

VIII.

THE SECRET OF POWER IN THE PULPIT.

BY REV. FRANCIS J. GRIMKE.

By power I do not mean physical power, strength of lung and voice, important as these are. I remember when I was taken under the care of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, and examined with a view of being recommended to the Board of Education, this was one of the tests to which I was subjected in determining whether I was called to preach or not. I was directed to go to one end of the room and read aloud a hymn. Whether these brethren seriously contemplated making my recommendation to depend on this, I cannot say; but the thing which they desired to emphasize is an important one—every minister should be able to make himself heard. And yet, in passing, it may be well to say, there is reason to fear that entirely too much importance is sometimes attached to this as an element of ministerial qualification. Too often nowadays the ability to make a noise is the only power which some of our pulpits display, and the one which is most highly prized by the people. It is not an uncommon thing to hear mere empty words uttered in thunderous tones, lauded in the most extravagant terms, and the noisy ignoramus pronounced a great preacher. It is the duty of every minister to make himself heard, but the boisterous and uproarious manner in which the truth is often presented is a disgrace, and the sooner such disgusting exhibitions cease the better. Nor do I mean oratorical power—the power which comes from a fine delivery, from a thorough mastery of the principles of elocution—though there is reason for wishing that something could be done to improve many of our pulpits in this respect; nor do I mean intellectual power—the power which comes from a trained intellect, from scholarly attainments and from great native endowments, important as these are, and as great as is the need for improvement along these lines; but *spiritual power*—power to affect the heart and conscience, power to produce conviction of sin, and to awaken in sinners a desire for Christ and His salvation.

Without this power all preaching is vain. The time spent in the preparation and delivery of sermons is time thrown away. Not that careful preparation, as to thought, arrangements, etc., is not necessary; but if to this something else is not added, if the preacher himself is not clothed with *power from on high*, it will go for naught. One of the saddest remarks I ever heard was from one of the most eloquent and gifted men that ever stood in a pulpit. "At times I

have grave doubts," he said, "if even a single soul was ever led to Christ through my ministry." And the ground of his fear is not difficult to be understood by those who were permitted to hear him. In spite of his extraordinary gifts as an orator, impossible as it was to listen to him without being charmed beyond expression, yet the impression left was never of a spiritual nature. His grand discourses left you full of admiration for the man, but with scarcely a serious thought about the soul and its eternal destiny. That he had power there can be no doubt, but it was clear to all who heard him that it was not spiritual power. This fact is also strikingly illustrated in the history of the noted evangelist, Moody. Speaking of himself he says:

"I can myself go back almost twenty years and remember two holy women who used to come to my meetings. It was delightful to see them there. When I began to preach I could tell by the expression of their faces that they were praying for me. At the close of the Sabbath evening meetings they would say to me, 'We have been praying for you.' I said, 'Why don't you pray for the people?' They answered, 'You need the power.' 'I need the power?' I said to myself, 'Why, I thought I had the power.' I had a large Sabbath school and the largest congregation in Chicago. There were some conversions at that time. I was, in a sense, satisfied. But right along these two godly women kept praying for me, and their earnest talk about 'anointing for special service' set me thinking. I asked them to come and talk with me, and we got down on our knees. They poured out their hearts that I might receive the anointing from the Holy Spirit, and there came a great hunger into my soul. I did not know what it was. I began to cry as I never did before. The hunger increased. I really felt that I did not want to live any longer if I could not have this power for service. Then came the Chicago fire. I was burnt out of house and home at two o'clock in the morning. This did not so much affect me; my heart was full of the yearning for Divine power. I was to go on a special mission to raise funds for the homeless, but my heart was not in the work for begging. I could not appeal. I was crying all the time that God would fill me with His Spirit. Well, one day, in the city of New York—ah, what a day! I cannot describe it; I seldom refer to it, it is almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke for fourteen years. I can only say God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand. I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different; I did not present any new truths; and yet hundreds were converted."

