculative philosophy into a religion, and worship God as the Mysterious Essence which underlies all phenomena, and in the cause of them? No, you cannot. Why? This view of Him does not inspire the mind with faith, trust, and love. Philosophy talks big; it kindles what appears to be a great fire, which shoots into space, burns heaven-high, and illumines the spheres; but it brings no Divine wrath, no holy enthusiasm, into the soul of man, and, with all its splendour, is cold as the Northern lights playing around the Pole. Three things are certain: first, man must have a religion,—it is the deepest want of his nature; second, he cannot discover a satisfying religion for himself, as is proved by the spiritual history of the race; and third, therefore, we must continue to preach to him the Gospel of the grace of God, for that is what he needs. We should take our view of man's nature from the teaching of Jesus Christ. He speaks of a hunger and thirst of the soul which no earthly good can satisfy, and to these He appeals in his preaching. We also may do the same; for the hunger and thirst remain. The literature of the age bears testimony to the unrest that exists in the minds of men. In the ablest writings of our times, both prose and poetry, there is an under-current of sadness, a sobbing sorrow, mournful as the sighs of the captive Hebrews when they wept by the rivers of Babylon. We have escaped from the Egypt of barbarism into the Canaan of civilisation; but still the old discontent is upon us, and we seek a "better country."

#### THE GREATEST OF ALL NAMES.

The place which Christ holds in the minds and hearts of men is a source of inspiration and encouragement to the Christian preacher. The angel said to the Virgin-mother, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus;" and that by to-day has become the greatest of all names. It has lived through eighteen hundred years, during which time so many names, that were once considered great, have faded from the memory of the world. Time does not diminish the charm of His name; for never, except in the age of the apostles, were greater efforts made to spread the knowledge of it than in this nineteenth century. Multitudes of learned and holy men make it the chief business of their life to preach the glories of His name. Parents teach His history to their children, believing that there is a power in His name to keep them from evil. The Church is engaged in sending His Gospel to the heathen nations of the earth, that they also may see "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The name whispered by the angel is gradually filling the world; and we may say of Him, as was said in the days of His flesh, "He cannot be hid." Consider, also, the faith and love which He has inspired. It was said of old, "In His name shall the Gentiles trust;" and we know how true this has become. Millions put their trust in Him, believing He can and

will give them eternal life. This is true of all classes of men—old and young, rich and poor, learned and illiterate. There is a painting of Him with His disciples, wherein He is placed in the centre, like the sun among the planets, and all faces are turned towards Him, and every eye is fixed upon His calm and sorrowful countenance. The work has a wider application than the author intended. A great company, which no man can number, turn to Him with faith and love unutterable, and with expectations that pass the boundaries of time and embrace the ages of eternity.

#### SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

Think, further, how He grows upon us as our days go on. As our knowledge widens, and our experience of life is made deeper and more real, great changes come over us. Books in which we once delighted are cast aside; old opinions become obsolete, and fall from us like withered leaves from the autumn tree; and creeds with which we were at one time content are found to be too narrow for a resting-place. You who are timid may object that this ought not to be, and that we should rest satisfied with our first views. The reply is, We cannot help ourselves. To think is to grow; and the garments of the child are too small for the man. And as our years multiply, we outgrow the world; we discover that it cannot satisfy the yearnings of our mind. The soul turns away from it all, calls it "vanity and vexation of spirit," and longs for "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." But it is not so with Jesus Christ our Saviour. As we grow older, wiser, and holier, He becomes greater, more real and divine, more to be desired, and more wonderful in our sight. At one time we may speculate concerning Him, and endeavour to explain the mystery of His person, work, and power; but in after years when we are grown grey-headed, bordering on the unknown country, we fall at His feet, we trust and love, worship, and adore. Some fancy that they have outgrown Christ; but this is as if a man should say, I have ascended above the firmament, forgetting that the firmament is boundless—heaven beyond heaven in glorious and endless succession. Christ is "the Son of the living God," and "it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell" to supply the wants of the soul throughout the ages of its eternal existence; and we never can become independent of Him.

#### THE LORD OF MANY CROWNS.

And it should be added that all efforts to dethrone Him have failed, and must fail. Some seem to think that Christ was not at all. He is only the poetry of the human mind, the creation of man's imagination; his highest and most noble creation it may be, but nothing more. Man was weak and helpless, and longed for a Saviour to deliver him from ignorance, sin, and death. From this feeling there sprang up an ideal Redeemer. In the course of time this mental vision was projected from the mind; and man fell down and worshipped his own thought, calling it Jesus Christ, my Saviour. Others will have it that Christ was a good man only, who lived a life of love upon the earth, such as was never seen before or after; and as time went on men clothed Him with divine perfections, and enthroned Him as Saviour, King, and Judge of the world. We are also told that His Gospel is becoming obsolete. It gave light at one time, but that light is now being lost in the brighter splendour of modern knowledge. It is a tent under which the spirit of man found shelter in other days; but it is now worn out with age, the canvas is rent, the rain falls through, and the storm beats upon the defenceless inhabitant. Or, rather, man has outgrown the Gospel; the robe which Christ wove for him is out of all proportion with the dimensions he has assumed in his present civilised state. The tent may be standing whole and entire where it was erected,