

shall not return void? Where is the adequate proof in lives transformed and bent upon the Father's business? What is lacking in the sermon to make it the perfect instrument of the Holy Spirit? Or to put the truth in another way, what was it in the word that made your heart thrill with wonder and filled you with a solemn joy as you spoke to men? It is all summed up in one word—*reality*. A message for the hour is reality in pulpit speech.

We must be real—real in our manhood and real in our speech, or men will have none of us. It is the age spirit; a robust, fearless spirit of search, trying ever to get behind mere phenomena of mind and matter to the stability which nothing can move. "He had supreme regard for a fact," was said of the late Dr. Peters, of Hamilton College; and in his own sphere of toil he was a type of the best minds of the generation, in his indifference to theory, his scorn of shallow pretence, the eager, painstaking, persistent search for truth, for actuality.

It is a spirit that tries men and institutions and creeds, seeking ever for deeper reality. It is rightly impatient of verbiage, has pricked many an ancient windbag, and has turned ambitious style into faded finery. It has swept the nimbus from the head of the clergy and challenged the privilege of the cloth. It makes severe demands upon the ministry of thought, disciplined speech, spiritual taste; but a virile faith glories in it. Is the minister less? The man is more, and truth will get a better hearing. Never has the heart of man been more restless or more open to what promises the light. The fires of criticism—they are God's fires to separate the precious from the vile, that the mouth of His servants may be as His mouth. Who does not wish everything false and unreal to go out of his creed, out of his life, out of his speech!

Reality in pulpit speech means reality in the message, reality in the expression, reality in the utterance.

I.

The message comes first: the living message from the living Lord. The preacher above all men is the man with the open vision, the man with the message. From the realm of spiritual thought and pure inspirations, the land of light and peace and nobleness, he comes to men in their temptation and distraction with the sure word of prophecy.

It is commonplace to say that the message must be scriptural, but it may be by no means commonplace to have it so. It means the essential, saving truth of Scripture, not some petty side-light, some small and curious bric-à-brac of truth, but the primary and eternal truth of God and man. It hardly needs saying that the reality of thought, the vivid concept of God's Word in the Scripture demands the best in the man and all in the man; that no hasty skimming of books and papers, no dilettante idling over polite literature will lodge God's thoughts in the mind in their vitalizing reality. The minister is called to be the student of the Word.