

TACT, TRUE AND FALSE.

Another would like to hear more "practical" preaching, he would like the clergy to deal oftener with matters of conduct rather than with doctrinal questions, there is the man also who hungers for sermons on "living issues" and would like to see the clergy social, and (occasionally) political leaders, others consider that the majority of sermons are too "cold" and make no appeal to the feelings, affections or imagination, some like written sermons, some "extempore." The clergyman who studies these letters in the hope of getting some "pointers" in the preparation of sermons will find his work cut out for him, if he desires to form general impressions. In this connection one is remembered of a story that appeared some years ago in an American church paper of a clergyman who had a parish with two congregations, rather remote from each other. One day a member of each congregation met and began to discuss their common parson. Said one, "What a fine preacher Mr. Blank is, we often wonder he isn't made a bishop." "That's queer," replied the other. "He's a good fellow, but we never considered him any preacher, sometimes we wonder how he got into the Church." This story, which we believe was vouched for, illustrates the vast diversity of tastes in sermons so strikingly borne out by these letters. Still, bewildering and conflicting though they be, these letters do possess a practical value and are worth study by any clergyman who desires to make his sermons of real use and worth. Out of the welter of conflicting tastes and opinions certain solid facts make themselves apparent. The average layman, however he may differ as to the kind of discourse that specially appeals to him, is guided by some general principles in his judgment of sermons. There do appear to be a few qualifications generally demanded. They may be enumerated under three heads, Earnestness, Definiteness and Spirituality. On the necessity and attractiveness of these three things, all are practically agreed. Here at last we have something to go on. The sermon that appeals to the normal layman must be "earnest," that is to say, it must be characterized by a certain fervour, it must, to use the common expression, "come from the heart," it must produce the impression of strong conviction. It must be definite, have an unmistakable message, the preacher must know his own mind, he must have something to say, and say it. Above all it must be spiritual, it must deal with eternal realities, and meet and satisfy the universal human craving for spiritual counsel and direction. The faithful observance of these three cardinal principles, we gather from this very interesting, but at first rather bewildering correspondence, will ensure success in preaching. We gather also from these varied utterances the desirability of variety in preaching. There is, as a rule, too much sameness in the style (not the matter) of sermons. A great many clergymen would gain by varying, not their doctrine, but their methods of preaching. Everything constantly repeated, tends to become monotonous. A man may become conventionally unconventional, and monotonously startling. A change is always a change in whatever direction it may be made. The "extempore" preacher would undoubtedly maintain or revive the interest of his hearers by, at times, going back to a manuscript, as would the reader of sermons by reversing the process. Within bounds, of course, variety should be the constant aim of the preacher, and for two reasons: There are so many different ways of approaching the same man, and there are so many different kinds of people to approach.

Those who defer their gifts to their death-bed, do as good as say: "Lord, I will give Thee something when I can keep it no longer." Happy is the man who is his own executor.—Bishop Hall.

life with as few knocks, as possible. Such a man is soon found out by his fellow-men. No, the tactful man is something more than a vulgar self-seeker. He is a man with a strong sense of justice. He has the capacity for putting himself in other people's places, and of doing as he would be done by, not from motives of policy but from a sense of duty. He recognizes the fact that up to a certain point, and in certain connections, a man's self-love is something that demands recognition and respect. And so he labours to avoid unnecessarily wounding the self-love of others from a sense of fair play, and not from self-interest. More harm comes from the unnecessary wounding of human self-love, than from all other causes combined. Sometimes it is necessary to do this, but not nearly so often as the majority of us, in our self-centredness and perversity, imagine. The man of tact who when in the interests of right and truth has to wound the feelings of others, will eventually be sustained by public opinion, for people soon learn to distinguish between the outspokenness that comes from mere self-conceit, or is the outcome of a genuine reverence for the right. The man of tact owes his influence to the fact, that he respects and sympathizes with what is the dearest human possession, self-respect, and so he holds a key to every heart. Many people of otherwise admirable characters are, it cannot be denied, lacking in this great quality, and as public men they fail, comparatively or actually. Tact is certainly a quality that may be cultivated, and it is essential in the ministry, where we fear the counterfeit is very common. Tact, therefore, let it be remembered, is a moral, not an intellectual gift.

"THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT."

As compared with all other systems, the Jewish included, Christianity is emphatically the religion of free men, i.e., of men who in details are left free to follow their own discretion, and to "do their own work in their own way," to speak after the manner of men: The Christian is not bound by rules, but is governed by general principles. What is the practical result of this? Is it to make Christianity an "easy" religion? This, we imagine, is in some shape or form, the notion entertained by the average Protestant, and popular theology is largely responsible for it. The condition of the Jew, burdened with the performance of a number of mechanical duties, is contrasted with that of the Christian, and the inference seems to be that the chief merit of Christianity consists in the fact that it relieves mankind from the necessity of personal self-sacrifice. This impression, it cannot be denied, in various vague forms, is very widespread. Christianity has smoothed the way to heaven, and made religion easier. In following the "spirit" we go much as we please; in following the letter we impose heavy burdens upon ourselves, and make the service of God unnecessarily hard. Could anything be more directly opposed to the teaching of Christ, and the principles which universally apply to human life and experience? What is the greatest of all burdens that a man can be called upon to bear?—Responsibility. Compare the life of the boy at school, tied to hours and subject to certain rules, to that of the full-grown man, who has the disposal of his own time, and the direction of his own habits; or that of the private in the army, subject indeed to certain routine duties, and curtailed of his personal liberty, but free of all responsibility, with that of the officer, with the comparatively free disposal of his time and exempt from many mechanical duties, but burdened with immense responsibilities. Which is the harder? We do not ask, which is the more desirable? The fact that most men prefer, as a rule, positions of responsibility to those of dependence, does not in the slightest

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