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 (occa-

sionally) political leaders, others consider that

the majority of sermons are too "cold" and make

no appeal to the feelings, affections or imagina-

tion, some like written sermons, some "extem-

pore." 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 impres-

sions. 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

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 him-

self 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 con-

nections, a man's self-love is something that de-

mands 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 per-

versity, imagine. The man of tact who when in the

interests of right and truth has to wound the feel-

ings of others, will eventually be sustained by

public opinion, for people soon learn to dis-

tinguish 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 re-

spects 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 cer-

tainly 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

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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.

TACT, TRUE AND FALSE.

Of no class of men is the celebrated saying of Talleyrand's so true, "A blunder is worse than a crime," as it is of the clergy. For tact is the capacity for avoiding blunders. It may safely be said, that in the overwhelming majority of cases the lack of this quality is the cause of ministerial failure, and of those unhappy disagreements between priest and people, which sometimes wreck the work and influence of men otherwise estimable and often exceptionally gifted. This is true, of course, in a very marked degree of other callings, notably of the politician, of the physician, the merchant, of in fact everyone who has his living to make by the patronage of the public. But it is, we think, specially and uniquely true of the ministry. Because in no calling does the personal equation count for so much as in the ministry. It is what the man is, not so much what he does, that determines his position in the affection and confidence of his people. This is not so much the case with other callings. We appreciate tact in the politician, physician, and merchant, but we forgive its absence for exceptional services rendered. The tactless physician who does brilliant work, the tactless merchant who sells needed goods, even the tactless politician, whose oratory commands the admiration of the multitude, all these men can be endured, admired, and sometimes enthusiastically followed. But it is different with the ministry. No amount of pulpit ability, for instance, will compensate for lack of certain personal qualities, of which the thing called tact is undoubtedly the most important. And this is true in every other respect, zeal, self-sacrifice, capacity for work, general efficiency, all these things will not in the case of a clergyman, and we say it advisedly, outweigh the absence of tact. What is tact? it may be asked. The great majority of people, we fancy, have rather a low opinion of this quality or gift. To them tact is merely adroitness, the ability for steering clear of dangerous subjects and situations, for evading crucial issues, for "letting sleeping dogs lie," and for generally getting round things. The tactful man therefore is a bit of a schemer. He is not of a very high order. The word is often pronounced "tack" by the uneducated, and the common idea regarding the tactful individual is the man who tacks, who does not sail with the wind, but who dodges along, watching his chance at every turn, and taking advantage of every favourable shift in the weather. This is the average man's idea of tact. And yet nothing could be further from the truth. Tact is something far higher, to use an expressive modern Americanism, the popular, but radically mistaken equivalent for the word, than mere "foxiness." Tact is a moral quality, and one of a high order at that. The tactful man is not the man who is simply bent on getting along as easily with his fellow-men, or of sliding through

"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 selfsacrifice. 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

gift.

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