

EXTEMPORE PREACHING.

In his heart of hearts every preacher confesses that the ideal in preaching is that, as Carlyle said, "a man stand and speak to men." And in his heart of hearts every hearer cordially assents. From no other place but the pulpit do men tolerate a manuscript in any address to heart and conscience, or any appeal through motive to action. The advocate at the Bar who would read his speech to the jury would do so only once. He would not be briefed again. The political orator who would turn over careful pages would not find the clumsiness of the method forgiven because of the weightiness of the matter. Even in the House of Commons, full of speakers who know the arduous path of effectiveness, copious notes provoke ear-casting comment. Read speeches are forbidden. The well-based feeling in all men's minds is that of Carlyle when he threw aside his pages prepared for his Rectorial address to the students of Edinburgh University, and delivered the most moving message any Lord Rector ever gave. He felt himself in shackles. All men understand the criticism passed by that famous preacher, Stewart of Cromarty, when, as Hugh Miller tells us, he addressed his brother, also in the ministry, as "The Rev. James Stewart, Reader of the Gospel, Pilchory."

The list of extempore preachers includes all the great names of early days and the great majority of more recent years. We need not go back to Chrysostom, Ambrose, Saxonarola, nor cite Huss, Luther, Ridley, Latimer, Knox. In such primitive times men's minds were in no other way to be approached. But in our modern days, when we read more widely, if not more deeply, the preacher without "the paper" still keeps his pre-eminence. Robertson of Brighton, Spurgeon, Parker, Maclaren, Hugh Price Hughes, George Matheson, are to be added to Bersier of Paris, Guthrie of Edinburgh, Agostino of Florence, Beecher of Brooklyn—to name only those whose day's work is done. Nor can it be said that the men who are holding the crowds today differ from their predecessors. They must at least seem not to read. Still more significant is the fact that, although the sermon loses one-half its power when no longer spoken by the brilliant and magnetic voice, the message of the extempore preacher is more powerful when printed than that of the man with the manuscript. The issues of the best-known reading preachers do not altogether equal that of Robertson, Spurgeon, Parker, or Maclaren. Nor will they live so long. Students find that there is more in the extempore preacher's message. It has less embroidery, fewer dainty phrases, but it has no elaborate and prosy platitudes and more weight and pungency of truth. The new editions of Robertson of Brighton, whose very words have become part of the ordinary preacher's speech, are selling in thousands. Young preachers buy Newman because other men praise his style; laymen leave him much alone.

There are, however, great names of preachers who have used the manuscript. We recall Blair, whose polished periods no memory could have carried, Chalmers, Newman, Dale—who was, many thought, more moving, if less massive, in his message when he discarded his paper—Candlish, Edward Irving, Liddon, Caird, and Phillips Brooks. But the delivery of all of these, and of all who have held the people, was, as the old woman said of the preaching of Chalmers, "fell reading;" or, as in the case of Newman, it was reading to a select audience in a voice of enchanting music, with a solemn, arresting pause after every sentence, by a man whose brilliant gifts and attainments and sanctity of character held his hearers in a

worshipping reverence. Men like Wesley, with his soft voice, and Whitfield, with his clear but strident note, and Parsons of York thrilled much vaster masses only because they were unhampered by a written page. Newman and Liddon never attempted their work.

The question naturally arises, then, if extempore preaching makes for power, why do men read? To that another question may be added: Why do so many, both of preachers and hearers, declare a preference for the read sermon? The general answer is that men read because they cannot preach. If men could preach effectively, they would as quickly be persuaded to read as to use spectacles when they can dispense with them. But many readers have such bitter recollection of extempore preachers, and many preachers have such humiliating memories of their attempts, that both concur in the comfort of the manuscript. One reason for the manifest failures is that many men are fools enough to believe that extempore preaching is easier, less costly in preparation, and less straining in delivery. But extempore preaching is not extempore thinking. We are not considering the fluent and frothy word-monger who can take a text as he walks in his garden, or as he climbs the pulpit stair. Extempore thinking is as feeble and as noisy as extempore writing. The sermon which many a painful writer dashes down late on Saturday night, or in the small hours of Sunday morning, content when he has filled the requisite number of pages, is as vacuous as any verbiage of the tongue. "Beaten oil for the sanctuary," as McCheyne said. No man will continue to preach either with paper or without it who does not read and think and perfect his power of expression. Even R. S. Storrs of Boston, whose rolling periods have a perfect balance, attained his ease only after years of drill with his pen. Spurgeon kept up his fertility and his pellucid English only by incessant study and discipline. The extempore preachers who fail are the men who will not toil.

