

Beecher's Yale Lectures on Preaching

SINS AND SINFULNESS.

I fear, this afternoon, that I may render myself somewhat liable to misapprehension, a thing so rare that I might venture upon it as a luxury, were it not for the importance of the subject. I propose to speak on sins and sinfulness, and I will profess what I am about to say by the statement that I suppose I have as deep, as abiding and as touching a feeling and sense of the sinfulness of the race and of the indispensable need of the interposition of God in man's behalf as any one can have with my faculties; and, therefore, must be understood in any criticism or statement made, as lowering the importance of the facts of human nature.

Sin is the foundation of all theology. Without it I had almost said there could be no religion, as without disease there could be no science of medicine, though there might be a science of hygiene. On the one hand are the will and government of God, on the other is the sinfulness of man. The latter is to the former almost what disease is to medicine. If, say almost, for if there were no disease there would be no remedies devised; but if man were not sinful, God and His government would still exist. It is worthy of remark that our ideas of sin, for the most part, have been derived not from the Scriptures, nor from a scientific observation of facts, but they have come down to us from the discussion of the schools, such as I remember to have been given to us in the seminary. Christ never, in a single instance that I can find, defined the nature of sin. Never did he declare that the race was universally sinful. The forms of statement regarding sin, so commonly used and supposed to be Scriptural, are nowhere to be found in the teaching of Christ. He did not preach about abstract sinfulness, but about particular sins; nor about the philosophical condition of human nature, but the peril of wrong doing. While pointing out to men their peculiar sins, he presented the recuperative power of repentance. He did not say "You are naturally depraved," but "Go, sell all thou hast and come, follow me, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." It does not have much effect on selfish, worldly men to tell them they shall receive pay in heaven. It is too long to wait. Preach to a man repentance for specific sins, and offer to him some effectual way of deliverance, and he will go away more converted than the philosophy of the schools preached to him for a century would have made him. If you to interest men, speak to them, not of things which concern equally the whole race, but of what concerns them personally. The generic idea of sin may be preached—much more the specific.

In inquiry respecting sin, the question of questions with theologians has been of the origin of evil. If all the tracts, and books, and pamphlets, and sermons which have been written on the "Origin of Evil" were piled up together, not all the pyramids of Egypt would be so large, and if all the passions excited by them were concentrated and applied to that pile they would burn it to ashes. Yet we know just as much as our fathers did about it; they knew just as much as we do about it, and neither of us know anything at all about it. Suppose the schools of medicine, instead of considering the anatomical structure of man, the nervous or bilious temperaments and the pathology of disease, should wrangle over the origin of diseases—who was first sick or how he came to be so—it would be no more a waste of time and thought than the interminable discussion about the origin of evil. All such questioning comes back to this: "Why did God make the world as he did, and not in some other way?" Of like nature are all speculations regarding that in which sinfulness consists. Is it a physical inheritance? Is a man born with a sinful nature, as one is with scrofula, or with a taint of the gout? Is it a physical secretion? These opinions are hardly held now, but there have been wordy wars over them. Then arises the question, is sin of the nature of a moral secretion? Is man born with a nature so perverted that when he begins to act he necessarily acts wrong? It would seem that if a man is thrown into the world with a nature born to strike, he is no more to blame for striking than the clock is that was made to do so. This view, however, was once taught so vigorously that men must have believed that if they didn't sin they did sin in defying the end for which they were created. Again, is sin hereditary, a common inheritance? In other words, was Adam a common reservoir, and are we the faucets? I don't undertake to discuss this subject, for I am not in the chair of didactic theology, but I will say that this view cannot be very profitable for awakening men to conversion, nor is it likely to edify them.

