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## An Old Preacher on Preaching.

BY REV. ALEX. MACLAREN, D. D.,  
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THE PREACHER AS PROPHET.

The preacher's work has a third aspect. Besides being evangelistic and educational it is also ethical, and, in that aspect especially, may rightly be designated as Prophetic. Of course the form of "inspiration" belonging to the prophet in Israel is not claimed for the Christian prophet, but every true prophet should be able to say: Thus saith the Lord, and if we do not speak what we have heard in the ear in many a secret "hour of high communion with the living God" we had better be silent for evermore. It may be objected that the preacher has neither the inspiration nor the insight into the future which belonged to the prophet. But there are different forms of inspiration; and that which is secured by hours of communion, by earnest effort to stretch the narrow tablet of the mind so that it shall be capacious enough to hold the amplitude of God's message, by sedulous suppression of our own clamorous opinions and resolute turning a deaf ear to the world's noises, by docility and by prayer, is no less real than that which touched Isaiah's with a live coal. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit." Philip the evangelist's seven daughters, or the prophets in the Corinthian church, had no inspiration which we have not. What does Paul direct as to the letter? "Let them speak by two or three, and let the others discern," a function which is very cheerfully and abundantly discharged among us. So the New Testament prophet's teaching had to submit to criticism. It had further to submit, sometimes to being cut short; "if a revelation be made to another standing by, let the first keep silence." So a New Testament prophet could be tedious and had to learn to give way. There seems no reason to believe that the inspiration which endowed these prophets has ceased to be given to us. Much rather is it that the name has become disused, than that the persons who have a right to it have failed. Are there not prophets among us today? Have there not always been prophets in the church?

Nor does the lack of predictive insight damage the claim to the name. It is a common-place now that that element is not the sole, nor even the principal, one in the ideal of the prophet. If we rightly understand what he was to Israel, we shall rightly understand how he still survives, in modern garb indeed, but the same. For his chief function was to be an incarnation of the national conscience. It was his task to hold aloft the divine ideal for Israel, to bring life to the test of the divine law, to stand before king and people unflinching, with his face as iron against their faces, to denounce national and individual transgressions, to set the trumpet to his "mouth and declare to Israel its sin." He was necessarily a predictor, not only because God gave to some of the order a foreknowledge of particular events, but also because God had graven deep in his mind the sure conviction that righteousness exalts a nation, that all national or individual departures from God is bitter as well as evil, that sin is death, and good the sure result in the long run of goodness. The prophet supplied the force for the law, the dynamic by which it got itself obeyed. As one of them says, his word was "as a hammer," to drive home and fasten in a sure place the nails of the law.

And is not this the function of the Christian church as a whole, and eminently of its preachers? What are we here for but to bring the principles of the gospel to bear on all life? No doubt the courtiers of an Ahab or a Zedekiah said what they thought clever things about the fastidious prophetic conscience, just as we have heard would-be 'aunts which were really tributes and turned to a testimony, about "the Nonconformist conscience." It is the Christian conscience, and to be its voice is no small part of the preacher's duty. He has to direct the searchlight on individual sins, especially those prevalent in the class from whom his hearers are drawn. He has to apply the measure of the sanctuary to worldly maxims which his hearers take for axioms, and to practices which they think legitimate because they are popular. He has to witness against the cancerous vices which are eating out the life of the nation. He has to bring national acts to the standard of Christ's teaching, and to insist that politics is but Christian principles applied to national life. A church which has ceased to protest against the "world" suits the world's purpose exactly, and is really a bit of the world under another name. The true church must always be remonstrant, protestant, a standing rebuke to the world, till the world has accepted and applied the principles of the gospel to personal and social life. And the preacher who does not give voice to the church's protest falls in one of his plainest and chiefest duties.

