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The Modern Parson.

PART II.

(Being an Essay Written by J. SINCLAIR TAIT, M.D.)

In Part one of this Essay I endeavoured to outline in a general way the "Modern Pulpit" in its relation to modern thought and the reconstructive tendencies of the times. In further extending the subject I desire to put forth my views as to the requisite qualities of the "Modern Parson" if he is to measure up to the responsibilities, duties and demands of this wonderful and progressive age.

Those great problems of faith and unbelief, which agitate the mind and rattle the surface of Life, must be put on trial, so that the valid and reliable may be separated from the indifferent and unreal, and mankind saved from those "Sunless gulfs of doubt" into which so many are drifting to-day.

There never has been a time in the history of the Christian Church when an intelligent exposition of the Scriptures should be made, not so much in the refinements of theology, as in the essentials of simple, religious belief. Our readjustment to changing conditions demand this; so that the "Modern Parson" to be successful, and at his best, must be trained to think and act more in harmony with the spirit of the times, rather than in the theology of those fixed dogmas and mechanical standards which only cripple the mind, and stagnate the soul. We must not fear the "New Knowledge" as expressed by Darwin, Spencer, Driver and others. Neither science nor criticism can ever affect the truth and validity of the Sacred Scriptures, when rightly interpreted, or in any way lessen the life of God in the human soul.

The former has rendered a great service to man in giving him a larger control over the forces of Nature, together with a grander conception of the Universe. While the latter seeks to give us a more credible and verifiable account of the order, character and literature of the Bible, with a view of restating the truth contained therein in terms of modern philosophic thought. For we must bear in mind that the Bible is not a book of theology, but a book of religion.

Many timid Christians when brought face to face with difficulties never before considered, and confronted by truth not yet reconciled to the stand-

best virtues and qualities, whose imitation will help to insure a useful, profitable and honored life. Such a man cannot but succeed, for he is above his calling; he overtops his vocation.

In an article written by that distinguished theologian and writer, Dr. Denny of Glasgow, he offered the opinion that three elements were necessary for an efficient preacher, (a) He must know his Bible thoroughly well so as to find the Gospel in it; (b) He must be so thoroughly trained as regards his literary style, and his mode of delivery, as to command his message by its manner as well as its matter; and (c) He must be so familiar with the thought of the age as to adapt his preaching to its needs and requirements. If we analyze these requirements we shall soon discover that they are the fundamentals of a calling which require vision, humanism and indisputable learning. For in no calling must a person be more sure of his ground, and more careful in expressing his opinions, than in that of the "Modern Parson." He is forever on ground which he must make substantial by his works. He must invite confidence by his sincerity, and only when he knows himself, and his subject, can he be actually sincere.

The maxim "Know thyself" does not suffice, "Know others—know them well," is good advice.

It must be remembered that times change, and so must everything else. The preacher of to-day must be more human, and less stiff, than heretofore. The strait-laced, unbending clergyman, who fears to smile lest he should appear undignified, has but little charm in the pulpit, more especially to our younger generation. The distractions of the twentieth century are so many and varied that the Church must, in a sense, compete with them. The long drawn out theological sermons, which in other times were considered essential to the preacher's art, have lost their attractive power, and become practically obsolete. The music has gone out of them, and their liturgies are fast becoming lost. In fact the "Modern Parson" is one who must fall in as far as possible, with the prevailing fashion, and keep up with the movements of the times. Above all he must practice what he preaches, and be able to find out what most bothers the men and women to whom he preaches. He must talk to them in a practical way—not in set phrases and ready made speeches, but with spontaneity of thought, and that freedom of expression which stamps him as a sympathetic friend, who is desirous of helping them in times of difficulty and distress.

It is a mooted question how far our "Modern Parson" should go in the matter of "muck-raking." The sensational preacher, no doubt, attracts the crowd; but if he wishes to draw the crowd continuously, he must not only be sensational, but rational. The sensible man does not want an actor for his parson. He, however, wishes his minister to be full of animation and life. He wants him to deliver his sermons in a fashion which will not put him to sleep, as the droning and drivel of some pulpits do.

The social activities of the Church should receive a fair proportion of the pastor's attention, but he must not intrude too much religion into these endeavours, so as to make all Church and nothing else. While no one would like to drive the spiritual out of the people's mind, yet it must be remembered that we need change and relaxation. The Church prospers and grows if it keeps in touch with social advancement, yet the mantle of the Church must not be used to envelop these to an inordinate extent so as to lose sight of more vital things. Our "Modern Parson" must not be too radical nor too conservative. He must be able to adapt himself to changing conditions, and be able to meet his people on even ground.

He must not exploit either himself, or his sermons, too much through the newspapers, as such advertisements, like those of the vendors of quack medicines, are extremely offensive to all well thinking people.

Finally the man who thinks well and acts accordingly, who goes out of his way to help his people, and knows enough on a hot day to cut his sermon short, will be regarded by his parishioners, not only as a "Modern Parson" but a "Model" one as well.