There was a mode of discussing sin—more prevalent formerly than now—which fills a much larger place in professional study than in preaching, namely, in connection with the subject of total depravity. Now, however much one may indulge his speculative faculty in theorizing, he must so preach a doctrine, if he would be successful, that it will commend itself to those to whom he preaches. To preach a truth so as to cast a shadow of a lie on the minds of men is to mispreach. If I say "a man is so created that the recuperative power is not in himself, but in God; that men are in need of a new birth and of such a moral sense as will tell them they do sin and have sinned," no one will object. But if I say "men are totally depraved," I shall be misunderstood, and shall run the risk of almost effacing the distinction between good and bad men, and of violating a common moral consciousness. We cannot make a mother who is devoting her days and nights to her sickly babe believe that the perfect, disinterested and self-forgetful love is a part of her total depravity. You can never make that man who works and perils himself for a friend, think that his generous self sacrifice is but an evolution of total depravity. My father used to say to me, "My son, these are only natural affections; they must be inspired and qualified by divine inspiration before they will be good." But I hold that the divine inspiration is universal; that moral and spiritual

men always derive inspiration from the divine soul, and that the affections and every part of us that is good comes directly from the ever-present spirit. So this distinction was not well founded.

Then there is the scientific theory of sinfulness, which treats of the inheritance of the spirit in the body, of hereditary transmission, of the effect on the passions of various kinds of food, climate, and other external agents. It becomes necessary that the preacher have knowledge to enable him to meet the assertions and skepticism of the new mental philosophy.

The end of preaching either sin or sinfulness is repentance. You may preach sinfulness in a measure, but sin continually. Sinfulness is generic, sins are specific, and although every man needs to know what he is, and how low, yet the specific treatment is necessary to arouse him. You can't repent of Adam's sin, but you can of your own. Every man can measure himself. When Christ preached, the Pharisee had his own specific repentance, and the thief his. His preaching made each in his own personal character feel the need of repentance. The thief learned that he must repent of, and be saved from stealing; the cruel man, from his cruelty; the lecher, from his lechuousness, and the drunkard, from his drunkenness. If you preach a common sinfulness that men say, "Yes, I did sin, but it is human to sin, you know; we are all sinners together; we'll all go together and keep step," you destroy the power of individual conscience. They think they are no more to blame than a sour apple-tree is for bearing sour apples. If you keep on preaching "All men are sinful," "All men are sinful," all will probably justify your opinion, and not one will feel sinful. It is your duty to study each one and discover the specific sins of each, that you root up the poisonous weeds, and frame and evangelize the character into a full Christian manhood.

You should preach repentance as Christ did. When men asked him, "What shall we do to be saved?" how did he answer? The answer from what ours would be! To the soldier he gave one answer, to the Pharisee another, to each that which his specific sin required. We, on the other hand, preach man's sinfulness to create a sense of universal guilt, and then point to the grand refuge. Not so did Christ. He aroused in men a sense of discontent and danger, and then preached repentance, a repentance personal and peculiar to each, a development of a new life on the basis of the old. The miser can't repent and reform as the spendthrift does.

Christ preached conjointly the necessity of repentance for specific sins and the presence of the divine power indispensable to the spiritual changer. This divine power is as the surgeon to the wounded man. He is the helper, the man cannot live unless he come. Christ did not teach men to say, "Here am I, a dry and thirsty land. I am parched and can grow no grass, or moss even, unless I have rain. And here I am waiting for rain, waiting for help." On the contrary, he taught that the divine spirit is always present to enter as soon as the soul shall open itself. From this teaching the very outcasts of society drank in hope. Religion will not take rude men of bad habits and by one sweep of the divine power lift them up instantly into a higher sphere. You can transform instantly the purpose, but there is a whole life work after that.

Next comes a consideration, not of what is sinful, but of how men can be made conscious of sin.

