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Notes Editorial and Critical

From Wuchow, South China, Rev. R. A. Jaffray, a Canadian missionary, reports to "The Missionary Witness" of August 2, 1910, an extraordinary repetition of the burning of the costly books of magic in Ephesus, recorded in Acts xix. 19, 20, as showing that "so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed". The communication referred to, illustrated by a photo, duplicates, in the case of one man and that the hereditary fortune-teller of that region, the scene in the Acts in Modern China, and shows that the Gospel has the same power in Eastern Asia to-day that it had in Paul's day in Western Asia. The incident is a most significant one, as reported by Mr. Jaffray.

Mr. Cuh-Fi-Hung was a very successful fortune-teller in the streets of Wuchow. His father and grandfather before him had followed the same diabolical profession, and these books, of considerable value in the profession, had been handed down

A Chinese Fortune-Teller

from generation to generation. Mr. Cuh heard the gospel through one of our Christians and was finally prevailed upon to come to the meetings. He was a proud man, and though he had read a good deal of the Gospel books and was favorably impressed, yet he did not yield to Christ. Finally,

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however, the Spirit conquered and he accepted the Savior.

Shortly before his baptism he came to the missionary in considerable perplexity about what he should do with the books. As we have said, they were of considerable value, but he said, "How can I sell them or even give them away, lest they might damn another's soul as they all but damned mine". I turned him to Acts xix. 18 and 19 and read, "Many also of them that had believed came, confessing and declaring their deeds. And not a few of them that practised magical arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all".

He at once determined that he would do the same thing on the day of his baptism. On that memorable day, therefore, a company of fellow-Christians, students and missionaries gathered in the court of our mission premises, and made a glorious bonfire around which we sang praises to the blessed name of Jesus, while Brother Cuh with his own hands burned the devilish volumes to ashes.

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We print on another page an able and admirable review of Professor Mathews' latest book, "The Gospel and the Modern Man", in which he attempts the medi-

Prof. Mathews' Latest Book ation role in commending the results of the New Criticism and the New Theology to

The Modern Minister's Message*

PROF. W. M. MCPHEETERS, D.D., LL.D., THEOL. SEMINARY, COLUMBIA, S. C.

I esteem it a privilege to be present at this Conference, and especially to be permitted to present a paper upon so timely and important a topic as the Modern Minister's Message. This Conference itself, and this special topic are, it seems to me alike, healthful indications of the fact that we who are gathered here are aware both of the privilege and of the vast responsibility that are ours as those who are ambassadors for God; those whom Christ Jesus our Lord has counted faithful, appointing us to his service, that we may preach his unsearchable riches to the dying sinners

and the struggling saints of our own day. If I have correctly interpreted the mind of those who proposed our topic, the precise question that it is designed to bring before us is:

How must we ministers shape our message? what must be its distinctive characteristics, if we are effectively to serve the present age?

In speaking to this question, the most that I can hope to do, is to lay before you for your kindly consideration such answers to it as appear to myself to be sound.

I. The Characteristics of the Present Age

First, then, I venture to think that if our message is to be effective, we must try to frame before our own minds as clear, comprehensive, and correct a picture as we can of the leading characteristics of this time in which we live.

It is only as our preaching is wisely related to these characteristics that it can

possibly be effective. And, of course, it is only as we ourselves correctly picture these characteristics to ourselves that we can possibly shape our message with reference to them.

Now, to me it seems that the following are some of the most noticeable characteristics of our own day.

(1) It is, for One Thing, a Time of Intense Activity along All Lines

The American goes at everything with a rush. He throws all the energies of his being into whatever he puts his hand to.

Among other things, it is an age of great intellectual activity.

Knowledge was never at more of a premium. The agencies for the advancement, and diffusion of knowledge were never more numerous, more thoroughly equipped, or more constantly and industriously at work.

