

CURRENT ENGLISH THOUGHT.

BY JOSEPH PARKER, D. D., CITY TEMPLE, LONDON.

DIFFERENT men will probably give different opinions regarding the present status and influence of the English pulpit. No one man is sufficiently acquainted with the whole circuit of pulpit influence to be able to decide whether at present we are greatly in advance of our former selves, or whether in some instances there is not a considerable and discouraging lagging behind. Speaking personally, and strictly confining myself to my own standpoint, I have no hesitation to say that the English pulpit exercises a wider influence to-day than it ever did, and that because its preachers are men of larger capacity and fuller culture than any of their predecessors, how famous soever in their own day. Nor is it needful to detract one iota from the reputation of our illustrious ancestors. Up to their time they were the best men that the church could produce; and if they had been living to-day they would have been among the first to avail themselves of the deepening and extending culture necessitated by a larger popular education. Were any one to supply a list of eminent preachers of a former generation, I would undertake to put down side by side with that catalogue a series of names that would totally eclipse anything that has yet been seen in the way of English preaching. It would be invidious to mention living names; all living names are of course open to the kind of criticism which is not sober and quiet enough to be correct, while the dead would enjoy the advantage of having been sainted in the memory and affection of many admirers. It is certain that the pulpit is now dealing with questions which were hardly ever referred to by the preachers of a former generation. Social questions occupy no small amount of attention in the English pulpit to-day.

Many preachers are dealing with social questions in an indirect but not pointless way, while other preachers are stating them specifically, and dealing with them one by one in a really cordial, practical, and, in some instances, scientific manner. I am not sure that the working-classes respond to the latter kind of ministry as they might be expected to do. Unless preachers go the whole length of the working-class demand, they will be sure to be discredited and abandoned. While not a few workingmen are able to see that all controverted questions must have a variety of aspects, there are others that can only see their own side of any question, and unless the preacher shall stand up for that side as if there were no other, he will be accounted servile and ignorant.

This leads me to say that the time must come when preachers must face the difficulty of being honest to all sides. I am personally of opinion that a man is not necessarily a saint because he is a day-laborer; and I am further of opinion that a man is not necessarily a Judas Iscariot because he is an employer of labor. With regard to the recent strikes which have agitated a large section of English society, I am sorry to observe that some distinguished men seem to have proceeded upon the principle that employers are necessarily wrong and the working classes necessarily right. They would be far enough from admitting any such conclusion in words. On the contrary, I should not be surprised to find them indignantly repudiating what they would term my imputation of unfairness. At the same time I have not been struck by the tone of discrimination which ought to pervade and inspire all criticism of social difficulties. For myself, I have one difficulty with the working classes which I am utterly