

# THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

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## REVIEW SECTION.

### I.—RECENT RECONSTRUCTIONS OF THEOLOGY.

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FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF LOGIC.

ALMOST all attempts at theological reconstruction have sprung from a logical impulse. Some thinker has discovered or suspected that the current system of belief involved certain incongruities in itself, that it rested upon misinterpretation or misapplication of Scripture, or that it was incompatible with some riper conclusion of human thought regarded as incontestable and final. The necessity of readjustment, to escape irrationality and consequent incredibility and rejection, became, thereupon, immediately imperative.

Dr. Lyman Abbott has lately ventured the assertion that "in the death of Dr. Emmons, in 1840, there died the last representative of the old school of New England preachers, the purely logical; . . . a new school is taking its place, the intuitional." Transcendentalism has no doubt left a hazy residual legacy to New England thought; but it is probable that, on the whole, the "purely logical" element never had a larger place, and never was more relied upon, in theological speculation, there or elsewhere, than to-day. And this for obvious reasons.

The recognized sphere of logic has been immensely extended. It is no longer the "barren vestal" of the days of the schoolmen, toying with ready-made formulas in idle logomachy. It claims mastery of the whole field of thought from initial concept to final synthesis. It allows no single "operation of the human understanding in pursuit of truth" to evade its jurisdiction. To think consecutively at all is to think logically.

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NOTE.—This periodical adopts the Orthography of the following Rule, recommended by the joint action of the American Philological Association and the Philological Society of England:—Change *d* or *ed* final to *t* when so pronounced, except when the *e* affects a preceding sound.—PUBLISHERS.

brethren, the test of our Church and of others is not mere orthodoxy, tho that is indispensable; not its superiority of organization, not its ecclesiastical pedigree, but its present relation to Jesus Christ as manifested by its performance of His work. That the work of the early Church was *reformatory* we need hardly stop to say. The thieves, the murderers, the hateful and hated publicans were brought to the justice, the mercy, the purity, the generosity of Jesus, the tenderness of His forgiving love. The Church of that day accomplish the wonderful thing of which we hear so much and frequently see so little; it "reacht the masses." The people heard them gladly. They got down under the "submerged tenth," and the other nine tenths as well, and raised the whole unsaved mass. They were so absolutely "other-worldly" that they transformed a goodly portion of this poor sin-sick sphere. They were so ignorant of scientific objections to their teaching that they blundered ahead to magnificent success.

I close by calling your attention very solemnly, very strongly, to one point, which I wish to leave most deeply in your minds. I have hitherto held it back because it could not, as I felt, come in under any subordinate division of my text. It is itself the supreme fact of the whole narrative, the explanation of its every wonder. That fact the writer states in these simple words, "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost." We need not marvel at such a membership, for they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. We need not be amazed at such preachers and such preaching, for they, too, were filled with the Spirit. We need not be surprised either at the quantity or the quality of the work done, nor at its depth and permanence, for every worker was guided by the Spirit of Truth. There is no courage like His courage; no love like His love; no tenderness, no pity, like His; no wisdom like that which He imparts.

O Holy Spirit, fall now upon this assembly of Thy ministers! Make us mighty for the work of Jesus Christ!

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**NOT BY MIGHT, BUT BY THE SPIRIT.\***

BY REV. CHARLES H. PARKHURST,  
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*And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretcht out his hand, and drew his sword and struck a servant of the high priest, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.—Matt. xxvi. 51, 52.*

FROM the parallel passage in John's gospel we learn that the smiter was Simon Peter. This disciple was always interesting. He was a man of very positive character and deeds. Here, as on other occasions, he was in a state of eruption. On any occasion he was liable to flame forth. His mistaken impulse now was to rescue Jesus by force from those who had seized Him by force. He did not as yet understand that Christ's kingship and kingdom are spiritual, to be promoted by spiritual means, not by carnal weapons. And his act was in effect a denial of the divinity of Jesus—as if the Divine Master could not extricate Himself if He chose to do so—as if Peter's arm and sword were necessary to deliverance.

How utterly the act of Peter was opposed to the spirit of Christianity we may see by imagining that he might have occasion subsequently to lead this servant of the high priest to Christ—to preach to him and convert him. How could he present the nature of the Christian religion in the face of his own physical violence in the cause of the Master?

But, after eighteen hundred years, we, in this day, are prone to the same

\* Sketch of a sermon at the Madison Square Church, March 5, 1899.

mistake in one form or another. We know that, in the first Christian centuries, the great conquests of our religion were purely spiritual; worldly power, with its armies and navies, was wholly on the other side, in opposition. The one prevailing force was the truth and the Spirit of God.

We even think that somehow civilization must precede or must cooperate with evangelization. Now evangelization conducts to civilization, but civilization has no necessary bearing on evangelization; that is to say, there is in civilization no energy inherently calculated to yield Gospel effects. Culture is not even third cousin to holiness. What is said about trying to make men better or about trying to make nations better by introducing among them the subduing influence of letters and arts is, nine tenths of it—not to say ten tenths—aside from the mark. And we who live eighteen hundred years after Peter, and who understand the Gospel in a way that at the date of our text he could not, and have seen distinctly set forth in later portions of the New Testament the work Christ came to do and the kind of kingdom He came to establish—we, with all this light, ought to be restrained from thus disastrously mixing things that ought to be kept distinct.

