

Religious Romancing.

Power to persuade is the preacher's greatest gift; and it is often his greatest temptation. He is controlled by the purpose to make his hearers believe as he does and do what he would have them do. He is fully convinced that what he believes is true and what he would have them do is right. When their minds are open and their sympathies stirred, then the preacher is moved to support his argument by the most impressive facts and to give the greatest force to his appeals. Then romancing is most easy, while its results are most vicious.

Recently a minister was persuading a susceptible congregation of Christians to devote themselves to evangelistic work. He told them of one woman who, only the other day, was stirred by a deep bereavement to labor with her neighbors in a great city. Already, he said, tens of thousands have been converted and the greatest revival is in progress there that has been known for a generation. That same week we were in the company of two pastors of churches in that vicinity. They talked of the religious conditions of that city and of the work carried on in it. But neither of them appeared to have heard of this revival now going on.

We have heard from representatives of missionary societies accounts of marvelous wickedness in frontier communities and of wonderful transformations through the labors of missionaries and the planting of Sunday schools and churches. Afterward, visiting these same communities and reciting what we had heard of some of the inhabitants, we have found them unaware of the former turpitudes of their neighbors and unconscious of the changes described. There had been changes worth all the money and labor expended, but the facts as colored by imagination were removed from the realms of the marvelous. We have heard missionaries describe achievements by themselves or their fellow laborers which would have been physically impossible without miracle.

We were present in a Sunday-school meeting where a man arose in the audience and described experiences of boys in his class who had suffered from the cruelties of their parents and had made great sacrifices in order to attend the school, and who had given up many things for Christ's sake. The address was simple, straightforward, pathetic and the speaker was deeply affected. But most of the audience sat unmoved. We were told that he had often rehearsed these stories, that some of them were known to be untrue and that probably the others were mostly imagined.

It is unnecessary to cite further examples of this sort of romancing. They are altogether too common. We have been prompted to write this editorial by several protests recently made against this practice.

But the fault is not to be charged wholly to evangelists and representatives of missionary work. Unreasonable demands for the marvelous are constantly pressed on them. This generation, like that in our Lord's time, is constantly calling for signs. Those who are invited to win souls for Christ or to give money to aid others to do so want evidence beforehand that marvels will follow. In the Holy Land, tourists often blame the natives for pointing out the exact places where great events of Bible times occurred, though different guides are apt to assign the same events to different places. But many travelers employ and pay well the natives who show them these places with confidence, and refuse to employ those who do not. In all lands, the greatest inducements are held out to those who make religious life and work most marvelous.

The gravest consequences of religious romancing are their effects on those who have discovered that things they have been urged to believe are not true. Many who are called gospel hardened have been made so by reaction against exaggeration prompted by religious zeal. Many who are impervious to appeals to give are not ungenerous or indifferent to need, but doubtful about the facts presented to persuade them.—Congregationalist.

Are You Praying in Vain?

"He gave them their request"—to how many of us that would seem like blessing. Yet in the Psalmist's picture it is the forerunning word of judgment:

"They lusted exceedingly in the wilderness,
And tempted God in the desert,
And he gave them their request;
And sent leanness into their soul."

To have what we request seems to many the picture of a perfect prayer. It would be paradise to sway Omnipotence to our desire. But the perfect prayer, as Jesus taught it, begins with a petition for the coming of God's Kingdom and the doing of his will. If we seem to be praying in vain, it may be because of God's mercy, who will not grant us our unwise requests. "God's 'No' is as good as his 'Yes.'" His denial may be the only merciful answer to our mistaken thought of what we need.

The right and perfect prayer includes far more than petition, and its petitions are only right so long and so far as they acknowledge the loving sovereignty of God.

We do not come as to a banker, in whose hands we have a balance which we may draw down to the last cent; but to a Father whose stores are boundless, but whose wisdom is to be the final arbiter of choice.

Wrong prayer sets our wisdom and desire as the measure of giving. It is not always denied, even when it asks for hurtful things. Right prayer comes in humility and confidence, and asks from its own point of view for what is needed, but always in submission to the loving will of God. Right prayer is always heard, but petitions which are right in spirit may be unwise in choice, and the loving kindness of God may deny them for our good.

Prayer and petition are, therefore, whole and part. Prayer is the approach to God, seeking communion. Petition is the part of prayer which asks for gifts. No man ever drew near to God but God drew near to him. Is it wise to pray? That is a question whether we shall live our lives alone. Prayer is communion. God's children cannot live without it. Is it wise to ask for definite gifts which we desire and need? That is a question of our faith and our humility. If we ask from the level of our own judgment—as if we had all knowledge—it must needs be that many of our petitions will be mistaken. No man in sober second thought would wish God to grant ignorant and foolish requests. That he could only do in judgment, not in mercy. But no prayer and no petition urged in simple faith and humble acquiescence in God's loving will can ever be in vain.—The Congregationalist.

A Consecrated Life.

Who can estimate the good accomplished in such a life, especially when, in God's mercy, it is continued many years? None but the Omniscient Mind can follow the lines of moral influence and power. The Christian throws the pebble of prayer into the ocean of Divine providence, and the influence is felt in every direction, widening and deepening along the course of eternal ages. Our mission is not to trace out results, but rather to create and put in motion influences. We spin the threads of life, but God weaves them, and in designs of his own. By simple faith we must do our work, and then leave the results with him. We may have only "five loaves and two fishes," but under the quickening and directing power of the divine Spirit these are sufficient to feed the multitude with many baskets of fragments remaining. Causes are constantly creating changes in the material world, but in all the changes created there is no loss—not a particle of matter is wasted. Through the power of heat a quantity of water is converted into steam, and this passes beyond the reach of human vision and even the power of human knowledge. So the power of divine grace, acting upon the human soul, generates influences which radiate the wide expanse of God's spiritual kingdom, but in ways unknown to finite minds. Wonderful beyond the power of human thought is the web woven from the threads of every human life. Eternity will not be long enough to trace all the threads in this marvelous web. What inspiration dwells in this thought! What a powerful motive it presents to the people of God to purer devotion and more complete consecration in his exalted service!—Leander Hall.