What will you say to the man who sits under your ministry, smiling complacently at all you say, believing that man is totally depraved, and yet is perfectly happy? How will you bring him down? There is a solid, stolid man who hears you, and is no more affected than Sinai were by the laws that were given upon it. While you are proving the universal sinfulness of the race, he unconcernedly is saying, "Our minister is doing this thing very well to-day." How will you make him feel he is a sinner, not on account of his univided dividend in Adam, but on account of personal sins? Then there is the simpering sort of a man, who is too amiable and polite to deny anything you say, yet if you appeal to him personally, he is wonderfully difficult to reach. You tell him he is a sinner, and he replies, "Oh, yes, that undoubtedly is so." You say that he needs salvation, and he answers with a smile, "You are doubtless right, sir. But don't you think it is time you should repent? Still the same smile and reply. A Western Methodist preacher used to say that when the grain leaned from him he could easily cut it with his sickle, but when the grain leaned toward him then the sickle slipped over the straw, and it was almost impossible to cut it. So the question how to reach the opposing men who are always leaning to you is one of the most difficult in your ministry. This and some kindred questions I hope to answer, in part, next week.

Sir Walter Raleigh on Wine.

Take especial care that you delight not in wine, for there never was any man that came to honor or preferment that loved it, for it transformeth a man into a beast, destroyeth health, poisoneth the breath, destroyeth natural heat, bringeth a man's stomach to an artificial burning, deformeth the face, rotteth the teeth, and to enslave, maketh a man contemptible, soon old, and despoiled of all wise and worthy men; hated in the servants, thyself and thy companions, for it is a bewitching and infectious vice; and remember my words, that it were better for a man to be subject to any vice than to it for all other vanities and sins are recovered, but a drunkard will never shake off the delight of beastliness, for the longer it possesseth a man, the more he will delight in it, and the older he groweth the more he will be subject to it, for it dulls the spirit, and destroyeth the body, as ivy doth the old tree, or as the worm that eateth the kernel of the nut.

It is not until we have passed through the furnace that we are made to know how much dross was in our composition.

A New Ecclesiastical Project.

The North British Mail of Tuesday contains the subjoined article:—

The Conservative Ministry are as yet scarcely installed in office, but already an intrigue is on foot between them and the anti-union section of the Free Church, headed by Dr. Begg, for the re-establishment of the Established Church of Scotland. Anybody acquainted with that bustling modding clergyman might have confidently predicted that he would avail himself of this favourable juncture to press his long-cherished scheme for the union of his party with the establishment. The proposals for the abolition or rather for the modification of patronage were intended to pave the way for this result, and indeed some of the more indiscreet of the anti-union made it known that if patronage were abolished they would at once return to the bosom of their "old respected mother" rather than remain in connection with a Free Church rapidly degenerating into voluntarism. It is quite possible that even though Mr. Gladstone had remained in office some change might have been effected in the law of patronage, but the sudden and unexpected advent of the conservatives to power has fired the mind of the leader of the anti-unionists to frame another more ambitious project. He has returned from his Australian voyage just in the nick of time to gather the first fruits of the conservative victory. Dr. Begg has occupied alternately the extreme left and the extreme right of the Free Church battalion. He has been pro-Unionist and anti-Unionist—National and anti-National—Educationist—Radical and Tory, by turns, and his busy brain has at last conceived a scheme, which he is now compassing sea and land to carry out, for repairing the breaches and restoring the ruined walls of our Scottish Zion.