By carrying schools and arts, trade and manufacture, among people that are now savages you may be able to refine the quality of their deviltry; but that is not even the first step toward making angels, or even saints, of them. An elegant thief, an educated libertine, an accomplished courtesan is no nearer the kingdom of heaven than is a loathsome cannibal. The style of a man's depravity will very likely vary with the degree of civilization; but, judging from Christ's way of dealing with all sorts of sinners, the different styles of depravity leave but little to choose between.

If you put cold lead into a man's heart for the sake of trying to civilize him, his children may be pardoned for

receiving with only chill cordiality the Gospel you undertake to put in their hearts for the purpose of Christianizing them. If Jesus had gone armed it would have been a confession on His part that the brute force of the visible world is more than a match for the spirit power of the invisible world. You can not make a man believe in God if you do not convince him that you believe yourself. Peter, by brandishing his sword, denied the divinity of Jesus. And any other man cheapens God when he goes about to yoke God's spirit alongside of carnal contrivances. It is the absence of such carnal contrivance that explains the rapid extension of Christianity during the first three centuries of our own era. God worked mightily because He had no backing. Up to that time armies and navies were on the side of the pagans. Christianity is never so safe and so powerful as when it is unprotected; and evangelization that depends for its good results upon soldiers and gunboats has no future.

I am not reasoning on general principles, but putting in current terms the lessons so unanimously set forth in the gospels and epistles, and so luminously illustrated by almost nineteen hundred years of history. The instant Christianity begins to lean on anything its divine vitality dries out of it. The cause of Christ prospered in the Roman empire till it became the state religion—till it came to have the government back of it; then Christianity deteriorated into a pious kind of politics, with a good deal more politics than piety.

Very emphatic have been the words of a secretary of the American Board on this subject, teaching us that no Gordian knot can be cut by a Peter's sword. In the lessons read this morning we are taught that no mortal hand is needed to interfere and hold up the ark of God, and that the only sword of the Christian is the word of God. A most striking illustration of the subject is the conversion of the Fiji Islands by the simple power of the Gospel,

with no aid from a secular arm. In 1835, when the missionaries landed there, there was not a Christian native. They labored on, and a half century after there was not a pagan, and out of 116,000 natives 104,000 belonged to Christian assemblies.

All that the world needs in order that the unfertile wastes of heathenism may be transformed into a blooming garden of the Lord is God and missionaries. God is ready.

### CHRIST'S TACT SHOWN IN INTERVIEWS.\*

BY JOHN WATSON, D. D. ("IAN MAC-LAREN"), LIVERPOOL, ENG.

*Philip findeth Nathaniel, etc.*—John i. 45-51.

*There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, etc.*—John iii. 1-21.

*And, behold, there was a man named Zaccheus, etc.*—Luke xix. 2-10.

NATHANIEL was a critic; Nicodemus a learned skeptic; Zaccheus a disreputable sinner. Our Master made no mistake in dealing with and judging any man.

The form of each man's religion is his own. No man ought to imitate another man's religion, and no man ought to criticize the form of another man's religion. It matters little how a man finds God. What is essential is that he should find Him and be satisfied. What a man wants to know when he thinks about Christ is, not where He was born, but, Can He enter into the tangled skein of my thoughts and unravel it? Can He enter into my temptations and help me to overcome them? Can He read me to myself? If He can, then He is the master and savior of my soul.

I. Nathaniel was a critic, but not a skeptic. The difference between a critic and a skeptic is this: A critic

will not believe unless he obtains proper evidence; a skeptic demands evidence that can not be given, and consequently never believes. Nathaniel was no hypocrite. He saw Jesus, conversed with Him, was satisfied with the evidence, and was brought to believe by faith.

II. Nicodemus was a skeptic and a learned doctrinaire. He occupied a position equivalent to that of a president of a university and a justice of the Supreme Court. He was the only honest Pharisee. However wide may be the school of thought that divides them, one honest man will always recognize another honest man and do justice to him. Nicodemus saw in Jesus's face the note of reality and spirituality. He resolved to call upon Him and investigate for himself. He has been criticized for going stealthily at night. When a man has reached a certain standard of education and refinement there is nothing he shuns so much as notoriety. Nicodemus was a leader of the people. He can not be blamed for not showing himself publicly in the company of Jesus the reformer.

Then he may have felt some fear. Men who are able are not always strong and brave. Physical and intellectual courage do not always go together. Men brave in battle are often timid in matters intellectual. Men of intellectual daring often fear physical pain. Nicodemus went to Jesus intending to enter into academic debate with Him, but Jesus would have none of it. On these lines they might have argued all night—aye, to the end of the day of life.

III. Zaccheus was an ordinary sinner, a man with whom no respectable person cared to associate, whose wife, because she was his wife, had to hide her face for shame when she went out of doors. Now we must forgive our enemies, but my personal idea is—and I don't offer it as a religious doctrine—that a man ought to be a long time in forgiving any one who has wronged

\*Preacht in Rutgers Riverside Presbyterian Church, New York City, March, 1899.