As one result of this intellectual activity, ours, as has been repeatedly said, is an age of doubt. Everything is being cast into the melting-pot—every opinion, custom, institution, I mean. And of this the result in turn is that men are prone to regard nothing—at least nothing in the sphere of thought—as settled. Nay, the tendency is not only to regard all questions

as open questions, but even to maintain that there can be no such thing as what those who preceded us were wont to call "closed questions".

And accordingly we are not surprised to find that still another peculiarity of the temper of our times is a marked restiveness under and resentfulness of everything like authority.

This latter characteristic is not only fostered by, but is itself in no small measure an outgrowth of two other characteristics of our day. One of these is the tendency to combination, and to organization. The other is the great advancement that has been made in the knowledge of the physical universe. Together these have led to an amazing mastery over the forces of nature.

More and more men tend to act, not as individuals but in masses. More and more they tend to rely for results upon perfection of organization. They have seen one

*Paper prepared and read by request at a Conference held at Montreal, N. C., August 18, 1910, by Prof. W. M. McPheeters, D.D., LL.D., of Columbia Theological Seminary.

department and force of nature after another successfully brought under their easy control.

Moreover, this increased knowledge of natural forces has ministered in ten thousand ways to man's physical well-being, comfort and pleasure. The very natural result, therefore, has been that ours is what we call a materialistic age—that is an age when men devote their time and energies to material things. These are the things that interest them. These are the things in which they are trying and expecting to find their satisfaction.

And still another result is a vastly increased sense of power. Men are tempted to modify our Lord's words and say—

“with man all things are possible”.

And with this increased sense of power there has been a corresponding access of self-confidence, self-importance, and self-esteem. There is a disposition to deify, not this or that individual perhaps, but to deify man, or the abstraction that we call humanity.

Moreover, with this highly developed sense of self-importance and self-sufficiency and as the natural out-come of it, men are, as I have said, exceedingly restive under and resentful of authority. As Dr. Coe has told us, they are more and more disposed to take their “oughts” and their “musts” from within—and only from within.

(II) *Lack of Poignant Sense of Sin*

But there is still another characteristic of our time that has been matter of frequent comment, and that must not be omitted here: I refer to its lack of any poignant sense of sin.

Due in part to facts already mentioned, this lack of sense of sin has been greatly confirmed by the long dominance of the theory of evolution. If men are indeed “falling upwards”, you cannot reasonably expect them deeply to deplore their fall. Sin ceases to be sin, when it comes to be viewed merely as a disagreeable measure of progress from a relatively lower to a relatively higher stage of being. If man has indeed slowly, and painfully struggled up from brute to savage, from savage to civilized being, and finally from civilized being to saint, then, obviously whatever of good is found in him at any stage is just so much clear gain, and clear glory.

And, on the other hand, whatever in any man we are compelled to look at askance, that is only too easily regarded rather as his misfortune than his fault. It is simply a part of his heritage from the brute. It is of course a limitation, something to be gotten rid of, yes, in a very real, and somewhat humiliating sense it is even a badge of relative inferiority. But on the other hand it is something to which intelligence refuses to attach the idea of guilt, or that which has in it intrinsic desert of punishment.

Such then in very general outline, without any attempt at delicate shading or filling in, are some of the distinctive characteristics of the age in which our message must be delivered, and to meet the needs of those living in which our message, if we are to approve ourselves unto God, must be shaped.

II. Our Message to be Effective Must be Shaped in the Light of the Fact that, While the Times Change, the Essential Man Does Not Change with Them

But again, if our message is to be really effective, I venture to believe that it must be shaped also in the light of a great fact, and that one which it is only too easy for us to forget. It is this: That while times change, man does not change with them.

You observe, that I have had the temerity to alter the old familiar maxim, “Times change, and we change with them”. And in very truth, current and plausible though it be, that maxim is essentially false and

misleading. It keeps the word of promise to the sense, but breaks it to our intelligence.

