

own, bawling to the public to try them; they trundle their push-carts down the boulevard, hawking new creeds: '*Par ici, mes amis, par ici! Voici des croyances nouvelles, voici la Vérité!*'" Beliefs old or beliefs new, we all have them; and when we take our place in the rostrum in their behalf we perforce become their teachers. There may be Christian truths of which we speak as if they were of infinitesimally little importance, because, as Aubrey Moore caustically puts it, "from first to last we know infinitesimally little about them";* but we need not fancy that we are teaching nothing in so speaking of them, or are failing to preach a dogmatic faith or by it to mold lives in essaying to occupy a position of indifference. To withhold these truths from our hearers is not merely a negative act, nor can their loss act merely negatively upon their spiritual development. A mutilated Gospel produces mutilated lives, and mutilated lives are positive evils. Whatever the preacher may do, the hearers will not do without a system of belief; and in their attempt to frame one for the government of their lives out of the fragments of truth which such an one will grant to them, is it any wonder if they should go fatally astray? At the best, men will be "driven to a kind of empirical theologizing, attempting with necessarily imperfect knowledge to coordinate for themselves the truths of religion and those which follow as consequences from them";† and so will build up an erroneous system of belief which will mar their lives. At the worst, they will be led to discard the neglected or discredited truths, and with them the whole system of Christianity—which they see, even tho the preacher does not see, to be necessarily correlated with them; and so will lapse into unbelief. In either case, they may rightly lay their marred or ruined lives at the preacher's door. It is not given to one who stands in the pulpit to decide whether or no he shall teach, whether or no he shall communicate to others a system of belief which will form lives and determine destinies. It is in his power only to determine what he shall teach, what system of doctrine he shall press upon the acceptance of men, by what body of tenets he will seek to mold their lives and to inform their devotions.

By as much, however, as the communication of a system of belief is the inevitable consequence of preaching, by so much is the careful formation of his system of belief the indispensable duty of the preacher. And this is but another way of saying that the systematic study of divine truth, or the study of Systematic Theology, is the most indispensable preparation for the pulpit. Only as the several truths to be presented are known in their relations can they be proclaimed in their right proportions and so taught as to produce their right effects on the soul's life and growth. Systematic Theology is, in other words, the preacher's true text-book. Its study may be undertaken, no doubt,

* *Op. cit.*, I. 26.

† Aubrey Moore, *loc. cit.*, p. 25.