

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

PREACHING IN THE SECOND AND THIRD CENTURIES.

Pressense's fourth volume on "The Early Years of Christianity" contains a chapter on the preaching of post-apostolical fathers from which is extracted the following passage:

The form of the religious discourse was in harmony with its design. As it was directed primarily to the conscience, and intended to stimulate spiritual life in a persecuted Church, which was like an army waiting on the eve of battle for the inspiring charge of the commander, so the preaching in the primitive Church gave no scope for lengthened displays of oratory. "Let us leave for the harangues of the rostrum the facile eloquence which glories in the multitude of words," says Cyprian. "When we have to speak of our God and Saviour, we will use an unadorned sincerity of speech. Faith is not strengthened by displays of oratory, but by truth itself. We should aim not to make long dissertations which may charm a popular audience by the flowers of rhetoric, but to find weighty words which, presenting the truth in its native simplicity, are such as become the gospel of Christ. Let us seek to reach the heart more than the mind."

The rules which St. Augustine subsequently laid down for the preaching of his day only expressed in the form of precepts that which had been the ancient practice of the Church, and we find in them a faithful representation of what preaching was in the third century. The interpreter of holy Scripture, he says, the defender of the true faith, and hence the opponent of error, should teach men how they may do good and avoid evil. "His teaching should have for its aim to reclaim the wandering, to arouse the negligent, and to teach the ignorant both what they should do and eschew. If his hearers need to be instructed, let him proceed by consecutive narration thoroughly to explain things. If there are doubters who need to be brought back to the faith, let him bring the force of argument to bear on the subject. When the hearers need more to be warned than to be instructed, when they require to be urged not to show themselves negligent in the practice of that which they already know, then the appeal should be made with redoubled energy. In such a case the preacher must use prayers, reproofs, threatenings, oburgations; in a word, every influence which is capable of moving the heart."

We see, then, that it is the ruling principle of the homiletics of the early Church that the preacher should always keep before him the greatness of the spiritual result to be obtained. The precept of the poet is instinctively carried out: *Festinat ad Eventum*. Hence the entire absence at this period of that empty and pompous rhetoric which was the cause of the age of decadence; when fine speakers, as Apuleius declared, took the place of rope-dancers, amusing an effeminate people with tricks of language as void of serious purpose as the feats of acrobats. The preaching of this primitive period was no less remote from the ponderous ratiocinations of the school-men, that pedantry of logic in which sophistry delighted, and which is to philosophy what rhetoric is to eloquence. To trifle away hours over these spiritual gymnastics was to lose souls. Christian preaching was no less superior to the forensic eloquence of antiquity, always bitter and vindictive. It was not, however, wanting in passion, though it was raised above the petty animosities of men, for its fervor might well be fed by the remembrance of the glorious cause it had to plead, not before a human tribunal of fallible and venal judges, but before that supreme tribunal which Tertullian describes at the end of one of his most eloquent treatises, and on which he shows us the Judge of all the earth ready to deliver his final sentence. The speaker has to plead with immortal souls to escape, while yet there is time, this awful condemnation. Such a charge leaves no scope for florid speech; it demands the full fervor of the soul directed towards the end to be attained.

At the close of the third century preaching begins to be considerably modified. If bishops like Ambrose and Chrysostom sustained in the following age its vigor and beauty while enriching it by a varied and brilliant culture, court bishops like Eusebius adopted a redundant rhetoric, and often fell into the platitude of servile panegyrics.

DOCTRINAL HARMONY.

Partially informed persons are often perplexed in view of what to them appear to be doctrinal contradictions. These apparent contradictions are frequently the result of a partial presentation of truth from the pulpit. Ministers of the gospel, especially uneducated ones, do not always preach, or perhaps understand truths in their systematic and hence harmonious relations. The result is that a single doctrine apart from its relations to other truths, is preached by one man, whilst another professing to be an expounder of the gospel sets forth a different doctrine which he, like the other, has carefully abstracted from the system.

Now there are many propositions in regard to which each is strictly true in one sense, whilst the same proposition is false in a different sense.

Let us look more carefully at some of these apparent contradictions.

The gospel in its provisions is adapted to the two-fold necessities of man's condition as a sinner. First, provision is made for his justification; second, for his holiness. First, there is provision for a change of law relation; second, for a change from sin to holiness, or a qualification for enjoying the privileges of the new relation.

Now a proposition may be true as it relates to *one part* of the gospel provision, and untrue as relates to *the other*. No one is qualified to preach the gospel who does not understand this distinction. He who does not, is sure to preach heresy, and to make Scripture appear to contradict Scripture. As for example, when a man says "you have nothing to do in order to salvation: Christ has done everything." "Only believe." "He that believeth hath everlasting life." Another, equally zealous, says "only neglect the great salvation and you are lost." "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." "Only do nothing and you are lost." "The Christian life is a race. It is a continual warfare. To neither is there a termination this side the gate through which the victors enter the eternal city." There are no real contradictions here. The ignorant may fail to comprehend these different classes of truths, and hence fail to see their harmony.