The world in which we of these United States to-day live is so utterly different from the world in which those of the times and of the lands of Moses and the prophets lived, so utterly different from that of Calvin and the reformers, so utterly different from that of the Scotch Covenanters and of the English Puritans, that it is only too easy, as I have said, for us to

permit ourselves to believe that man himself in these last days is himself as different from the men of the periods referred to as his outward circumstances and surroundings are different from theirs. This, however, is only one of many illustrations of how powerfully our imaginations are affected by what strikes our senses.

I say again, therefore, that if we of to-day are effectively to serve the present age, we shall have to throw off the delusion that the men of to-day are *in any essential respect* different from the men to whom Moses and the prophets ministered, or the men to whom our Master and His apostles ministered.

We must, of course, recognize and reckon with the fact that man's outward circumstances have undergone a most wonderful revolution. We must, of course, recognize and reckon with the fact that this revolution in man's outward circumstances has likewise revolutionized his occupations, and in many respects has revolutionized also his relations to men and to things, as well as his interests also, his points of view, and his modes of thought and of self-expression,—whether the latter be through language or through one or another of man's varied activities. These things, I say, we must recognize and reckon with in the shaping of our message.

III. Our Message to be Effective in the Present Day Must be More Instructive

And now, permit me to be somewhat more specific. If we are effectively to serve our age, I believe that our preaching will have to be more instructive.

I asked an exceptionally intelligent young layman, himself a constant attendant upon the services of the sanctuary, what he missed most in the preaching that he heard, and one of the things that he mentioned was instruction. He said that most of the preaching to which he listened seemed to him to be "scrappy". He evidently meant that it unfolded to him no system of truth. Indeed, he said that so far as the preaching to which he listened was concerned, it left him without any special reasons for being a Presbyterian.

Doubtless there are those in our day who fancy that it is not of much importance whether one can or cannot give a reason for being a Presbyterian, or, for that mat-

ter, whether he is or is not a Presbyterian. But just because this is true, it is all the more imperative that we guard ourselves against the delusion of supposing that these changes, vast as they unquestionably are, have wrought any corresponding change in man himself. For despite all his achievements, man to-day is still a *mere creature*, with all the limitations and the insufficiency implied in that term. His relations to God are still for man the most fundamental, intimate, and vital relations that he knows. His supreme and abiding interests still ground in and hinge upon those relations. Now God has not changed; nor has His truth changed. Neither has the essential in man changed. That which is born of the flesh is still flesh. And the mind of the flesh is still enmity against God. It is still true that the mind of the flesh is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be: still true, that "Except a man be born from above, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God"; still true that "the whole world lieth in the wicked one". Yes, and despite all man's attainments and progress, it is still true, that "it is appointed unto all men once to die, and after death a judgment": still true, that all of the dearest permanent interests of the individual lie beyond the confines of time, in another and eternal sphere of existence.

With such a view I do not agree. But I am not going to stop now to argue the point. I bring up the statement of my intelligent young friend merely to show that some of our hearers feel that they are not getting from the pulpit the instruction that they have a right to expect, of which they feel the need, and for which they would be grateful.

I am not just at present concerned to indicate specifically the matters upon which the modern minister should give instruction. Upon that point I shall have a few words to say later. My point now is that our preaching, if we are effectively to serve the present age, *must be more instructive*: not drier—perhaps that might be scarcely possible in the case of some of us; not even more scholarly and certainly not more scholastic—but more instructive.

Certain it is at any rate, that our Master, from one important point of view at least, was first of all and above all a Teacher. Even his miracles were signs. They were addressed rather to men's understandings than to their mere emotions. They have been called parables in action: and such they were. He looked to the truth apprehended by the understanding and acting upon the conscience, the affections and the will as the means by which men were to be freed from the blighting effect of sin—sin usually if not always having error as its ally. The commission that he gave his Church runs, "Go ye, therefore and make disciples of all Nations; . . . teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you to do", etc.

