

The Secret of Power.

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My genial Scotch friend, the late Rev. William Arnot, used to tell the story of his having been detained at a railway station, waiting for the train to start. He inquired of one of the men on the engine if they were out of water.—"There's plenty o' water," replied the man, "but its nae bilin'." Cold water, however good in its place, cannot drive a locomotive; the fuel supplies the motive power, or else the train is at a standstill.

The motive power that propels a church and keeps it in steady activity must be generated in the hearts of God's people. External pushes in the form of eloquent appeals, of special services, of imported preachers, or other kindred agencies may utterly fail of any solid results. It is the Spirit of the living God in the hearts of his people and nothing else which can supply the needed power. To as many as receive him, and are ready to pray, to labor and to give, in co-operation with him, he bestows this power; and just in the same degree that we possess that Divine Spirit do we possess spiritual warmth, vigor and converting influence. "He who converteth a sinner from the error of his ways does save a soul from death." The responsibility of converting souls, you perceive, is put right back on ministers and teachers and Christian parents and others in Christ's service. The measure of a church's power is its influence on the surrounding world; and its chief influence is in turning people from darkness to light, from a life of sin to a life of obedience to Christ. A lack of conversions, therefore, in our congregations and Sabbath-schools and families, proves incontestably that the water is "nae bilin'" in the hearts and the lives of Christians. Christ is the only effective inward heat, and inward strength and inward joy.

There is a wonderful penetrating and permeating power in Jesus Christ when he enters into our hearts, and is permitted to reach every faculty and control every affection. When a bar of metal is thrust into a glowing furnace, the heat penetrates the metal, melts it, kindles it to a red glow, makes it malleable, and it is then shaped into an implement of usefulness. So doth Jesus, as a living fire, penetrate the heart that receives him, purifies it from dross, transforms character and furnishes the perpetual motive to live, to give, to pray, and to labor for the uplifting and the saving of those who are "dead in sin." Reverting to the railway illustration—it is always true that when the steam gauge reaches a high mark, it is because Christ's love is shed abroad abundantly in our hearts.

Nothing is so actually ours as that which we contain within us. A thief may steal our silver, or our crockery, or he may carry off the flour in our pantry, but he cannot rob me of the food that I ate at my morning meal. That is mine and has gone into blood and bone and muscle. Our loving Master says to us, "I am the bread of life." But he is not bread to us until we take him into our system; and one reason why so many church-members are but little better than walking skeletons is that they do not feed on Christ. Sermons, services and sacraments are only profitable according to the amount of Christ's Spirit that we take in and carry away with us. All that we ministers can do in our pulpits is to offer Jesus and press him upon our hearers: if they do not accept him and possess him, they will die of self-starvation in sight of the "great supper." And if Christians "quench the Holy Spirit"—who is the source of heat and life—then the church becomes a motionless train encumbering the very track on which the Master placed it. What a spectacle for angels to weep over!

When a church has lapsed into the condition that it exerts but little or no converting influence, there is often a temptation to throw the blame on the pastor. If he is not made the scape goat, then the brethren who offer the stereotyped prayers in the cold and formal prayer-meetings, utter the stereotyped lamentation that the "ways of Zion mourn." Confession of other people's sins or shortcomings amounts to but little. And all this time the patient loving Jesus is—in beseeching tones—saying to his people, "Behold I stand at your doors and knock; if any man will hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him." That amazing offer is commonly applied to impenitent sinners. Christ originally addressed it to a lukewarm church whose "water was nae bilin'." That is the message for the hour; let it ring through the churches! If Christ's people desire light, heat and converting power, let them fling open their hearts to Jesus. A great deal has got to go out of us before Jesus Christ's searching, kindling and renewing Spirit will come in to us. That master-engineer, Charles G. Finney, used to say that he never got any inflow of spiritual power until he emptied himself. Christ and worldliness, Christ and selfishness, Christ and indifference to the welfare of souls cannot occupy the same quarters. When even a few earnest Christians get a whole Christ into their whole hearts, and open room after room to him, and let him own them, and cleanse them and have full sway over them, then converting power will kindle their lips and endue their lives; then will that church begin to have a revival that will last; then they will realize what Paul meant when he said "Christ in you the hope of glory."—Evangelist.

