

pion of Hopkinsianism, had a creed which has hardly survived him, and with which I certainly have no sympathy; but he knew how to preach as few other men have known. He preached on an amazing diversity of subjects, many of them in form as unevangelical as the spiritual kinship of Jeroboam and Thomas Jefferson, or the alleged iniquities of the Democratic party of his time; but he never failed to show how his main proposition is a corollary of some dogma in his regard fundamental, or to draw from it practical inferences for the consciences and the conduct of his hearers.

Do you want to refute error? Preaching against it may be successful. But if you have nothing to put in its place, you leave, it may be, a void in the very region of thought which, on ethical or spiritual grounds, your hearers most need to have filled. Moreover, this region may not remain void. It offers room for any kind, number or range of misbeliefs,—not infrequently for an occupancy like that ascribed to the craft of the evil spirit in the house from which he has been expelled, which he finds “empty, swept and garnished,” all ready for such worse tenants as may seek admission there.

The only fit way of assailing error is, first, to obtain for yourself definite notions on the subject-matter of the error, then to state, explain and prove them, and, finally, to leave the error to its own destruction. Two edifices cannot stand on the same foundation. In the very process of building with materials that will sustain the wear and tear of time, you displace the meaner materials that cumber the ground,—the “wood,” thatched and plastered with “hay and stubble,” which, when its compactness is loosened, is swept out of the way by the first wind. But it is much better that you let the wooden edifice, though mean and shabby, stand undisturbed till you can replace it by “precious” building “stones,” with ornaments in “gold” and “silver.” Such positive wrong belief as an intelligent and devoutly-minded person in this nineteenth century is likely to hold on any important religious subject, is immeasurably to be preferred to no belief at all; for the error, if not itself a half-truth, still retains its place solely by virtue of some element of truth which it embodies, and which its dilution or distortion cannot wholly neutralize.

I would next say to the preacher, Avoid, so far as is possible, writing a sermon simply because you have got to write one. I have known ministers who seemed to look on Sunday as a school-boy or a sophomore regards the day for bringing in a theme. So much decently written matter, with a solemn sound, must be ready before the church bell rings, and heaven and earth are ransacked—earth oftener than heaven—to find a subject on which the required amount can be written. The result may be a well-worded essay, which, if the preacher be still a young man, may reflect no discredit on him. But if he be a parish minister, the fit motto for his pulpit will be :—