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Sermonic Literature and Discussion of Practical Issues

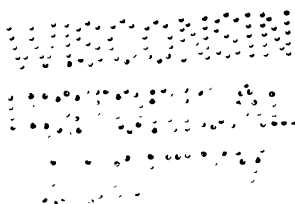
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or curiosity, nor in supplementing imparted idea with confirmatory fact, nor in display of awe-inspiring mastery over elemental and spiritual agencies, but in such intelligent coordination in individual feature, sphere of occurrence, and order of succession as to reveal wisdom and love using power as their vehicle of expression. Omnipotence, omniscience, and beneficence are the "signs" thus accrediting Jesus as the

matchless "Son of God"; and these too are the attributes of the divine which those more patient students find suggested who "look through nature up to nature's God." In the one case as in the other there is perpetual law and perpetual innovation, and that without discord. For

"The new is old, the old is new,
The cycle of a change sublime
Still sweeping through."

III.—DR. B. M. PALMER, AS A PREACHER

BY R. Q. MALLARD, D.D., NEW ORLEANS, LA., EDITOR OF "THE SOUTHWESTERN PRESBYTERIAN," EX-MODERATOR OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SOUTH.

BENJAMIN MORGAN PALMER, D.D., LL.D., was born in Charleston, South Carolina, January 25, 1818, and when he died in New Orleans, May 28, 1902, in his eighty-fifth year, from injuries received from an electric car, he was, save for dimness of eyesight, in full possession of all his faculties, and in active discharge of the manifold duties of a large pastorate, held in the First Presbyterian Church for forty-six years. While he lay hurt, as it proved unto death, the city watched with tearful interest the daily bulletins from his sick chamber; when he died the municipal council passed resolutions of respect and regret, and the press published elaborate tributes to his memory; on the occasion of his funeral the Cotton Exchange and other commercial bodies, and the courts, adjourned, car wheels by order paused for five minutes, a mighty throng of all classes and faiths crowded the great church, or gathered in front of its doors, and a continuous multitude watched with bared heads the funeral cortège which bore him to his tomb. The journalists styled him "our first citizen"; a distinguished rabbi, "the public conscience." Outside his church, he, as a public-spirited citizen, with vote and tongue, fought vested and corrupting evil; in his pulpit, he never even advocated civic reforms. By many, from North, South, East, West, and from across seas, was he regarded one of the greatest preachers of his day; by not a few as, taken all in all, the greatest of his generation. An inquiry into the sources of his pulpit power can but be interesting,—may it prove profitable.

EARLY SHAPING INFLUENCES.—It is not the theological seminary (or college, as it is called abroad), that has the exclusive making of a preacher. Other factors must be reckoned with, such as divine purpose, heredity, environment, and especially spiritual exercises at the crisis of the new birth and the call into the ministry; of these, briefly.

Young Palmer was a baptized child of the covenant and heir to its privileges and responsibilities on both sides of the house, and was, it is believed, chosen from the womb to the ministry. In an account of his mother's death, drawn up by himself, he tells that it was her custom to rise an hour before domestic duties claimed attention, for religious and other good reading and prayer, and to keep a book open on her work-table. He said he had inherited his intellect from her, and that his character was largely her work. Her wish and prayer before his birth had been that God might make him a minister, but this desire was prudently concealed until the question had been settled by himself. Of a race of preachers, running in almost unbroken line to Colonial days, and reared in a country community where the pastor's position justified the use of the term "parson,"—the "person" of the parish,—it was perhaps not unnatural that the lad's ambition should develop, in the child-land of Make-believe, in the direction of the Christ and the pulpit. As he used laughingly to say, he would go into the woods, and pulling a wild grape-vine to simulate bell-ringing, would then from stump or log address his beloved congregation of trees, in elo-

quence such as was not surpassed in after years. The country-side in which he was reared was not diversified with hill and dale, nor illuminated by waters, but it was clothed with singing pines and, in season, carpeted with flowers; and the skies, as in all our Southern sea-coast country, were blue as Italy's, and the starry constellations, as Humboldt observes in regard to the tropics, rendered brilliant by the humidity of the atmosphere. Thus his surroundings were not unfavorable to that vein of poetic imagery, as pleasing as it was unpremeditated, which ran through his sacred oratory.

