

Ministering Spirits.

BY J. V. B. P.

Oft have I fancied that a loving hand
Has touched my brow;
A hand so dear, which I, alas! may clasp
No longer now,
Ah! tender spirits from celestial realms,
How they must grieve;
When that they seek to tell, our hardened
Hearts
Will not receive.
O that our hearts might answer to the
call
From realms above;
Borne by these heavenly messengers from
Him
Who is all love.
Yet there are ministering angels here
Whose love we've spurned,
Who, ere we think, to that bright home
on high
May have returned.
Teach us, O God of love, our hearts to
yield
Into Thy hand;
That what they strive, and yearn to teach
us, we
May understand.

—N. Y. Adv.

Expository Preaching.

Expository preaching when well done is instructive and edifying. It is not so common now as formerly. In Scotland it was customary for a minister to devote one of the Sabbath services to what was known by the name of lecturing. It was the practice to take up a gospel or an epistle or some Old Testament book and make it the subject for exposition in regular course. It may not be advisable to give expository discourses so prominent a place now in the ministrations of the sanctuary, but an adaptation of the plan might even in these days be made very effective. There is a longing for variety and freshness in preaching which a prolonged series of discourses on a particular book of Scripture would scarcely meet. At the same time a carefully-prepared course of expository discourses would not be monotonous. Indeed such discourses could be made thoroughly interesting, and they would certainly be instructive and profitable. Neither can it be doubted that in the matter of freshness they would gain in the long run when contrasted with the haphazard selection of promiscuous themes of detached sermons. Even sensational sermonizing soon pulls on the vitiated taste that craves for the excitement such kinds of pulpit oratory is supposed to cater for. There is but little edification in sensational sermons, and it is not the function of the Gospel ministry to vie with other forms of amusement. There is at the same time as little excuse as there is toleration for dulness in the pulpit.

If a regular course of expository sermons is projected, it is clear that if they are to be useful and effective they must be prepared with conscientious care. They cannot be slipshod without the certainty of disastrous and humiliating failure. Before the field is entered upon it must be surveyed comprehensively and the whole plan thoughtfully matured. Then each discourse in the series must be the result of earnest and, it may be, laborious study. It would be well to obtain the latest and the best results of scholarly research, and effort should be directed to make the discourses luminous and interesting. A mere synopsis of the conclusions reached by Biblical scholars and exegetical experts would be unsuitable and unsatisfactory. The minute shades of meaning conveyed by the original text and nicely-drawn distinctions may be of interest to the critical student, but for the average occupant of the pew they would fail of appreciation. It would not conduce to the success of expository preaching to make it technically scholastic. It would have little value if it were only a reflex of the style and material embodied in the commentaries. There is no reason why it should not be made thoroughly popular in form and style. The most successful expository preacher would be the one who could bring to his aid all the advantages of a well-disciplined and scholarly mind, one whose reading has been extensive and whose touch with humanity is close. In the hands of such an one expository preaching could scarcely fail to be effective.

As Biblical preaching is the best of all kinds of preaching, so this systematic study of certain portions of Scripture by minister and hearers would have the advantage for the latter in that they could gain a more intimate and thorough knowledge of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity as they are unfolded in the Bible. Preaching to be valuable needs to be instructive, and this mode would certainly contribute to the increase of Scriptural knowledge, enable the hearer to have a clearer perception of the doctrines of grace and help to a firmer conviction of the verities of our holy faith. Should the impression be entertained that such

