

## THE HIGHWAY PULPIT

"But Sin, that it might appear Sin"—Rom. 7:13  
A Sermon by H. C. Mullen

In looking back over half a century I am able to note some radical changes in matters both temporal and spiritual. I have seen the change from ox-cart to automobile, and just as great changes in things spiritual only in reverse order. There has been a decided change for the worse in the prevalence of sin of all kinds, and above all a very noticeable tendency to excuse and condone sin and to make sin appear less sinful. Soft sounding words are used to designate sin, and what was once counted an offence to God is passed over with no compunction of conscience. People have less fear of offending God, and there is less reverence for things holy.

Speaking of changes, I was quite a lad before I ever saw a cigarette, and that was rolled and smoked by a transient Jewish pedlar who happened to stop over night at our home. Now cigarettes are almost born in the mouths of babies. Mothers will nurse their babies while they themselves are sucking at a poisonous cigarette, and passing on the poison to an innocent and helpless infant. I have seen some passing styles in my time. My sisters would not have been seen in public with no more clothes on than is worn unabashed on the streets today, for any amount of money. Perhaps the limit has been pretty well reached in this regard: there is little more that could be done. This being so, some have gone to nudist societies.

I was quite a big boy before I ever heard the Lord's name used in swearing; and larger still before I ever heard the name of our blessed Jesus used blasphemously. But what now? Almost everybody swears. One hears the name of Jesus used blasphemously everywhere. One cannot stand for a minute in a group of men or boys without having his ears shocked by hearing the name of deity taken in vain, while filthy insults are thrown into the face of the Almighty.

We used to think that when a man swore he must be raging mad, and terribly tried about something, and there seemed to be some semblance of excuse for him, but now men will curse the name of God, and take the blessed name of Christ upon their profane lips without the least bit of provocation whatsoever. It seems to come from a heart condition of sheer irreverence and hatred to God and things holy. And the saddest part of it is that there are those who will condone this sin and try to fix it up by saying it is only a habit, and people do not mean anything by it. And if the blasphemer happens to be a soldier, he is considered to be perfectly within his rights, and very excusable. Some clergyman would preach him into Heaven if he died with an oath upon his lips. People would be ready to say, "Yes, he would swear a little, but you know he was a good hearted fellow after all!"

I once gently reproved a man in his little shop, for taking the name of Jesus in vain. It was "All Saints Day," and he was not doing any work but was keeping the day holy, would not so much as go out hunting. In reply to my reproof he said, "Oh, it's no harm to swear if you don't mean it!" I have heard others try to excuse it in the same way.

I wonder where the Lord has made any distinction between swearing and meaning it,

and swearing and not meaning it? His word says plainly, and with no qualifying, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." The time is due for a return to definite preaching on the demands of God's holy law, and true reverence for His name.

The moral standards of the pew will go no higher than the pulpit, so if the clergy soft-pedal sin, the laity are sure to slump in moral standards.

What great responsibility rests upon the ministry! Do they all measure up to the Bible standard? I fear they do not. Long ago Shakespeare said, "There is no error, but some preacher will bless it with a text." It is the same today. Sin is of that nature that if we take a lenient attitude toward it, we may first abhor, then excuse, then fondly embrace it.

I was riding with a clergyman of another denomination, just leaving the cemetery after a funeral. A group of young men were marching in order ahead of us. I remarked to the minister, "What a pity all those young men were not converted and in the church." He sort of groaned and hesitated, then replied, "Yes, but they are a fine group of young men after all." That they were a well dressed and physically fine group I would freely admit, but I knew those fellows personally, and knew that not one of them knew the Lord in saving grace, or made any profession of being a Christian. One of those young men was a member of this preacher's church and held an office, and I freely believed that he would have taken all of them into his church just as they were.

At a later date I was in company with a later pastor of this same church. He happened to mention the great loss that his church had suffered by the death of a certain man of the town. I was acquainted with the man, and it was reported that he died drunk. I asked, "Did that man belong to your church?" He said, "Yes!" Again I asked, "Did he not hit the booze?" He replied, "There is no doubt he hit the booze all right, but there are not many Christians who do not!" To this I said, "What, a Christian drink liquor and get drunk? Why, my church would not take in a man who smokes cigarettes!" At this he sneered and said, "Huh, I look upon the cigarette habit as only a fad, like girls painting their fingernails."

What wonder that standards are low, and that Holiness folk are counted fanatical in their stand for a clean church, when there are church leaders that have no more conscience than this. This fact does not in any way excuse us but makes it more necessary for us to hold up the standard.

A few years ago I stood in the company of a number of city clergymen. I was a silent listener to a conversation between two of them. Said Mr. P. to Mr. S.: "Did you hear what went on at the masquerade party down at the fair grounds last night?" Mr. S. replied in the negative. Then Brother P. related a dialogue between two young women. The first girl said to the second, "Were you at the masquerade party last night?" The second girl said, "No!" Then the first girl said, "I was there, and I was gloriously drunk!" Now, this was shocking enough but Mr. S.'s comment was the most shocking. He said this: "And I suppose if anyone said anything against the young folks going to such places they would leave and go to some other church!"

I understood the situation pretty well. There

was at that time an especially popular church in the city, whose liberal and broad-minded pastor took no stand whatsoever against dancing and other forms of worldliness. He was putting on a program that was attracting a crowd of young people from all over the city. This same preacher about this time came out in print and publicly ridiculed Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God," a sermon that was used of God to the salvation of hundreds, and brought such conviction upon sinners that it was said that some clutched the backs of their seats lest they fall into hell. No one ever heard of such revival or crying for mercy in the above mentioned church. The moral is obvious.

What a pity that all churches did not preach the Bible and lift a standard so high that when people leave one church and seek to find one where they will not be disturbed, they would meet the same truth wherever they went. But unlike Mr. S., there are some preachers who are going to preach the truth whether people go or stay.

If people found no one to palliate their sins, and soothe their consciences, they would be very liable to repent, fly to the blood, and find salvation.

Satan is shrewd and changes his tactics. In the preceding generation infidelity was rife, and quite the fashion. People flocked to hear Bob Ingersoll, and his kind, but who goes to hear infidel lectures now? Who knows of an outstanding infidel lecturer today? I know of none. Who would go far to hear one? Not many would take the trouble to go hear an agnostic ridicule the Bible. No, the fashion has changed, but the strategy of the devil is more effective now. The vogue today is to admit the truth of the Bible, to patronize God, profess belief in His deity, and the divinity of Christ, and even belong to the church, and yet live according to the world and the lusts of the flesh. Just as the apostle foretold, "having a form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof." Men are quite willing to accept the emoluments of the Christian religion for personal gain, but shun the restraints of a real experience of salvation. So we have religion without godliness, church membership without regeneration, church forms with no glory and power and victory. To use a term coined during the last war, we have a lot of "fox-hole" religion, the kind that appeals to God in a supreme emergency, but when out of that, could take His name in vain, and think nothing about it.

This sad condition has come upon us almost entirely because someone has failed to preach the commandments of God, failed to make sin to appear sin, failed to show sin to be exceedingly sinful.

## HEAVENLY DEW

Just as the refreshing dew never falls on a stormy night, so the dew of God's Grace seldom fall on the restless soul. Rest and relaxation are necessary to the human body, food is vitally essential to the sustenance of life, and waiting upon God is of supreme importance to the soul in Christ.

If your spirits are low, do something; if you have been doing something, do something different.—Hale.

The highest culture is to speak no ill.