

THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

VOL. XIV.—NOVEMBER, 1887.—No. 5.

REVIEW SECTION.

I.—HOW CAN THE PULPIT BEST COUNTERACT THE INFLUENCE OF MODERN SKEPTICISM?

NO. VII.

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WHATEVER be the difficulties of the modern pulpit, there is no reason to fear its discomfiture. People seem to speak of Modern Skepticism as though it were a Colossus, or a dragon, before which Christian teachers must quail. But this is an entire misconception. It is difficult to argue with doubt; but in so far as assaults have been made in recent times on the Christian faith, they have been met at every point, and have only served to show what an able and well equipped band of scholars and dialecticians is at the service of the Church of God.

Occasionally a sort of crow of triumph is sounded forth by some very superior gentleman, who assumes that the whole civilized world steps meekly behind him and his skeptical associates. He announces that, as a system of doctrine resting on history, "Christianity" is exploded, and it is now on its last trial as a system of ethics. He hints not obscurely that in this respect also, its failure is certain; so that its doom is settled. Poor old Christianity must take its place among the effete superstitions of mankind. But all this imposes on none but those who wish to have it so. Probably it passes for the voice of intellectual illustration and independence. Nevertheless, calm observers of the time are quite assured that it is mere "bounce;" and that although skepticism may be growing and spreading, faith also is growing and spreading with a quite phenomenal earnestness.

At such a time, the occupant of the pulpit is bound to be wide awake to the questions and "oppositions" that are in the minds of men, ay, and of women also; and he is most likely to encounter them with effect when he takes no explicit controversial notice of them, but carefully states and calmly argues the positions which are impugned. I purposely insert the word "argues," being of the same opinion with an old critic who liked a fair proportion of "therefores" in a sermon. And yet more important than any argument in aid is the skillful statement of

REV. HORATIO BONAR, D. D.

BY REV. CHARLES PARKHURST.

A HALO of glory gathers around the name of Bonar. A rare preacher in his days of physical strength; he, Horatio, is known world-wide as the sweet singer of our universal Israel. In the last edition of his poems issued, it is stated that 90,000 copies had then been sold, and no doubt that number has been quadrupled since. Besides, in every hymnal, many of the choicest collections, those which utter our deepest spiritual aspirations, are from his pen. What Charles Wesley was to England and Methodism, what Ray Palmer has been in the utterance of devout spiritual communings to the American, more than this Bonar is, in this cosmopolitan age, to all religious desire and life. He is now Horatio, the aged.

Seventy-two years have come and gone, and there has been such an outpouring of the vitalities of his soul that he is now weak in body, and looks as if he might be four score. As we gazed reverently upon him, we thought, indeed, and impressively, of his own prophecy, too true:

"A few more years shall roll,
A few more seasons come,
And we shall be with those
Who rest asleep within the tomb."

How his hymns of the heart, in reverie, now thrill us! The first we ever read in a church service seemed a fitting confession:

"I was a wandering sheep,
I did not love the fold;
I did not love my father's voice,
I would not be controlled."

How many times about the Lord's table have we found these words our best expression:

"Alas, and did my Saviour bleed!"

How oft have we stirred our congregations to more faithful effort with these words:

"Go labor on;
Spend and be spent."

What so tenderly presents our Christ to us as the hymns commencing:

"I see the crowd in Pilate's hall."
"I heard the voice of Jesus say."
"I lay my sins on Jesus."

It will fittingly increase your appreciation of this devout singer with such spiritual ken, if you will examine the index of your hymnal, and see how largely you sing his hymns.

We were not aware that there were three brothers of the Bonars still in the ministry. Andrew is older, and still preaches at Glasgow, Scotland; John is older still, and continues the work of a successful pastorate at Greenock. Andrew has written some poetry, but John does not share in this gift. Some 15 years since, Horatio was settled over the Chalmers Memorial Church in Edinburgh. For two years he has been practically retired from his pastorate, having an assistant now. It is his practice to preach a yearly sermon to the children of the church. This effort happened fortunately to fall upon the Sabbath that I was in Edinburgh. I was at the church at an early hour, but none too soon, for the service had been noticed in the press, and the people had thronged the capacious and beautiful structure, beautiful for Scotland, to hear their favorite. There he comes, and his step gives indication of faltering and physical weakness. He is tall and commanding in stature, the top and crown of his head entirely bald; his face is long, and somewhat spare and sharp; eye looks comparatively small but piercing. The face looks gentle and winsome, but just a little disappointing. Age has doubtless, with its premature feebleness, taken something of charm from it. He does not look like him, not so well as Rev. Dr. Smith, the author of our national hymn, "My country, 'tis of thee," but he reminds us of him. Around the base of brain and neck there is hair, long and untrimmed, but the face is shaven; these locks were snowy white, and gave him a venerable and prophetic look.