The great revival in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah was accompanied by systematic instruction of the people in the truth of God's law. And how significant for the point I am now making are the words of the apostle in 1 Tim. ii. 5-7, where he says, "For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all; the testimony to be borne in its own times; whereunto I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I speak the truth, I lie not), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth".

From which it is certain that, in his view, His chief function both as herald and apostle was to teach men the great truths that furnish the only possible basis for an intelligent faith.

Luther, Calvin, and the reformers generally were first of all great teachers. The same was true of John Wesley. Nor do I hesitate to affirm the personal conviction that to be truly evangelistic, preaching must always be instructive.

I may be permitted to add here, in just a word, three concrete considerations which conspire to confirm what I have been saying as to the importance of making our preaching more truly instructive.

First, then, let me again remind you that ours is an age of intense intellectual activity. Men are being stimulated to think, nay, as it were driven to learn. Is not ours the day of compulsory education? How monstrous, then, would be the unfaithfulness that would leave them without competent instruction in regard to what

man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

But again, errorists in our day are neither modest nor backward about instructing the public in their errors. They seek the public ear not only through the press but from the platform at great conventions, and from the pulpit. And, what it is most important of all for us to notice, they are using every insidious device to capture the Sabbath Schools of the entire land. Merely to fume over this state of things is as childish as it will prove futile. The true remedy is for us to teach the truth and in every way to seek to commend it to men's consciences in the fear of God.

Finally here, we ought to make instruction a principal feature in our preaching, because there is the most abounding ignorance upon the most elementary truths. This is not surprising. Men have no natural knowledge of anything. Whatever they know, they must learn. They must learn it either for themselves, or from others. True in other spheres, this is pre-eminently true of spiritual things.

And I say again, that the people of our day need instruction in the most elementary truths of Christianity. Could anything in the Christian system be either more elementary or more fundamental than those great experiences represented by the two words faith and repentance? And yet there are few subjects upon which there is more general or more harmful confusion than there is regarding faith. Regeneration, justification, sanctification, adoption, sin, salvation, redemption, and a host of others, are all scriptural terms. They are terms some understanding of which is indispensable to an understanding of the most important part of the modern minister's message.

And yet to many they are just so much Greek, or Sanskrit. We speak of baptism and the Lord's Supper as "sealing ordinances": But we might perhaps with more strictness of speech call them *sealed* ordinances. For it is to be feared that, in the case of only too many, these sacraments are as much meaningless mummery as is the Roman mass. The Bible we say is the religion of Protestants, and yet are our young people clearly instructed as to why we believe the Bible not only to contain, but to be itself, the Word of God?

IV. Our Message to be Effective to-day Must Deal More with the Cardinal Doctrines of Christianity

But I must pass on. If we are effectively to serve the present age, then, it seems to me, my brethren, that our preaching must habitually deal more with the great, central truths of the Christian religion.

The staple of our Master's message has been summarized for us in the statement by Mark (ch. i. 14, 15) :

"Now after that John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee heralding the glad-tidings of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the glad-tidings".

The apostle Paul summarizes for us his Ephesian ministry in the tender and ever memorable words recorded in Acts xx. 18 b-21 :

"Ye yourselves know from the first day that I set foot in Asia, after what manner I was with you all the time, serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind, and with tears, and with trials which befell me by the plots of the Jews: how that I shrank not from declaring unto you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ".

And again, he outlines for us the themes that he made central in his own preaching, when he says, speaking to the Corinthian church (1 Cor. xv. 3, 4) :

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures".

And very significantly, as it seems to me, he speaks of his ministry, as the "ministry of reconciliation".

So much then for the example of our Master, and his great apostle.