Why Priest?

Glancing at a shop window the other morning we saw therein a mural tablet made to perpetuate the memory of a pastor of a Christian church. His name of course, was given, and following it was the title "Priest." Instantly the question arose, as many a time before under similar circumstances it had done, why priest? The ordinary and true conception of a priest is that he is one who officiates at the altar of sacrifice. That of course, is the conception of the Old Testament, and that is the conception pertaining to the term in all ethnic religions. That, too, is the conception attached to Jesus Christ in the New Testament. "A priest forever after the order of Melchizedek," we read of him, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. He was a priest presiding at his own altar upon which he was laid, as sacrifice; according to the teaching of the word, as the final and consummated sacrifice needed in the relation between man and God. If this is so, then the priesthood of the minister of religion has lapsed, or rather, been fulfilled. His office now is to declare rather than to prepare a way of propitiation. When our divine Lord sent his disciples out as his heralds he bade them not go out as priests but as preachers, telling people that the kingdom of God was at hand. When from the summit of the hill near Bethany he went back to his glory, and gave to his disciples their commission, it was not a commission of priesthood. These were his words, "Go ye, and preach the gospel to every creature;" tell them in other words, that the way of reconciliation is open and that all they now need is to come to receive in loving trust him who has made this reconciliation possible.

The whole conception of the sacerdotal nature of the Christian religion, it seems to us, is fatal to the true understanding of it. As we have said, the sacrifice has been offered, and what is now demanded is the proclamation of that fact. In the true conception of New Testament Christianity there is no place for the mass, and no call for the priesthood other than that which attaches itself, according to the words of Peter to the whole Christian church. When Victor Hugo in his great novel, "Les Misérables" makes the nun lie through the livelong night before the altar, making expiation, as he puts it, for the sins of the world, he causes her to do that which has already been done, and thereby does dishonor to the eternal sacrifice for this purpose which Jesus Christ has made. When before the altar any one man assumes the attitude and function of a priest, he assumes that which in Jesus Christ has been fulfilled, and because of fulfillment set aside. Of course, historically we know the reason for the perpetuation of this idea of priesthood. A priest, if his functions are really believed in, has a greater influence, other things being equal, than the mere preacher. It is doubtless because of this in large measure that the Roman Catholic church has perpetuated the idea. It is, however, as we have said, wholly contrary to the New Testament conception of the Christian faith. Those who are sent forth on its behalf to make it known, and press home its claims upon the people are not priests but heralds. They are sent to declare the fact that Jesus Christ has come and that he has made of himself an offering for sin. No other offering is demanded, and the acceptance of this in full and complete obedience is that only which is demanded for salvation.—The Commonweath.

What Makes a Paper Religious?

It is a suggestive question to ask what constitutes a religious newspaper. Surely not that it talks a good deal about God and the Bible. There are infidel papers which do that. Nor that it avows and contends for particular religious theories or doctrines. The Pharisees who crucified Christ were religious theorists and creed advocates to an extent which would have enabled any one of them, as an editor, to make the "soundest" kind of a contender for doctrines, very many of which were true to Bible teachings.

Nor can we class as irreligious many periodicals which rarely ever use religious phraseology or, as papers, make any direct claim to being religious. They give themselves in the spirit of weakness and with great zeal to finding out and teaching the truth along the line of God's revelation in nature and history; to instructing and inspiring the young; to amelioration of hunger, prison reforms; cessation of war and other things, which directly tend to prepare the way for the coming of the reign of Christ.

We do not know what would be the list of religious papers if Christ should make it out. Of one thing we are sure; no paper would be upon the list which would continually wound good people by vicious nagging; which would seek to belittle and injure religious men and movements which might not strongly endorse its special theories; which would distort facts, or would seek to pull questionable wires for its selfish purposes; which would leave in the homes where it might be read a captious, fault-finding, suspicious atmosphere; which would breed doubts as to the fairness and spirituality of its promoters.

