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## Perverted.

A LITTLE, innocent, white-winged Cloud  
Flew out across the summer sea,  
And there was met by a surly crowd  
Of Fogs and Tempests—She tried to flee,—

"Now join us," cried a menacing form,  
"Or else thy beauty we destroy!"  
When back she came with the hosts of storm,  
Destruction was her only joy.  
—Nathan Haskell Dole, in Independent.

## The Pulpit's Place in Church.

REV. THOMAS C. HALL, CHICAGO.

IT was a sad break in the harmony of the universe, according to many, when the stiff ugly swallow's-nest pulpit with its winding stair and banging door, gave way to the platform and the well-nigh secular reading desk. The change has, however, not been simply in the pulpit, but also in the ideals of pulpit work. The platform is nearer the people, and the preacher needs to be nearer them also. Splendid work was done from those little swallow-nest pulpits, but if men are honest and true to God and self, there is before the pulpit of to-day a field of influence such as never yet has been its lot. The curse of many a pulpit is to-day lack of all definite aim. Who has not listened to a good man preach for forty minutes, and sat wondering what under God's dear sun the preacher expected to get at by the sermon? Rambling, pious soliloquy is not preaching. Dividing up devout platitudes under three heads and nine sub-heads, with a feeble exhortation at the close to "accept the Saviour," is not preaching. Dumping second-hand theological conceits or systems on to a congregation is not even a fair substitute for preaching. Wishy-washy, goody-goody talk, with illustrations dragged in headlong, and now and then a furious thrust at some universally condemned sin, is not preaching, and has no power. There is an infinite variety in the presentation of the Gospel message, but these are not types at all of real preaching. Can these things content us when we meet, face to face, congregations, and say to ourselves, on our knees, 'God has sent me with a message. There are hungry, dying, despairing men and women before me, and I may be God's voice to them, if I only will?' Shall we not strain mind and heart to read the needs of those about us, and, in as compact, clear, sympathetic a way as possible, condense our message, and go to the pulpit burdened lest we miss a chance never to come again? Better ten eager, honest, sympathetic words than half a ream full of the doleful, dreary commonplaces that most of us can write by the hour and foist on patient, long-suffering congregations under the name of "pulpit ministrations." The pulpit has several misfortunes. It is a grave disadvantage to preaching—whatever its many advantages in other lines—that so many regard church-going for its own sake as a virtue. It gives weak preaching a hearing it does not deserve and should not get. Another disadvantage is that no one answers the preacher. He can belabour with merciless severity "higher criticism" and "science falsely so called," and only one or two in his whole congregation detect from mispro-

nounced names and absurd arguments that the learned pastor is, along those lines, an ignoramus and a humbug. The preacher can be a literary impostor. He can, by the skilful use of names and alleged facts, picked out of reviews and other irresponsible sources of misinformation, pose as a very widely read and learned man. No one cross-examines him. No one shows up his pretentious ignorance; and his flock is, sooner or later, composed only of those who have not detected the imposture and stayed away. There is an immense amount of this pulpit imposture, and it cannot be for the glory of God. It is not demanded that the preacher should know everything. But the preacher should be honest. He should not pretend to know what he does not know. There are thousands of young men who sneer at all preaching because they have detected in so many preachers this crass pulpit bunco game. The pulpit's place is in the centre of the church. Not in a corner or to one side. It is not a loosely built affair to reach the market or the forum, but to form the centre and inspiration of all the numerous activities of God's own Church. It has authority only as it resounds with God's message. It exceeds its power and becomes impotent when it attempts to claim for the preacher's private "views" and opinions the reverence that belongs alone to the truth of God. It is a very real channel of divine authority. But only when it fulfills divine conditions. And God no more gives the modern pulpit an infallible authority in discussing science, rationalism, higher criticism, and political economy than he gave his prophets of old an infallible message about geology, astronomy, or history. We may need to discuss these things as did the prophets of old. When we do, like them, we may easily fall (in good faith) into the errors of our time, but, like them, if God's hand is guiding us, we will nevertheless read to the world the divine message in tones so certain and so triumphant that, though the world may not hear us, the few who lead the world will

All organization should be only one more way of having that divine message gain wider and wider circulation. Live God out in clubs, circles, in reading rooms and prayer-hours. The Church is the second incarnation of God. It has often seemed to the writer that some of the forms of church organization fell below this dignity. So far as they do they are weakness and not strength. The Church may be inspiration to much that is beyond her immediate range. She has from time to time erred in wandering out of her given province, and found enemies she could not there face. Her real victory will come by keeping fast hold to the few simple things committed to her. Alas that so much of the Church's strength is often spent in a vain fight with imaginary foes or with real friends! She has to do with men's lives and characters, not with their whims and opinions. She is God incarnate, the bearer of divine authority, and has only been disowned and dishonoured when she prostituted her body for political power, or turned aside to ease and luxury to rest her among false lovers. Then God took her portion from her, and only restores it to her again as she seeks once more faithfully to follow the simple mandate of the waiting Bridegroom: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"