

THE HOMILETIC REVIEW

An International Monthly Magazine
of
Religious Thought, Sermonic Literature
and Discussion of Practical Issues.

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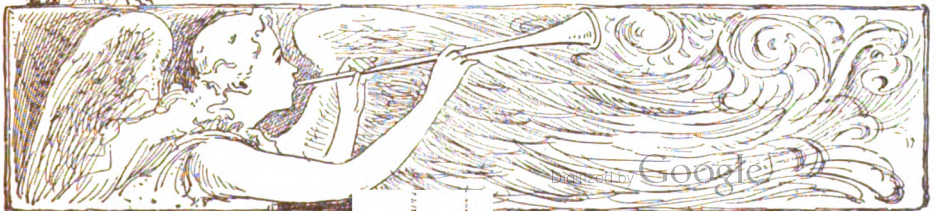
FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY

TORONTO, NEW YORK
30 Lafayette Place.
11 Richmond St. West.

LONDON,
44 Fleet Street.

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES.



THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

VOL. XXVII.—MAY, 1894.—No. 5.

REVIEW SECTION.

I.—THE PREACHER AND SECULAR STUDIES.

BY PROFESSOR J. O. MURRAY, D.D., PRINCETON, N. J.

LIFE seems sometimes to be made up of extremes; and history to be but the long record of reactionary movements. The pendulum swings over a wide area, from thrift to parsimony, from zeal to fanaticism, from prudence to time-serving, from self-respect to self-idolatry, from asceticism to luxury. The classical student sinks into the mere philologist, the scientific man becomes a materialist, the political thinker lapses into a partisan and gives up to party what was meant for mankind. Nowhere indeed is the tendency to extremes seen more than in the ecclesiastical domain. In theology we have the hyper-Calvinist at one pole and the Arminian at the other. In polity, the Pope confronts the Independent. The extreme of sacramentarian views is counterbalanced by the nominal observance of the two sacraments. Every church has in its own borders these opposing extremes. Rome has her Jansenists and Jesuits; the Church of England her High and Low party; the Presbyterian divides into Old and New School, the Baptists are found in two camps, Calvinistic and Free Will.

It is hardly to be expected that the Christian ministry would escape the working of this tendency. The preachers are not cast in one mould. The modern pulpit, at least, shows great divergence of method. Look over the list of Sunday advertisements of the pulpit, noting topics of discourse, and it will be clear that our city preachers are working in very different ways to publish the Kingdom of God. It may be said in general that modern preaching follows two well-marked types, either of which is an extreme. One of these types is bred from old scholastic methods. Preachers of this type are bookish men. Their sermons are redolent of commentaries and systems of theology. They have an air of monkish seclusion about them in their isolation from all living interests. They talk about "sanctification," instead of about being better men or leading a better life. They seem unreal,

MISCELLANEOUS SECTION.

The Kind of Preaching Needed.

BY T. DE WITT TALMAGE, D.D.,*
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

THE kind of sermons that are needed at the present time are sympathetic sermons. All people need help at some part of their nature. Those that seem to have the least need of it may be in the most dire necessity. Mere displays of scholasticism or putting forth the technicalities of religion in the pulpit are of no use in these days.

I do not know how far what is called the "new theology" has affected or will affect the character of modern sermons. My rule is never to criticize Christian workers; I take it for granted that each man is doing the best he can. I believe, however, that one tear of Christian sympathy is worth an oceanful of abstract discussion.

I am asked if what are called "sensational" sermons are valuable. Sensationalism is a word that has as diverse a meaning as the word Congregationalism, which reaches from Theodore Parker, who was pastor of what he called the 20th or 30th Congregational Church, clear on to the most evangelistic, old-fashioned theology. If a man stands in his pulpit with the dominant idea of giving entertainment—mere intellectual entertainment or the stirring of the risibilities of his congregation—he is committing blasphemy; but if he proposes to make a sensation by introducing Gospel principles in preference to worldly principles and bringing men to repentance for their sins and to faith in God, then the more sensationalism he has (with such ends in view) the better. The charge of "sensationalism" is generally made by dried-up ministers who cannot get an audience. Go into some church where a man preaches to seventy-five people on a clear Sunday morning and before he gets through you will probably hear

* An interview.

him deplore "sensationalism" in the pulpit.