Teachers that Boys "Hate."

A boy said, the other day, that he "hated two kinds of teachers"—the "oh-dears" and "my-dears." A boy is nothing if not courageous, and he expects and admires that purity in others. He detests whining and worrying, weeping and weariness, in a word, all the weary varieties of "oh-dearing." The teacher who frets at the weather, objects to the class-room, finds fault with the superintendent, and the secretary, and the ways of the librarian, not only sets a bad example, but earns dislike; for when did flies ever love vinegar, or boys dull faces? No. Set your face like a flint to look pleasant, no matter how hard it hurts you to do it. "Speak like you do when you laugh," begged a little sick child from her chamber, on hearing a neighbor's plaintive inquiries below stairs. It is good advice for everybody. Train your voice to notes of exultation. With a gospel of gladness, it is a shame to go about drooping at the mouth corners. It is not strange that the patronizing and too demonstrative teacher should be another object of boy's detestation. No healthy boy cares for coddling and petting, except at bed-times, possibly, and by his mother. Talk sense to a boy. He will respect it and you. A little fellow of four, who had just graduated out of kilts, and appeared at the door of the primary room in all the glories of rubber boots and many-buttoned "ulster," came home in high dudgeon, complaining that the teacher "acted like he had on dresses," and never noticed his new "ulcer." Teachers of junior and intermediate grades do well to remember carefully the sudden access of manliness that comes with promotion from the kindergarten and primaries, and as far as possible refrain from treating these little men as if they "had on dresses."—Sunday-school Times.

You Are Always as Young as You Feel.

People grow old by thinking themselves old. When they reach the age of forty, fifty, or sixty, they imagine they look like others of the same age, and that they soon will be useless, unfit for work, and unable to perform their wonted duties. As surely as they think this it will come true, for thought is creative. How many of us can say, with Job: "The thing which I greatly feared has come upon me?"

The time will come when children will not be allowed to celebrate their birthdays; when they will know that by thinking themselves young they will remain young, and that they will cease to grow old when they cease to believe in old age. The body is built up of beliefs, and our convictions are stamped upon every fibre of our beings. What we believe, what we think, that we are; so people who remain young in spirit never grow old.

Not one of a hundred students, of whom the writer was one, under Oliver Wendell Holmes, at Harvard, ever thought of him as an old man, although he had then passed his eightieth birthday. His spirit was so young, and he was so buoyant, so fresh and full of life, that we always thought of him as one of ourselves. His vivacity and joyousness were contagious. You could not be in his presence five minutes without feeling brighter and better for it. The genial Doctor never practiced medicine, yet he did more to relieve human suffering than many practicing physicians. His presence was a tonic; it was a perpetual delight to be near him.—Success.

Life.

Let me but live my life from year to year,
With forward face and unreluctant soul,
Not hesitating to nor turning from the goal,
Not mourning for the things that disappear
In the dim past nor holding back in fear
From what the future veils, but with a whole
And happy heart that pays its toll
To youth and age, and travels on with cheer.

So let the way wind up the hill or down,
Though rough or smooth the journey will be joy,
Still seeking what I sought when but a boy,
New friendship, high adventure, and a crown,
I shall grow old, but never lose life's zest,
Because the road's last turn will be the best.

—Harry Van Dyke in The Outlook.

A Man Named John Wesley.

In one of her lectures, Frances Willard told the story of a young nobleman who found himself in a little village away off in Cornwall, where he never had been before. It was a hot day, and he was thirsty, and his thirst increased as he rode up and down the village streets seeking in vain for a place where something stronger than water could be had.

At last he stopped, and made impatient inquiry of an old peasant who was on his way home after a day of toil.

"How is it that I can't get a glass of liquor anywhere in this wretched village of yours?" he demanded, harshly.

The old man, recognizing his questioner as a man of rank, pulled off his cap and bowed humbly; but nevertheless, there was a proud flash in his faded eyes as he answered, quickly, "My lord, something over a hundred years ago a man named Wesley came to these parts," and with that the old peasant walked on.

It would be interesting to know just what the nobleman thought as he pursued his thirsty way. But what a splendid testimony was this to the preaching of John Wesley! For more than a century the word that he had spoken for his Master had kept the curse of drunkenness out of that village; and who can estimate the influence for good thus exerted upon the lives of those sturdy peasants? What nobler memorial could be desired by any Christian minister?—Epworth Herald.

The Good Side.

"If I can get on the good side of him!" said a young man half-jestingly.

"That is the only side you have any business on—with anybody," answered his older companion.

Whatever the fragment of conversation might mean, there is a sense in which the statement of the last speaker is true. Every nature has its good side, or, at least, its better side, however faulty that may be, and whatever association we have with any fellow-being should mean the awakening, so far as lies in our power, of his higher self. His beliefs, his education, his aims, may be very different from our own, but somewhere along the line of experience, hope, or desire must lie a little point of common ground where we can meet with sympathy instead of antagonism.

It may not be easily found, indifference is not likely to discover it, but every life with which we come in contact is worth studying—must be studied—if we would bring to it any real helpfulness. It is our business to find the "good side" and be on it.—Forward.