

THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

VOL. X.—SEPTEMBER, 1885.—No. 3.

REVIEW SECTION.

I—SYMPOSIUM ON THE PULPIT: "IS THE PULPIT DECLINING IN POWER? IF SO, WHAT IS THE REMEDY?"

NO. IV.

BY PROF. J. H. W. STUCKENBERG, D.D., BERLIN, GERMANY.

"Is the pulpit declining in power?" Yes, and no. In some respects, in some churches, yes. The ritual may take the place assigned by the Reformation to the Word, and the pulpit may even be abolished in order to get more room for the altar. When tradition becomes the law and the gospel; when some magic transforms the form into the substance; when the authority of the abstract Church robs the conscience of its prerogatives; when a special order of men destroys instead of promoting the universal priesthood of believers; when this order is ashamed to be called Evangelical because it is Catholic; when the liturgical and sacramental are made substitutes for the living Word; when churches are built for architectural impression, rather than for hearing the truth; and when mysticism, with its symbolism of lights and vestments and movements, takes the place of the simpler worship of God in spirit and in truth—then the sermon, unless altogether omitted, will be treated as subordinate; and when it begins, the worship being over, worshipers can perhaps withdraw without serious loss. The entrance of the priest may mean the exit of the preacher. For fifty years there have been in Europe and America, in various churches, tendencies which, in the name of deeper devotion and purer religion, have promoted the decline of the pulpit.

Other circumstances have affected its relative, if not its absolute, power. Subjects of which it once had almost a monopoly, are now discussed in legislative halls, on the platform, and by the press; and thus it is brought into competition with agencies which formerly did not exist, or were not so potent. The fact, however, that new forces have been introduced into the organism of society, does not imply

him. When he gave to the elders of the Ephesian Church his farewell discourse, he said, "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Spirit testifyeth unto me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But I hold not my life of any account as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course, and the ministry which I received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." (Acts xx: 22-24.) Behold this life! It is one of the sublimest pictures on which the eyes of men have ever looked.

The secret of it all is, Paul loved Christ; loved Him with all his heart and soul and mind and strength. He knew that Christ had loved him, that out of love to him, had died to redeem him; had died the death of shame and infamy on the cross; and all that he could do was ever felt to be but a poor return to Him "who loved me, and gave Himself up for me."

This, brethren, is the life to which we are each called. Does it not inspire you with an ardent longing to reach so pure and lofty a standard? So catch Christ's spirit and go forth amongst our fellow-men with such grace and dignity that all shall take knowledge of us; to let His life so enter into us that we shall be constrained with quenchless zeal to seek the good of men for whom the Christ shed His precious blood; to him so that when life's work is done the Master, who has beheld every sacrifice, and marked every act of devotion, and traced us through every track of life, shall sum up the whole, and with a welcoming smile say, "Well done!" Surely this is a life worthy of the ambition of every man. Compare it as you may, this is the noblest life possible to man. Will you estimate life by the dignity of its pursuits. Then what life can possibly touch the skirts of that which aims to fulfill the will of God after the pattern of God's own Son? Will you estimate life by the self-sacrifice of its labors? Then where can you find again men who have shown a tithe of the self-

sacrifice of Paul, and of those who, like him, have caught and reflected the spirit of the great Master? Will you estimate life by the loftiness of its hopes? Then where is the life again that listens to the voices which sweep down from the hills of everlasting praise, and that is filled with a well-grounded expectation of joining that glorified throng? Will you estimate life by the sublimity of its attainments? Then it is utterly impossible to put anything by the side of the life that reflects the character of Christ, that so lives among our fellow-men, in love, in patience and unselfish zeal, and consuming desire for their well-being, their salvation, that he can say, "For to me to live is Christ."

Let me appeal to all. Are you living for anything less noble than this? If Christ is not the inspiration of your life, then for what are you living? Is it for wealth? Is it for power? Is it for pleasure? Is it for aught—for all that earth can gain? Oh! how ignoble beside the life I urge you to commence to-day? I proclaim to you a gospel which you may accept—the good news—that the poorest sinner may abandon his past life of unsatisfactoriness and sorrow, and coming into a new life, say: "Henceforth for to me to live is Christ."

ISAAC'S MEDITATION AT EVENTIDE.

A SUMMER EVENING MEDITATION, IN THE WOODLAND CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA, BY LEONARD WOOLSEY BACON.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide.—Gen. xxiv: 63.

It is a delightful thing to turn back the leaves of the world's history—bloody leaves, foul leaves, leaves written all over with insincerities and falsehoods and the records of man's inhumanity to man—and come to these early pages of the life of our race. We linger here among the tents of the patriarchs, and are in no hurry to press forward to the splendors and intrigues of the Egyptian court and the brutal barbarism of the days of the Judges.