EARLY SPIRITUAL EXERCISES.—We now approach the supreme shaping influences upon the preaching of after years, in the story of his conversion and call to the ministry. As having an important bearing upon his exercises at the time, without going into minute particulars, it must be told how, when but a lad of thirteen, he was sent to Amherst College, Massachusetts, making the journey alone to Charleston, and the voyage to New York in a sailing vessel, at once illustrating his trustworthiness and manly independence, and the narrowness of resources of the manse, the *res angusta domi*, which did not permit his father's accompanying him even to the seaport. Through the report to the college authorities of some harmless, if not very respectful, caricaturing of some of their number, in a secret society, carried to them in violation of oath by certain divinity students, he was summoned before the faculty; and because he, a mere stripling, indignantly denounced the method by which they had obtained their information, he was incontinently "rusticated," and, returning home, found no sympathy in his father, who, in natural trust in the faculty, and in the bitterness of his disappointment and mortification, would not lend a hearing to his side of the unhappy story. Under a keen sense of injury, he was about to leave his roof forever, and, as he phrased it, "would have gone to the devil" but for his mother, who threw her arms about him and tearfully entreated him to remember—it was his father. The estrangement was not lasting. For long years afterward, the intercourse between the two was marked on the one side by proud affection, on the other by reverent love. There still hangs in the empty study a letter received by the son from his father a short while before the latter's death at ninety-five, so framed as to

show the writing entire. It is in bold hand, and ends, "Your affectionate and thankful Father."

Shortly after this, he became tutor in a private family, supporting himself in proud independence until, ready to resume his studies, he entered and was graduated from a Southern university. The long-rankling sense of injustice, as he saw it inflicted by Christian people, set him fearfully against religion, so that in his last college year grace found him, as it did Saul, "kicking against the pricks." The struggle was fearful and protracted, giving him, to use his own words, "a year of agony." At last, profoundly convicted of sin, he sought, like Luther, to save himself by the works of the law. He said afterward that he would willingly have gone round the earth on bared knees to have achieved a sense of forgiven sin; reminding us again of the monk of Erfurth, crawling up Pilate's staircase at Rome. At last light from the cross broke in upon his darkened spirit, and he entered into the joys of pardoned sin and experience of the new birth, issuing consciously in the new creature in Christ Jesus.

Of his call to the ministry we have no account, save that, like Paul's, it was simultaneous with his call into the kingdom. Whether these terrible doubts ever afterward assailed him is unknown; but we note this utterance in a conversation with an honest skeptic, a college youth of parts, published in the *Southwestern Presbyterian* over the heading, "From a Pastor's Portfolio":

"Ministers of the gospel have wrestled with too many doubts in reaching their convictions not to sympathize with the early struggles in search of truth. Doubt is the hunger of the mind, the starting-point of all inquiry."

It will be admitted in advance, without argument, that such marked initial experiences must have imparted tone and color to his preaching throughout his long ministry. We come now to

THE PREACHER AND SOURCES OF HIS POWER.—Not of large build, stooping a trifle in the shoulders, he seemed, as he spoke, to grow taller and larger; he moved easily from side to side of the pulpit platform, sometimes perilously near the edge, but never losing control of himself. He enforced his great thoughts, clothed in splendid and unpremeditated diction, by graceful and forcible action. He was not only master of his motions and voice, but of his emotions. There was al-

ways an impression of reserved force; it reminded one of a massive trip-hammer adjusted and held under control of superb mechanism, and now let down so as not to crush an egg-shell, and again with force sufficient to flatten out a bar of steel. His voice was a marvel of flexibility and adaptability, adjusting itself to every space, filling but not overflowing the darkened chamber where lay beneath the flowers the confined dead, and never failing with equal ease to fill the biggest hall or largest church.

We append the beautiful words of Ashton Phelps, of the *Times-Democrat*, of New Orleans:

"His voice was always sonorous as a great bell, rich and deep-toned. Sparing of gesture, his every movement was pregnant and forceful, and while his sentences were always rhythmic, every inflection and intonation was freighted with meaning and purpose. A past master of all the refinements of our English speech, the resources of his oratory were but the scabbard for a blade of celestial temper. The grandeurs and the niceties of phrase simply served to set forth the symmetry of his thought, as the toga's graceful folds revealed the giant form of the masterful Roman. Whether Dr. Palmer spoke from the pulpit or the platform, he fused the earnestness of the Hebrew seer with the perfect beauty of which classic Greece is the matchless exemplar."

Dr. Palmer was a prince of extemporaneous orators. His relation of the stress which led to the early adoption of this method, as I heard him tell it, is interesting. Beginning his ministry in a city charge, preaching to the same congregation always, he laboriously prepared, besides his lectures, two written sermons each week. He soon exhausted his small store of accumulated material, and went to Dr. Preston, an old pastor, with the story of his lamentable discovery; but was assured, yet by no means comforted, by the information that it was no uncommon experience of young preachers. He at once resolved to preach without manuscript, giving the time hitherto spent in writing to gathering knowledge. He told me in later years, after the homiletic habit had been thoroughly acquired, that he thought out all his sermons, without reference to expression, save as to points and occasional simile, trusting to the occasion to suggest words.