He took entire charge of the service, reading slowly, Scripture and hymns. We hoped he would select one of his own hymns, of which there

were many in the collection used in the church, though not compiled by him, but he did not. It would have been a great privilege to have heard him intone and accent some of those hymns which have become so sacred to us. He preached to the children, but so tenderly, just leaned over the pulpit, rested upon his hands and talked to them. He said, with most sublime pathos, that he never expected to preach to them again. This was his text, "For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." What impresses you most is his wonderful familiarity with the Scriptures, and that poetic imagination which enables him to reproduce the scenes of Scripture as if they were actually taking place before you.

Mr. Moody tells, enthusiastically, of a sermon which he heard Dr. Bonar preach in which he imagines Peter and Paul, on the return to Jerusalem after the fourteen years named by Paul. That remarkable sermon, says Moody, Bonar commenced in this simple, conversational way: Peter asks Paul, Would you like to take a walk, Paul? and Paul gladly assenting, Peter takes him to Gethsemane and says, "It was just there, while we were watching yonder, that he sweat the great drops of blood," and so on through the crucifixion and resurrection, with its most impressive places and scenes. Peter leads Paul as a guide, until, says Mr. Moody, "I saw it all as I never did before."

This was the kind of sermon he preached to the children to-day, showing the most consummate art in preparation, and yet so faultlessly done that you could only say, how simple and natural! Dr. Bonar has so well learned that the perfection of art is in the concealment of art, that art, at its best in speech, is most simple and natural. One distinct purpose, evident in all he said, was to interest the children in the Scriptures, and purposely left much untold, and required them at the close of his ser-

mon to go over its scenes with them, and to promise that they would pick up the references to the several scenes noticed in the life of Christ, which he had mentioned, but he would not find them, where in the New Testament each could be found.

As this is probably the last sermon of Dr. Bonar, certainly to children, and as the plan is so suggestive and helpful to the preacher, I will add a brief abstract of it.

THEME.—He proposed to tell the children *some* of the different places where Jesus found his lost people.

1st. In a boat on Galilee; and with each scene there was coupled something picturesque and life-like in description. There were one, two, three, four, five of them, counting on his fingers, but I will not tell you who they were. He just said, "Follow me," and with an unwonted gleam in his eyes he said, "They left all and followed him." In each case a personal application was made. Jesus will call you; will you leave all and follow him?

2d. Where Jesus found a lost soul was at a counting-house. Strange place, was it not? Men, Christian men, are afraid to call on business men at their counting-houses, but Jesus was not. But don't you be afraid. If the Lord tells you to ask a business man to come to Christ, or to do something for him anywhere, don't you be afraid to do it, children. These men are not to shut Christ or Christian people out of their counting-houses. Jesus said to this man only this: Follow me; and he left all and followed him. I shall not tell you who he was; you must find that.

3d. Jesus found a soul in an upper room, and do you know, children, Jesus never staid over night in Jerusalem? I do not know where he was that night; somewhere out in the suburbs, quietly resting in some congenial home, when lo! a rap at the door, and he illustrates it while the children eagerly watch him, and Jesus says gently, Come in. I will

not tell you who it was that came; but Jesus said that great word to him: "Except a man be born again he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." He was a great and wise man in Jerusalem, but he could not understand what Jesus meant. After a great while he did, however, learn just what Jesus meant, and he became a most faithful disciple.

4th. The next place where Jesus found a person who was lost was at a well. She was a woman. I could not tell you her name, for we are not told, but she was a terribly lost woman. And yet, just like Jesus, he told that lost woman, first of all, just who He was, and he told her how sinful she was. Then he spoke that great word to her: "If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." Under each head he quoted and emphasized some Scripture passage to leave with the children to help them in their search for the record.

5th. The next place in which Jesus found a lost soul was in a tree. The reader has so caught the natural trend of his sermon, that I need only name this point. It is impossible, however, to give any adequate expression of the peculiarly happy way in which he held the interest of the children, and indeed of the crowded congregation.

