

THE HOME MISSION JOURNAL

VOLUME III, No. 10

ST. JOHN, N. B., MAY 21, 1901.

WHOLE No. 60

Something to Say.

"HE has something to say," was remarked by one in our hearing the other day, when speaking of her minister. The utterance made an impression, and we thought of it at once as a portion of possible grist for our *Commonwealth* mill. Perhaps the mental and spiritual condition indicated by the words is not so common as it ought to be, but upon its existence depends the acceptableness and the usefulness of our modern ministry. If there is something to say on the part of its representatives people will listen; if this is wanting the audience will very likely be absent. Nothing in these days can really take its place. Mere unctious anecdote or clap trap, which is another name for cheap sensationalism, will find itself out of place when masquerading for it. In connection with the preaching of the gospel as with the presentation of other great themes the people want to listen to those who have something to say.

In a recent editorial in the *Independent* we find these words, which illustrate the point we are seeking to make: "The old truth, the truth they are perfectly familiar with, they will be glad to hear if it be told in a fresh, lively, interesting way, with illustrations that are taking, in an earnest, confident, masterful manner, with an agreeable attractive elocution and out of a clearly loving heart backed by a noble character. These are the things old that Scripture tells us the preacher should bring out of his storehouse." To have something to say, therefore, it is not needful always to have something new. The great themes of the gospel have been presented throughout the centuries, but as they are taken into individual minds and become mingled with individual experience and shaped to new and individual purposes, these old themes become new. As this process obtains among the ministers of the Word, we fancy it will not be thought that they are growing old. The passing of the years will give additional weight and the fusing of these great themes in the alembic of personal experience will give the additional power. Congregations get hold of this fact sometimes, and possibly where there seems to be a lack of this appreciation of age there is the absence of this growth. We are quite positive that where there is a man who in relation to the gospel and cause of Jesus Christ has something to say that takes hold of the heart and of life which grows out of it, he will not lack for listeners. We are pleased to see recently that one of the Methodist Bishops was importuned by the constituency of some localities to send them old ministers, and not those who were untried and inexperienced. Perhaps they had had their fill of the one and now were swinging back to what we are inclined to think should be the preference, other things being equal, of a Christian congregation. At any rate, they seemed to feel that they would more likely find the older and more experienced preacher having something to say.

The Pulpit and the Perplexed

EVERYONE who has eyes to see and ears to hear knows that great controversies are going on both within and without the church regarding the composition and authority of the Scriptures, and the foundations of nearly all our religious beliefs. There is no possibility of concealing this fact from the people, even if it were wise and necessary to do so. A question naturally comes up like this:—How far should the pulpit take notice of these controversies and seek to guide the hearers to right thinking and intelligent convictions concerning them? There are two or perhaps three different courses recommended. The first is, say nothing about them. You start more doubt than you can answer, and many people will know nothing of them if you do not tell them. Besides,

the majority of Christians are wholly undistributed by these things and therefore they should not hear them discussed when they are not concerned with them. Many wise brethren give counsel of this order, but we fear they give way to unwisdom in doing so.

The next line of advice runs in this direction: Let errors alone, let doubts alone, let current controversies alone, and preach positive truths, the great truths of redemption; appeal to the heart and conscience and trust the word of God to bear witness to itself. But criticism cannot be silenced in this way. Difficulties that suggest themselves in reading the Scriptures or that are created for us by those arrayed against them, will not always melt away before the testimony of experience. The mind demands explanation of the difficulties, and a larger knowledge before it yields its confidence to the words of Scripture. Denunciation of doubt and unbelief is worse than useless, it intensifies them. The only way to meet them is to remove that which occasions them.

What then should be the attitude of the pulpit towards these controversies? If we say it is unwise to magnify them. A whole sermon combatting error is rarely called for. A too large element of controversy in a discourse hinders the cause we want to help. The incidental and indirect method of treatment we think the wise one. The pulpit should not be an arena of controversy or apologetics. Philosophy and science should have small place when speaking to people who mostly live outside of these realms. Yet, to pass by the things that are troubling thousands of earnest Christians, as if they had no existence, is to make many feel that the pulpit is not honest and manly. Many are smothering doubt instead of meeting and answering it. Their faith is assailed, they read books and papers, hear lectures, converse with unbelievers and so come into contact with skepticism and what is called a liberal faith. They need to have their belief buttressed by the best information possible on the matters in question. It helps them to know that their minister knows and thinks about these things. Many a difficult passage that is a stumbling block to faith may be set in a new light by an explanation, comment, or paraphrase. Many a book of the Old Testament will gain new meaning by a brief outline of its teaching or a reference to the circumstances under which it was written. There is seldom need for an apologetic discourse, but there is seldom not a need for an illuminating word on some bit of history or hard saying that makes many stumble. A few words might relieve the strain of troubled minds.