Surely a religious paper should always carry within its

columns the very spirit of Jesus Christ—that spirit which binds up wounds, unites brethren, stimulates prayer, arouses enthusiasm for missions, instructs the young, scatters broad-cast signs of the coming King.

We believe such an ideal is growing in the minds of very many religious editors. A distinct change for the better is seen in the majority of our papers in the last quarter of the century. May God hasten the day when all of us who undertake to make religious papers may have the mind of Christ—his wisdom and power and love—that our papers may become as breaths from heaven. This would be a good object for all readers of religious papers to remember when in the presence of him to whom we all belong.—The Argus.

Plain Sermons.

Intelligibility is really the first requisite of successful preaching; and it ought to be an intelligibility which extends to the uneducated and simple minded. If the whole sermon cannot be within the grasp of children, part of it should. Large words and complex sentences in spoken discourses are too often indexes of confusion or imperfection of thought on the part of the speaker. It is difficult to analyze and clarify our thought and set in order our impressions of truth, reducing them to their simplest elements, but the overcoming of that difficulty is the secret of power. Preaching is of the intellect, but the mere display of intellectuality hinders its access to the heart. Like the small bullet of the modern rifle, the little word goes further and sinks deeper than the large one. Let the preacher take his written sermon, if he uses one, and go through it, substituting little words for large, and short sentences for long ones, and see whether he will not be awarded by the attentive and responsive looks of his congregation. If he speaks without a manuscript let him think of himself as a herald who delivers the message from his Lord as directly and forcibly as possible.—The Congregationalist.

The Personal Touch.

In a great meeting a young man was leaning forward on the back of a seat, with his face covered by his hands. There were many like him, and the workers were all too few. "Go speak to that young man," was the loving command of the leader to another young man who happened to be in the forefront of young people's work in that church.

Fear took possession of him, he trembled as a leaf and said: "Oh, I can not go; I never did such a thing before; I am not able to do it." The leader was firm in his loving command. "You must go," he said. Going down the aisle he dropped into the seat of the young man, put his arm over his shoulder, and in a half sobbing tone said: "I have been sent to talk to you, but I do not know what to say. But Jesus loves you, and I know He is ready to save you." They both dropped on their knees, and it was only a moment or two before a soul was born into the Kingdom. The personal touch of the loving heart was the means, under God, of directing and winning a soul.—Rev. W. H. Geisweit.

It is good that we have sometimes some troubles and crosses; for they will often make a man enter into himself, and consider that he is here in banishment, and ought not to place his trust in any worldly thing. It is good that we be sometimes contradicted, and that men think ill or inadequately; and this, although we do and intend well. These things help often to the attaining of humility, and defend us from vainglory; for then we are more inclined to seek God for our inward witness, when outwardly we be condemned by men, and when there is no credit given unto us. And therefore a man should settle himself so fully in God that he need not to seek many comforts of men. When a good man is afflicted, tempted, or troubled with evil thoughts, then he understandeth better the great need he hath of God, without whom he perceiveth he can do nothing that is good. Then also he sorroweth, lamenteth and prayeth, by reason of the miseries he suffereth. Then he is weary of living longer, and wisheth that death would come, that he might depart and be with Christ. Then also he well perceiveth that perfect security and full peace can not be had in this world.—Thomas a Kempis

What the people of our communities need is definite teaching of the things revealed in God's Holy Word. The common people of Christ's day had heard enough of human scholarship. They listened to Christ gladly because he indoctrinated them with unadulterated instruction. So the masses of the people of our day have grown tired of pulpit essays on philosophic themes, or on science and poetry and art and politics. They need, and they want, God's Word expounded by those whose hearts are filled with the illumination of the Holy Spirit. When they ask for bread, why give them a stone? Or, for fish, why give them a serpent?

The popular preachers of these times are those who follow the example of Christ. These are the men that God honors. These are the men that the common people hear gladly. These are the men that will never know a "dead line." They will continue to bloom in God's garden clear down into old age, and then the Lord will transplant them into the heavenly garden beyond.—Ex