

Perils in Funeral Discourses.

O. P. EACHES.

WHEN hearts are tender it is fitting that they should be turned to the comforts in the eternal life. The place of mourning has its opportunities for pointing the soul to the unseen and abiding realities. The place of feasting may shut the thoughts to the unseen, the place of mourning may induce deep thoughtfulness. When Stephen dies a faithful man of God, when the Christian brotherhood mourns a pillar of the faith, it is fitting to dwell on the motives that moved him, the things that made him, the imperishable elements of such a life, the certainties of the unseen. The Episcopal church makes no provisions for words from the pastor on funeral occasions. No words are heard but the words of the Holy Scriptures. There is no opportunity for injudicious words, words of foolish eulogy, words recognizing beautiful traits of character, but laying such stress upon them that the essential teachings of Jesus are ignored. But there is a distinct loss on such occasions when the pastor is retrained from words of exposition; of appeal, of unfolding the elements that make up the good man's life, the need of Jesus Christ in the life for its real success.

But it requires a wise man to rightly divide the word of truth, to comfort the sorrowing, to be loyal to the truths of the New Testament, to see to it that the teachings, fundamental teachings, of Christ are not injured. The pastor should not be a eulogist. He is called upon to be a eulogist of the Christian life, of the abiding truth, but not of dead men, however good. There is strong temptation for a tender-hearted pastor to affirm hopes for the deceased which neither his sober judgment or the truths he preaches should permit him to express. It is not the part of the minister to speak infallibly concerning the condition of men on the other side. He may and ought to enunciate the principles on which men can be saved and in accord with which men will be judged. John Huss goes to the stake arrayed in garments covered with demons, but his soul goes through the smoke to glory. A man in the church seems to be a pillar of faithfulness, months after he dies it is seen that he "lived a noble life." The temptation is for the minister to use forms of expression that only an omniscient mind might fittingly use.

If a pastor be known as a eulogist of the dead, if all beauties of character are assumed to be evidences of a Christian life, incalculable harm is wrought. Moral distinctions are wiped out and death is made to cover a multitude of sins. If a pastor makes eulogy a large part of the remarks on funeral occasions he thereby places a mortgage upon all his discourses at funerals. To be an eulogist on some occasions and not on others straightway loosens his hold on a community. The safest way is to hold up to the living a living Christ whom they need in their life. If a man be known as a good man his influence in the community will speak for him. If the pastor speak in unguarded ways, all present will instinctively think of traits of character and incidents in the life of which the pastor was not aware. As a rule the pastor sees only one section of a man's life, the Sunday side, the church side. The community often gets to know the interior of a man's life in a way impossible for a pastor. The good that a man does and is will not be buried with his bones, it will be present in a very living way at the time of burial.

Especially must a pastor be true to the teachings of Jesus. A wise minister said that he would not profess religion for a man who had never professed it for himself when living. It is no part of a minister's function to speak ex cathedra concerning a man's spiritual condition. That the pastor so frequently does speak in this way leads the gatherings at funerals to expect the speaker to give some words that will give assurance or hope that the departed had entered into God's rest. Let the pastor always make it known that it is no part of the power conferred upon him by Christ to open or shut the doors of everlasting life. The orthodox preachers who always find a title to mansions in the skies to every rich or popular or benevolent man even though he never gave any scriptural evidence of

being born again, take back in the particular what they preach in the general, arouse contempt among unbelievers, encourage neglect of religion and strengthen the hands of loose thinkers in and out of the church. A pastor who finds in natural beauties of character, in honesty and probity, in the helping hand and generosity the distinct evidences of a Christ-like character prophesying an abundant entrance into Christ's glory is undermining the foundations of the Christian faith. No one could surpass Robert G. Ingersoll in the beauty of his home life, in personal honesty, in attachment for his friends, and yet he would count it an insult to himself to regard him as a Christian. A funeral discourse that has many words for uprightness, for honorable dealing, but no words for the sinfulness of the heart, the need of forgiveness, the necessity of a change of heart, salvation through Christ, is distinctly an ignoring of the plain and fundamental teachings of Jesus, the truth and the life. Funeral discourses may so emphasize the beautiful natural qualities that often dwell richly in pagan and atheist as to create the feeling that the assertion of a distinctly Christian character is reserved for the formal utterance of a church sermon, but that for all dead people the possession of the ordinary good qualities is sufficient for salvation. In counselling the inquiring, in removing the doubts of the man in the dark, in reproving wickedness the pastor needs to be guided by wisdom. Especially when he stands in the presence of the dead does he need to be guarded in speech that he speak not unadvisedly with his lips, that his emotions do not make him disloyal to the truth, that he do not in his praise of the dead hurt the cause of Christ and impair the motives that make for Christian living.—*Hightstown, N. J.*

Rank in the Church.

