

CHRISTIAN OBSERVER.

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Poetry.

THE PAUPER'S DEATH-BED.

Tread softly—bow the head—
In reverent silence bow—
No passing bell doth toll,—
Yet an immortal soul
Is passing now.

Stranger! however great,
With lowly reverence bow;
There's one in that poor shed,
One by that paltry bed—
Greater than thou.

Beneath that beggar's roof,
Lo! death doth keep his state:
Enter—no crowds attend—
Enter—no guards defend
This palace gate.

That pavement damp and cold,
No smiling courtiers tread;
One silent woman stands
Lifting, with meagre hands,
A dying head.

No mingling voices sound—
An infant wail alone;
A sob suppress'd—again
That short, deep gasp, and then
The parting groan.

Oh, change!—oh, wondrous change!
Burst are the prison bars—
This moment *there*, so low,
So agonised, and now
Beyond the stars!

Oh, change!—stupendous change!
There lies the soulless clod.
The sun eternal breaks—
The new immortal wakes—
Wakes with his God.

Doctrine and Duty.

ON SERMONS.

[FOR THE CHRISTIAN OBSERVER.]

Preaching, in its general sense of proclaiming or orally advocating any cause is nearly coeval with human society and human language. Before the invention of the press, it was almost the only means of in-

fluencing the public mind. Its use in the dissemination of divine truth is traced back historically to the antediluvian ages. Moses and his successors were preachers, publishing the law, and declaring the will of God in the hearing of all the people. So, likewise, the succession of prophets and public teachers, down to the days when John the Baptist "came preaching in the wilderness of Judæa." Our Lord was a preacher. In the outset of his ministry, he went into the synagogues at Nazareth, and read the prophecy of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor;" and begun by saying "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." Of the sermon he then preached, we learn that the congregation "wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth." At his departure from earth, he left it as a standing ordinance to his followers, that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations."

Preaching, as thus practised and enjoined, however, had nothing more in common with modern sermonizing, than that both imply an oral address on a religious subject. The Greek word, rendered to preach, signifies to herald, or proclaim as a public crier. Our own word preach seems to be derived from *præco*, a crier. And the manner in which the first disciples preached the gospel, is sufficiently shewn in their addresses which are left on record. They simply proclaimed to Jews and Gentiles the glad tidings of salvation—announcing the Saviour—publishing the offer—and urging its acceptance. Their preaching was not a part of stated worship, nor confined to stated meetings of a church; but wherever and whenever they found an opportunity and an audience, there these bold and zealous heralds proclaimed Jesus the Christ.

In the stated exercises and devotions of Christian assemblies in the first ages, there was evidently great simplicity and, as we would say, informality. It was not the exclusive duty or privilege of one man or one class to teach and exhort; yet there were occasions when the mutual exhortations of the brethren, and the general addresses of those who had the gift of teaching gave way to a prolonged discourse. As when Paul preached to the disciples at Troas. Though our translators use the word

preach, in this case also, it is not the same in the original scriptures, as that used in the cases mentioned above. *There*, as we have said, the word used signifies to publish as by a herald; *here*, the word used signifies to discuss a subject, to make a discourse, or to lecture as a teacher of philosophy might to his students. The former was the mode of making known the gospel to those who were without; the latter was the mode of teaching and enforcing the truth to disciples.

In process of time, as the elders acquired increasing influence in the affairs of the church, they gradually monopolized the right of preaching in both senses. The altered circumstances, also, in which the churches were soon placed, when heathenism was generally abandoned, and a certain amount of knowledge of the gospel was generally diffused, gradually obliterated the distinction we have noticed between two modes of discourse—the one proclaiming the gospel to strangers, and the other inculcating duties and doctrines to disciples. The usual assemblies consisted of believers and unbelievers indiscriminately; and discourses addressed to such assemblies became naturally of a mixed character; so that to preach in the modern acceptance of it, is generally to pronounce a public discourse on a religious subject. From the practice of using a passage of scripture as an authoritative statement of the truth to be discussed, the term preaching has still further been defined as pronouncing a public discourse, formed from a text of scripture, which discourse is styled a sermon: It is evident, however, that to preach in the modern sense, does not necessarily imply to preach in the evangelical sense. A man may deliver a thousand discourses on religious subjects, formed from texts of scripture, without once preaching the gospel, according to the ordinance of the Lord.

At what time the practice of sermonizing as it is now followed, was first introduced, we have no definite information: Doubtless there was a gradual change from the simple and informal addresses in which the first Christians endeavoured to edify one another. Specimens are extant of discourses delivered within the first four centuries, which, in general form and design closely resemble modern sermons. Neander, in his History of the Church in the first three centuries, says, "After the reading