We need brave men in the pulpit, who shall speak with freedom what they believe they have learned from God, of the evils in the land. We need men who have heard him saying to them, "Be not dismayed at them, lest I dismay thee before them." We need for the prophet's

office much secluded fellowship with God, who "wakens" his servants "ear morning by morning," and gives them "the tongue of them that are taught." We need to keep clear of popular currents of thought and practice, suspecting always that truth does not dwell with majorities, and that what the multitude acclaim, God is likely to condemn. We have to be keenly sensitive to the drift of thought, else we shall not wisely make head against it, or know how to use or direct it. We have to remember that preaching may be as accurately adapted to the times, when it directly contradicts popular dicta, as when it falls in with them, and that the Greeks' demand for wisdom, and the Jews' for a sign, were met by being refused in appearance, even while granted in truth.

We have need to remember the woes pronounced on two classes of prophets, those who "stole the word every man from his neighbor," and those who "prophesied out of their own hearts, having seen nothing," and heard no voice from on high. So we have to be sure that we stand on our own feet, see with our own eyes, are not plagiarists or copyists, nor borrow oil from our neighbors' vessels, but go to them that sell for ourselves. And on the other hand we have to see that the word, which is in that sense our own, is, in a deeper sense, not our own, but God's. We have to deal at first hand with him, and to suppress self that he may speak. And no man will ever be the Lord's prophet, however eloquent or learned he may be, unless he knows what it is to sit silent before God, and in the silence to hear the still, small, most mighty voice that penetrates the soul, and to the hearing ear is sweet as harpers harping with their harps, and louder than the voice of many waters.

But the prophetic or ethical aspect of the preacher's work can never be rightly done, unless it is based upon the evangelistic and the educational.

We shall rejoice that the pulpit and the church have recognized more clearly than before, the call to make their voice heard on Christ's side, in regard to drunkenness, gambling, impurity, and other national vices. But it will be no gain to the cause of Christian morality or of national righteousness, if the ethical side of religion is presented exclusively or disproportionately to the other two, which are its foundation. Let us have applied Christianity by all means—the more the better, but let us make sure first that there is a Christianity to apply. Let us preach Christ as the regenerator of society, but let us not omit to preach him as the Saviour of the soul from sin. Let us begin where the gospel begins, with "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life,"—and then let us draw forth from the depths of that great word all the teaching which it contains, and all the ethics for single souls, for society and for the world, which flow from it. It is Christ the sacrifice and the Saviour who is Christ the wisdom of God, and the realized ideal of humanity, the embodiment of the perfect law for life, the perfect motive to fulfil it, and the perfect giver of the perfect power for obedience. It is Christ, the sacrifice for men and the wisdom of God, who is the King of nations, from whom the peoples will learn righteousness, and following from the tribes of earth shall enter into the land of peace. We, the preachers of his all-transforming and all-vivifying name, have to preach him in all the aspects of his mission, and to present these, so far as our imperfections will permit, in the order, promotion and harmony in which they are revealed to us. The threefold beam may be separated into its parts by a prism, but neither of these three is sunshine. The preacher has to try to re-combine them into the sweet, all-blessing white ray which every eye feels to be light. We are preachers—that is to say, we are Evangelists, Teachers, Prophets. Let us not limit ourselves to either function, but try always to blend the three in that one which should include them all.

Fathers and brethren, I am but too conscious of the imperfection of the conceptions of our office, which I have ventured to lay before you. I am still more conscious of the imperfection of my presentation of these. I am most of all conscious of the imperfections of my attempts at realizing their ideal, in my day of service on which the evening shadows are falling. But, however condemnatory may be the light of an ideal of our office, the absence or dimness of that light is fatal. The more loftily we think of our work, the more lowly will be our estimate of ourselves, and the more earnest our efforts to reach up to the height of our possibilities, which are therefore our duties. The more we feel the burden of the Lord laid on us as evangelists, the more shall we have a passion for souls, which will fill our hearts with wistful tenderness, and soften our voices into prevalent entreaty. The more we rise to the requirements of our function as teachers, the more shall we labor to learn what we have to teach, and make all our culture however wide, all our requirements however various, all our thinking however profound, subservient to the Master Truth, like mirrors set round a central light. And we shall feed the lambs as well as the sheep, the babes as well as the full grown men, seeking to achieve the simplicity in which full comprehension of deep truths is ever garbed, and so will speak with the authority of the

Truth itself and not as the scribes. The more we are constrained by the word of the Lord given to us as his prophets, the more bold shall we be to weigh popular habits and customary sins in the balance of the sanctuary, and the more shall we sometimes be honored to help in stemming evil—but if not, we shall have delivered our souls, and "whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, they shall know that there hath been a prophet among them."

