

THE HOMILETIC MONTHLY.

A MAGAZINE

DEVOTED TO THE PUBLICATION OF SERMONS AND OTHER
MATTER OF HOMILETIC INTEREST.

VOL. VI.—JANUARY, 1882.—No. 4.

SERMONIC.

MAN'S PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE.

By EUGENE BERSIER, D.D., OF PARIS.
(Translated from the French by Sylvester F.
Scovel, D.D.)

*What is man that Thou art mindful of him,
and the son of man that Thou visitest
him?*—Ps. viii: 5.

ONE of the things with which ancient and modern sceptics have most frequently reproached Christianity is its having exaggerated the value of man, and the historic importance of our globe. "What is man," they have said, in the very words of our text, "that God should be busied about him?" and they have found pleasure in displaying his insignificance. Everything that could lower mankind has served their purpose. There is no ephemeral insect to which they have not compared us. The earliest adversaries of the Gospel prided themselves on this sport. Celsus, for example, returns to it again and again, and shows himself irritated by the greatness which Scripture attributes to man. "Wherein," he exclaims, "is man higher than the ant or the fly? They tell us we are the kings of animals, but do not animals devour us nevertheless? Have

not the ants and the bees states, magistrates, cities? Do they not make war and form alliances?" And that spirited writer, accepting all the most fantastic assertions of travelers about these things, masses all the arguments which appear to him fitted to exalt animals at the expense of man, and to turn into ridicule all the glorious destinies which the Word of God promises us.*

This kind of attack is, therefore, nothing new, yet it has found, in the progress of science, a rejuvenation and special eclat. Science, we are told, displaces us from the world's center. Formerly, in the ages of simple credulity, man saw in our world the point to which all other things converged. The sun rose every morning, and the stars shone each evening, in order to illumine the earth. The skies were only the azure tent, blazoned with gold, which covered our dwelling-place. Man could even read there the secret of his individual destiny. The eclipse of a planet was, for him, the sign of a fatal event. The star which shed its rays on the cradle of an infant, presaged his high fortunes.

* See particularly Book IV. of Origen against Celsus—entire.

[The first several sermons are reported in full; the remainder are given in condensed form. Every care is taken to make these reports correct; yet our readers must not forget that it would be unfair to hold a speaker responsible for what may appear in a condensation, made by another, of his discourse.]

CORRUPT LITERATURE.

BY T. DE WITT TALMAGE, D. D., IN THE
BROOKLYN TABERNACLE [PRESBYTE-
RIAN].

And the frogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt.—Exodus viii: 6, 7.

THERE is almost a universal aversion to frogs, and yet with the Egyptians they were honored, they were sacred, and they were objects of worship while alive, and after death they were embalmed, and to-day their remains may be found among the sepulchers of Thebes. These creatures, so attractive once to the Egyptians at Divine behest became obnoxious and loathsome, and they went croaking and hopping and leaping into the palace of the king, and into the bread-trays and the couches of the people; and even the ovens, which now are uplifted above the earth, and on the sides of chimneys, then being small holes in the earth, with sunken pottery, were filled with frogs when the housekeepers came to look at them. If a man sat down to eat, a frog alighted on his plate. If he attempted to put on a shoe, it was preoccupied by a frog. If he attempted to put his head upon a pillow, it had been taken possession of by a frog. Frogs high and low and everywhere; loathsome frogs, slimy frogs, besieging frogs, innumerable frogs, great plague of frogs. What made the matter worse, the magicians said there was no miracle in this, and they could, by sleight-of-hand, produce the same thing: and they seemed to succeed, for, by sleight-of-hand, wonders may be wrought. After Moses had thrown down his staff and by a miracle it became a serpent, and then he took hold of it and by a miracle it again became a staff, the serpent-charmers imitated the same thing, and, knowing that there were serpents in Egypt which, by peculiar pressure on the neck, would become as rigid as a stick of wood, they seemed to change the serpent into the staff, and then throwing it down, the staff became a serpent.

