

its charity. Sure I am that Christ comes to our door in the person of His needy disciples and tests our love and liberality to Him. In His saints He is perpetually incarnate, and is ever undergoing the treatment again that He received on earth. The Apostle urges us to hospitality on the ground that peradventure we may entertain angels unawares. May we not be urged to charitable helping on the ground that we are ministering to Christ Himself? Angels gladly ministered to Him in His earthly need—His temptation, His agony. We may minister as angels cannot—minister a daily service to Him in His saints; their agonies are His, their desert fastings and temptations, their bitter cup of fear and death. We may be as angels to strengthen them, and if we refuse, why, He will judge it as if the angel had refused His minister.—*Rev. Henry Allon.*

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Christian Messenger.

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Has the Pulpit lost its power?

Whatever affects the spiritual character and the eternal interests of mankind is of paramount importance, and is a legitimate subject of serious and earnest enquiry. In London and some other large cities there have been active steps taken, on the supposition that the question at the head of this article is already answered in the affirmative. And enquiries have been instituted as to the causes of such decline. Various answers have been put forth, according to the character and opinions of the persons giving them. There was, perhaps, some truth in all the replies of the persons who habitually absented themselves from public worship. And yet the subject is far from being settled, or even decided that there has in reality been such decline as is by some supposed.

Dr. Caird has given a carefully prepared article on this subject in *Good Words*, and assumes that the pulpit of modern times has declined in its influence. He attributes it to the greater disparity that formerly existed between the clerical order and laymen, and the demand in other professions for men of talent and power. There has too, he affirms, been a softening down of the pulpit style. He says:

"The modern sermon has lost, of necessity, many elements of its ancient power. The time has been, when, without any breach of sanctity, it possessed all the attraction and influence of the newspaper, the political harangue, the popular article; when the less devout repaired to the sanctuary from motives which now draw them to the political meeting or the public debate; when sermons were spiced with personalities, political allusions, and witticisms not over refined; when the preacher revealed the last new state secret, inflamed the passions of his auditory by daring denunciations of men in power, or sent a thrill of wonder and ecstasy through the crowd by rebuking the errors of the monarch to his face. The pulpit, it is obvious is now confined to narrower ground, and must depend, for its influence, on more legitimate attractions."

Dr. Caird very truly remarks:—

"The only legitimate power of the church is its religious power. What it got in old times by transforming priests into lawyers or statesmen, what it gets, or sometimes tries to get now by turning church organizations into means of political influence, may be an object of desire for worldly-minded or ambitious churchmen, but does not make it a more efficient agent in the moral and spiritual improvement of the world. The world's secular work was not better done when it was done by men nominally ecclesiastics, and they themselves were only corrupted by a false position. So in modern times, if the attraction of secular professions draws off many able and eloquent men who might have been clergymen, it is to be considered that it is better for the cause of Christ, and more conducive to the true influence of His church, that a man should become an energetic and useful lawyer or physician or statesman, than a clergyman whose heart is not in his profession. A worldly-minded priest, a clergyman whose leanings and tendencies are all secular, however able and accomplished, lends no real weight to the sacred office. The shrewd, sagacious, worldly-wise parson, able and sensible perhaps in the pulpit, but finding himself most at home in church court forms and debates, having ecclesiastical laws at his finger ends, strong in precedents,

subtle in distinctions, and clever as any special pleader in debate; the clergyman, in short, who is manifestly and palpably the spoiling of a good attorney, adds no real dignity or influence to his profession, sometimes brings reproach on it in the eyes of the devout and serious minded, and would have been infinitely more useful to society had he devoted his talents to their proper objects."

In treating of the future prospects of the work of the ministry, Dr. Caird concludes his article, by asking, "What the future of the church is to be, who in this strange time of seething thought and unsettled enquiry can foretell?" and replies:—

"Be it what it may, one thing is obvious. If we are to make head against manifold opposition without, and much indifference and saint-heartedness within, it will not be merely by ritual improvements, though solemn beauty and tasteful services have their use. Still less will it be by ignoring the difficulties of the age and determining to ring for ever, in the old stock phraseology, the changes on the old forms of thought as if no one had ever asked their meaning, or questioned their authority. But where such means fail two things, if God and truth be realities, will—nay, must—succeed. First, the life of God in our own souls, for life only can diffuse life; and next to that, the power of living thought, of rich and genial culture, of intellectual nobleness in the teachers of the church."