Some of us are almost passing from the stage, some of us are pressing on to it, eager, hopeful, perhaps thinking that we shall do much better than did the veterans, who now seem to "lag superfluous." The modes of thinking change as do the thinkers, the wonderful new lamps of one age become the dim twinkling candles of the next. Much in our conceptions of the truth will not long outlive ourselves. That which can be shaken will be removed. Be it so; that which cannot be shaken will remain—and what cannot be shaken is the gospel of the "kingdom that cannot be moved," and its King, the same yesterday, today, and for ever. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower falleth: but the word of the Lord abideth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached."

## The Upper Stewiacke Baptist Church.

BY REV. A. C. CHUTE, B. D.

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The first house of worship owned by Upper Stewiacke Baptists began to be erected in 1839. A letter of Noah Bentley's to the "Messenger" of Jan. 17th, 1840, mentions that there were then but thirteen members in this section. The land for the edifice and for the sleeping-place of beloved dead ~~ones~~ was donated by my maternal grandfather, Charles Cox. Nearly three years before this Mr. Newcomb had died, so that he and his wife have their sepulchres in the Presbyterian burial-ground. As indicating the zeal of the few upon whom was laid the task of securing a public sanctuary, the Rev. Mr. Sprott, Presbyterian pastor of Musquodobit, is credited with saying: "Look at what these Baptists have done. I could put them all in a Yankee wagon and drive them out of Stewiacke, and yet they have erected and finished a house of worship." In the summer of 1841, before the inside of the structure was completed, a series of meetings was held therein, conducted by Rev. A. Stronach, Rev. R. E. Burpee and several licentiates from Acadia College, which resulted in about doubling the membership. In January of 1874, that square, two-story and not altogether handsome edifice was taken down, and the present smaller building was dedicated Sept. 10th, 1876, the people assembling meanwhile in the Temperance Hall.

Of others who have more recently ministered to these Baptists, mention should be made of Rev. Raleigh H. Bishop, who was ordained among them in 1879; Rev. M. L. Fields, and Rev. J. J. Armstrong. Because the membership has ever remained small, not often getting beyond fifty, it must not be inferred that the service rendered Christ's cause has therefore not been valuable. Weak congregations do themselves injustice by looking only at their present size, forgetting what they have all along been contributing to other communities. With denominational enterprises the Upper Stewiacke Baptists have maintained intelligent touch. A letter exists addressed to Jacob Layton, dated at Aylesford, Oct. 12th, 1865, and signed by Charles Tupper, wherein the writer mentions the effort among Baptists for the support of native preachers in Burma; and says of this little band that it has "with commendable zeal and generosity raised \$60 for this object." Out from them Rev. S. N. Bentley would have gone as a missionary to the pagan world but for physical disqualification. Toward higher education the attitude has been one of substantial interest. A great while ago "The Newcomb Scholarship" was founded by payment of a hundred pounds, and thereafter "The Archibald Scholarship" in the van of those who had to do with bringing about our excellent system of Common School Education was Dr. Crawley. "And it may be worthy of notice," wrote Rev. D. W. C. Dimock, "that as a member of the associated religious body to which it belongs, at one of its anniversary meetings of that body, this church (at Upper Stewiacke) by its delegates, gave a unanimous vote assenting to and recommending a general taxation as the surest and most successful mode of promoting Common School Education."

Important positions in the work of the Lord, both near by and far away, have been the better manned because of the exodus from this humble company of saints in that rural district. Rev. James Newcombe, for twelve years pastor at Moncton, N. B., was a son of Abram Newcomb. Of grandsons, this pioneer had four who entered the Baptist ministry, Rev. S. N. Bentley, pastor at Liverpool, N. S., and then of the North Baptist church, Halifax; Rev. E. N. Archibald, who served for a number of churches in these Provinces, and is now retired from active labors; Rev. Wm. A. Newcomb, son of Rev. James, for many years a prominent pastor in Maine, and still at work there; and Rev. Isaac Chipman Archibald,