

Our Contributors.

FIFTY YEARS OF WITNESSING FOR CHRIST IN EUROPE.—IV.

BY REV. THOMAS SIMS, D.D.

In previous articles we have referred to Dr. Craig's long experience as an evangelist on the continent of Europe as illustrating the antagonism of Popery and of Rationalism to the spread of intelligent faith and vital godliness. The aim of this paper is to exhibit the working of Religious Formalism whose influence is as ubiquitous and as antagonistic as that of either Popery or Rationalism. Even where her creed is evangelical the Church may easily become a smooth highway to perdition. By exalting sacraments, ritual, organization, ministers, symbols, or other sacred forms, personal faith and spiritual life are soon made to suffer. The emphasis which belongs to life gets transferred to ceremony and the soul of religion perishes out of its pampered and overgrown body. In the religious condition of Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, as Dr. Craig came in contact with it, this is shown abundantly.

The law in most of these countries provides that all children, those born of Jewish parents excepted, should be baptized in infancy. At fourteen or fifteen years of age they were confirmed and admitted to the Lord's Supper. Thenceforward they were full members of the Church and therefore, of course, undoubted Christians. The point of contact with Christ, according to this system, lies in the sacraments. In baptism they become children of God. In partaking of the Lord's Supper they feed on Christ. And what do they need more for life and salvation? The moral and spiritual effect of such a system may be readily imagined. The wickedest man in the parish could come forward and claim the ordinance as his right. The Holy Spirit in personal experience was almost unheard of. Few indeed could bear such testimony to the power of divine grace as he who cried, "Oae thing I know, whereas I was blind now I see!"

One pastor, apologising for the apparent moral poverty of the people and the emptiness of the very few Churches, said: "A stranger can have no proper notion of the prevailing piety of the Hamburg population. The Hamburger does not boast of his religion, or, indeed, speak much about it; but deep down in his breast is a very sincere piety. He is outspoken. He can swear a good oath and give a good blow—may spend much of his leisure time in the beer-cellar and little in church; but there is not an unbeliever in the whole town." He then went on to say that the police were very strict and saw to it that every child not born of Jewish parents was baptized. Then, when they were confirmed, at fifteen or sixteen years of age, a certificate was given them without which no maid could enter domestic service, no apprentice commence a trade, and no situation, civil or military, could be secured in the public service. Even marriage could not be contracted except on proof given of membership in the Church by confirmation and communion, and consequently there was "not a single, unbeliever in the town." And this man, who evangelized as he vaccinated, was, according to Dr. Craig's testimony, "perfectly sound in his conception of the person and work of Christ, on the inspiration of the scriptures, on the providence and grace of God, and on many other points. But ignoring the work of the Holy Spirit he bound up the efficacy of all in the Sacraments, and therefore no awakenings and no conversions took place under his preaching. The truth, as preached by him, was wrapped in such a thick mantle of ritualism that it was hidden from view."

Equally significant with this State development of sacramentarianism was that of another

pastor who published a catechism on frequent communion. "His reasons were that a communicant would abstain from any glaring sin on the day of the communion and on the previous day, as well as on that which followed. Three days thus spent without sin would count for much in the day of judgment." And that, we take it, is only the logical outcome of a system of religion whose central tenet is the validity of sacraments. Such a system will always be the adversary of evangelical truth and evangelical experience. If men can be saved by such short and easy methods few will be found striving to enter in at the strait gate of a personal acquaintance with the crucified and risen Christ.

In connection with one of Dr. Craig's meetings a notorious drunkard was converted. Shortly afterwards the churchwarden of the parish came to the service bringing his family with him. They desired to know what it was that could change such a man as drunken Tim, and many more had been drawn to the service by a similar motive. Dr. Craig had not been preaching long when a sob was heard. It came from the wife of the churchwarden. Meanwhile tears were streaming down the husband's cheeks while the face of the eldest daughter beamed with joy. At the close of the service the young woman rose and embracing her mother said, "Father, mother, it is all true. I know it!" "I cannot comprehend it," the father said, "It is too wonderful." "How often," said the mother, "Have we repeated the words that Jesus Christ died for our sins, and we did not know what they meant?"