The scheme is, in brief, to obtain the sanction of the Legislature to the principle embodied in the Free Church Claim of Rights, combined with the appropriation of the handsome sum of £750,000 a year—the produce of unexhausted tithes—furnished stipends for the Free Church ministers, who, it is expected, will in due season gradually return to the bosom of the Church from which they were expelled upwards of thirty years ago. Attempts have already been made to sound some of the leading Free Church laymen in order to ascertain whether they are prepared to turn a favourable ear to such an overture, and they are positively assured that the Premier and the Home Secretary have authorized Mr. Gordon, the new Lord Advocate to prepare with all speed a measure embodying the concessions mentioned for the consideration of the cabinet. Mr. Disraeli, it is alleged, has been induced to give his sanction to this scheme by the conviction that it was the disruption of the Established Church which ruined the Conservative party in Scotland, and the hope that the reunion of the scattered fragments of the Church the gathering of its dispersed members into one—will infuse new life and strength into his party. But he is said to have expressed his apprehension that the project will meet with the opposition of his unreliable colleague, Lord Salisbury. It is quite likely that a scheme which will virtually disestablish, but not disendow, the Scottish Church will not be regarded with much favour by the cynical and supercilious High Churchman who now presides at the India Office. But, whatever Mr. Cross who is but a juvenile politician, may say or do, it is highly improbable that an astute and veteran statesman like Mr. Disraeli will rashly commit himself to such a perilous experiment, or make Mr. Gordon or Dr. Begg his confident as to his hopes and fears. It is of comparatively little importance, however, what may be thought by politicians of either party of this notable scheme for infusing new life and vigour into the State Church. The main consideration is how will it be received by the great body of the people of Scotland? Now in the first place, there can be no doubt that the project will not be regarded with favour by the parties in the establishment itself—the old Conservatives, of whom Dr. Cook may be regarded as the representative head, and the Broad Church party, comprising no small portion of the younger clergy, who are well aware that if the union contemplated were to be carried out they might lay their account with seeing, in the course of twelve months, Dr. Begg framing a libel against Professor Wallace, and Dr. Forbes Brown, Principal Cairn to the bar of the Church Courts for heresy. Secondly, the old Dissenters—whether Presbyterians, Independents, or Baptists—will certainly resist with all their might this or any other attempt to "lengthen the cords and strengthen the stakes of the Established Church. And with respect to the members of the Free Church, for whom mainly the net is spread we would require better evidence than Dr. Begg's before we can believe that men who "with a great sum obtained their freedom," and who for thirty years have enjoyed its privileges, will now barter their liberty for a morsel of patronage. The agitation for the separation of Church and State has of late been somewhat dormant, but such a project as that just hatched by Dr. Begg will revive the Voluntary agitation with a vengeance. Mr. Disraeli's attempt when he was last in office to prop up the Irish Church by an offer to buy off the opposition of Roman Catholics and Presbyterians led directly to its disestablishment. It will be curious should his intermeddling with Scottish ecclesiastical affairs involve the established Church of Scotland in a similar fate.

A ham, well packed in pulverized charcoal, after the usual smoking, will keep for years. Butter in pots, well surrounded with charcoal, will keep for twelve months. Each atom of charcoal can absorb 1,000 times its bulk of deleterious gases.—*Hall's Journal of Health.*

There is no outward sign of politeness which has not a deep moral reason. The education teaches both the sign and the reason. Behavior is a mirror in which every one shows his own image. There is a politeness of the heart akin to love, from which springs the easiest politeness of outward behavior.

God never lays more upon any one of his children than he will enable him to bear, and if thy strength be increased proportionally, it is all one for thee to lift a pound weight or to lift a hundred pound weight.—*Elias Peliger.*

Hearing that his pastor intended to preach on the recognition of friends in heaven, a parishioner suggested that he should preach on the recognition of friends on earth, since he had been sitting in his pew twenty years without being recognized by the occupant of the next pew.—*Baptist Weekly.*

Ripening for Glory.

Some of the planets finish their rotations in much less time than others. The nearer they are to the sun the more speedily they revolve. Mercury, for instance, is not quite eighty-seven days in accomplishing his year, while Saturn takes up considerably more than twenty-nine of our years in orbiting the same common centre. Thus, some of God's converted people are soon matured for glory by their nearness to, and intimate communion with, the Sun of Righteousness. These are frequently known to outrun their brethren, and, like John at the tomb of our Lord, to reach the sepulcher, finish their course and ascend to their Master's joy at a very early period: while other saints, who do not ripen so fast, or who have a larger field of usefulness to occupy on earth, are detained from their crown until they are full of years and good work. Each of these is gathered as a sheaf of corn in its season. Observe, if thy God summon thee away betimes, his Spirit will first perfect that which concerneth thee; nor will providence apply the sickle until grace has made thee ripe for harvest. Or, if he lengthen thy thread, having much for thee to do, and much to suffer, he will show himself the God of thy old age, and not forsake thee when thou art gray-headed, for he hath irrevocably declared, "Even to your old age, I am he; and even to your hairs will I carry you."—*Isa. xlv. 5.—Topology.*

Mission of Little Children.