OLIVER W. VAN OSDEL.

I.—The Strenuous Rank.

Those who with unabated zeal are loyal to Christ, living apart from the world, attending all the meetings of the church, unless providentially hindered, regularly observing the Lord's Supper, subscribing liberally and paying promptly to all the Lord's work, interceding for the lost, leading souls to Christ and going about doing good. They are Christ's force at work to represent Him and save the world.

II.—The Infirm Rank.

Those sensitive, slighted people who have discovered a cold church and complain of personal neglect. They want to be nursed and carried. They absorb that time and thought and care of active Christians which might be used to save the lost. They will do some work, attend church, do some paying and praying if they have some one to coax, encourage and care for them.

III.—The One Talent Rank.

Those Christians with distorted views about doctrine, piety, liberty or prudence which makes them a hindrance to the progress of the Kingdom. Read Matt. xxv: 14-30; I Cor. iii: 11-15.

IV.—The Mistaken Rank.

Those who have come into the church through some mistaken influence or advice, or some false motive. Their names are written on the church book, but not in heaven. They are unregenerated.

Christ died for us all. He freely offers to take away sin and give His righteousness and Spirit to all. The opportunity to live the Strenuous Life, represent Christ and gain an abundant entrance and inheritance to heaven is fully and freely offered to all. Everyone is free to choose.

What have I chosen?

To which Rank do I belong?

"If our church had entertainments and fairs I might then work and give." No, dear soul, ten thousand times no. This is the "wood, hay and stubble" delusion, which has robbed thousands of their reward, and served as a stumbling block for others to blunder over into perdition.

Take your Bible and feed your soul on its precious fruit. Divide with the Lord the money you have used for yourself. Go to prayer meeting.

Gather up the children about you and take them to Sunday school. Intercede with God for the lost. Take the grace and sweetness of Christ's presence into your heart and then go out and tell your neighbors about it. "But I have no gifts for this kind of work." You are mistaken. Do not let Satan deceive you and rob you of the reward and glory Christ died to give you. Ask God to help you and begin work at once.

Conditions of Divine Favor.

C. H. WETHERBEE.

IN all past history there have been times when the general state of religion, as represented by the people of God, was very low and most discouraging to the truly spiritual minded ones. Of course, there never was any necessity for such a state of affairs. Religious degeneracy, however great or small its extent, has always come about by individual remissness in duty, by departures from godly principle, and hence by disobedience to God. And when a religious people have, as individuals, degenerated into a morally bad condition, so that they are practically forsaken by God, to the extent of His withholding from them conquering power and affluent blessings, then they each need to bewail their degeneracy, confess their iniquities, humbly pray for God's pardon, and in proper ways set themselves right before God and men. I am now reading the book of Joel. This prophet devotes the first part of his book to a description of the terribly backslidden condition of the Israelites, and states the judgments of God upon them in various forms. He told the people that although they had grievously sinned against God, who was angry with them, yet He would have compassion upon them if they would turn unto Him with all of their heart, lamenting their sins and repenting of their iniquities. Then he said: "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the old men, gather the children." Further he exhorted: "Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them; wherefore should they say among the peoples, Where is their God?"

It would seem that this exhortation was duly acted upon, and now notice the result: "Then was the Lord jealous for His land and had pity on His people. And the Lord answered and said unto His people, Behold, I will send you corn and wine and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith." Other favors were also promised by the Lord.

As soon as the people heartily complied with the necessary conditions, then God granted them marked evidences of His fullest favor. We may call that a great revival. It was preceded, first, by the prophet's showing the people the gravity of their sins and God's condemning attitude towards them; second, by a call of fasting, sorrow for sin and yearning supplication for God's favor. There are many churches in our land today that need to pursue a similar course. They are an offence to respectable society; God cannot bless them as they now stand; let them humble themselves before Him and pray.

Holland Patent, N. Y.

The report which the committee on revision of the Westminster Confession will make to the Presbyterian General Assembly of the United States will state that the returns from the Presbyteries show that the church desires some changes in its credal statement, and that it is the mind of the church that the Confession shall be interpreted throughout in harmony with the teaching of Scripture that God is not willing that any one should perish, nor is it the decree of God, but the wickedness of their own hearts, which shuts some men out from the salvation freely and lovingly offered in Christ Jesus to all sinners.

The Baptists of Australia and New Zealand have had an increase of 4,042 in the last ten years, making the present membership, exclusive of West Australia, 19,420.