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a course of preaching would leave out of sight the practical, every-day duties of Christian living, that impression would be wrong. The Gospels and Epistles, indeed the entire collection of sacred books, are filled with truths fitted for daily use. What more practical than the Pauline writings, the Epistle of James and the Epistles of Peter and the pastoral Epistles? It would be difficult to imagine conditions that the counsels, the precepts and the exhortations they contain could not meet. Modern society may be different in many respects from what it was in the first age of Christianity, but human nature, in its leading characteristics, and in some of its minor features as well, is still wonderfully like what it was then. The very truths the apostles taught need earnest and zealous enforcement in the midst of the highest civilization of the present day. The systematic yet popular exposition of these and many other portions of the Divine Word could be brought home with power to the understanding, the heart and conscience of the people now, and as the series proceeded interest would grow and the effect would be cumulative. The result would be mutually beneficial for the pastor and people. In due time their profiting would appear. To the pastor the work would be stimulating and encouraging. It would prevent waste of time. He might also be saved not a little anxiety, and uncertainty in searching for topics from which he could discourse. His work is mapped out before him and his regular course of study would be fruitful in suggesting subjects on which separate discourses might be preached. It would also be helpful in making him mighty in the Scriptures, and there is little doubt that his ministry would thereby be rendered more fruitful. His people would grow in their acquaintance with sacred truth, and there is reason to believe that in Christian feeling, and practical usefulness, they would be stimulated by having their attention systematically directed to the special aspects divine truth thus presented. There are greater possibilities in the occasional adoption of expository methods of discourse than are to be found in the selection of a detached passage, the style of sermonizing now so generally prevalent. The whole subject is worth considering.—*Can. Presbyterian.*

The Conditions of Effectual Prayer.

"And all things, whatsoever ye believe," etc. Have we not sometimes been tempted to think that here, at least, is a case in which our Lord has not literally and always kept His word? In which we do not get quite so much as the plain English of the promise might lead us to expect? If so, well may He say to us, "Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God?" If we had known the Scriptures by searching, we might have known more of the power of God by experience in this matter; for this is no unconditional promise. This marvelous "Whatsoever" depends upon five great conditions, and if we honestly examine we shall find that every case of seeming failure in the promise can be accounted for by our own failure in one or more of these:

1. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do." Really, not verbally only, in the name of Jesus; asking not in our own name at all; signing our petition, as it were, with His name only; coming to the Father by our Advocate, our Representative. Do we always ask this?

2. "Believing that ye shall receive." The faith-heroes of old "through faith" * * * obtained promises, and there is no new way of obtaining them. Is it any wonder that, when we stagger at any promise of God through unbelief, we do not receive it? Not that the faith merits the answer, or in any way earns it or works it out, but God has made believing a condition of receiving, and the Giver has a sovereign right to choose His own terms of gift. Can we put in this claim to the glorious "Whatsoever?" And if not, why not, for this is His commandment, "Abide in me." And this leads us to see the root of our failure in another condition.

4. "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." Only as we are abiding in Him can we bring forth the fruit of obedience, for without (apart from) Him we can do nothing; only in walking by faith can we do those things that are pleasing in His

sight; for without faith it is impossible to please Him.

5. "If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us." When what we ask is founded on a promise or any written evidence of what the will of the Lord is, this is comforting. But what about petitions which may or may not be according to His will? Surely, then, the condition can only be fulfilled by a complete blending of our own will with His; by His so taking our will, so undertaking it and influencing it for us that we are led to desire and ask the very thing He is purposing to give. Then, of course, our prayer is answered, and the very pressure of spirit to pray becomes the pledge and earnest of the answer, for it is the working of His will in us.

Two comforting thoughts arise: first, the very consciousness of our failure in these conditions shows us the wonderful kindness and mercy of our King, who has answered so many a prayer in spite of it, according to His own heart, and not according to our fulfillment, giving us of His royal bounty that to which we had forfeited all shadow of claim; secondly, that He who knoweth our frame knows also the possibilities of His grace, and would never tantalize us by offering magnificent gifts on impossible conditions. Will He give him a stone? Would an earthly parent? Would you? Therefore the very annexing of these intrinsically most blessed conditions implies that His grace is sufficient for their fulfillment, and should lead us on to a blessed life of faith, abiding in Jesus, walking in obedience unto all pleasing, and a will possessed of His own divine will.—*Frances Ridley Havergal.*

Humility a Safeguard.