No one feels the death of a child as the mother feels it. The father cannot realize it thus. True, there is a vacancy in his home, and a heaviness in his heart. There is a chain of association that at set times comes round with its broken link; there are memories of endearment, a keen sense of loss, a weeping over crushed hopes, and a pain of wounded affection over them all.

But the mother feels that one has been taken away who was still closer to her heart. Hers has been the office of constant ministrations. Every graduation of feature developed before her eyes, she detected every new gleam of infant intelligence; she heard the first utterance of every stammering word; she was the refuge of its fears, the supplier of its wants; and every task of affection wove a new link, and made dearer to her its object. And when her child dies, a portion of her life, as it were dies with it. How can she give her darling up, with all these loving memories, these fond associations? Timid hands that have so often taken hers in trust and love, how can she fold them on its smothered breast, and surrender them to the cold grasp of death? The feet, whose wanderings she had watched so narrowly—how can she bear to see them straightened to go down into the dark valley? The head that she had pressed to her lips and bosom, that she had watched in peaceful slumber, and in burning heart-saddening sickness, a hair of which she could not see harmed—how can she consign it to the darkness of the grave? It was a gleam of sunshine, and a voice of perpetual gladness in her home; she had learned from its blessed lessons of simplicity, sincerity, purity and faith; it had unsealed within her a gushing, a never-obscuring tide of affection; when suddenly it was taken away, and the home is left dark and silent; and to the vain and heart-rending aspiration shall the dear child never return? there breaks in response the cold grave silence—nevermore? The heart is like a forsaken mansion, and those words go echoing through its silent chamber.

The Refiner.

There was once a little piece of gold lying hid in the earth. It had lain hid so long that it thought it should never be used, and it said to itself: "Why do I lie idle here? Why am I not picked up, that men may see me shine?"

One day a man dug it up and looked at it, and said: "There is some gold in this lump; but I cannot use it as it is; I must take it to the Refiner." When the Refiner got it, he threw it into a melting pot, and heated his fire to melt gold. As soon as the little piece of gold felt the heat of the fire, it began to tremble, and cried: "I wish I had lain quiet in the earth." But the fire grew hotter and hotter, till at last the gold melted and left all the earthly part of the lump by itself.

"Now," said the gold, "my troubles are over: now I shall shine." But its troubles were not over yet. The man took it once more, and began to hammer it into some shape. "Ah!" said the gold, "if I had been dross or common earth, I should not have been put to all this pain." "That is true," replied the man; "if you had been dross, you would not have had all this pain; but then you would not have become what you are now—a beautiful gold ring."

The piece of gold is a little child. The dross or common earth means the child's faults and weaknesses. Jesus is the Refiner: He sends trials and troubles to us to make us good and strong, and to take away our weaknesses and faults.

Pain is one of a little child's trials. If we bear it patiently, Jesus will make us better by pain. He will make you brave and gentle. Next time when you have to bear pain, say to yourself, "Jesus is taking away my faults: I must be patient."—*From Parables for Children.*

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Needing Prayer.

The daily press of our country. It is growing in influence, but not so rapidly as it is growing in iniquity and profanity, vice speaking, and every kind of evil. Before the war, as we all remember, the daily press was not favorable to evangelical religion. It had no word to speak for vital godliness. It sometimes ventured on a sneer. It was of the world, worldly. The daily press of late years is all that, and it is worse. It travesties sacred texts. It drags any subject, no matter how holy, into its own mire to amuse its readers. And more than this, it violates not only the sacredness of religion, but the modesty and purity of virtue, and indulges freely in profanity, to make a laugh. The new fashion of "newspaper wit," is leading father and father downward. The sacredness of religion, the purity of virtue, suffering, sorrow, nothing must stop the course of the joke. The daily press of our country is a most excellent subject for prayer, for a woman's crusade, if need be, of application and exhortation.—*Christian Observer* (Louisville).

