

# THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

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## REVIEW SECTION.

### I.—EUGÈNE BERSIER.

BY PROFESSOR WILLIAM C. WILKINSON, D.D., TARRYTOWN, N. Y.

IF a Greek critic of the Attic prime, supposed living again among us moderns, should, merely from the point of view of oratoric art, compare the achievements in pulpit eloquence of the various races of mankind, it would no doubt be to French preachers that he would award the palm of supremacy. Among those French preachers (of whatever time) such a critic, free from every prepossession, would, I feel sure, find no one superior to the subject of the present paper. Critics less severe and less severely Greek—Asiatic, let us say, rather than Attic—might pronounce a different judgment. A warping influence admitted from an admixture of romanticism in the literary taste might not unnaturally lead to a preference of something English or of something American over anything French. But to your pure Attic sense the French would infallibly seem finer. And of the French, as I said, nothing would seem more free from fault or defect than the eloquence of Eugène Bersier.

It is thus a very high, but it is also a somewhat peculiar praise that I bestow on this eminent French preacher. I prepare, as far as I may, my readers for considering the claims of a master in pulpit oratory contrasted, but rather in quality than in quantity of merit, with all of his peers in the list of illustrious names furnishing subjects for the present series of papers. It is Attic performance that is here to be judged; we must apply Attic canons of art and Attic standards of taste in judging it.

This means, of course, that nothing to strike by eccentricity, extravagance, excess, no indulgence of individual caprice, no lawlessness willing to be mistaken for independence, no sins against taste hoping to pass for audacities of genius, no violences of expression doing duty for originalities of thought—nothing whatever of this sort need be looked for in Bersier. All with him is measure, proportion, propriety, pure taste, sound judgment, undisturbed dominance of the rule of not too much, order, harmony,

selves irreligious, but would rather their son were a constant attendant of the prayer-meeting than of the theatre, or an interested reader of the Bible than of Ingersoll. The testimony of the unrighteous to the worth of religion as a moral armor is an exceedingly valuable testimony.

Let all, then, covet and cultivate moral strength. Oh, for a holy pride on this point! that we can say *No!* to evil solicitation and maintain it. We cannot all be athletes, and if we could, "bodily exercise profiteth little." We cannot all have genius, and if we could, there is something better. We can all have moral strength, and "he that subdueth his own spirit is better than he that taketh the city." In the midst of venality and corruption, when jobs and bribes are rife, when tricks of trade are increasing till it almost seems that every man has his price, we can stand firm. "Let no man take thy crown." "Be not thou a partaker of other men's sins." "Keep thyself pure." "I have written unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the world."

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### THE PENITENT THIEF.

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*Remember me when Thou comest into  
Thy kingdom.*—Luke xxiii. 42.

THIS sacred scene brings us to the central heart of Christianity, to the great sacrament of the world's history, the cross of Jesus Christ. It has its vital relations to us personally, and deserves our serious thought. It is a strange spectacle. Earth was moved and heaven was still more intent. Here is the glorious Son of God placed between two thieves, a strange setting for a priceless jewel. He is numbered with transgressors. Such are we, all of us. He takes His place with us, transgres-

sors, that we may be numbered with His saints in life everlasting, written in the Lamb's book of life. These malefactors differentiate mankind. All are transgressors, but some accept the Lord Jesus and some turn their backs upon Him. Studying the attitude of this penitent thief, we may ask three questions:

1. What did he think of himself?
2. What did he think of Christ?
3. What did Christ think of him?

We are apt to be more lenient in judging ourselves than in weighing the actions of others. We are ingenious in self exculpation and severe on our fellows, instead of being exact with ourselves, whom we know, and charitable with others, whose motives we do not know. We, if we have the spirit of Christ, the spirit of gentleness, will reprove with meekness, and remember our own exposure to temptation. This repentant thief said that he deserved to die. He realized his guilt. He extenuated, palliated nothing. I once ministered to a man in this city condemned to die, who showed his sincere penitence not only by withdrawing his denial of guilt, but in demanding his penalty and discouraging an appeal for pardon. He said that the cause of morality required his execution. He died, I believe, a true penitent. The felon on the cross asked not a great thing, a throne in heaven, a seat beside the King; he asked not that his pardon be heralded in heaven; he asked not even a glance of Christ's imperial eye, but only a thought, "Remember me." There had been a great revolution in his heart, and this is seen when we ask.