Mr. Spurgeon in *The Sword and Trowel* takes Dr. Caird most severely to task for the sentiments of said article. He commences as follows:—

"To complain that the former days were better than now is a common diversion and a frequent infirmity, a diversion for sour spirits, and an infirmity of impatient minds. It may be harmless if confined to the complainant's own bosom, and according as it may be true or false it may be beneficial or baneful when proclaimed abroad. The spirit of the utterance will have much to do with its value, and the remedies which the prophet of woe prescribes for the evil which he deplures must in a great measure apportion the judgment due to his lamentation. Vain is the cry if the evil be not there; equally vain if there be no balm in Gilead, no physician for the disease of Israel. In the March number of *Good Words*, a divine who has, before now, taken up his parable in the presence of royalty, comes forth as a wailing prophet with the exceeding great and bitter cry, 'The pulpit is fallen, the glory of the ministry is departed.' Well may the Lord's servants weep between the porch and the altar, and proclaim a fast, and gather a solemn assembly, since the excellency has departed from Zion and the majesty out of the midst of Judah. 'How is the gold become dim? How is the most fine gold changed? The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter?' Not that our present prophet bids us humble ourselves; or seek the Lord by prayer, or invoke the energy of the Holy Ghost, or wait upon the great Head of the Church for deliverance; far from it; he has no burden from the Lord as to such 'archaic' and 'conventional' instructions; his message to this enlightened and thoughtful age is far better adapted to the present times and the existing phases of society. He sees no need to warn ministers to cultivate fellowship with God, but much more cause to bid them keep abreast of the culture of the age and know something of what its deepest speculators have said and its sweetest poets have sung. He is not afraid lest the cross of Christ and the doctrines of the gospel should be obscured by human wisdom, but he is very severe upon those 'who insist upon our identifying divine truth with the historic accidents and archaic forms in which it has been couched, with the literal interpretation of the language of allegory and symbol, with statements, which true and beautiful as poetry, lose their reality and beauty when construed as literal fact.' What that fine jargon means, those who are acquainted with Broad School innuendoes very well know. Sermons are not recommended to be baptised with power from on high, but it is said to be of the first importance that they should bear traces of careful thought, logical arrangement, cohesiveness of argument, conclusiveness of result; they must contain novel and interesting interpretations of Scripture, and sparkle with imagery: lacking these the auditor goes away discontented, and reads with entire assent a sneering article in the next *Times*, or *Saturday Review*, on the decline of the pulpit in modern times.

Now we are prepared to endorse any man's opinion who shall say that it is most desirable that our ministers should be well educated, and should command respect by their substantial attainments, but we are indignant when we find these secondary matters thrust in the first place, and the weightiest of all considerations, compared with which these are light as feathers thrust into oblivion. Moreover we are not prepared to allow that the school of preaching which the writer of the *Good Words* article would desiderate would be any gain to the church or to the world if it could be called forth from our universities and theological schools; on the contrary, we believe that no greater calamity could befall mankind than to be preached to by such men as 'the highly cultured and fastidiously critical class' would patronise. The high culture of a mortal man! Bah! How ludicrous it must seem to the Eternal mind! Vain man would be wise, though he be born like a wild ass's colt. Refinement of intellect to be the guide of gospel ministrations! What then means the apostle when he says, 'And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excel-

lency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God, for I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling, and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.' 1 Cor. ii * * *

"Scattered all over England and Scotland are self-educated men who have been called of God to be soul-winners, who care not a jot for what Darwin or Colenso, or even the great Scotch Latitudinarians may have to say for themselves who are doing their work all the better because they have eschewed the refinements of modern scepticism, and have not come into the secret of the new liberalism. These may be pooh-pooled as much behind their times, but we are persuaded that they have contributed far more to maintain the power of the pulpit than anything which has been achieved by the 'deep-thinking' and free-thinking doctors and professors with all their boasts. If the pulpit be declining in power, it is due in a great measure to the men who mistake error for freshness, self-conceit for culture, and a determination to go astray for nobility of mind. So far from despising brethren of small literary accomplishments who excel in spiritual power and life, it is our duty to have them in abundant honour, to cheer them under their difficulties, and imitate them in their industrious use of their few talents. They can arouse a conscience though they cannot elucidate a problem; they can stir the affections, though they cannot revel in poetic imagery; they can reclaim sinners, though they cannot mystify with subtleties. If the fields of literature and science do not entice them, have they not enough of understanding if they are 'mighty in the Scriptures'?"

After considering what it was that gave so great power to the primitive preachers of the gospel, Mr. Spurgeon remarks:—

"We greatly doubt whether the Christian pulpit was ever more generally powerful than at the present moment; certainly congregations were never larger, nor religious effort as a rule more abundant. Far enough are we from being satisfied, but still there is much to rejoice over as well as much to deplore. We could rehearse the names of a score of active, useful, attractive, spiritually-minded evangelists, all exceedingly popular and powerful, and this we the more rejoice in because this class has only of late been called into existence. In our own denomination alone we have pastors whose churches from year to year increase at a ratio altogether unprecedented in modern times. Bad as things are they are not worse, but much better than formerly, and this is owing mainly to the growing power of the pulpit. We do not believe that our educated people care an atom for the brilliant sermons which Mr. Caird would prescribe for them. The thoughtful and intellectual men with whom we are acquainted, tell us that they do not want that kind of refreshment on the Sabbath; being eminent in their professions they find enough of the intellectual in their daily work, and are just the men above all others who delight in the simple, earnest appeal to the heart and conscience. Preach Christ to them with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and they will be content, but try to dazzle them with the fireworks of intellectual display, and they will tell you that the articles in a respectable review are far preferable.