So, likewise, these magicians tried to imitate the plague of the frogs, and, perhaps, by smell of food attracting a great number of them to a certain point, or by shaking them out from a hidden place, the magicians sometimes seemed to accomplish the same miracle. While these magicians made the plague worse, none of them tried to make it better. "Frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt."

Now, that plague of frogs has come back upon the earth. It is abroad to-day. It is smiting this nation. It comes in the shape of corrupt literature. These frogs hop into the store, the shop, the office, the banking-house, the factory; into the home, into the cellar, into the garret, on the drawing-room table, on the shelf of the library. While the lad is reading the bad book, and the teacher's face is turned the other way, one of these frogs hops upon the page. While the young woman is reading the forbidden novelette after retiring at night, reading by gas-light, one of these frogs leaps upon the page. Indeed, they have hopped on the news-stands of the country, and the mails at the post-office shake out in the letter-trough hundreds of them. The plague has taken, at different times, possession of this country. It is one of the most loathsome, one of the most frightful, one of the most ghastly of the ten plagues of our modern cities. There is a vast number of books and newspapers printed and published which ought never to see the light. They are filled with a pestilence that makes the land swelter with a moral epidemic. The literature of a nation decides the fate of a nation. Good books, good morals. Bad books, bad morals. I begin with the lowest of all the literature, that which does not even pretend to be respectable—from cover to cover a blotch of leprosy. There are many whose entire business it is to dispose of that kind of literature. They display it before the schoolboy on his way

home. They get the catalogues of colleges and young ladies' seminaries, take the names and the post-office addresses, and send their advertisements and their circulars and their pamphlets and their books to every one of them. The president of one of the finest young ladies' seminaries on the Atlantic coast being absent one day, one of these miscreants came in and secured a catalogue. The president returning, and hearing of it, had his fears excited, and he reported the case to official authority. For two weeks that man was hunted, and he was hunted down, and in his possession was found not only the catalogue of that institution, but the catalogues of fourteen colleges, and in eight of them already he had done the damning work. In the possession of these dealers in impure literature were found nine hundred thousand names and post-office addresses, to whom it was thought it might be profitable to send these corrupt things. In the year 1873 there were one hundred and sixty-five establishments engaged in publishing salacious literature. From one publishing house there went out twenty different styles of corrupt books. Although twenty-four tons of salacious literature have been destroyed by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, still there is enough of it left in this country to bring down upon us the thunderbolts of an incensed God. What has been very remarkable is the fact that more of these publishers of impure literature lived in the city of Brooklyn than in any other city; lived here, did business in New York, had their factories, some on this side the river, some on the other side the river, but they dared to have their residences in this City of Churches. All of them now driven out, or for the most part driven out, these vultures will alight in other fields, and they must be pursued and exterminated from Christendom. In the year 1868 the evil had become so great in this country that the Congress of the United States passed a law forbidding the transmission of impure literature

through the United States mails; but there were large loops in that law through which criminals might crawl out, and the law was a dead failure—that law of 1868. But in 1873 another law was passed by the Congress of the United States against the transmission of corrupt literature through the mails—a grand law, a potent law, a Christian law—and under that law multitudes of these scoundrels have been arrested, their property confiscated, and they themselves thrown into the penitentiaries where they belonged. Against that good and wholesome and Christian law no good man could make any objection; but it stirred up the animosity and the indignation of a great many people and they sent up a petition to Congress to compel that body to repeal that good, Christian law. The petition rolled up to the door of the House of Representatives asking for the repeal of the law, and the head name on the petition was Robert G. Ingersoll, the champion blasphemer of America. He appealed to the House of Representatives with others. That body refused to grant the petition. Then Mr. Ingersoll made application to the Senate of the United States, and that body also refused, so that both houses of Congress rejected the petition. Here is the report. The Committee of the House of Representatives, May 1, 1878, sent the following report:—

“The Committee on the Revision of the Laws, to whom was referred the petition of Robert G. Ingersoll and others, praying for the repeal or modification of sections 1,785, 3,878, 3,893, 5,389, and 2,491 of the Revised Statutes, have had the same under consideration, and have heard the petitioners at length. In the opinion of your committee the Post-Office was not established to carry instruments of vice or obscene writings, indecent pictures or lewd books. Your Committee believe that the statutes in question do not violate the constitution of the United States, and ought not to be changed. They recommend, therefore, that the prayer of the said petition be denied.”