Twenty-seven editions of the memoir of Billy Bray, a pious miner of Cornwall, have recently been sold in England. This memoir, written by the Rev. F. W. Bourne, and republished in this country, contains the following concerning an eminent characteristic of this godly man:

"One of the most blessed results of his deep piety was his unfeigned humility. His estimate of himself in comparison with other Christians was that he was a coarse sparrow among beautiful specimens. He would say: 'Most gentlemen have a groto'—in Billy's sense, a collection of mine specimens and other curiosities so arranged as to make things beautiful in themselves still more beautiful, in the center of which a coarse old (old) sparrow would be generally placed. So the Lord has His groto—the Church, in which He ~~sets~~ His own people as so many beautiful specimens of different sizes, colors and degrees of beauty, but all so arranged as to exhibit all the graces of the Spirit, and consequently constituting a very grand and beautiful sight; Billy being only the 'coarse old sparrow' among the rest to show their beauties to greater advantage,' but with a heart bounding with gratitude and a tongue vibrating with praises because he was counted worthy of a place among the people of God.

"His humility was his safeguard all through life. An aged person remembers hearing him say on one occasion: 'Soon after I was converted the devil said to me: "Billy Bray, you'll be a great man; but I sunk into nothing, and in that way slipped through the devil's hands." Another result of Billy's deep piety was his continual sense of dependence upon God. The Lord's servants without the Lord's presence are weak like other men, like Samson when he lost his locks.

"Here is one experience of Billy's: 'When I was in the St. Neot Circuit I was on the plan; and I remember that one Sunday I was planned at Redgate, and there was a chapel full of people, and the Lord gave me great power and liberty in speaking; but all at once the Lord took away His Spirit from me, so that I could not speak a word, and this might have been the best sermon that some of them ever heard. "What!" you say, "and looking like a fool, and not able to speak?" Yes, for it was not long before I said: "I am glad I am stopped, and that for three reasons. And the first is, To humble my soul and make me feel more dependent on my Lord, to think more fully of Him and less of myself. The next reason is, To convince you that you are ungodly, for you say we can speak what we have a mind to, without the Lord as well as with Him; but you cannot say so now, for you heard how I was speaking, but when the dear Lord took away His Spirit I could not say another word; without my Lord I could do nothing. And the third reason is, That some of you young men who are standing here may be called to stand in the pulpit some day as I am; and the Lord may take His Spirit from you as He has from me, and then you might say, "It is no good for me to try to preach or exhort, for I was

stopped the last time I tried to preach, and I shall preach no more.' But now you can say: "I saw the poor old Billy Bray stopped once like me, and he did not mind it, and told the people he was glad his dear Lord stopped him, and Billy Bray's dear Lord is my Lord, and I am glad He stopped me too, for I can benefit the people and glorify God, that is what I want." I then spoke a great while and told the people what the dear Lord gave me to say.'—*Advocate.*

The Peace of God.

The peace of man is a truce; the original trouble remains, ready to break out anew into fierce strife or perpetual struggle. The peace of God is a reasonable and final settlement by disposing of the points at issue. The cause of the trouble is removed. The sin, which alone separates between the soul and the divine Father, is forgiven, blotted out, and put far away as the east is from the west. If any future trouble arise, it must be on a new issue; the old one is disposed of and forever relegated to oblivion. The sin is not only forgiven, but so forgotten that the sinner is treated as though the sin had never been committed. He comes back into the Divine favor and confidence under a covenant, which, on the Divine side, can never be violated. The love extended to us will be as lasting as the grasp of our faith upon the Divine promises.

The peace of man is too often formal, unsubstantial—the pledge upon the lip, the uttered salam, the mere husk without the kernel; the peace of God is real—the streaming into the soul of divine light and life, the tranquilization of all the faculties under the control of Him whose voice stills the waves. At the sound of that same voice thesea of human passion becomes calm. The peace of God is a great calm.

The peace of man is scant, inadequate, there are great voids in the soul; the peace of God is full, the soul overflows.—*Herald.*

Skepticism.