Another reason why many fail is that their speaking faculty is weak, and has never been cultivated. We all sympathize with the man who, listening to a halting preacher discoursing on Naaman the leper, became so creepy with nervous fear lest the preacher should break down that he felt himself prickly with leprosy before the twenty minutes' family was done. Few men can accept Professor Bruce's counsel to his class, when insisting on free speech in the pulpit, that they should thank God for what they forgot, for if they could not remember it, how could they expect others to carry it in their minds; and then he added, more euo, "most likely it was not worth remembering." Yet it remains that many men who are helpful, wise, even moving preachers, would be paralyzed in a pulpit if they found that they had left their manuscript behind them.

To sum up, it must be clear that, could men preach as a French lecturer speaks, with a glass of water as his sole resource, or as Professor Edward Caird addressed his rapt and stilled class, with his notes on the desk, but his large, dark eye suffused with thought and his voice rising and falling in expressive modulation, no man would read or ask reading. But cultivated audiences and congregations who wish clear, well argued, unemotional teaching get from the average man what they want, and perhaps need, better when he has a manuscript before him. Yet when the preacher can speak, or can deliver what he has written so as to make men forget that it has been written, as Guthrie did, the most academic assembly will listen with

deep pleasure. And it remains true, with still more cogency and significance, that to the preacher with the manuscript many topics are forbidden. A man may reason, argue, denounce, expound from a paper, but the evangel—the warm, glowing, pleading message which calls to faith in God—can be preached, and is, in point of fact, preached only by men who speak out of hearts quickened by the sight of men's faces to an urgent passion. It may not be safe or fair to press the instance too far, but neither as He preached from the ship to those on the shore, nor as He spoke to the disciples on the mount, could the Preacher of preachers have used a manuscript. A generation of extempore preachers of skill and taste would fill the churches again.—Scottish Review.

URGENCY IN PRAYER.

By C. H. Wetherbe.

Even those people who are not Christians will urgently pray God to deliver them when they are in great danger of some kind, but it is not because they either love God or love to pray to him. They are urgent because they feel the need of help from a source which is higher and greater than anything human. This is not a wholly commendable kind of urgency in prayer. The true kind is that which has place in the heart of a genuine Christian; but even such a person is not, in many instances, habitually urgent in his praying. His prayers may not be formal and languid at any time, but at times they are destitute of an urgent spirit. In many cases this fact is owing to a condition of mind and body which is not favorable to earnestness and persistence. Then too, some objects of prayer are much more likely to incite urgency than others are. Nevertheless, all Christians ought to be a good deal more urgent in prayer than much of the time they are.

The late Prof. O. S. Stearns, in a sermon on the Gift of the Holy Spirit, said "you have prayed, O, yes, you have prayed, but have you asked, asked with the importunity of a mendicant; asked as you would for the life of your child; asked as you did for the forgiveness of your own sins? With the Spirit of God within you, with the Spirit of God willing to help your very infirmities, with the Spirit of God prompting you to ask for Him more and more,—yes, bidding you to summon a whole world in its blindness before your soul's eye until you fathom the mighty wonders stupended upon your asking—have you as yet even asked once?"

O, how lazy in prayer we oftentimes are! How frequently do we scant our prayers! We act, too often, as though prayer were one of the least important matters of our life, and that we can scarcely afford to spend much time in that capacity. If we saw God as largely and clearly as we ought to see Him, and more fully realized the worth of human beings, we would much more urgently pray God to save people from sin and death, and also to make us far more useful to humanity around us and beyond us. Pray for that urgency of spirit.

One of the impressive things about the greatest engines is the silence with which they do their work. The stars, rushing through space with a force we cannot even imagine, do so in silence. The same thing may be observed in regard to the work which is done in the world. The most powerful is always very quiet. The great spiritual ministry of the Christian Church is carried forward with very little noise. Noise is not the same as power; frenzy is not power.