"If the lamps are dull and pale,
The stars are shining still;
If shadows gather in the vale,
The Sun is on the hill."

Truth still abides, God is not dead,
And though old views depart,
A loftier temple domes our head,
A larger hope our heart."

The Congregational Pulpit.

On Sunday morning the Rev. Dudley B. Ashford spoke on the subject of "Mutual Helpfulness and Co-operation." He found a very appropriate text for his purpose in Isa. 41, 5-7, "Then helped everyone his neighbor; and everyone said to his brother, 'Be of good courage.' So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smiteth the anvil, saying, 'It is good.' And he fastened it with nails that it should not be moved." These words were really a description of a work-shop scene and were written in sarcasm of the heathen idol-makers' attempt to manufacture a god for themselves. But though the energy and art of these heathens may have been mis-applied, there is something to be learned from the spirit in which they worked. Note for instance the spirit of friendliness and brotherliness amongst them. Everyone said to his brother "Be of good courage."

That is the spirit which is needed in the labour world to-day. It is used to characterise the ancient guilds to a large extent; then men worked with enthusiasm and vied with each other to do the best possible work. To-day there is too much envy of the man who does more or better work than ourselves and the tendency is rather to hinder than to encourage men to do more work and better. This same spirit is needed in the churches. How rarely are churches characterized by brotherliness. Many Christians are as cold as ice-bergs and some churches are religious refrigerators. Said a young fellow to me concerning a certain church in Hobart, "I went to that church for two years and not a soul spoke to me." And said another, "There's no room for me in that church; I'm not in their sphere."

There should be no social distinctions or superior cliques within the church; they all belong to one family and should be united in their love to Christ. Note also the spirit of co-operation amongst these idol-makers. "They helped everyone his neighbor; the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith." And in the church of to-day the same spirit is needed. One would think that the various denominations were opposing armies instead of regiments under the same Generalissimo. The one thing that a soldier dreads above everything else is firing into his own men; and yet that is what the churches are always doing. I for one do not look for immediate union of all the churches. So long as men are cast in different moulds so they will desire to think and worship differently. But what we do need is a more friendly attitude towards one another and more of this spirit of co-operation.

I notice that it took carpenters, goldsmiths, tinmiths and blacksmiths to make an idol. And there is scope for every kind of talent in the work of the church. We need the one talent men and women as well as the ten talent ones. A tourist expressed his admiration for Cologne Cathedral to a workman who was standing near by. "Yes," said the man, "It's a fine building and it took us many a year to build." "Took YOU?" said the tourist, "What did you have to do with it?" "Well sir, I mixed the mortar," replied the man. A Cathedral cannot be built without mortar mixers. These old idol-makers encouraged one another. "They said of the soldering, 'It is good' (R.V.) What a difference a word of encouragement makes. I remember making a fearful hash of a sermon on one occasion, at least I thought so. As I left the church feeling fearfully despondent, a lady slipped a scrap of paper into my hand on which were the simple words, 'a beautiful sermon.' It was a great encouragement; my message had helped someone at least. Friend be an encourager and an inspirer. Let us catch the spirit of these old heathen idol-makers and let us co-operate in the great work of establishing the Kingdom of God here upon earth.

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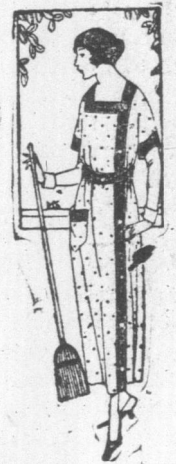
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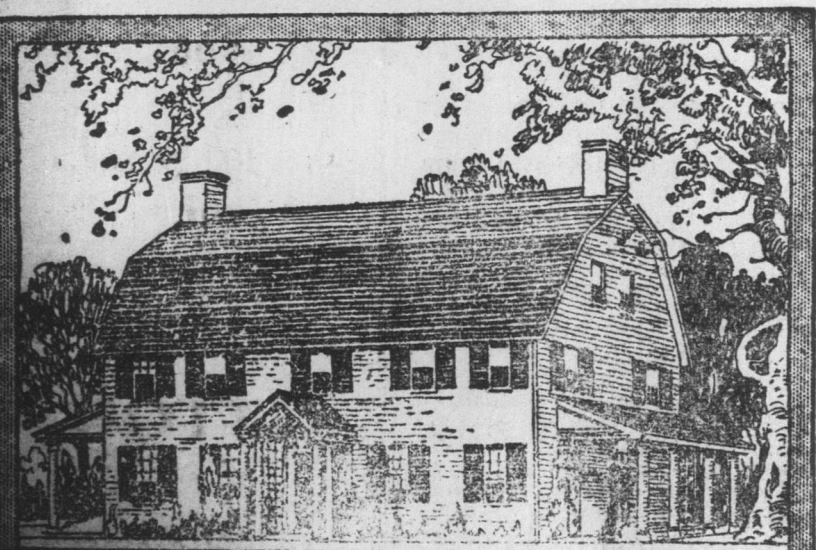
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