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OLD SERMONS AND NEW.

THE "Interior" in this period of ecclesiastical lull, has succeeded in stirring up a little breeze upon the subject of old sermons. One can almost see the editor sitting in his sanctum, at Chicago, listlessly looking over the exchanges, sweating at every pore, and wondering what to do to get up a sensation. Suddenly a thought occurs to him. It is not a great thought, as the editor in question does not believe in great thoughts at this time of the year. It is however a useful thought. He feels that there is a great deal in it, that it is just of the kind to be seized upon by every editor from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and he goes for it with the dash and vim that have made the "Interior" the bright and sparkling paper that it is.

Everybody takes an interest in sermons whether new or old. This is one of the things without which we cannot get along. It has to be classed with bread and clothing. It is amongst the indispensables. And somehow or other whether we occupy our minds much with the matter with which sermons deal or not, we have an interest in sermons themselves which we cannot shake off. To be respectable we have to go to church, and who ever heard of church without a sermon? The Prince of Wales once tried the plan of walking out of church at the end of the prayers, and just before the sermon. But it would not do. It was a dangerous innovation. John Bull felt that the sermon was needed to do full justice to the culinary operations at home, and so he proclaimed to all and sundry through the press that he must have the sermon, and that he would not tolerate such conduct even in the heir-apparent. When John Bull is in earnest he lets the people know it, and so the prince wisely did not repeat the experiment. But to a large class the sermon is more than food and clothing. They feel it to be more than *indispensable* in the sense in which we have been considering it. It is their literature. It is their mental pabulum. They would sooner part with their clothing than their weekly instruction. At all events,

if the minister from pure disinterestedness, proposed to leave the sermon out of the service in these hot days, he would be the first to hear of it. It would never do to let the parson off so cheaply. But again there is the important section of the community who love the sermon because they love the Bible, and who esteem the one as an aid to the understanding of the other. They joy when it is said to them, "Let us go up to the house of God." The sermon is a means of grace to their souls. It will be seen then that the "Interior" has made a happy hit in getting up this discussion upon sermons. It is attractive to all. It is even interesting to those who never go to hear them.

The question arises, is a sermon that has once done service, never to be repeated? Are old sermons of no use? Are they to be treated like so much waste paper? A Scotchwoman, when asked what General Assemblies were meant for, replied they were meetings for ministers to "swap" sermons. Horrified as moderators and stated clerks may be at such an answer, it is founded upon a great truth, viz., that there is such an amount of good writing and thinking in old discourses, as to give them some special value, and to demand for them some use beyond that of their first delivery. In our view they are so valuable as to make it desirable that every preacher should carefully preserve his stock. The earlier sermons of a minister are generally more elaborate, and florid than those of his mature years. They are crammed full of matter. There is a certain enthusiasm about them arising from youthful spirits. They glow with rhetorical colourings. They sparkle with illustration and allegory. They are full of poetical imagery. Let such discourses be repeated in after years, when the reasoning faculty has become more severe, and the mind no longer revels amidst the wealth and rank luxuriance of its imaginings, some of the hearers will prick up their ears and be heard exclaiming, "that reminds us of our pastor's younger days," while others will say, "we wish our minister could be like that all the time." The few who have learned to appreciate the more concise language, the more matured scholarship, and the riper thoughts of their minister, will experience a peculiar pleasure as they listen to sermons from him of a more florid caste, and which bring to their recollection the unformed qualities which gave promise of his bright and useful future.

But old sermons are of more value than this. They are the capital in trade of a minister, and ought to serve the purpose of capital in business, that, namely, of giving relief from the severe strain and pressure of one's every day work. As journalists who come into close contact with every point of a minister's life, we have here to bespeak for him the considerate sympathy of his people. Many may not know or realize that a pastorate is not a mere sinecure; that is, when its duties are conscientiously discharged. We are thankful to say we have not in this Dominion any of those fox-hunting parsons who spend the week in pleasure, and content themselves with a borrowed or bought manuscript for Sunday. To be a minister of religion in this country, means to be a working-man in the best sense of the term. It is not merely brain work with such a man. There is the

expenditure of physical force in going through the daily routine of visiting, counselling or praying with the sick. In the course of the year he writes hundreds of letters, and holds countless consultations, which do not add a cent to his too slender salary. He must have time for reading and study, that are not strictly in the line of getting up sermons. He must in fact replenish his mind with all kinds of knowledge, to keep abreast of the more intelligent of his hearers, and also to furnish richness and variety of thought, and illustration to his discourses. Then comes the special task of composing his sermons. As to the mere penmanship, it will give an idea of the work done, when we state that a sermon of thirty minutes would occupy more than twice the space of this article, that is, if printed. Many of our ministers have to get up two such discourses every week, not to mention the weekly lecture and other innumerable addresses in the fulfilment of Presbyterian and social appointments. This has to be done week in and week out, year after year. It is a most exhausting process as any one can imagine who even tries to write gossiping letters to his friends at a distance. Now, the old sermon may become a vital help in the discharge of such duties. At times the pastor will be like a well in a season of drought, dried up, and needing replenishing. He need not be dry in the pulpit—with that well-filled barrel in his study. Often he will arrive home late on Saturday with his mind scattered by parochial or presbyterial work. It is impossible to do at the fag end of the week what should have been going on all the six days. He has to choose between a non-prepared condition, and some fine rich discourse, which on a former occasion greatly edified his people. Our readers can judge for themselves, of possible interruptions arising from a pastor's own bodily or mental ailments, or from sickness in his home, or from distress in his congregation. These must be legion. It is just possible that he may have a sermon cut and ready for such an occasion, and is a mere conventionalism to prevent the use of it when he is sorely pressed for time? But we have more to say, and that not at all in an apologetic strain. It is that a sermon which is worthy of the name, which is original in so far as it expresses the thoughts of its author, which is full of philosophical meditation and valuable experience, which is at the same time a masterpiece of English composition, and which has been thoroughly made one's own for ready and effective delivery, ought in our opinion to be delivered again and again. It is worthy of an honoured place in the memory and affections of the people. We read chapters of the Bible over and over, and always with renewed interest and profit; we have our favourite authors with special paragraphs marked for frequent reference; we sing without wearying the same psalms or hymns in worship, or the same songs for personal or social gratification, and it would be strange indeed if a sermon to which we have listened for the first time with perfect delight, should have the ban placed upon its repetition. If so it is a false notion. There is no principle in it. It is a waste of what might be a valuable possession. The distinguished preachers certainly have not followed such a practice. The great French pulpитеers announced in