But farther, if the outline of the characteristics of our age that I gave at the beginning of this paper was even measurably correct, then it seems to me that nothing can be more obvious than that the message that is to meet the profoundest needs of the men of our day must patiently, persistently, wisely, ceaselessly recall to

their attention the great central fundamental truths of the gospel. If we are indeed ambassadors for God, my brethren, then it does seem to me that two things follow of necessity. One is that we must get our message *from God*. We must preach the preaching that he bids us preach. And the second obvious corollary is that our message must be one *concerning God*; the fact of God, the rights of God, the gracious saving plan and purpose of God.

I turn to the much talked of, much praised Sermon on the Mount, and to me its most striking feature is its absolute God-centeredness. I study the life of our Lord, and again to me its most central, nay its most startling characteristic, is its absolute God-centeredness. I look out upon the present age and I am far less disturbed by its ungodliness, than I am by its godlessness. In the words of the psalmist, "God is not in all their thoughts". Man, money, and even mere things, have largely usurped His supreme place. He has ceased to be even the Great Companion, and has become at best the great convenience, or the great inconvenience, as the case may be. And yet until God in Christ is at the center of our modern life, our modern life will and must itself be out-of-center, with all that that means.

If I know my own heart, my brethren, I am deeply interested in all that concerns the present as well as the future welfare of my fellow sinners. I am profoundly interested in all that promises to minister to their physical as well as to their spiritual well-being. I ardently desire to see their wrongs righted, their miseries alleviated, their outward condition bettered, their labors lightened, their minds enlightened, their pleasures refined and rendered wholesome, their capacity and their opportunity to get the best out of God's wonderful and beautiful world vastly enlarged. I say if I know my own heart, all movements that seem to promise well along any of these lines are to me matters of genuine satisfaction. And if as a minister of Christ I feel compelled to hold my tongue, and not directly and officially to champion the causes that aim to secure these ends, I

do it deliberately, and for what I am bound to esteem compelling reasons. Permit me, if you please, to mention some of them.

First, then, no one can hope really to originate or even greatly to help forward such movements, unless he can devote to them a considerable amount of time, thought and energy. Good intentions in such matters are all well enough; but they by no means guarantee good results. Personally as a minister of Christ I have to choose between giving what time, thought and energy I can command to such causes, or to the preaching of the word. But in becoming a minister of Christ I came under the most solemn obligations to preach the word. I cannot afford to divide my service.

Again, important as are the things that I have mentioned there are in my judgment other things that are vastly more important. Farther still, the great and urgent danger of all concerned is that the less important things will come to occupy a wholly disproportionate place in men's minds. The less important needs are obvious and clamorous. Men know when they are hungry; all men can see the sallow faces of our factory children; and the squalor of our slums sends its stench into our nostrils, and threatens our homes. Men have never forgotten these things. Multitudes are working at the problems to which they give rise, or of which they are the expression. What men are in danger of forgetting is God. Being absorbed with the offences of their fellows against themselves—real offences sometimes and sometimes fancied offences—men easily lose sight of the seriousness of their own offences against God.

I ask myself, then, under such circumstances, is God to have no special representation in His own world? Is no one to devote his whole time and all of his energies to crying in our marts, and slums, "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. *Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfieth not?* Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in

fatness" (Is. xl. 1, 2)? Is no one to give himself to the much needed task of constantly sounding in men's ear the warning, "*He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again*"; but he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst"?

Once more, I am compelled to hold aloof from all direct championing of the good causes above enumerated, because I believe in my heart that I champion them all, and champion them most effectively, by ceaselessly directing men's attention to the great essential truths of the gospel. Gallagher would never have shot Gaynor, if Gallagher had been led to know Christ. I do not dare to say that a faithful fearless proclamation of the great truths of the gospel will cure the greed of capital, or arrest the passions of labor; I do not dare to say that it will secure the sanitation of our slums, or deliver the children of the poor from the cruel avarice of their parents, and more cruel avarice of exploiters; and secure for them a reasonable share in the innocent and wholesome pleasures of childhood—I say, I do not dare to affirm that even the faithful fearless proclamation of the whole counsel of God as set forth in His word will certainly secure these and other much desired results, but I do say that, if it will not, then, nothing else will. For if God be not enthroned in the human heart, then nothing is more certain than that every man according to the measure of his little ability, his little opportunity and his little conception, is certainly going to be *his own god*. As long as Judah and Ephraim forget God, just so long will Judah vex Ephraim, and Ephraim envy Judah.