That application for the repeal of that good law against the transmission of corrupt and obscene literature

through the mails of the United States only demonstrates what you and I know, that the same infidelity which wipes its feet on the Bible and spits in the face of God, is the worst foe of American society. I do not wonder that when Robert G. Ingersoll applied to the Mayor of Toronto for permission to lecture in that city, the Mayor of Toronto replied: "No, sir. You may have no God in the United States, but we have one up here in Canada, and you shall not stand here and blaspheme Him." One of the filthiest creatures who had been sending corrupt literature through the mails of the United States was arrested, tried, condemned, and put in the penitentiary. A petition went to President Hayes asking him to pardon the culprit. President Hayes looked over the whole case, saw there was no excuse for the infamy, that there were no extenuating circumstances, and he declined to pardon the miscreant. Then a company of what are called "Liberalists" got together in a meeting and passed a resolution of "deepest sympathy"—these were the two words, "deepest sympathy"—for that culprit, and the resolution of "deepest sympathy" for that culprit was offered by Robert G. Ingersoll, and the resolution was passed amid great acclamation of the people present. Ah! my friends, the day will come when it will be demonstrated—and if no one else will undertake the work, I will—that, while Christianity is the mother of all the virtues, infidelity is the foster-mother of all the vices of this century, not one excepted. Any man who could ask for the repeal of that good law against the sending of corrupt literature through the mails of the United States—any man that could do that is the enemy of every decent home in America, and has offered an insult to every clean-minded man and every pure-hearted woman in Christendom.

Now, my friends, how are we to war against this corrupt literature? And how are the frogs of this Egyptian plague to be slain? First of all, by the prompt and inexorable execution of

the law. Let all good postmasters and United States district attorneys and detectives and reformers concert in their action to stop this plague. When Sir Rowland Hill spent his life in trying to secure cheap postage, not only for England but for all the world, and to open the blessing of the post-office to all honest business, and to all messages of charity and kindness and affection, for all healthful intercommunication, he did not mean to make vice easy, or to fill the mail-bags of the United States with the scabs of such a leprosy. It ought not to be in the power of every bad man who can raise a one-cent stamp for a circular or a three-cent stamp for a letter, to blast a man or destroy a home. I was glad when I saw how Jay Gould last week pounced upon the culprit who was desecrating our magnificent post-office system. Because the culprit lived on Fifth Avenue instead of Elm Street only made the matter more outrageous. The New York Post-Office never did better work than when they detailed fifty postmen to watch the letter-boxes, and the Police Department of New York City never did better work than when they detailed fifty detectives to make summary arrest. The postal service of this country must be clean, must be kept clean, and we must all understand that the swift retributions of the United States Government hover over every violation of the letter-box. There are thousands of men and women in this country, some for personal gain, some through innate depravity, some through a spirit of revenge, who wish to use this great avenue of convenience and intelligence for purposes revengeful, salacious and diabolic. Wake up the law. Wake up all its penalties. Let every court-room on this subject be a Sinai, thunderous and aflame. Let the convicted offenders be sent for the full term to Sing Sing or Harrisburg, and hurl that Governor from his chair who shall dare to pardon before the expiration of the sentence. I am not talking about what cannot be done. I am talking now about what is

