

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

THE REASON FOR FOUR GOSPELS.

Four portraits of himself—this is the whole of the legacy left by Jesus to His family on earth. But they are sufficient for its needs, because by the contemplation of these the Church receives into herself, through the communication of the Spirit, the life of him whose characteristic features they set forth.

These four pictures originated spontaneously, and the three first, at all events, independently of each other. They arose accidentally, in a manner, from the four principal regions of the earth comprehended by the church in the first century. Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy.

The characteristics of these four regions have not failed to exercise a certain influence upon the manner in which Christ has been presented in the pictures intended for the use of each. In Palestine, Matthew proclaimed Jesus as him who put the finishing stroke to the establishment of that holy kingdom of God which had been fore-announced by the prophets, and of which the foundation had been laid in Israel. In Rome, Mark presented him as the irresistible conqueror, who founded his divine right to the possession of the world upon his miraculous power.

Amongst the generous and affable Hellenic races, Luke described him as the divine philanthropist, commissioned to carry out the work of divine grace and compassion towards the worst of sinners. In Asia Minor, that ancient cradle of theosophy, John pictured him as the Word made flesh, the eternal life and light, who had descended into the world of time. Thus it was, under the influence of a profound sympathy with those about him, that each evangelist brought into relief that aspect of Christ which answered most nearly to the ideal of his readers.

But on the other hand, each of the evangelists has also, by means of the picture which he has drawn, pronounced a judgment upon whatever was impure in the aspirations with which, in some respects, he sympathized. The spiritual and inspired Messianic idea, presented by Matthew, condemned that political and carnal view of the church which is the very soul of false Judaism. The sanctified and divine Romanism of Mark condemned the Cæsarism of mere brute force. The heavenly Atticism of Luke took the place of the frivolous and corrupt Hellenism encountered by Paul at Athens. Lastly, humanitarianism—the divine humanitarianism of John—stands as an eternal witness against the humanitarianism, profane and anti-divine in its nature, of a world dazzled with its own greatness, and lost in evil.

Our Gospels are at once magnets to draw to themselves whatever is left of divine in the depths of human nature, and, as it were, winnowing machines to sift from it whatever is sinful. Hence the power both of attraction and repulsion which they exert upon the natural heart of man.

It has been sometimes asked why, instead of the four Gospels, God did not cause a single one to be written, in which all the events should have been arranged in their chronological order, and the history of Jesus portrayed with the accuracy of a legal document. If the drawing up of the Gospels had been the work of human skill, it would no doubt have taken this form; but it is just here we seem able to lay a finger upon the altogether divine nature of the impulse which originated the work.

Just as a gifted painter, who wished to immortalize for a family the complete likeness of the father who had been its glory, would avoid any attempt at combining in a single portrait the insignia of all the various offices he had filled—at representing him in the same picture as general and as magistrate, as man of science and as father of a family, but would prefer to paint four distinct portraits, each of which should represent him in one of these characters,—so has the Holy Spirit, in order to preserve for mankind the perfect likeness of him who was its chosen representative,—God in man—used means to impress upon the minds of the writers whom He has made His organs, four different images—the king of Israel (Matthew); the Saviour of the world (Luke); the Son, who, as a man, mounts the steps of the divine throne (Mark); and the Son who descends into humanity to sanctify the world (John).

The single object which is represented by these four aspects of the glory of Jesus Christ could not be

presented to the minds of men in a single book; it could only be so in the form under which it was originally embodied—that of a life; first, in the church—that body of Christ which was destined to contain and to display all the fullness which had dwelt in its Head; and then again in the person of individual believer, if that is true what Jesus said: "Ye in me, and I in you;" and we are each of us called to make the personality of Jesus live again in ourselves in all the harmony of his perfection.

In the church, then,—in you, in me,—we behold the living syntheses which were to be the result of that wonderful analysis of the person of Jesus Christ which produced our several gospel narratives. The harmony of the four Gospels is something better than the best written book; it is the new man to be formed in each believer. From the earliest times, the canonical Gospels have been compared to the four figures of the cherubim which support the throne of God. This comparison has given rise to many arbitrary and puerile exegetical fancies. We would rather compare them to the four wings, continually growing, with which the cherubim more and more cover the whole extent of earth, and upon which rests the throne of the majesty of Jesus.

Let criticism beware: to destroy one of these wings is to mutilate the holiest thing on this earth.—From Godel's "Studies on the New Testament."

DISTURBERS OF WORSHIP.

Give a preacher a good "send off" when he begins his sermon, and then listen attentively, and in nine cases out of ten you will be rewarded with an interesting and instructive discourse. Many things done by thoughtless and indiscreet hearers perplex and annoy the sensitive preacher, and where there is little sensitiveness there is little sense. I will point out briefly some of the individuals who trouble the minister and disturb the devotion of the well-behaved and devout hearer.