Seasonable Hints on Gardening.

Winter has no sooner passed than every one possessing a patch of land considers how he will cultivate it in the coming season. In the country, the farmer is already at work with his subsoil plough, and he has decided which acres shall be sown with grain and which with vegetables. Parties owning country seats adjacent to the towns and villages along the Hudson River, in Connecticut, and Jersey, says the *Commercial Advertiser*, are just now making trips to their rural homes, to give directions concerning the vegetable gardens and flower beds. Fancy gardening has of late years become so fascinating to men of means that much money is annually invested in vegetables which cost, after they are ripe, their weight in gold. One of our representative citizens estimated the value of his cabbage raised at his country seat to be twelve dollars apiece. However, the pleasure of "seeing them grow," of exchanging the skill of expert horticulturists upon them, of feeding the soil around them with the finest guano, and then of believing that, when grown, they are a little larger and better flavored than any raised by neighbors, is the height of satisfaction.

It is becoming a favorite employment with ladies to superintend their flower and vegetable gardening to devote a certain portion of the spring days to selecting and purchasing the choicest seeds, and to oversee their starting in hot beds. The early radishes and lettuce found on so many tables before their regular season are often the product of the labor and care of the female members of the family. Since window gardening has been so successfully introduced by our leading florists, and ladies have given their attention to planting and nursing flowers, the study of horticulture has been pursued by many of them until they understand the science of propagating plants.

WINDOW GARDENING.

This is an especial appropriate season of the year to make the windows beautiful with plants. There is great pleasure in bringing spring indoors by collecting the flowers which are now in bloom in the hot house, and planting them in the handsome boxes or baskets made for that purpose. Window gardening is delightful in winter time; nevertheless, there the hardest plants suffer more or less for fresh air. At this time there are hours at noon when the windows can be thrown open, and the plants which have been housed in greenhouses will apparently speak their thanks for the drink of fresh air and the contact with the sun's rays. The plants now in blossom are the hyacinth, narcissus, tulip, daffodil, carnation, heath, violets, lilies of the valley, and several other varieties which are charming as companions in the sitting room. Shallow cigar boxes are very useful for planting seeds, and can be arranged to look nicely in the windows. In two or three weeks from this time, it will be proper to plant mignonette and sweet elysium, these fragrant and most suitable plants for window boxes. The vine seeds should then be put in the hanging baskets. They are for the most hardy vines. The morning glory is easily cultivated and is exceedingly graceful in leaf and flower. It will grow readily in any sunny window. Violets, early flowering snowdrops, forget-me-nots, and primroses are the best plants for culture in outside window boxes. The exquisite loveliness of the rose will not permit it to be omitted from the window garden, notwithstanding it is with difficulty kept in a thriving condition. Tea and China roses are the best adapted for culture in boxes.

For keeping plants healthy which are indoors at this season, close the windows of their room by three o'clock. Great attention must be paid to their cleanliness to promote their rapid growth. Flower pots need washing on the outside weekly. Never leave water standing in the saucers of the flower pots. Water must be given to the plants plentifully in these spring months. Rain water is always best for vegetation. Stimulate plants once a week with liquid manure. A large sponge is good for a watering pot for house plants. This is the month to prepare the ground for a successful crop of vegetables and flowers.

Christian work is more than furnishing food and raiment and shelter. It is also teaching men of God, of Christ, of heaven, of sin, of love, of justice, of brotherhood.

A correspondent of the *London Field* suggests an easy and, he says, most effectual way of getting rid of those garden pests, namely: Put two small heaps of bran (about two handfuls) close to the plants which they destroy most, and then, about 10 or 11 o'clock at night, go round and put a handful of quicklime on each heap; the number of slugs found killed in the morning will be almost incredible. Slugs prefer bran to any fruit or vegetable, and will congregate on these heaps from all parts of the garden.