being done. A great many of the printing-presses that gave themselves entirely to the publication of salacious literature have been stopped or have gone into business less obnoxious. What has thrown off, what has kept off the rail-trains of this country for some time nearly all the leprous periodicals? Those of us who have been on the rail-trains have noticed a great change in the last few months and the last year or two. Why have nearly all those indecent periodicals been kept off the rail-trains for some time back? Who effected it? These societies for the purification of railroad literature gave warning to the publishers, and warning to railroad companies, and warning to conductors, and warning to newsboys, to keep the infernal stuff off the trains. Cleveland and Rock Island and Ann Arbor and other cities have successfully prohibited the most of that literature even from going on the news-stands. Terror has seized upon the publishers and the dealers in impure literature from the fact that over six hundred arrests have been made, and the aggregate time for which the convicted have been sentenced to prison is over one hundred and fifty years; and from the fact that over one million three hundred thousand of their circulars have been destroyed, and the business is not as profitable as it used to be. How have so many of the news-stands of our great cities been purified? How has so much of this iniquity been balked? By moral suasion? Oh, no! You might as well go into a jungle of the East Indies and pat a cobra on the neck, and with profound argument try to persuade it that it is morally wrong to bite and to sting and to poison anything. The only answer to your argument would be an uplifted head and a hiss, and a sharp, reeking tooth struck into your arteries. The only argument for a cobra is a shot-gun, and the only argument for these dealers in impure literature is the clutch of the police and bean soup in a penitentiary. The law! the law! I invoke it to consummate the work so grandly begun.

Another way in which we are to drive back this plague of Egyptian frogs is by filling the minds of our boys and girls with a healthful literature. I do not mean to say that all the books and newspapers in our families ought to be religious books and newspapers, or that every song ought to be sung to the tune of "Old Hundred." I have no sympathy with the attempt to make the young old. I would rather join in a crusade to keep the young young. Boyhood and girlhood must not be abbreviated. But there are good books, good histories, good biographies, good works of fiction, good books of all styles, with which we are to fill the minds of the young, so that there will be no more room for the useless and the vicious than there is room for chaff in a bushel measure which is already filled with Michigan wheat. Why are fifty per cent. of the criminals in the jails and penitentiaries of the United States today under twenty-one years of age—many of them under seventeen, under sixteen, under fifteen, under fourteen, under thirteen? Walk along the corridors of the Tombs prison in New York and look for yourselves. Bad books, bad newspapers, bewitched them as soon as they got out of the cradle. Beware of all those stories which end wrong. Beware of all those books which make the road that ends in perdition seem to end in paradise. Do not glorify the dirk and the pistol. Do not call the desperado brave, or the libertine gallant. Teach our young people that, if they go down into the swamps and marshes to watch their jack-o'-lanterns dance on decay and rottenness, they will catch malaria and death. "Oh!" says some man, "I am a business man and I have no time to examine what my children read; I have no time to inspect the books that come into my household." If your children were threatened with typhoid fever, would you have time to go for the doctor? Would you have time to watch the progress of the disease? Would you have time for the funeral? In the presence of my God I warn you of the

Corrupt Literature.

fact that your children are threatened with moral and spiritual typhoid, and that, unless the thing be stopped, it will be to them funeral of body, funeral of mind, funeral of soul. Three funerals in one day! My word is to this vast multitude of young people: Do not touch, do not borrow, do not buy a corrupt book or a corrupt picture. A book will decide a man's destiny for good or for evil. The book you read yesterday may have decided you for time and for eternity, or it may be a book that may come into your possession to-morrow. A good book—who can exaggerate its power? Benjamin Franklin said that his reading of Cotton Mather's "Essays to Do Good" in childhood gave him holy aspirations for all the rest of his life. George Law, the millionaire, now awaiting his burial, declared that a biography he read in childhood gave him all his subsequent prosperities. A clergyman, many years ago, passing to the Far West, stopped at a hotel. He saw a woman copying something from Doddridge's "Rise and Progress." It seemed that she had borrowed the book, and there were some things she wanted specially to remember. The clergyman had in his satchel a copy of Doddridge's "Rise and Progress," and so he made her a present of it. Thirty years passed on. The clergyman came that way, and he asked where the woman was whom he had seen long ago. They said: "She lives yonder in that beautiful house." He went there and said to her: "Do you remember me?" She said: "No, I do not." He said: "Do you remember a man who gave you Doddridge's 'Rise and Progress' thirty years ago?" "Oh! yes. I remember. That book saved my soul. I loaned the book to all my neighbors, and they read it and were converted to God, and we had a revival of religion which swept through the whole community. We built a church and called a pastor. You see that spire yonder, don't you? That church was built as the result of the book you gave me thirty years ago." Oh! the power of a good book. But, alas! for the in-