The preacher was invited to go home with them, where he "expounded the way of life more perfectly," and soon the whole family were rejoicing in the Lord. When the pastor of the parish heard of it he was in a great rage. He said, "It was all very well to convert drunken Tim, but think of the presumption in Dr. Craig of converting the most respectable family in the parish. If that goes on, why we are none of us safe!" Finally the bishop was sent for to quiet the parish down. The diocesan was happily Bishop Koopman, of Holstein, a man who had a personal knowledge of the grace of God, and he made haste to discharge his duty. "He arrived at the appointed time and preached in the Church, which, for the first time in the memory of the oldest inhabitant, was crowded to the door. Taking for his text the words, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,' he went on to describe the nature, necessity, evidence, agency and fruits of the new birth.

"Then falling back for illustration on his own experience he described the piety of his parents, the faithfulness of the minister who confirmed him, but how he was still without God and without hope in the world. Proceeding, he described his work at college, what care he took as a preacher in the preparation of sermons, and what little effect they produced because he omitted the only subject that could change the heart of his hearers. He then gave a brief description of how he was awakened and what discoveries he made when he came as a guilty, helpless sinner to the cross of Christ. Then all within was made new.

"The congregation returned home that day saying to each other, that if a Bishop required to be converted before he was of any use, how much more must a peasant or tradesman need this great change."

These pictures of a people sunk in the degradation of religious Formalism in the land of Luther contain lessons for the churches of Canada. All religious movements begin in fiery energy and progress rapidly. Then they take on respectability and cool down. Finally they freeze into formality and their adherents go on doing the things their father's did because the fathers did them and because it is easier and more respectable to go on in that way than to stop. There never was a religious

reformer, however fervent, who was able to impart his own fiery energy to his followers in succeeding generations. Not Martin Luther, nor John Knox; not John Robinson nor John Wesley. Every generation, every individual needs to be baptized anew from the fount of divine fire. And the moment any individual or any Church ceases to realize its perennial privilege of access to the source of all spiritual inspiration and its hourly dependence on the divine quickening, there begins a process in which freedom is exchanged for stiffness and energy of life for the lifelessness of sacred forms. More love to Christ, increasing diligence of communion with God in prayer and study of the Word, with new baptisms of the Spirit are the only conditions under which Anglicanism or Methodism, Presbyterianism or Congregationalism can be prevented from stiffening into bodies in which there is the form of goldness without the life.

THE PREACHER AND HIS PLACE.

BY REV. W. G. HANNA, D.A.

Judging by use and wont there would seem to be an anomaly in the appearance of this book. It consists of a series of lectures on preaching by an Episcopal clergyman in a Congregational Theological Seminary. Let us hope that the last trace of anomaly will be lost here, and that such fraternal interchange will be no longer the exception. The lecturer has been selected not only because of his liberal views, but chiefly because of his recognized ability. He is a fluent extemporaneous speaker, and pastor of St. Bartholomew's Church, which is the most conspicuous institutional church among the Episcopallans in New York City.

The Lyman-Beecher Lectureship has produced many excellent books, and in practical purpose this will not suffer by comparison with any that have preceded. It is a remarkably fresh and suggestive book. It has an atmosphere of open-air contact with living issues, rather than ideal theorizing in the study.

The title exactly represents the theme, and the purpose is "to determine the distinctive place and work of the minister in the economy of modern life."

If the preacher is to do his duty in the present, he must take his true place in relation to the past. For he is in some respects conditioned by its historic situation as well as endowed with its heritage of privilege. He must maintain fealty to its doctrines and symbols in the light of modern advancing theological thought. Taking these as his starting points he is to think them through anew with a broader range of meaning. To this subject the opening lecture is devoted.

