

OLD SERMONS.

An Old Country contemporary, The Belfast Witness, deals with this subject in the following sane fashion:—

"What to do with old sermons? Burn them." That is the advice often given. It is partly good advice, partly bad, or at least inadequate. A minister whose mind has been growing, who has kept abreast of recent thought and scholarship, who has an open soul for all new light which is also true light, cannot preach his old sermons word for word with any satisfaction or inspiration. Let him look up his discourses of fifteen or more years ago, and honestly pronounce judgment on them. Does he not find the treatment of the subject too artificial, too professional and parsonic? Does the sermon not smell of the study lamp? Are its views of Divine truth quite the views that he holds now? Is the exposition according to his present knowledge? Are the illustrations such as his present taste can approve? Is the whole thing calculated to benefit the actual men and women of his present congregation? These are only a few of the queries which the candid preacher will put, and pause for a reply. The last fifteen or twenty years have brought many changes; some of them to be disregarded, but also some of them no good, earnest minister can disregard. And a popular work gives the opinion of the intelligent layman on the subject, the man who sits in the pew and listens to the preacher. Speaking of Ministers, he says:—"They do not realise that the world of their middle age is more educated and more intelligent than the world of their youth; and that if the public intellect is to be nurtured by the pulpit, those whose duty it is to keep the people within the fold of Christianity—ministers, namely—must provide it with a food suited to its development." That is perhaps a little roundabout, but the meaning is right enough; the public mind is moving, it is growing, and if the minister's mind is not growing, and he preaches just as he did years ago, the people will soon perceive the ancientness of the sermon and the fossil-like character of the preacher.

If the sermons have been written and read, no matter how carefully written, or how well read, they will cease to be serviceable to the more intelligent worshippers. Therefore, when a preacher lays open on the pulpit a mellow and yellow manuscript, be prepared to hear texts quoted from the Old Version, which are admittedly corrected and improved in the Revised; to hear positions assumed which have been abandoned as untenable, even by the most conservative and orthodox; expoundings which do not explain; illustrations which do not apply; the whole effect of the sermon is neutralised, except, of course, the personal equation, the character of the good man in the pulpit. Thus it appears certain enough that the old sermons which have been fully written out had better be consigned to the flames, except such portions as are still true and valid; they can be saved, yet so as by fire.

But what has just been said of the written MS. sermon cannot be said of all old sermons. Experts and wise judges in the matter have declared that the best sermon is the old sermon that was never written and read, but has been often preached, and every time of preaching has been recast and improved. The minister can put into such a sermon his maturest thought, his ripest knowledge, his richest religious experience. The old text, of course, is good; possibly the old divisions are still valid, the old gist and intention still excellent. And not being tied down to every phrase and sentence, the preacher can leave out what is no longer tenable, no longer believable or applicable to modern life and experience. He can put in what is now true and relevant and practically useful. He needs no blue pencil to cancel anything, he is a free man in the pulpit, and can speak as the Spirit now

gives him utterance; he can bring the thought and knowledge of To-day to bear, and express himself in the language of To-day. We have all heard of the young curate who inherited his father's old sermons, and who one Sunday amazed his audience by saying—"Forty years ago, when I took charge of the parish," &c., &c. It is not perhaps so absurd, but it is equally disastrous to use the thoughts and opinions and ideals of an earlier day when preaching to the young people of this. Under the conditions here indicated a minister's old sermons will be his best, and may be used most effectively. They contain his freshest imagination, his finest literary taste, his early enthusiasm and inspiration. What was crude and juvenile is now dropped out; what recent scholarship has annulled no longer appears; what was suited to the taste of the public when first preached, but suits not the public taste now, he cancels or alters—and all is done freely, easily, because he is not hampered with the bother of erasing and interpolating an old manuscript, interlining, and, perhaps, interleafing, a patchwork and palimpsest that can never be satisfactory either to himself or those who hear him.

"One word more," as preachers say. We have not been unaware of the fact that some persons may remark that since the subject of all sermons is Christianity, and Christianity cannot change, therefore old sermons founded on Scripture must remain good to the end of time. A sentence will suffice in reply to that. Divine truth is still the same, but our human apprehension of it is capable of enlargement, and our power of stating and expounding it is capable of improvement. The people whom the preacher addresses are not the same; the English language is changing; the social environment is not what it was fifteen or twenty years ago; and last of all, the preacher himself is not the same man that he was, he has moved with the process of the suns, he has moved with the experience of life, and his Christian experience has a wider horizon. All this is sufficient reason why he should constantly and conscientiously adapt his old sermons to the new people, the new conditions, his own new self, or else—religiously burn them.