But even more important than any of the considerations so far mentioned is the fact that, as a minister of Christ, I have no commission from Him to speak to the always concrete and oftentimes exceedingly complicated forms in which the reform measures referred to present themselves. Doubtless circumstances may arise when, as a man and a citizen, it may become a minister's duty to reach the most intelligent conclusion that he can regarding one or another of the matters mentioned, and when it may be both his right and his duty as a citizen to let that conclusion be known, or even to commend it as best he

can to the reason and consciences of his fellow-citizens. I say, it is entirely possible for circumstances such as I have supposed to arise.

And, if under such circumstances a minister asserts his right and performs his duty as a man and a citizen, making it plain that he is simply expressing his own personal judgment, and is in no sense speaking for his Master, or claiming his Master's authority for what he says, then I should be among the very last to blame him. But it seems to me that the case ought to be very plain and the duty very urgent, before a minister should permit his interest in and enthusiasm for even the best of such causes to lead him to take a step by which he may greatly compromise his influence as an ambassador for Christ.

V. Our Message to be Effective Must be Grounded in Personal Conviction

Once more, and finally, if we are effectively to serve those of our own day, then our message must be characterized by the note of *personal conviction*.

Preaching, as we are, in an age of doubt, nothing will compensate for the absence of this note. If we are not ourselves profoundly convinced of the truth and importance of our message, we need not hope to produce conviction in the minds of our hearers.

And I need scarcely say that conviction is something very different from a self-assertive, self-confident dogmatism; something different from merely tearing a passion to tatters; something very different from mere intellectual assent to a series of abstract propositions; something that is different even from genuine earnestness. It is something that is more easily felt than defined; more easily recognized than described. It may perhaps be said to be that visible effect that we all believe would be produced upon a minister's whole personal bearing, tone, treatment of his subject, and attitude towards his hearers, as the result of his having himself come into personal contact with the living God, and having himself attained personal insight into and made personal appropriation of the great realities of the gospel. Earnestness will certainly be one element in such

If a cool, clear-headed man like Mr. Taft thinks that it is unbecoming for one in his position to throw his direct personal influence to this or that element of the Republican party in the State of New York; if many a judge refrains from expressing himself upon political and social questions on the ground that to do so would be prejudicial to his official influence, then certainly the ambassador for Christ can well afford to maintain a wise silence upon many important matters upon which as a man and a citizen he has the right not only to have and to express an opinion, but also to commend and to defend it. Among the most important rights that any man has is the right, for good and sufficient reasons to forego the exercise of this or that right.

an effect, but will it not also include humility, sobriety, tenderness, simplicity, directness, fearlessness?

I have mentioned this quality of the modern minister's message last, and yet I doubt not that we all agree that in importance it really stands first. I say we—that we will all agree on this point—and yet when I submitted to two godly Christian men—one of them a young man, and one of them somewhat past middle life—the question: What do you most desire and what do you most miss in the preaching that you hear? I say, when I submitted this question to these two men separately, and apart, I was pained, and even startled, when each of them mentioned first of all that that which he most missed from the preaching that he heard was what I have called *the note of personal conviction*. I give you their testimony for what it is worth. Whether they have simply been unfortunate in the ministers whom they have heard, or have misinterpreted or misjudged them, it would be idle to inquire and impossible to decide. But about this there can be no room for rational doubt,—namely, that both for the modern minister himself, and for the effectiveness of his message the note of personal conviction is one of prime, yes, of indispensable, importance.