6th. The next place in which the Lord Jesus found a lost soul was in the temple. Then he tarried longer than usual on the description. It was morning; the sun was just gilding the temple into glory. I cannot tell you the name of the woman, but she was dreadfully wicked. We could see the maddened face of the Pharisees ready to hurl the stones, now lifted in hand, upon the woman Jesus must condemn. He speaks, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone," and lo! they who were to kill, are all gone. It seemed to me that Bonar was at his best in this description of

the unique mercy of Christ. His whole frame seemed surcharged with force as he described the malevolent hate of the Pharisee, and with sublime tenderness as he pictured the tender mercy of Jesus. We have oft heard these words, but never with such significant expression as when this master of description paused, and then deliberately said, "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more."

7th. The last place at which Jesus found a lost soul was on the cross; he and that soul both nailed to the cross. But even there the lost soul was found, and in answer to his sincere appeal, the lost was saved and ushered into eternal life.

Touchingly he closed with a personal appeal to the children. Remember, Jesus comes to seek and to save the lost. You are among his lost ones, unless you have become his disciples. He will seek you wherever you may be; here, in this church, tonight, as you lie down to rest, and if you wake he will say follow me. At your school, in your hours of play, when away on the hills alone, as you walk these streets, Jesus will seek you and say follow me. *You may, you must, you will follow him.* He used but a single incident in the whole sermon. He did not need to do it. He made Scripture so vivid and real as to hold the children entranced until he closed. The effort had been too much. He sat down exhausted and complained of weariness.

His work is done, but its influence shall go on in cumulative power. Soon the cablegram will flash the intelligence, Horatio Bonar is dead. But such elect souls, God's harps, never die. The spiritual melodies which he has trilled shall echo from thousands of lips yet unformed. We may die with his words, as our best, on our lips, To have seen him is worth a pilgrimage to Scotland. His hymns will ever speak more potently to us. If we shall have helped others,

in any degree, to appreciate them and their author with deeper spiritual significance and gratitude, we shall have accomplished the purpose with which we took our pen in hand,

OUR PRAYER MEETING.

THE SILENT MEN OF THE CHURCH.
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In speaking of the "silent men" of the church, I would not have the inference drawn that I think all the women are, or should be, silent. I am in full sympathy with the idea that the prayer and conference meetings of the church should be open and free for all, whatever the sex, to participate as the spirit shall prompt. These are family gatherings, where every member should feel at home with equal share in all good things that are served, and equal responsibility for the serving of good things.

Many a woman can speak and pray as acceptably and as impressively as her husband, or as the husband of any other woman. In seasons of special religious interest the voice of woman is often heard in the expressions of sweet experience, in the utterances of earnest prayer and tender appeal. This article, however, is not designed as a discussion of the question whether women shall speak or keep silence in the churches, but rather as a look at the SILENT MEN of the church.

By these we do not mean the dumb. They have voice and facility of expression on business matters, on politics, and on affairs of secular concern. They do not all talk with the same ease and fluency; but few of them fail of having something to say on every subject of public or private interest. In their homes, where neighbors and friends meet, in stores and offices, in markets and marts of trade, they express their convictions, judgments, preferences and experiences, so as to be perfectly understood. But in the place of prayer

and conference they are silent, save as they may assist in song.

I have no means of ascertaining with accuracy the proportion of this class in the churches. It is, however, safe to say that four out of five of all the male members of the churches never participate, by remark or prayer, in these social religious meetings. The proportion of non-participants is less than this in many of the smaller churches, but the above is believed to be a generous estimate for the churches as a whole. How many local churches are there, with 200 male members, forty of whom can be relied upon to aid in "Our Prayer Meetings?" How many with 100 male members, twenty of whom are ready for service of this kind?

Why so many SILENT MEN? Many causes may be assigned; among them the following:

1. *Wrong beginnings.* Every Christian life has a beginning, and that beginning, in most cases, is the key note of after activities. I leave out of the question here those extreme emotional experiences, those extravagant ecstasies and expressions which have the prophecy of short life, and speak only of those sober moods with which most begin, and which only are reliable. Such beginnings are always prophetic. The time was when the Saviour had not been accepted as Redeemer and Lord. The time came when the Saviour was accepted. All souls in this new found faith have not the same translatable or even discoverable experiences. Every true child of God, however, touches a time when he begins to rejoice, though it be with trembling. That is the time for testimony. He should then begin to be a witness in the church of the love and grace bestowed upon him. The profoundest conviction of a human soul is that of sin. The divinest bestowment of God on a human soul is that of forgiveness. When this conviction has come, and this forgiveness has been bestowed, at once, the soul should