If, indeed, the ministry be declining in power, let us betake ourselves to the grand resource of prayer; let us invoke the Holy Spirit's aid; let us pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers into his harvest. Then as matters of detail let us purge our colleges of sceptical professors, let us make the training more homiletical and less metaphysical, let us seek after unction rather than intellect, and encourage our young men in pursuits of practical evangelism rather than speculative theorising. In opposition to learned men, who by elaborate essays cry up the Diana or Minerva of their idolatry, let us look to the heavenly Comforter, and have respect unto that Scripture, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.'

Newman Hall gives the following as his opinion of the preaching of the present day in the United States:—"The sermons are too precise, too elaborate, too argumentative, too essay like, too much like books, and too little like earnest talk. Moreover they are too often read with strict adherence to the prepared manuscript, and thus, though if reported verbatim, they would be read as finished treatises; as heard they are frequently unimpressive."

Since the above was in type, we have received from M. A. H., an excellent article on "The Power of the Pulpit," which we shall give in our next.

National Christianity.

A week or two since we received two small publications from a Society formed at Philadelphia, having for its object "to secure a recognition of Almighty God, and the Christian Religion in the constitution of the United States."

They propose to ask for an amendment of the Constitution by the adoption of the following formula, or something equivalent thereto:

We, the people of the United States, [acknowledging Almighty God as the source of all authority and power in civil government, the Lord Jesus Christ as the Ruler among the na-

tions, and his Revealed Will as of supreme authority,] in order to constitute a Christian government form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, and promote the general welfare, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

At first sight this might appear very reasonable and proper, but, upon closer examination, it will be seen to be a matter of more serious import, and such as deserves attentive consideration.

It is, we think an incipient development of the church establishment principle, such as has not yet been known in the United States. It is taken for granted, that a large majority of the people of the Republic, are nominally christian, and therefore they should give a formal recognition of christianity in their government and national capacity.

The *National Baptist* gives a very distinct utterance on the subject, which we believe, will commend itself to all consistent lovers of civil and religious liberty. Our contemporary remarks:

"We could not advocate such a change as that indicated above, unless we were prepared to deprive Unitarians of the rights of citizenship."

But suppose that difficulty was removed, and the amendment had assumed a form acceptable to all bodies of professed disciples of Christ, simply recognizing the Christian religion as the only true religion. Has the majority a right to make any such declaration? Have those who do not receive Christ as a divine teacher no rights? Must every Jew be excluded from citizenship? Must Mr. Abbot of New Hampshire, who thinks the name Christian too narrow for him, be disfranchised? He may be a very unsate teacher. We may be sorry to have him hold and promulgate the opinions in which he differs from us. But shall the holding of those opinions interfere with his civil rights?

It is urged however that we ought to take our stand as a Christian nation. We reply,—we are not a Christian nation, except in a very indefinite sense of the word. Many of our people are personally Christians, and we hope the time will come when all of them will be. But many besides Christians are citizens and magistrates. Our being citizens does not make us Christians; our being Christians does not make us citizens. The realm of religion is essentially different from the realm of civil government. Men are Christians personally and of choice; they are citizens by birth, and often without their own choice. The nation is composed of men, each one of whom ought to be personally a Christian; but the nation collectively cannot be a Christian, or hold opinions on religious questions.

True religion not only does not need the patronage of the state, but is better and stronger without that patronage. The whole history of the Christian church shows that truth and piety have not flourished most under the special protection of government.

Besides if the principle is correct, that where the majority are Christians they may proclaim the government Christian, then where the majority are papists they may with equal right proclaim the government papal, and the foundation is laid for all the enormities of the Inquisition.

We are sorry to differ with men with whom we generally agree. But we believe that this attempt to place in the national constitution a declaration of faith in Christ as supreme ruler is a most dangerous precedent, and an invasion of the perfect religious liberty which we hold most dear. A Jew ought to have the same civil right to be a Jew, and the Deist to be a Deist, that the Christian has to be a Christian. As a Dissenter in England may rightly object to the nation's support of Episcopacy as a form of church government, and as an honest Episcopalian may admit this objection to be reasonable, so a Jew in this country may rightly object to the nation's declaration of faith in Jesus, and an honest Christian may admit this objection to be reasonable.

We are glad to observe that in the list of officers of the Society above mentioned, the name of no Baptist appears; for the very object of the Society is at variance with a fundamental principle of Baptist faith."

The Irish Church Question has been under debate in the British Parliament during the past week. The principal arguments used in favor of upholding the Irish Church Establishment, are that the existence of the Established Church in England, would be threatened by the separation of the Irish Church from the State. This of course brings up in Parliament all the class interests involved, which will of course form a powerful barrier against any interference with the existing state of things in Ireland. The disproportion between the adherents of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Ireland and the rest of the inhabitants, is somewhat greater than it is in England, and it is seen that if the Irish Church becomes dis-established, the same thing in England will be only a matter of time. The Ritualistic and semi-Popish practices of a large number of Church of England clergymen have long shewn the futility of the old argument that the Established Church is the great bulwark of Protestantism. The opposite view was long ago taken by the Dissenters in England. They held that the Church being by-law-established was rather the great promoter of Romanism.