

# THE MISSION OF THE PULPIT.

A SERMON

BY THE LATE REV. G. T. PERKS, M.A.

"By manifestations of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."—2 Cor. iv. 2.

THE power which man exerts over his fellow-man by the exercise of speech is one of his noblest prerogatives. If this power were to be suddenly and universally suspended, life would sustain a terrible and irreparable innovation, and lose some of its purest and sweetest joys. The appointment and commission of the ministry of men for the promulgation of the Gospel was one of the last solemnities in the earthly career of the Son of God: "Jesus came and spake unto the Apostles, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." When we accompany those heralds of the Cross as they prosecute their high vocation, and mark how the light of Grecian philosophy wanes in their presence, how the political power of Rome stoops at their feet, how idol temples tremble at their approach, how barbarous nations spring into greatness at their bidding, how dead souls start into newness of life at their call, we cannot resist the conviction that there is a divinity about this office which invests it with absorbing interest and paramount importance. "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

The revival of an earnest Christianity during the last century, and the aggression of the Church on the empire of paganism during the present century furnish ample and encouraging evidence that the pulpit has still a power to sway and a work to do. It will not be displaced by the press. The press, as a circulating medium of thought, is one of the glories of the age; and as a foe to ignorance, superstition, bigotry, intolerance, and despotism, may be a valuable auxiliary to the preachers. The pulpit must not be set aside by the school. When education comprises the entire man—his body, intellect, and moral nature; when it is conducted on the basis of religious truth; and when it is prosecuted in a thoroughly Christian spirit, it contributes in an eminent degree to the success of an intelligent, thoughtful, and edifying ministry. The pulpit must not be sacrificed to the lecture-room. The lecture, as a means of diffusing popular information and of stimulating self-improvement, is serviceable; and by awakening mental ac-

tivity and disclosing the wonderful works of God, is helpful rather than hostile to the preacher. But still the pulpit has its specific duties, its exclusive functions, and its permanent obligations; its origin, object, privileges, responsibilities, and issues combine to give it a uniqueness which is at once solemn and sublime. The Mission of the Pulpit, then, is the subject now before us; and it is comprehensively stated in the apostle's words: "By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

The mission of the pulpit is—

I. A MISSION TO THE CONSCIENCE.

II. A MISSION FOR GOD.

I. THE PULPIT IS A MISSION TO THE CONSCIENCE. Conscience is that simple and original faculty of our nature which, among other things, points us to the great laws of God; pronounces judgment on our actions as good or bad; produces painful or pleasurable emotions in us, according to our conduct; and by its combined energy prompts us to do that which is right. It asserts its prerogative in the breast of innocent infancy, and it retains its grasp of the hoary-headed sinner; it flames with light in the dark spirit of the besotted pagan, and it reigns in serene majesty in the soul of the true Christian. "Had it strength as it had right; had it power as it had manifest authority," says Butler, "it would absolutely govern the world." It may be slighted, but it cannot be silenced; it may be resisted, but it cannot be dethroned; it may be seared, but it cannot be destroyed. The worm that dieth not is the avenging power of an infuriated conscience: a conscience lashed into madness by all that is vile in evil and intolerable in despair. The mission of the pulpit is to this awful monarch of the soul.

1. *The Mission to the Conscience has its Advantages.* The

man who appeals to the conscience by the force of truth occupies a throne of imperial power, and sways a sceptre of irresistible might. If we appeal to the imagination by sallies of wit and beauty, we shall be perpetually chasing clouds and shadows; if we appeal to the reason by facts and arguments, we shall encounter a network of sophistry and scepticism; if we appeal to the passions, we shall create floods of sentimental sorrow and troops of fictitious saints; but if we appeal to the conscience by the truth, there is not a law, precept, prohibition, or warning of the Word of God to which the conscience will not instantly respond, and of which it will not instinctively approve. Here, then, is a prodigious advantage. Your ear may not be charmed by the musical cadences of a flowing eloquence; your taste may not be gratified by the beauties of elegant composition; your judgment may not be



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From a Photograph published by F. E. Lougley.