NOT BY COMPROMISES.

The Herald and Presbytery very properly remarks: "Church unity will not be readily secured by compromise on what are considered really essential points. An illustration is at hand. In an editorial in the 'Churchman,' a correspondent asks: 'Would you give up the principles and the fact of the Apostolic Succession if thereby the unity of Christians could be secured tomorrow?' The answer is: 'Such a betrayal of trust is impossible. One can not give up that which is not his. The Church can not give up that which was committed to her in trust. The moral obligations can not be escaped.' The fact, however, is that the Episcopal Church is not asked to give up any fact or any essential principle, but only the obnoxious form in which it asserts that it has Church and ministry, and that other bodies, equal to it and superior in purity of life and doctrine, have no part in the ministry and the Church. It has never been committed to it, in trust, to make any such claims, and as soon as it retires from its position of narrowness and exclusiveness and realizes that God's Spirit has given his ministry to the whole body of believers, that moment, without escaping any moral obligations, it will have done its own little part in bringing about Church unity."

The New Year certainly brings new cares and new responsibilities. But with it come new hope and new promises as well. "As thy day, so, shall thy strength be."

THE NAME OF THE LORD.

"The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." Here is the very voice of mercy from heaven to man, and mark, my soul, the gracious plenitude of truth. As if to assure or encourage timid and conscience-stricken man, we have attribute piled upon attribute, and the whole pointed out as a foundation of hope. Our hard thoughts of God are here at once rebuked and dispelled, and the chief of sinners may begin to rejoice.

First, it is the Lord, the Lord God who speaks; but what is his name or his memorial among the sons of men? "He is merciful and gracious;" nay, more, he is "long-suffering;" and further still, he is "abundant in goodness and in truth." But even more specific; he "keeps mercy for thousands," he forgives iniquity; and as if that were not enough, we are further assured that he also "forgives transgression and sin;" that is, every kind or degree of iniquity may be blotted out, according to the system which tells of the blood which cleaves from it all. May not the soul rejoice, then? Should it not exult in this mercy, and flee, in the full assurance of hope, to him who is so mighty and so gracious to save?

Yet the mercy of God is not to encourage sin. Man's sin-loving soul would persuade him to continue in it, since grace so much abounds; but to cut off every pretext for that delusion, we read that the Lord, all-merciful as he is, will not, he cannot, "clear the guilty." And strange as it may sound, there never was a single sin committed which did not receive its due meed of punishment. Either in the sinner, or in the sinner's Substitute, every transgression, of every shade and degree, must receive what it deserves. It may be pardoned to the sinner, but that is only because it was punished in the person of him who died the Just for the unjust; and it is here that the believer sees at once the mercy of God expunging his sin, and the unswerving justice of him who "will be no means clear," punishing that sin to the uttermost.

"To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness though we have rebelled against him," Daniel 9:9—W. K. Tweedie, D.D.

THAT NEW LEAF.

What you need, old man, is a new book, not a new leaf. The new leaves you have turned over in the past ten years would make nice reading for your friends. There are a lot of people who for two or three days in January hold up their heads like seraphs and whistle hymn tunes, but who get down to earth and rag-time before the second week. It's a good thing to make resolutions and keep them, but every broken vow is a nail in your moral coffin. "Be not rash with thy mouth and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God. When thou vowest a vow unto God defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow than thou shouldst vow and not pay." Get a new book. Turn in the old one to the recording angel with all its blots, smears and tears. Commence a new volume. Put God on the title page, preface with a clean heart and dedicate all that goes into it to your Maker and humanity.

The Rev. James Marchant has been invited by Mrs. Barnardo to write the authorized life of the late Dr. T. J. Barnardo. If readers of the Dominion Presbyterian have any letters, reminiscences, etc., of the late doctor, they are asked to be kind enough to send them addressed to Rev. J. Marchant, 18 to 26 Stepney Causeway, London, Eng., marked "private." Letters will be safely returned.