fluence of a bad book. John Angel James, than whom England never had a holier minister, stood in his pulpit at Birmingham and said: "Twenty-five years ago a lad loaned to me an infamous book. He would loan it only fifteen minutes, and then I had to give it back; but that book has haunted me like a spectre ever since. I have, in agony of soul, on my knees before God, prayed that He would obliterate from my soul the memory of it; but I shall carry the damage of it until the day of my death." The assassin of Sir William Russell declared that he got the inspiration for his crime by reading what was then a new and popular novel, "Jack Sheppard." Homer's "Iliad" made Alexander the warrior. Alexander said so. The story of Alexander made Julius Cæsar and Charles XII both men of blood. Have you in your pocket, or in your trunk, or in your desk at business, a bad book, a bad picture, a bad pamphlet? In God's name I warn you to destroy it. Have the courage of the young man who, carrying a large package of infidel books and tracts out toward his village, felt the burden getting very heavy, and his knees knocked together. He sat down to rest. He could not understand why that burden should so bear him down. He shouldered it again and started on, but was sickened with it. His knees knocked together again. He could not go on. He sat down to rest. The third time he shouldered the burden, and it seemed to get heavier and heavier, until at last he threw it down, ripped open the bundle, tore up the infidel tracts and the infidel books, and scattered the fragments to the wind. Alas, the power of a bad book!

Another way in which we shall fight back this corrupt literature, and kill the frogs of Egypt, is by rolling over them the Christian printing-press, which shall give plenty of healthful reading to all adults. All these men and women are reading men and women. What are you reading? We see so many books, we do not understand what a book is. Stand it on end.

Measure it, the height of it, the depth of it, the length of it, the breadth of it. You cannot do it. Examine the paper, and estimate the progress made from the time of the impressions on clay, and then on the bark of trees, and from the bark of trees to the papyrus, and from papyrus to the hide of wild beasts, and from the hide of wild beasts on down until the miracles of our modern paper manufactories, and then see the paper, white and pure as an infant's soul, waiting for God's inscription. A book! Examine the type of it, examine the printing of it, and see the progress from the time when Solon's laws were written on oak planks, and Hesiod's poems were written on tables of lead, and the Sinaitic commands were written on tables of stone, on down to Hoe's perfected printing-press. Examine the binding, and think of the progress made from the covers of oak-board on and on until, fifty years ago, Mr. Pickering, the London publisher, invented cloth binding, making a revolution in book-binding. A book! It took all the universities of the past, all the martyr-fires, all the civilizations, all the battles, all the victories, all the defeats, all the glooms, all the brightnesses, all the centuries, to make it possible. A book! It is the chorus of the ages; it is the drawing-room in which kings and queens and orators and poets and historians and philosophers come out to greet you. If I worshiped anything on earth, I would worship that. If I burned incense to any idol, I would build an altar to that. Thank God for good books, healthful books, inspiring books, Christian books, books of men, books of women, Book of God. It is with these good books we are to overcome corrupt literature. Upon the frogs swoop with these eagles. I depend much for the overthrow of iniquitous literature upon the morality of books. Even good books have a hard struggle to live. Polybius wrote forty books; only five of them left. Thirty books of Tacitus have perished. Twenty books of Pliny have perished. Livy wrote one hundred and forty