One of the most injurious things for a preacher to do is to repudiate and denounce what accredited scholars say with flippant contempt. Respect and courtesy should be shown them even when we think them wrong in their conclusions. Of course, scholarship and infallibility are not synonyms. The abandonment to a critical spirit has led many scholars to extremes which border on folly. But if scholarship is not infallible, ignorance and prejudice are much less so.

One of the most difficult duties of pastors is to hold thinking and doubting people to the confidence of Christ and the church. They are of many minds and dispositions. When self-sufficiency is at the root of their doubts, little can be done for them. But there is hope for the modest and sincere. No one can help a person whose faith is shaken unless he has knowledge of the questions that trouble him and a broad sympathetic nature for the skeptical. The pulpit should minister to baffled minds not less than to weary and sorrowful hearts. To interpret the Scriptures broadly and wisely; to abstain from sarcasm and ridicule of those things that perplex people; to recognize frankly the well-proven facts of history, of criticism and science, to liberate the truth from the bandages of false tradition and modes of expression which have lost their meaning in the present age; to emphasize the Christian doctrines of sin and redemption which appeal to man's sense of need and aspirations after God and peace and immortality, is the surest

way of maintaining faith in the minds of the perplexed and doubting.

Christianity and Labor.

"A Buddhist priest said in the parliament of religions that Christianity was too restless; it lacked repose. And as one looked into the faces of the heathen priests on the platform of the parliament, it was easy to see that they had the repose of death. His criticism is to the praise of Christianity. It is religion of activity. The Lord Jesus went about doing good, and he says to his followers, 'Go ye also into the vineyard and work.' Our Master toiled with hand and brain. His discourses show an active brain. We need not be careful to draw the distinction between manual workers and brain workers. They go together. The hand cannot do without the brain, nor the brain without the hand. Winning bread by writing may be harder work than winning bread by digging. The brain worker is indeed in more danger of collapse, for he wears out his nerves, while the brawn worker builds up his muscles.

THE DIGNITY OF LABOR.

"Labor is needful for man's happiness. Even in sinless Eden he was required to work, and now that sin has come in with its train of sorrows, labor is all the more a necessity. The ground was cursed for man's sake. It is good for him that he must fight the battle against weeds and thorns. To be condemned to perpetual idleness would be a great misfortune. In heaven they serve, and honest labor does much toward turning earth into heaven. We may well pity the poor prisoners in the jail or the penitentiary who have not the blessing of work. Count Caylus, a noted French antiquary, though very wealthy, continued to labor constantly. When asked the reason he replied: 'I work lest I hang myself.'

"The Bible places high dignity upon labor. The only person in all history who had the power to choose his own parentage, selected the wife of a carpenter for his brother. He was himself a carpenter and doubtless worked to support the large family of his struggling parents. He called into his apostleship humble fishermen, and the most gifted of his followers was a maker of tent cloth. The Lord Jesus brought a flood of light into every working man's life by magnifying the individual. 'What shall it profit a man,' he asked, 'if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' Organization is good, but organizations, whether of state, society, or church, may fall to pieces and be restored, but the soul of man, with infinite capacity for joy or sorrow, is immortal. When Jesus spoke for the worth of man the state was everything, the individual nothing.

For sixty-two years Rev. Dr. Morse has been pastor of the Baptist church at Sandy Cove, Digby, N. S. He is now eighty-two years old, and yet is at work, and is in the midst of a revival. He is a man of much more than ordinary talents, and might have taken a more prominent field, but was satisfied to spend his years at Digby, evidently believing in the divine will for him. Just how much his long and faithful ministry has meant for the people of his field, and in influence on lives widely scattered only the great day of revealings will make known.

The list of massacred missionaries in China is larger than at first reported. Late news gives the names of nineteen more men and women and nine children of missionaries still unaccounted for, and who are now believed to have been murdered.

The Baptists of the United States have seven Theological Seminaries.