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Clergymen and City Editors.

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AMOS. P. WILDER, a well known newspaper man of New York, not long ago read a paper before the Congregational State Conference of Maine, on the personal relations which ought to exist between clergymen and the city editors of the local papers. Probably few clergymen have ever thought that perhaps it might be a duty, or an opportunity, to cultivate the acquaintance of the city editor. The general view of the average clergyman is that the city editor ought to cultivate his acquaintance. It is a popular maxim with many clergymen that if a sermon is worth reporting at all, it is worth detailing a reporter to hear it. It is true that many clergymen are good natured, and when they find that a reporter assigned "to do" one of their sermons, has by some chance missed it, will, tired as they are, give him a synopsis of its main points. This is regarded by them as simple benevolence, an act of supererogation, quite beyond what can be reasonably expected of them. But to go out of their way to cultivate the city editor, and to secure for their sermon—not simply for some unusual sermon on a "live subject," a "topic of the day," such as the Briggs case, or the Sunday opening of the World's Fair—regular publication in Monday issues, that is a view of it quite apart from anything included in the usual conception of clerical opportunity. They would even criticize it as seeking newspaper puffery—as bordering on a sensationalism. Now, Mr. Wilder's point of view is just the reverse of this. He believes that a report of the ordinary sermon has its place in the ordinary news of the day, and when it finds that place, will prove an influence for good. Mr. Wilder understands the natural clerical disgust with the kind of sermon usually selected by the city editor for his biggest display type, and hence with all idea of utilizing the city editor for the dissemination of religious truth. As Mr. Wilder pointedly put it in addressing the disgusted clergyman:

"Your sermon on 'The Influence of the Spirit,' which may represent years of thought, and which the Andover Review would be glad to print, fails to impress the wise man who conducts your newspaper, while an able effort by the preacher down the street on 'Shall we Dance?' or 'The World, the Flesh and the Progressive Euchre Party,' is given columns of space, with a 'scare' head, picturesquely ornamented with a cut of the gifted orator, conveniently labelled."

"But," as Mr. Wilder makes haste to add, "the editor looks at the matter very practically." He has an eye to the "circulation." That is his business—that is what he occupies the editorial chair for. There is no use in fighting facts. The "scare" head and the sensational sermon fit each other and will for an indefinite future.

City editors appreciate that good, short reports of Sunday sermons interest a large part of a newspaper's constituency. City editors may not think it worth while to detail reporters to hear these non-sensational sermons. But it does not follow that they would not be glad to give space to the right sort of reports of sermons, secured without the trouble of sending reporters to hear them. Indeed, the

average reporter is not a theological expert, and is not fitted to make a good report—condensed—of what a preacher desires in particular to say. He is almost sure to give prominence to the wrong part of a sermon, to distort it, if not actually misreport it. I recall with amusement the indignation of a clerical friend of mine who found on Monday morning that his text had been taken from "the Epistle of Christ to His Apostle"—which one was not specified. The reporter who made this truly wonderful blunder was a young Catholic, who had probably never before in his life entered a Protestant church. A Protestant reporter, assigned for the first time to give an account of a ceremonial in a Catholic Church, might, perhaps, have equalled that. But where were the city editor and the proof reader? It "being only a sermon" they were both careless in reading the copy. That clerical friend of mine, the reporter's victim, belongs to that class of clergymen who disbelieve in the propriety of self-reporting. This leads naturally to the rule Mr. Wilder laid down to the clergymen of the Maine State conference in regard to "sermon copy" for the city editor. Said Mr. Wilder:

"I know some preachers who each week inclose to the editor an abstract of the most effective part of their discourse. It is neatly written on one side of the paper, properly punctuated, with space left at the top for a heading, and is in ready shape to go to the hands of the printer. Copy that has to be patched up and made legible usually goes where it belongs—into the waste paper basket. Study the style of the paper and follow it. And finally don't be discouraged if the abstract is occasionally omitted. It may have been crowded out on account of the pressure of a Home Rule debate, or possibly by an interview with the lately vanquished Mr. Sullivan, of Boston. Put your pride under your feet and try again. Some very commendable people have been willing to appear foolish for the truth's sake. I would have the students of every theological school instructed in the best way to utilize the secular press in building up the Kingdom of God."

Now, this last strikes the keynote of Mr. Wilder's address. He feels, as every experienced newspaper man must appreciate, how much might be accomplished by a clergyman in touch with the city editor, toward making the secular paper a purveyor of significant religious news in the same way that it is of financial or social news. The mere printing of abstracts of sermons may seem to many clergymen a matter of small importance—although it saves the paper from a monopoly by the sensational and misreported sermon, and this to no small extent cheapens religious teaching in the eyes of the newspaper reading masses. It is certainly something to bring that teaching before these masses week after week in a dignified and appropriate form. It is a quiet assertion of the right of religion to its own place in the news of the day which, persisted in, cannot fail of an effect. There are a thousand and one Church activities, from matters of special interest in the foreign missionary field to matters of the most direct interest in local work, to which the city editor can be induced to give wide publicity when rightly approached. The active, working clergy man can appreciate how numerous are the possibilities here suggested, the hearty co-operation of the city editor being once secured.