Here, dwelling in tents, with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, we find a people full of ignorances and faults;

who in naïf simplicity and half unconsciousness of wrong do the most monstrous things sometimes, and the most shocking to our moral sense. They seem to have the first principles of morality to learn; but plainly they are a people that *will* learn them, for they have the ground-work of morality well laid in a beautiful simplicity—childlike but not childish—of love to God and faith in God. They walk with God, and are called the friends of God. They endure “as seeing Him who is invisible.”

There has much light come to us on these old-world stories, from the study of Oriental life, which is so singularly persistent in its usages that the forms of courtesy and the modes of speech that were current 4,000 years ago may be illustrated by similar, if not identical forms and models, in current use to-day. But I really think that this matter of Oriental illustration has been somewhat overdone, so that sometimes we get darkness from it instead of light. When men read the stately words of courtesy of Abraham:—when, for instance, they see him declining the offer of the field of Machpelah as a gift from the owners, and asking that he might rather hold the burial-place of his dead as the purchase of his own money;—and when they say “that is only an Oriental custom in bargaining—it is a polite form which means nothing”—they forget that these immemorial fixed forms of Eastern life never would have become fixed forms at all, unless they had begun with being something more than forms. We hear in the East, every day, expressions full of pious feeling and faith in the invisible God, which are simply part of the language; you cannot express yourself without using them; but they mean nothing on the lips of the people. Now when we find just such expressions on the lips of Abraham and Isaac, instead of inferring that they meant nothing then, we ought to infer just the contrary—that in the infancy of

language and of society words were worth their face value, and that it is only when they have been worn smooth by some generations of circulation that they have to be taken at a discount. We are too wise to see the true meaning of a true story, when we allow our Oriental learning to hinder us from taking the history of the patriarchs in its simple and obvious sense.

It seems to me in reading this 24th chapter of Genesis, that I have been wont to make quite too little of the story of Isaac. Crowded into a brief chapter or two, between the heroic life of Abraham and the adventurous life of Jacob, he seems overshadowed by the father and the son. He is the longest-lived of the patriarchs, with the shortest history. It is related of him chiefly that he dug wells—excellent wells, no doubt, and famous, some of them, as Sitnah and Rehoboth, and Beer-Sheba; but with this exception, he is notable chiefly as being the son of his father, and the father of his son. And yet the thought grows upon me at every resting-place among the labors of life, at every reminder of my personal ineffectiveness and unimportance—at every quiet Sunday evening pause between the work and strife of the week past and those of the week to come, how much comfort there is, here in this long, quiet, almost unrecorded interval between Abraham and Jacob, in pondering the peaceful story of a man who had neither the heroism of the one nor the subtlety of the other, but who, just as much as either of them, has this testimony, that he pleased God. When I think of my father's life, crowded with great and noble deeds for the Church and for humanity, and think of my passing years and of their meagre record, it is comforting to remember that God requires to be served also by other men than heroes; it is pleasant to turn from Abraham, sitting in his tent door in the heat of the fiery noon-day, to placid, pastoral Isaac meditating in the field at eventide.

There is no little comfort of this sort to be had in the Holy Scriptures. Lest

* So Dr. W. M. Thomson, in “The Land and the Book.”

we might be discouraged with contemplating the examples of the heroes of the Church—of Paul and John and Peter—lest we might come to feel that life is unimportant in the case of those who are not heroes—who are not eminent nor illustrious—and that the Lord has no particular need of us; we have given to us the names of the twelve selected men, chosen out of all their generation by the personal call of Jesus Christ; and we are comforted in finding how many of those whom the Lord called, and loved, and loved even to the end, were men who never “made their mark” in history. It is pleasant to go over the names of them—Thaddeus, and Lebbeus, and Jude, and Bartholomew, and Simon Zelotes—men that we never hear of again—and think that if Jesus Christ loved them, and chose them into His own intimate family of disciples because He wanted just such men, how He may also have a place in His kingdom, and near his own person, for us, even the most unimportant of us. I don't know anything about Lebbeus; but Lebbeus is a great comfort to me sometimes. And so is Isaac.

Now this chapter out of Isaac's life, which makes the largest part of his biography, is nothing more than a little idyllic love scene—a sort of prose eclogue, more beautiful than a poem, set in scenes as fair as any pictures of Sicilian or Arcadian groves. And the figure painted for us, in this text, against the color of the Syrian sunset sky, is the figure of the young shepherd walking out in the fields by the well Lahai-roi, meditating on the hoped-for happiness of his wedded life with the maiden whom he has never seen. Doubtless it has seemed to many a hard student of the divine oracles as rather a strange chapter to be put here in the very fore-front of the holy Book—the story of a lover's evening meditation among his flocks, as he awaited his unknown bride; and they have tried to fix some allegorical or theological meaning upon it, by way of justifying the place that it occupies in these grave records. Poor wise men, that cannot be content

with God's foolishness, which is so much wiser than all their wisdom! This story of a pure human love is here in the holy Book by its own right, for it is a holy thing. And it is here by a divine approval that so it might receive, to all time, the divine stamp of holiness. Here the hand of God is laid upon it in benediction and in consecration. How Satan endeavors to pervert the love of man and woman to his service! How the world seeks to pollute it! How “society” that likes to call itself Christian tries to frivolize it and turn it into a jest! But here, God who did in the beginning ordain this mutual love of man and woman to be the fair type and similitude of His own dear love to those who trust Him, hath set this lovers' tale at the opening of the Old Testament, as the bright story of a wedding where the Lord was guest is set to shine at the opening of the gospel; thereby bidding us by such fair example, to honor that which God hath cleansed.