But the preacher is to face the present not the past. It is to-day, not to yesterday, he is to preach, but to a society that cares less about preaching than was cared yesterday. It needs preaching just as badly, but does not think so. The preaching for to-day must not deal with the life of yesterday, but with that of to-day, grapple with its problems, its duties, its dangers. What the people of this present time need is "the religion of Jesus Christ presented not so much to help them to die right and get to heaven when they die, as to help them to live right and to get into heaven before they die." This is an age in which unbelief is *debonair*, in which the material is the chief object of pursuit, but the visible does not rest fully in the invisible. Hence the sadness of much of our modern life. The preacher should not complain of the present but accept the situation and seek to improve it. In order to do so he must be alert, sympathetic and in full touch with the needs and conditions of the present. For those who wish this equipment our author furnishes excellent advice in his second lecture.

* "The Preacher and His Place." The Lyman-Beecher Lectures on Preaching, at Yale University, 1895. By Rev. David H. Greer, D.D. Cloth, 252 pages, price \$1.50. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York; Wm. Briggs, Toronto.

The question next considered is: What should be the message of the Christ: pulpit to-day, and how should the preacher present it? It must be a living message; the same old truth as in former days; not abstract forces but clothed in flesh and blood. The preacher must live in his message and he must never forget that to-day "the distinctive power of the pulpit is its personality, a personality that has made the truth its own and given it life and power and confirmatory sanction. The force of reason may be parried, but the power of living personality is irresistible. This life is that of the spirit dwelling in the preacher.

The relation of the preacher to other messages demands attention, and marked attention is given it here. Dr. Greer holds that all truth should be regarded as religious, for it is all a revelation of God. The Bible must be regarded as a Divine revelation in a unique distinctive sense, but there should be a receptive attitude to all contributions of truth from every source, to make it all religious. This is necessary if we are to make, as we should, everyday-duty and everyday-life truly religious. We should remove the labels which set off some things as secular over against others as sacred—all should be regarded as sacred.

But how is the message to be prepared?

(1) The preacher must study his Bible as a book for to-day, a book of facts for all time, but especially a book of principles that are needed for the direction of life in this present hour. (2) He must use sanctified imagination to apply it to present wants and conditions. (3) He must study diligently other books and other things outside the Bible that they may help him and his people to understand it. (4) He must become intimately acquainted with the human life of to-day.

To these general directions are added valuable hints on the special preparations to preach—not simply to sermonize but to preach. Their value lies in their exceedingly practical character. For they embody the results of Dr. Greer's own accurate observation and extensive experience. Of course some of this information is to be found elsewhere, but much of it is stated here for the first time and will be found fresh, stimulating and highly instructive.

The lecture on "The Preacher and his Parish" is packed full of wise directions. He is to regard his parish as the special place to which God has appointed him, and more than this, the instrument through which he is to work for God in the salvation of souls. Let him not fail to use that instrument to its highest efficiency, lest he find himself like the servant in the parable who hid his talent in a napkin. How, then, is he to make his parish, to the utmost possible limit, the most useful? (1) Find out what his parish can do and develop these activities, not others that may be unsuitable. This will require his best powers of study, observation and invention. (2) Find out the right persons to do this work and begin with one whom he has informed and interested. (3) Transfer to others all he can and keep only what work he must do personally. (4) Learn the art of judicious postponement; of what he cannot do at present. To these suggestions the lecturer has added wise necessary cautions.

The closing lecture deals with a subject almost untouched in other works, viz., how the preacher is to make the most of himself. On no subject is direction more needful. More power is needed in the preaching of to-day. Personality is the source of power, and the preacher is sacredly bound to develop to the highest all his own personal force. This is not easy, because the tendency of our life to-day is to merge the individual in the society, the organization, the corporation. The tendency is to corporate life and effort. To effect this the preacher must "by a fixed and steady purpose, serve the human life about him, resolve to minister unto others rather than have others minister unto him." Let the ministry be to