2. What he thought of Christ. He accepted the Redeemer as his all and addressed him as his Lord, then and there. He believed in the assumptions of Christ, that He was a King and had a kingdom. He looked beyond the cross and shame. His faith conquered every doubt and fear. He believed with all his heart. He may have heard Jesus preach and heard the gracious call, "Come unto Me all ye that labor

and are heavy laden." He may have even then had in hand his ill-gotten gains, but weary of sin, accepted of the grace of God. The other thief, too, may have heard, but why God softens one heart and not another we know not; we know that one received and one rejected Christ.

"Remember me," as if he had said, "No word is needed, for Thou art able to *think* me into heaven." Faith is the gift of God. Its origin is heavenly. It seeks its source. A kite carried the thread across the chasm where now the Suspension Bridge at Niagara is built. Stronger and stronger cords and wires followed. Had a bird been taken from its nest on either side, and allowed to fly from the opposite side back to its home, bearing a silken thread, the act would have pictured the movement of faith flying from the soul back to God. Thus heaven and earth are linked. Prayer and praise mount up the shining pathway, and finally at death the soul goes joyfully up. Though in the valley of the shadow of death, there is no fear where faith triumphs.

### 8. What did Christ think of him ?

He welcomed the penitent with the hearty assurance, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." The word recalls a garden, an Edenic abode of purity and beauty. Where is it and what is it? It is enough to say that it is to be with Christ. "Where I am, there ye shall be." There is no delay, "to-day—with Me!" In this hour of shame and pain, this public confession of the penitent thief must have been a sweet solace to Jesus. He felt the need of human sympathy. When on the Mount of Transfiguration, He had converse with those two monumental men of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah, and the theme of remark was "His decease." So in the garden He said, "Can ye not watch with Me one hour?" Now He was treading the wine-press alone. All His disciples forsook Him and fled, but here was one poor, believing sinner on the cross. He could not fly. His dying testimony

of love and loyalty to his Lord was sweet. A king has sometimes knighted a brave soldier on the battle-field for heroism, perhaps dying to save his king. But grander than "Rise, Sir Knight!" is the word of Jesus to the pardoned malefactor, bidding him to rise that very hour to his crown of glory, worn with his Lord above.

Fame, wealth, glory are empty possessions, but love, holiness, eternal life, the gift of God, these are substantial and incalculable. Then make this Master your Master, this Saviour yours to-day! You will then enter with Him into glory eternal. The sun goes not down alone. There is an evening star that with it sets. Jesus chose not an imperial Cæsar for the companion of His setting hour. He, the Sun of Righteousness, took not the high-priest, not Mary, His mother, or some cherished disciple, but this outcast, this criminal, lonely and despised. As the diver brings up a pearl from ocean's depths, He took this soul from a miry pit. As the setting sun transforms and transfigures the misty clouds to golden gates and pavements, as it were leading into heaven, so the Sun of Righteousness here glorifies sunken and debased humanity.

Called once in great haste to see a dying woman on the upper floor of a poor, tenement-house, I answered her anxious query as how she might be saved by saying, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ;" and the quick following query as to how she might believe, by telling her of the penitent thief. "What did he say?" came back to me, for she never had heard of him before. When I told it to her, she solemnly repeated it over, and then again, with her last gasping breath, "Lord—remember—ME!" and died. As I folded her pulseless hands across her breast, I felt that a new trophy of redeeming grace had been secured. Will you not, dear friend, and you, this hour accept this great salvation, and so make sure that you at last shall be where He is, forever with the Lord?