In the margin of the chapter we find over against the word *meditate* the alternate rendering, “Or, *pray*.” We do not need this marginal note to assure us that this evening meditation of the shepherd lover was a prayer. In so grave a crisis of life, the meditation of one who believes in God of course becomes a prayer. What anxious questions of a life-time's joy or wretchedness were to turn on what might be the result of that far-away embassy of the faithful slave, Eliezer! If ever one might pray, it should be for God's blessing on that coming bride, of whom he knew not yet so much as the very name. And lo! in the midst of his prayerful meditation there in the fields at eventide, he hears the faint tinkling of the bells of an approaching caravan, and looks up, and the sweet answer of his prayer is at hand. The veiled maiden lights from off her camel, and the bridegroom leads her to his mother's tent.

I have little sympathy (as I have said) with those who find the religious lesson of this story to be recondite or far to seek, all for not seeing how worthy of a

divine teaching is the plain lesson which it bears upon its very face. Oh! many are the sad examples, tempting one to cynicism and to a bitter incredulity of man and woman, examples of the evil end of love in which is no thought of God and prayer and duty to hallow and ennoble it. O hearers, and especially young men and young women, be willing to learn from the evening meditation and prayer of the young bridegroom, Isaac, how fair and glorious a thing that love may be which is "begun, continued and ended in God," and crowned by Him with blessing and only blessing.

THE LORD'S PRAYER A MODEL OF TRUE PRAYER.

BY JAMES M. LUDLOW, D.D. [PRESBYTERIAN], BROOKLYN, N. Y.

After this manner pray ye.—Matt. vi: 9.

THE Master does not say, "Pray in these words," as if He intended to establish a liturgy. He did not give us a fixed form of words, for the version of Luke differs from that of Matthew, in the original as well as in English. He places no stress on mere phraseology, and does not desire to confine our communion with Him to words alone. A father loves the prattle of his child far more than formal, stately speech. Our Heavenly Father's relationship to us is more tender and familiar. May He not be better pleased with the misapprehensions, mistakes, vagueness and puerility which attend our prayers when we come with humble, loving trust, than if we repeated the song of unerring angels? Written prayers are useful, specially as a stimulus to waken dormant emotion or to recall vagrant thought and thus to quicken spiritual mindedness. Books of devotion, like Jay's *Morning and Evening Exercises*, and Baxter's *Holy Living and Dying*, are excellent external helps. Rev. F. W. Robertson was one of the most independent of thinkers, as he was one of the brightest spirits in the Christian church. His writings are monuments of what is best in Christian thought, yet he was wont "to kindle

his own fire from another's light," that is, in beginning to think avail himself of the impulse which another mind gives out in the full glow of thought. A single idea caught up may be a keynote, at least a spur to individual and original thinking.

But in prayer, as in preaching, one cannot be satisfied with another's thought. Your needs are your own. No one can realize them as you do yourself, and your prayer must be your own, as in conversation your language is your own. The diction of another may be more elegant, but if you speak you must express yourself in your own way. We have, moreover, different feelings towards God and He to us. With "one Spirit there is a diversity of operations." Faces differ, though there be but one humanity. God's Government is one, but our experiences under it vary. Progress involves change. If we are growing in grace, last year's prayers will not serve us now. Backsliding involves change. Of course, then, the utterances of joyful, ardent, loyal love will not befit the lips that need to breathe confession and repentance.

Better than any human compilation, David's psalms will serve to enrich thought and quicken emotion. But above these are the Master's own words. Nothing will meet your daily need like the prayer of our Lord. Look at it, "Our Father, who art in Heaven." Wait. Ponder that thought in all its majesty and sacredness till you are brought under the sway of its grandeur and beauty. "Thy will be done." Wait. Dwell on that pregnant prayer. Can you offer it sincerely, "Thy will be done"? Thus go through the whole, reflecting on the meaning of each matchless phrase. But, after all, it is the spirit of prayer the Master teaches, rather than the verbal form, "Teach us how to pray."

I. Simplicity is a striking feature of this Christ's prayer. No prayer from human lips was ever more characteristically so. How unlike the grandiloquent addresses men pay to each other