It is clearly obvious that nothing that a sinner can do can constitute a meritorious element in securing his justification. Hence it is emphatically true that Christ has done all that is needful—has brought out a perfect righteousness—"has paid it all, yes, all the debt I owe." The benefits of His righteousness are unto every one that believeth. Unto such there is no condemnation. So far as relates to law relation, the believer is saved.

And does it follow that as a child of God—a servant of Christ, an heir of heaven, he has nothing to do? Surely not. Rather it does follow that his life of holiness—his preparation for heaven progresses in connection with earnest personal effort. The believer must work, must work out his salvation with fear and trembling. Is he a servant? Now, is his working period. Is he a soldier? The present is the battle period.

His rest is not here. His crown shall be received after the victory is obtained, not before. Not only so, but the measure of his growth in grace, and hence of his preparation for heaven, and hence, again, of the application of redemption to himself individually, may be determined by the degree of his personal consecration to God, which consecration will be manifested by a life spent in *doing*—in working for Christ.

Nor is this all; but it is further true that our *doing* here and now, will constitute the *measure* of our individual reward when life's labors are over. Every one shall then receive according to the deeds done in the body. What a misfortune that any one should fail to study God's word in its beautiful harmony.—*Rev. T. A. Bracken, in Louisville Presbyterian.*

THE TWO MITES.

What strange things are made much of in the Bible—Rahab's scarlet thread; Samson's jawbone of an ass; David's sling; this poor widow's two mites. Yet each of these was mighty, and this farthing, made up of two mites, was, perhaps, the most important offering ever cast into God's treasury. For it teaches us great lessons, which poor and rich Christians have need to learn by heart.

I. Whatever we give should be given to God. So we all say; but do we make every gift an offering to God? Let us suppose that a worthy church treasurer

is busy receiving subscriptions, and noting each in his columns. A modest shrinking woman, poorly clad, at last gets in front of his table, and lays down two mites. "Dear me, dear me," says the good man, "what are these? Two mites! I never saw two mites before. I have no column for such coins. It shows an excellent spirit in you to offer them; but, really, you are a poorer. I would rather not take them. You look more like getting than giving, my good woman. Take this shilling. Now, please, pass on."

The truth is, nobody cares for a farthing except the Lord Jesus Christ; but he does care. After he had twice purged his house of covetousness with a scourge and had ended his preaching in it, he would not go away, but sat down over against the treasury and waited for this friend of his to come. When she had come, he fixed the attention of his disciples, and of all the world, on her great offering. Why? Because it was, as he knew, given to God. But by what sign did he know that? The answer is another lesson to be learned by heart.

II. Whatever we give to God must be given with self-denial. It is only God who knows about that. Our good natured friend the treasurer was quite right, so far. It would have been very wrong to ask anything from the widow; but if she, for some reason strong enough to satisfy herself, is willing to deny herself, that is another matter. We cannot very often take this view of the offerings of others; but it is the only view God takes of any offering, whether by rich or poor. As some who understand Latin may read this little sermon, I shall quote what an old father of the Church, Ambrose, says about the text: "Quia non quantum detur sed quantum residet expenditur;" which means: "God looks not at how much comes out of our purses, but at how much remains in them."

There is a very common misquotation of this text. People say—you have heard them often—"I will give my mite." There is a letter wanting, and it makes all the difference in the world. The widow gave *both* mites. God has never said that he values the mite as a coin to be given. Those who talk of giving their mite mean little; our Lord, when he praised the two mites, meant much.

But will all self-denial please God? No.

III. Our self-denial in giving ought to be caused by love to Christ. The widow, just because she was a widow, had entered on a heritage of new promises. Her Maker was now her husband. She had everything to thank God for, and a treasure in heaven perfectly secured. She knew that He would not despise her attempt to show her grateful love to Him. The very same thing which made the boxes of ointment so fragrant as to fill the world, gave value untold to these two mites.

"For love delights to bring its best,

And where love is, the offering evermore is blest."

IV. Whatever we give to God will be given without ostentation. The other givers made a show, and had their reward; but who would not rather have the widow's?

"The censor swung by the proud hand of merit,
Fumes with a fire abhorred;
But faith's two mites, dropped covertly, inherit
The blessing from the Lord."

V. Everybody may give. Mark, I do not say "must," but "may." We have no authority to demand from the richest; but we have no right to forbid the poorest. If a pauper, living on half a crown a week (to give an actual case), chooses to give a halfpenny saved from the milk in her tea, let us feel we have more need to be concerned about our own givings than about hers.

"We can all do more than we have done,
And not be a whit the worse;
It never was loving that emptied the heart,
Or giving that emptied the purse."

—*Family Treasury.*

THE EVERLASTING ARMS.

The following eloquent passage on walking by faith is from a criticism in Mr. Spurgeon's "Pulpit," on Canon Farrar's book, "Eternal Hope:"

"When are the everlasting arms underneath us? The only answer is, now and forever more. Now, at this moment, beloved, the everlasting arms are underneath us. The life of a Christian is described as walking by faith, and to my mind walking by faith is the most extraordinary miracle ever beheld beneath the sun. Walking on the waves, as Peter did, is a type of the life of every Christian. I have sometimes