The presence of this power in all of our pulpits is the greatest need of the Church to-day, and to secure it should be our constant aim and desire. How this is to be effected will appear if we consider for a moment the source of this power. It is due to the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is again and again asserted in the Scripture. Acts 1: 8, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy



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Ghost is come upon you;" 1 Cor. 2: 4, "And my speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the *Spirit* and of power;" 1 Thess. 1: 5, "For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the *Holy Ghost*." See also Rom. 15: 18, 19, and 1 Pet. 1: 12. The same is still further evident from what is said of the work of the *Spirit*. He convinces of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. He regenerates and sanctifies; that is, these effects are due to His presence and influence. The way to get power in the pulpit, therefore, is to be filled with the *Holy Ghost*, to preach in dependence upon the *Holy Ghost*. The reason why there is so little power in many of our pulpits is because we do not honor the *Spirit*; because we rely too much upon ourselves, upon our eloquence and ability as preachers, and too little upon the *Divine Spirit*, forgetful of the fact that whatever may be our gifts and endowments, all will go for naught unless accompanied with the baptism from on high. When as ministers we come to realize this, while there will be no less diligence in preparation—that is, in the merely literary part of our work—there will be much greater earnestness and frequency in prayer; for it is by prayer alone that this power is to be obtained. "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." "If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the *Holy Spirit* to them that *ask* Him." It is our privilege to be filled with the *Holy Ghost*. John the Baptist, we read, was filled with the *Holy Ghost*; so were all the disciples in the day of Pentecost; so were Peter and Paul and Barnabas; that is, they were completely under the *Spirit's* influence, thoroughly devoted to Christ, which is only another name for consecration. When we can say with Paul, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel," "For me to live is Christ," "I am determined to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and Him crucified," the message as delivered by us will be not in word only, but in power. Greater consecration, therefore, is what is needed. We need the single eye—the spirit which counts all things but loss for Christ. It is only in this way that we can hope to possess that which every true minister should possess—power from on high—power to speak effectively for Christ, to awaken sinners, to arouse the slumbering conscience, and to wring out the cry, "What shall I do to be saved?" There are men who possess this power. Whenever they speak such cries are heard. Wherever they go conversions follow in their track. On the day of Pentecost three thousand under Peter's words, *being filled with the Holy Ghost*, cried out, "What shall we do to be saved?" And wherever the Apostle Paul went during his wonderful missionary journeys, throughout Asia Minor and Macedonia and Greece, he left behind him witnesses to attest the mighty power of saving truth, uttered by consecrated lips in dependence upon the *Spirit*. What if we were all clothed with this power, if such effects attended our ministries, what a different world we would have, how many more conversions would follow the preaching of the Word,

how much larger and stronger would be our churches, and how much wider would be the influence of Christianity. And the fact that such is not the case, that such effects do not, as a general thing, follow our preaching, should lead us all to the most serious self-examination and heart-searching, for the same Spirit that worked through Paul has been promised to us, and may be had if we will but ask in faith believing. How great will be our condemnation if the words spoken by us fail of their effect, in leading sinners to repentance and faith, through any lack on our part in fulfilling the conditions upon which the presence of the Spirit depends. To make the pulpit in point of spiritual power all that it is capable of becoming should be the ambition of every minister, and this he can do only by entire personal consecration, by becoming the bond-slave of Jesus Christ.—*δούλος Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ.*

IX.

THE CITY'S NIGHT.

BY RANDOLPH C. LEWIS, ESQ.

'Tis night, and all the glimm'ring city lying
 Wrapt in a pulseless silence vast and deep,
 Like some dark Genius resting, undefying
 And steeped within the gracious lull of sleep.
 Asleep! But no, this silence deep, exalting,
 The songless mass before another day,
 Is full of anguish, grief and vice unhalting,
 And dull remorse that in its shadows play.
 And slowly o'er the mute expanse ascending,
 The ghostly, drifting vapors mount the air,
 Like mournful shapes their lamentations blending
 With incense of a penitential prayer.
 The myriad lights from murk and mist outglowing,
 The flick'ring flame, the steady, baleful glare,
 Seem but the restless, sleepless eyeballs showing
 The darker world that holds its waking there.
 Within this sacred calm the earth, enfolding
 A baser life, comes quickened from its lair,
 In all the gorgeous mien of hellish moulding,
 While ghostly, drifting vapors mount the air:—
 The heated surge of mad desire leaping,
 The grip of soulless avarice and crime,
 And vice, distorted, watchful and unsleeping,
 And souls that make a sacrilege of time.
 Beyond, around, and to the cold stars' gleam
 The vast and deep Eternal reigns supreme.