1. *Those who are late.*—They are not all alike, for some have been detained by sickness and unforeseen accidents, but the habitual late comer is sure to stalk up the aisle during the service, and his squeaking boots proclaim his arrival, and call the attention of the auditors to his Sabbath suit and the fine figure it covers. The noise he makes adds discord to music, introduces a vein of thought not in unison with sacred worship, and provokes criticism not complimentary to his taste and judgment. Business men say in the silent speech of reflection, "He is not on time here, and cannot be depended upon when he makes a contract in trade." In that way his name and presence become associated with broken engagements, unpaid bills and protested notes.

2. *Those who cough needlessly.*—Those whose bodily afflictions and infirmities make coughing a necessity are not included in these strictures. A large number of persons have a habit of yielding to the slightest irritation of the throat. The juice of the mouth, the saliva, would if used, moisten the membrane of the throat, and the exercise of the will would completely conquer the inclination to cough; but one begins to bark, the habit becomes contagious, and those who are never heard in any other way in public attract attention by making an unpleasant sound, which is neither a sob nor a shout. A sermon punctuated with coughs is almost as unintelligible as the speech of a drunken man, which contains as many hic-cups as syllables. The minister makes a fine point which is lost in a cough. He is eloquent, but his rhetoric is spoiled and the climax is crowned with a cough. He touches the heart with his pathos, and moves the intellect with his passionate logic, but the effect has been irretrievably impaired by a needless cough.

3. *Inattentive hearers.*—Men and women who claim the advantage of education and culture, will do in church what they would not do in their parlors. They will shut their eyes and put down their heads when a friend, and that friend their pastor, is talking to them. They would not insult a stranger in their drawing-rooms by going to sleep when he was conversing with them, and yet they will indulge the habit of sleeping in church when the minister is delivering to them a message which cost him a week of hard work. Such bad manners come close to the border-line of bad morals, save in those instances in which sleep is a disease which the vigilance of the afflicted fails to cure. Men who never sleep at their desks, who are wide awake on the street and at places of amusement, need

not seek to conceal themselves behind an excuse for sleeping in church. It often signifies too much eating and too little appreciation.

4. *Those who leave during service.*—Sickness and positive engagements may make it necessary for a hearer to leave church before the conclusion of the services. I have no reproof for them. I refer to the little vessels that soon fill up and run over and run out—to the unquiet hearers who go to church to see and be seen, and who make themselves conspicuous by their impatience and noise. Perhaps they are offended because the preacher has uttered an unpopular sentiment, and they seek to advertise their anger and parade their opposition to his views by leaving the church abruptly. There are men of narrow minds who endeavour to control the minister by their down-sitting and up-rising, their in-coming and their out-going, but they only make themselves prominently ridiculous and conspicuously foolish.

5. *Those who are critical.*—Some hearers are nothing unless they are critical. Slips of the tongue are nuts for them to crack. Mistakes of any kind are sure to be noticed by them, and they are sure to let the minister know how sharp they are at discovering the mishaps and accidents that may overtake a man that is in the pulpit. "To err is human." The other part of the quotation is not known to them. These maudlin critics are not all qualified for the task they assume. In the words of Miss Emily Faithful they have been dipped in a thin solution of useless accomplishments, and know just enough to annoy those whose mission is to teach the lesson of eternal truth. Nothing pleases them so much as a misquotation or the literary blunder of a minister unless it might be an act of immorality. I might add to this list those who whisper in church loud enough to attract notice; those who bang their books into the pew boxes, those who scrape the footstools upon the church floor, and those who spit tobacco juice where there is no receptacle for it.—*Christian Intelligencer.*

CONCERNING PERSONAL RELIGION.

1. Somewhat of the reason why people in the midst of Christian congregations are unsaved, may be in the pews. Christian life has not been as cogently inviting as it should have been. Let this be freely granted, and let the Church lament it. Yet let us not be deceived into fallacious reasoning. The devil sometimes formulates bad arguments for us thus:

"Many professing Christians are bad; therefore do not be a Christian;" an argument which assumes two things that are not true. *First.* That imperfect Christians are worse than out and out sinners, and therefore it were better to remain impenitent; which is no more true than it is true that one had better be a rebel against father and mother, than an imperfect and often unfruitful son.

And, *second,* it assumes that the fact that there are bad church members, will somewhat justify the impenitent for remaining so! which is not true, because the one has nothing to do with the other. Every man must give an account of himself.

The arguments were better put in some such shape as this. It is possible we have become uncharitable. Perhaps we have judged Christians too harshly. We know the lives of Christians but imperfectly. We know nothing of their inner struggles. And anyway, if religion is true, we have no responsibility for others, but a great one for ourselves.

2. Sometimes people are restrained from Christian decision by lack of sympathy with the Church with which they have become associated. They are held by social and other ties, but they make the difference between their convictions and those the Church holds a reason for postponing the great question of salvation.

But at this point it should be considered a very narrow range of truth is essential to salvation, on which you and your Church are probably agreed. A Presbyterian Church, for instance, does not insist that you shall adopt the Westminster Confession before you become a Christian. The Session will ask you no questions about decrees, and election, and church government. Your Church agrees with you that the prime thing is to get your heart right with God, and enter on his service. And on this platform the doors of the Church are flung wide for your entering.

But if any still feel that they are so far out of sympathy with their Church that they cannot work at all under that flag, then they should march from under it. No Church should for a moment stand between the