But let none suppose Dr. Palmer disused pen. It was his custom, when a sermon pleased him, to recover it on Monday, and preserve it in writing. He was kept in con-

stant practise in writing for papers and reviews, and in composing books. His sermon on the "Headship of Christ," at the first Southern General Assembly in Augusta, in 1861 (which I heard as a visitor), was delivered from manuscript with no perceptible diminution of oratorical force.

With a mind gifted beyond most in acquiring and absorbing truth from every quarter and through every channel, and with every faculty trained to highest efficiency and in readiness for every call, he could marshal his thoughts in finished and effective array in shorter time than any other speaker I ever heard. Here is an instance told me by his cousin, one of the finest preachers the South ever produced, Dr. I. S. K. Axson, of the Independent Presbyterian Church, Savannah, Ga. The guest, Dr. Axson, preached in the morning, the pastor to follow in the afternoon. The visitor, as the hours waned, became anxious about his relative, and said to him, "Ben, you had better go and prepare," but without avail, until about thirty minutes before church. Then, asking if he (Dr. Axson) had any objection to his taking up the same theme, he walked his library floor (his favorite way of studying) a few times, announced himself ready, went into the pulpit, and made his kinsman ashamed of his superficial treatment of his text.

What were the sources of his power? is a question the writer might well approach with diffidence, but not with a misgiving occasioned by lack of information or of intimate and personal acquaintance.

Beginning with his natural gifts and culture:—Dr. Palmer was a born orator, even when an undergraduate touring the country an eloquent advocate of the temperance cause. He had a splendid intellect, highly cultivated by study, deep thought, wide reading; and his long life, unmarred by infirmity, save loss of sight in his last years, added the efficiency which long practise gives to every art. His, too, was a logical mind, and a penetrating genius which never could be deceived by sophistry, nor satisfied with superficial treatment of any subject. Then his style was marvelous for its richness, beauty, strength, and pictorial character. His figures were mostly metaphors, sketching the thought in a flash, his words, living things—like the angels, they had wings and hands and feet. Take these illustrations, selected at random in regard to union of two natures in the Media-

tor: "How the *two poles* of being shall be united without mixture or confusion"; "Who can trace *the seam* at which the two natures are brought together in the unity of a single person?" These qualities made him an acceptable preacher, not only to the intellectual and cultivated, but to the unlearned, for all minds love word-pictures, and, even without being aware of the cause, appreciate logic, because it interprets thought so as to be clearly understood and held fast in memory.

Turning now to his supernatural gifts:—His character, formed by grace and purified in the crucible of trial, was acknowledged, even by men not religious, as a tremendous force back of his eloquence. He could and did say with Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am." How deeply he realized this fact was shown in this dying utterance: "Were it not for election, not one could have been saved." What grace made of the work of creative skill and power, let a man of the world testify:

"In an age whose sin is a crass materialism, the example of men of this heroic type is continually needed to redeem the masses from the thralldom of passion. Controversy may rage about doubtful points of doctrine, but the essential truths of religion, as mirrored in a life so perfectly pure and consistent, are quite beyond the sphere of the casuist."

Was it Quintilian, a pagan rhetorician, who laid down character as an essential of eloquence—an orator must be a good man?

At this point we can not fail to note among the factors which made the man and the preacher what he became, wifely influence of no ordinary sort. Here we can not do better than transfer to our pages the portrait drawn of Mrs. Palmer by the skilful and loving hand of our associate, Rev. Dr. J. H. Nall:

"Mrs. Palmer was educated partly in Hartford, Conn., but graduated from the famous school at Barhamville, near Columbia, under the well-known Dr. Marks, one of the most distinguished educators of young ladies of those days. She was a woman of lovely character, uniting gentleness with great force, of remarkable prudence, with unyielding firmness in maintaining principle and in acting in accordance with her convictions of right, truth, and duty; thoroughly domestic in her tastes, devoted to her husband and children, she was, at the same time, a model pastor's wife exerting great power for good among the people of the church and community."

Nor should allusion be omitted in this connection to the influences of a blessed home life. The daughter was spared to him as his most intimate companion, who presided for

long years over his desolated home, and with her husband and the grandchildren by loving attentions brightened his closing days.