Skepticism is simply not believing. It is denial, negation, darkness. There is only one cure for darkness, and that is coming to the light. If you will persist in putting your eyes out, or in barring God's daylight out, there is no help for you; you must die in the dark. Sin has made your soul sick, and if you will not even try Christ's medicine then the blood-poisoning of infidelity will run its fatal course. If you will produce a better rule of life than my Bible (perhaps your mother's Bible also), if you will find a holier pattern of living than Jesus Christ, and a surer Saviour than he is, I will agree to forswear my religion for yours. But what is your "I do not believe" in comparison with my positive "I know whom I have believed?" What is your denial in comparison with my personal experience of Christ? Skepticism never won a victory, never slew a sin, never healed a heartache, never produced a ray of sunshine, never saved an immortal soul. It is foredoomed defeat. Don't risk eternity on that spider's web.—*Chryler.*

"The Honest Truth."

Some persons pride themselves on being blunt, or, as they call it, "honest;" but very blunt people do little good to others, and get little love to themselves. The Scriptures recommend gentleness and kindness. There is nothing in all this world of ours half so mean as a vindictive and malignant disposition. Yet many Christians gratify this spirit, and deceive themselves with the idea that they are rebuking sin. Christians should take heed of getting fond of the work of "rebuking." Such "spiritual constables" do a great deal of mischief without intending it. They are in the Church what a very witty and sarcastic person is in society, or what a tell-tale is in school, and approximate very closely to that class which the apostle terms "busybodies in other men's matters." Such Christians come, in time, to be regarded as nuisances in society, constantly to be avoided, and the little good they may do is thrown away. Our manner must be tender and winning. The nail of reproof, says an old writer, must be well oiled in kindness before it is driven home.—*Sel.*

List the ground of all thy religious actions be obedience. Examine not why it be commanded, but observe it because it is commanded.

Words once spoken can never die; they will turn up in the day of judgment, like things of life, and will either acquit or condemn.—*Everett.*

The more thou knowest and the better thou understandest, the more strictly shalt thou be judged, unless thy life be also the more holy.—*Thomas A. Kempis.*

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IF YOU WOULD INCREASE your happiness and prolong your life, forget your neighbor's faults. Forget the slander you have ever heard. Forget the temptations. Forget the fault-finding and give a little thought to the cause which provoked it. Forget the peculiarities of your friends, and only remember the good points that make you fond of them. Forget all personal quarrels or histories that you may have heard by accident, and which, if repeated, would seem a thousand times worse than they are. Blot out as far as possible all the disagreeables of life: they will come, but they will only grow larger when you remember them, and the constant thought of the acts of meanness, or, worse still, malice, will only tend to make you more familiar with them. Obliterate everything disagreeable from yesterday, start out with a clean sheet for to-day, and write upon it for sweet memory's sake only those things that are lovely and lovable.—*Lutheran Observer.*

THRE WILL BE little spiritual progress where the Holy Scriptures are not highly esteemed. There is a wonderful providence manifest in the preservation of the Bible through so many ages, and while so much of ancient literature has perished. As the word of truth is indispensable in regeneration so constantly it must dwell in us richly for our sanctification. Our Lord's prayer was: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." As we accept the teachings of the Bible we shall find light, guidance and stimulus to all that is lovely and of good report.—*Inquirer.*

"OF ALL that I brought with me from the home of my childhood into the world," says a leading business man, "the most valuable possession was the habit of kneeling to ask God's blessing, night and morning. It kept alive in me the idea that there was a power stronger than I—stronger than money, or business, or life itself. That idea saved me."

Random Readings.

He who forgiveth much loveth much.

God hates sin because it can make his children so miserable.

People do not grow in grace by looking at the faults of others.

Get wisdom and with all thy wisdom get understanding.—*Prov. ix. 7.*

When a man has lost his opportunity he doesn't know where to look for it again.

Believer, you have enough in God and in his Christ; why, then, are you so anxious about other things?

Those that do the will of God heartily will do it speedily; while we delay, time is lost, and the heart hardened.—*Henry.*

What are sciences but maps of universal laws? and universal laws but the channels of universal power? and the universal power but the outgoing of a universal mind.—*E. Thompson.*

Cast forward the eye of the spirit; awake in your souls the imaginative power, which carries forth what is fairest, what is highest life, away beyond the stars.—*Goethe.*

My heart has assured and assured me that the gospel of Jesus Christ must be divine reality. The Sermon in the Mount cannot be merely human production.—*Daniel Webster.*

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