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THE MINISTRY OF PREACHING.

'The pulpit,' said the saintly George Herbert, of Bemerton in speaking of the *Country Parson*—'the pulpit is his joy and his throne.' In these modern days, owing to the multiplication of sermons, the joy sometimes becomes a burden; but it cannot be denied that the pulpit is the parson's throne, if only he adequately realises its enormous opportunities for good. Look, for instance, at the part that preaching has played in the history of the Church of God. By preaching, the prophets of Israel and of Judah awakened again and again the dormant consciences of their fellow countrymen; by preaching, John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ; by preaching, the Lord of Life and Glory proclaimed His mission to the world; by preaching, the Apostles spread the glad tidings of salvation; by preaching, the medieval missionaries Christianised Europe; by preaching the lion-voice of Luther echoed round the world; by preaching, Hugh Latimer proclaimed from St. Paul's Cross the eternal law of righteousness; by preaching, Wesley and Whitefield startled into spiritual consciousness a careless and worldly age. Whenever the Church has been alive to her responsibilities, then has the voice of preaching been heard in accents of alluring tenderness, or of stern and fearless denunciation.

It is, of course, quite easy to sneer at sermons, to laugh at them, to make light remarks about them, to form an altogether false opinion as to what a sermon should be. A sermon is not, and was never meant to be, a rhetorical performance, a display of ecclesiastical fireworks, something to tickle itching ears, a mere exhibition of learning and scholarship. The sole

object of preaching is edification. 'Resort to sermons,' says the poet, "but to prayers most; praying's the end of preaching." 'Preaching,' said Canon Liddon, from the pulpit of St. Paul's, 'recalls to memory forgotten truths; it places before the soul new aspects of truth already recognised; it presents old truths in new aspects; it kindles affection; it fertilises thought; it quickens conscience; it rebukes presumption; it invigorates weakness; it consoles sorrow; it deepens the sense of man's helplessness and of God's omnipotence; it keeps the world which we do not see, but which is so close to us, and towards which we are hastening forward moment by moment, before the soul's eye.' But to preach as Liddon preached, to present truths in the light that he presented them, 'to shoot into the dark, arrows of lightnings,' is only given to one or two men in a generation. The great majority of the clergy are ordinary men, as ordinary as the great majority of laymen; and if even in an assembly like the House of Commons, which consists of some 670 educated laymen, but few really good speakers can be found, it is surely unreasonable to expect too high a standard of preaching from the clergy of the Church of England. Moreover, when we take into account the altogether preposterous number of sermons which is now required from a single clergyman—sometimes, as during Holy Week, as many as nine or ten—we cease to wonder at what must be considered the too low standard of many sermons. We do not see how it can be otherwise. 'He that preaches twice a Sunday,' said Bishop Andrewes, '*præterit auctor*.' Augustus Hare would never prepare more than one sermon a week, lest he should become '*a spirit text*.' The eloquent Latordine always took a week to prepare his school sermons; while in Notre Dame he would only preach some eight or nine times a year, lest he should become exhausted and repeat himself. But here, as elsewhere, 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread'; and notwithstanding Bishop Wilberforce's famous dictum, three and four sermons a week have often to be preached to the same congregation by the same minister. The only consolation is that—

'The worst speak something good; it all want sense, God takes a text, and preaches patience.'

And yet the fact remains that without a sermon, without an address of some kind, it is almost impossible to get a congregation to gather. And this seems to show—and for the preacher the thought is a comforting one—that, poor and feeble as sermons sometimes are, they are not wholly worthless to those who hear them.

It is sometimes said, especially by members of a particular section of the Church, that the duty of *preaching Christ* should not require any special preparation—that it only wants a heart alive to the blessed truths of the Gospel. Well, of all phrases, that of *preaching Christ* is, perhaps, most often misunderstood by pious people. It is taken to mean the constant repetition of the A B C of Christianity; the recitation of certain doctrines which may be true enough in themselves, but which by no means contain the whole round of revelation; the use of particular phrases, many of which are unknown in the pages of the New Testament. Now, such a view of *preaching Christ* is a painfully limited one. Christ is the Son of Man, the ideal man, the

representative man, and so whatever has to do with man has likewise to do with Christ the Son of Man; and, so the phrase, '*preaching Christ*'—at least, in St. Paul's estimation—includes the preaching of whatever affects mankind in his threefold capacity of body, and soul, and spirit. When Savonarola, in a voice of thunder, denounced the shameless profligacy of the people of Florence, he was preaching Christ. When John Howard startled Europe by his frightful descriptions of the conditions of prison life, he was preaching Christ. When William Lloyd Garrison, fired with the enthusiasm of humanity, championed the cause of the wretched slave, he was preaching Christ. When Martin of Galway, from his place in Parliament, pleaded for mercy to the lower animals, he was preaching Christ. They pleaded for justice, for mercy, for morality, for truth, and therefore they preached Christ.

In this sense it is the duty of all Christians alike, of the laity as well the clergy, to preach the Gospel. By rectitude of conduct; by integrity of purpose; by holding out the hand of fellowship to the fallen and undone; by 'smiling the hoary head of inveterate abuse'; by helping to make it for others 'easier to do right and more difficult to do wrong'; by consoling the afflicted; by comforting the sorrowful; by 'adding sunshine to daylight' by making the happy happier—it is possible for all men to preach Jesus Christ and Him Crucified; in other words, to be living sermons, 'written not with ink but with the Spirit of God, not in tables of stone but in fleshy tables of the heart.'—J. V. Church Bells.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST'S RELIGION.

The chief characteristic of Christ's religion is that it is a fellowship and communion in which the strength of the whole derives to every individual member. Nor does "the whole" signify only "the blessed company of all faithful people" but "truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ." The weakness of the individual man is merged in the might of the Society; his virtue contributes to the common stock, and all is at the call of every member, with the Lord at the head of them. Associations and unions are fast proving the value in the secular world and its struggles of life temporal. Trusts and trades' unions co-ordinate each other in hostile array, or co-operate as allies for mutual benefit. The spirit of combination is in the air; the *Zeit-Geist*, the late inspiration of modern social science. But it is only a late adoption of the principles of Christ's religion; a secondary and induced current from the great dynamo of Christianity. It is notable that the oldest reading of the collect for the third Sunday after Easter, in the sacramental of St. Leo, did not contain the words "of righteousness." It was: "Who showest to thee that are in error the light of Thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way;" in the prayer for "righteousness" following, made up the confession of Christ, as "the way, the truth and the life." The first Christians acknowledged no other social science, but Jesus Christ in whom the multitude of them that believe were of one heart and one soul. The simplicity of Christian faith had already begun to wane when St. Gregory added the words, "of righteousness." The preaching of Jesus Christ as Him crucified, by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, is the appointed means of bringing