How this factor, his character, grew with years, and was refined in the furnace of uncommon sorrows, may be told in the words of a dear friend and fellow elder of his church, a scholar and educator, for forty odd years a listener, W. O. Rogers, LL.D.:

"As years grew in number, he seemed more and more to concentrate on the Scriptures in his public teaching. The loss of eyesight had deprived him of the aid of larger reading and of the inspiration of the upturned faces of the congregation,—so he wrapped around him more closely the Word of God, and clothed himself with it as with a garment. The effect of his sorrows was only seen in the deepening of his daily life, in a more intense earnestness, and in a chastened sweetness. He was gentle, patient, and loving always, but looking back, I think I can see how these grew upon him as his head began to bow under the weight of years. In the weekly prayer-meeting, he gave the riches of his love with a freedom that he seemed to think not altogether suited to his Sabbath sermons."

The personal equation appears in another form in the positive note which always marked his preaching. He neither doubted—"this grand interpreter between God and man"—his divine call to be an ambassador of the King, nor the truth of the message he was sent to deliver. This was the result of profound and abiding conviction of the truth of God's Word, produced not only by examination of the whole array of evidences, but largely by personal experience of its accuracy to the facts of human experience, its supernatural acquaintance with the mysteries of the human heart, and its power to support and comfort under bereavements frequent and crushing. Not only all his beautiful Christian traits, but this conviction of the absolute trustworthiness of the Book in every part, was burned in furnace heated seven times hot as an elaborate design on precious porcelain vase, into the very fabric of his soul. He had experienced the Bible to be true, and from the serene heights of his lofty faith regarded with silent contempt the assaults of hostile Biblical criticism. Here we may quote from a conversation reported in the press, in which he finely discriminated between declamation, oratory, and eloquence, of which last he was a signal exemplar, and has this to say:

"The eloquent man must be above and beyond all things convincing. He must set the feet of his listeners upon the rock of truth, no

matter whether his methods at the onset be pleasing or otherwise. The strength of his convictions is sure to be infectious. It is thus that the really eloquent man sways his hearers and instills into them the same singleness of purpose and overmastering energy that have been the mainsprings of his own efforts. It is the eloquent man who injects his views into the minds of the masses and infects them with his own deeply founded convictions."

This experimental character of his knowledge of the Bible had still another effect upon his preaching; it made him sincerely and profoundly sympathetic with every form of trouble. He had gone through the entire gamut of wo, and it required no imaginative process of intellect to enable him to weep with those that wept. Like Paul, at times, with fiery logic reasoning of temperance, righteousness and judgment to come, he was often in his pulpit a veritable Barnabas—a son of consolation—carrying his hearers to the many fountains of consolation at which his own sorrowing spirit had drunk and been refreshed. Of his own experience, he could tell his hearers of the office work of the "Other Comforter," for he had been favored with His visits in his own dark hours, when the billows swept over him and hid the sky for a time.

A chief source of his pulpit power remains to be emphasized—the matter of his sermons. He could say with Paul, "I determined not to know anything among you but Christ and Him crucified," and go with him a step higher—"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom (or which) I am crucified unto the world and the world is crucified unto me." Rare was the sermon which did not somewhere hark back to the Cross. The Holy Spirit had shed for him such illumination on Calvary that he excelled any writer I have read, or preacher heard, in his insight into and exposition of the amazing scheme of redeeming love.

His brother, Rev. Dr. E. P. Palmer of Virginia, in response to inquiry writes: "I would say without hesitation that the deepest secret of his power was his intense love of the truth, an adoring joy and glorying in the Gospel."

Ordinarily, owing to the philosophical cast of his intellect, he preferred topical sermonizing, dwelling on the most vital and fundamental themes. His sermons, like Paul's Epistle to the Romans, were doctrino-practical. One of the very best of his series (of which he was fond) was on the Duties of the

Family. Usually he began in a quiet manner, expounding context, and sometimes with systematic concatenation of secondary, yet striking, thoughts, which would have served a lesser preacher for a complete sermon. This habit prolonged his discourses, which, in his earlier ministry, went beyond the hour-mark. Having thus deliberately approached his text, it was his custom to deduce its great truth, and state it in the form of a proposition, and then in some four or five particulars show why it must be so; concluding with appropriate practical application.