books; only thirty-five of them remain. Æschylus wrote one hundred dramas; only seven remain. Euripides wrote over a hundred; only nineteen remain. Varro wrote the biographies of over seven hundred great Romans. All that wealth of biography has perished. If good and valuable books have such a struggle to live, what must be the fate of those that are diseased and corrupt, and blasted at the very start? They will die as the frogs when the Lord turned back the plague. The work of Christianizing will go on until there will be nothing left but good books, and they will take the supremacy of the world. May you and I live to see the illustrious day! Against every bad pamphlet send a good pamphlet; against every unclean picture send an innocent picture; against every scurrilous song send a Christian song; against every bad book send a good book, and then it will be as it was in ancient Toledo, where the Toletum missals were kept by the saints in six churches, and the sacrilegious Romans demanded that these missals should be destroyed, and that the Roman missals be substituted, and the war came on: and I am glad to say that, the whole matter having been referred to champions, the champion of the Toletum missals, with one blow, brought down the champion of the Roman missals. So it will be in our day. The good literature, the Christian literature, in its championship for God and the truth, will bring down the evil literature, in its championship for the devil. I feel tingling to the tips of my fingers, and through all the nerves of my body and all the depths of my soul, the certainty of our triumph. Cheer up, O men and women who are toiling for the purification of society! Toil with your faces in the sunlight. "If God be for us, who, *who* can be against us?" Lady Husted Stanhope was the daughter of the third Earl of Stanhope, and after her nearest friends had died she went to the far East, took possession of a deserted convent, threw up fortresses amid the mountains of Lebanon, opened the castle to all the

poor and the wretched and the sick who would come in. She made her castle a home for the unfortunate. She was a devout Christian woman. She was waiting for the coming of the Lord. She expected that the Lord would descend in person, and she thought upon it until it was too much for her reason. In the magnificent stables of her palace she had two horses groomed and bridled and saddled and caparisoned, and all ready for the day in which her Lord would descend, and He on one of them, and she on the other, should start for Jerusalem, the city of the Great King. It was a fanaticism and a delusion; but there was romance, and there was splendor, and there was thrilling expectation in the dream. Ah! my friends, we need no earthly palfreys, groomed and saddled and bridled and caparisoned for our Lord when He shall come. The horse is ready in the equerry of heaven, and the imperial rider is ready to mount. "And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow, and a crown was given unto him, and he went forth conquering and to conquer: and the armies which were in heaven followed him on white horses, and on his vesture and on his thigh was written, 'King of kings and Lord of lords.'" Horsemen of heaven, mount! Cavalrymen of God, ride on! Charge! charge! until they shall be hurled back on their haunches—the black horse of famine, and the red horse of carnage, and the pale horse of death. Jesus forever!

THANKSGIVING SERMON.

A HISTORICAL DISCOURSE, DELIVERED BY
REV. D. C. HUGHES, BROOKLYN, N. Y.,
Nov. 24, 1881.

Then he said unto them: Go your way, eat the fat and drink the sweet, and send portions to them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.—Neh. viii: 10.

THE circumstances of this address of Nehemiah, the governor of the returned captives, may be obtained from the con-

text. While they are replete with interest and suggestiveness, our purpose to-day is not the exposition of the text, but to show from our national history that, if the returned captives from Babylon had reason to observe a "thanksgiving day," we much more.

There is little room for doubt, from the habit of our "Pilgrim Fathers" to seek Scriptural precedent for all their proceedings, that this first national thanksgiving, proclaimed by Governor Nehemiah, suggested to Governor Bradford, after the first harvest of the New England colonists in 1621, that a day should be set apart by them for similar rejoicing, in offering to God praise and prayer.

Gradually the custom grew of appointing an annual thanksgiving-day after the in-gathering of the harvest. These appointments were confined, for a long time, to the governors of the New England States. During the "Revolution" a day of national thanksgiving was annually recommended by Congress. Washington recommended such a day after the adoption of the Constitution; and his example was occasionally adopted by successive Presidents. During the "Rebellion" President Lincoln frequently recommended the observance of such a day after some signal victory. To-day it may be considered one of our national institutions.

Such a custom is eminently befitting and beneficial. To acknowledge a Divine providence, which "giveth us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness," is a dictate of the natural conscience. The sentiment of gratitude for blessings received is ever ennobling and inspiring, and its practice praiseworthy in all. This national custom of "thanksgiving" is creditable both to the head and heart of the Nation.

Our history as a people is replete with the highest reasons for the existence and the perpetuity of so worthy a custom.

Let us this morning take advantage of the occasion to review the past, and see what the Lord has done for us, and