The church in general is dying of humdrum. If we do not get a little more fire, and zeal, and holy vim into our religious services they will go to the wall.

I am asked "how can the Gospel best be presented by the preacher?" In reply I would say that every man must get his directions from headquarters. No one man can tell another man how to preach. No two men will do their work in just the same way, if they do it successfully. Failure in all kinds of Christian work is generally the result of a disposition to work as other people do. Theological seminaries which are indispensable, and some of them manned by the best representatives of religion in professorial chairs, often do damage by trying to make all students preach alike and think alike. The great object ought to be to develop each man's faculties, taking them as they are, and producing the best results. A professor is also useful as a critic. A college student, or young preacher, may have faults that are open to criticism and that never would be brought to his attention except by a professor.

A common temptation among young ministers is to make the sermon a result, not realizing that it is only a means to an end. As a man gets older in the ministry he finds that the sermon is of no use except as it accomplishes practical and religious results. The young preacher begins by thinking sermon-making an art; but the sermon is of no importance except as it brings men to a new life and a higher appreciation of duty.

The great mistake of the old preacher is finding fault with the young ones, and very often unjustly. The tendency of the older preachers is to discourage the young ones in their new methods of work.

The ideal preacher, in my opinion, is

the one who is seeking to make the world better and happier. There is a great, big wound on the heart of the world and the Gospel is a plaster. How to put the plaster on the wound in the practical question for all preachers to consider.

"How can a preacher get illustrations for his sermons?" By keeping his eyes and ears open. The best illustrations are not to be found in books but along the city streets, or out in the woods of the country. For some persons scrap-books and commonplace books may be very useful. Todd's *Index Rerum* used to be a very good note-book for this purpose, and, I have no doubt, it is still a very important help to many people. I have bought three copies of it at different times of my life, each time resolving to do something with them, but I never got so far as to make any use of them.

If a preacher has little imagination and is not apt in securing illustrations for his discourses, I should think that the line of his preaching should be the argumentative style, without illustrations. Some of the strongest sermons that have ever been preached have had no illustrations in them, and there are many sermons that are killed with a surplus of illustrations. In such sermons the mind is diverted from the central truth to the similes and parables connected with it.

It is sometimes asked how far the preacher should avail himself of the services of the evangelist. I think the services of such helpers are positively recognized in the Bible, and their work is an absolute necessity. The apostle says "to some pastors, to some evangelists, and to some teachers."

But a man cannot be a pastor and an evangelist at the same time. The man who attempts to be a pastor and an evangelist always comes to a very short pastorate. There are no exceptions to the rule. A man cannot preach every day in the week and preach on Sunday anything that is worth hearing.

Some men who have a special faculty

in that direction may conduct their own revivals, but it is of great use, after a man has done his best to bring people to the truth, to have a new voice come in and a new manner presented to the congregation. The evangelist may not have a tenth part of the ability of the pastor and yet do a better work for a little while. A farmer may get along with his fields the whole year working alone, but in harvest time he wants some new hands. Every farmer recognizes the truth of that statement. A revival is the preacher's harvest time.

I repeat what I said at the beginning, what we need is Gospel sermons, the simpler the better. We need sermons of kindness, which is only another name for the Gospel. People come into church from the world and they have been kicked, and cuffed, and knocked about, and cheated, and befooled, and lied about. They are irritated, soured with the world; and there ought to be something in our church services, from the first bar of music in the opening hymn to the "amen" in the benediction, to help them, elevate them, inspire them; send them back to their stock exchange, their store, their factory, their business office, with higher views of life and with more strength to endure its temptations.

Our present prayer-meetings are a great improvement on the old prayer-meetings, thanks to the Lord and Mr. Lampheer, the founder of the Fulton Street prayer-meeting. That man did more to enlarge and vivify the methods of Christian work than any fifty men that have ever lived. There is more life in such meetings now. In former times the prayer-meeting consisted of three long prayers, three long hymns, and, in consequence of the way in which it was conducted, it was only attended by Christian people. Now it is no unusual thing to have ten or fifteen prayers, ten or fifteen exhortations, with from five to ten hymns—a verse from each—interspersed. The consequence is that people of the world as well as church-members attend such meetings.