The pertinency and power of his messages, all taken from the Divine Oracles, were still further emphasized by his intimate acquaintance with the needs of his charge, and of humanity in general, acquired from his large experience as pastor and counselor. He did not formally and in turn visit his families, but when trouble came upon individual or household, he was a constant visitor, a wise and tender counselor. Said one of his elders, he was "a faithful pastor whose hand was always on the latch when sorrow or trouble called for him, and no amount of personal discomfort could prevent his active aid in the emergencies of his people." His study, too, was the resort of his own charge, and even of strangers, in any religious doubt or spiritual anxiety. Thus was he qualified to preach intelligently, for individuals are typical of classes. By his habit of introspection and acute observation of his own heart-workings and of other natures thus disclosed to him, reinforced by profound study of the revelations of Holy Scripture, he exhibited in his sermons, as we have been told by a constant hearer, a marvelous acquaintance with the human heart. His grasp not only upon the "severity of God," but upon the "goodness of God," made him a counselor as wise as he was tender, and these two qualities blended harmoniously in his discourses.

This paper can not be more fittingly concluded than in the fine discriminating analysis of the matter and mode of Dr. Palmer's sermons by Dr. Daniel, of Virginia, in the Memorial sermon, preached at request of session, in the First Presbyterian Church, six months after his death:

"Dr. Palmer's preaching, as the world knows, was largely theological. It must not be forgotten that for sixteen years before coming to New Orleans, he had been in close contact with a theological seminary. He was not of the shallow, superficial class who decry

what he pronounced the very Queen of Sciences. The very warp and woof of his sermons is fundamental and even technical theological truth, expressed in the leading terminology of that science. You take the doctrines of grace as they appear in any theological work, the trinity, the incarnation, the imputation of Adam's guilt or of Christ's righteousness, federal headship, atonement by vicarious sacrifice, the penal element in Christ's suffering, the judgment—he constantly preached them all, not excluding the full sovereignty of God. He varied his

method of presentation, turned and turned the kaleidoscope, but always he preached doctrines, and those doctrines were always Calvinistic. It is surely a significant thing that just at a time when popular clamor is blatantly insisting that the pastor must avoid doctrinal preaching, a pastorate forty-six years long, under a preacher as useful and as potent as the world knows, rises up to denounce the fallacy. Here lies the secret of permanence in the ministry's blessed work: Bible truth in its articulated relationships. And that is theology."

IV.—THE IRRUPTION OF DOWIEISM AND THAT SORT OF THING

BY WILLIAM COWPER CONANT, NEW YORK CITY, EDITOR OF "SALVATION" AND OF "MODERN MEDICAL SCIENCE."

THE prophet apostles of our Lord have warned His disciples of "many Antichrists"; and also of an Antichrist *par excellence*, who, or which, has been identified or anticipated by divers interpreters in divers forms. The present occasion is not one for tickling the vanity of a living individual pretender with the grave question whether he be possibly "that Wicked . . . whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish." There are, in fact, too many at the present moment that answer more or less to the description. It would be invidious, if not impossible, to elect the head from among them. They must be content, for the present at least, to be classified together. What would the beloved disciple have thought, if inspiration had given him a view of the twentieth century with its huddling swarm of impostors in the name of Christ and in patches of His livery, that cover the earth with streaming multitudes of followers drawn out from the unbelieving mass of men, and largely, alas! from the membership of churches? How emphatic would have been his warning to his "little children" of this time! Let us emphasize it for ourselves. Let us consider how to know them as a class; which the leading type may sum up and exceed *par excellence* as it may. What are their characteristics?

"Antichrist" means an opposition-Christ; anything that assumes His offices, titles, and characteristics, as the disguise of another, and as the structure of "another Gospel." It may be an individual pretender, such as we have seen many, but all of them weak and ephemeral. The formidable Antichrist must be em-

bodied in a religious system and society, of which some one man (or woman) may be the organizing head, but not the main body also.

What is their common fundamental principle?

In the last analysis, every opposition gospel ever broached under the sun carries us back to the original organizer who said: "Ye shall be as gods." Under some form of the same basic pretension, the same deceiver has organized his "churches" in all ages. It seems as if he made rather crude work with a "'prentice hand," in the early ages of gross adolatri, in stark antagonism to the living God. Yet it worked with dire efficiency in the degraded condition of men to which it was adapted in those early ages. But in the really primal ages, if we study intimately the "first church" under the priesthood of Cain, we find a principle of human works and will worship finely adapted to ensnare the better grade of natural men, and quite in vogue to-day, under the name of Christianity, among those who practise natural righteousness even to refinement, as a satisfactory tribute of independent goodness to the great Goodness *primus inter pares*. "Ye shall be as gods" in religion, morals, and culture.

Out of the glorious apostolic form of godliness was constructed gradually a new form of man-worship in a priesthood nominally for Jesus Christ, but in His name actually superseding His authority as teacher, ruler, and Savior. So cunningly is this priesthood (called the Church) connected with the Christ which it claims as Head, and of whom it makes itself a delegate head, that it has entitled itself by ecumenical prevalence to