

reasons why they differ from them. There is no class of men who have better opportunities of seeing human nature in all its phases. Is it likely, then, that men so situated, and with such a history, can be so defective as some believe them to be?

Besides this, our own experience is not at all in keeping with this outcry. We have heard many ministers preach. Our experience extends to town and country preaching, but chiefly to the latter. It embraces sermons preached on special occasions as well as ordinary pulpit services.—We have sometimes heard the young licentiate, frequently the minister in the full vigour of manhood, and occasionally the venerable father who has borne the burden and heat of the day; and seldom indeed have we listened to anything even approximating to what some would have us believe, is the general run of Scottish preaching. So far as our knowledge goes, then, the descriptions of the pulpit, to which we have already referred, are not even worthy of being designated a caricature. They are simply a gross libel, and one as false as it is malicious. Their effect on the influence of the Christian minister may be injurious among those who neither reason nor inquire, but they must inevitably degrade the sources from which they come, in the eyes of thinking Christian men. Before men blame the preacher for their want of interest in the services of the pulpit, they should look nearer home. Conscience may be quieted by blaming another for a fault that is our own, but there is a higher tribunal at which this expedient shall be of no avail.

While we do not believe in the reality of the grievance, our next remark is that the demand accompanying the complaint is exceedingly indefinite. What do the reformers of the pulpit want? *Platitudes*, and common places, and preaching behind the age, are the evils usually complained of.—There is a tantalizing vagueness about all this, utterly unworthy of those rational Christians, who so modestly claim for themselves the merit of being very deep and very accurate thinkers. We know what common-place is, we know what platitudes are, and we know what it means for a thing to be behind the age, but we are left in the dark about the things in sermons, to which these terms are applicable. Is it to such doctrines as the inspiration of Scripture?—the guilt and depravity of man?—the work of the Holy Spirit?—the Atonement?—justification by faith?—a judgment to come and the like? Are these the platitudes, the common-places, and the antiquated things of which so much complaint is made? We admit that these doctrines are very old. They are no doubt common-place, and to many they are weary platitudes. Are these the impurities of which sermons must be purged?—

If so, then the cry for pulpit reform is, after all, nothing new. There were wise men eighteen centuries ago to whom these things were very distasteful, and there has been a regular succession of 'deep thinkers' from that age to the present, whose views and feelings have been the same. When we hear some men complaining of platitudes in sermons, we sometimes doubt if, with all their learning, they know the meaning of their own words. In order to get rid of platitudes, the minds of all men would require to be cast in the same mould. What are platitudes to one may be the reverse to another. It is no uncommon thing to see one portion of an audience listening to a discourse with the deepest interest, and another portion giving way to sleepy indifference. There are even some whose tastes are so perverted that they can find platitudes in newspaper 'leaders,' and, as a general rule, pass them by as very dry reading.—When platitudes are condemned, we must therefore know what they are. The word itself is far too vague.

The antipathy to common-place is equally irrational. Take the greatest sermons that have ever been preached, remove all that some would call common-place out of them, and they would be great sermons no longer. We believe that the greatest genius would be the greatest sufferer, if subjected to such an ordeal. The writings of Shakespeare and Burns would be sadly mutilated, if everything that might be called common-place were extracted from them. The sweetest lyrics and the richest dramas would be of very little value, if they were estimated only according to what was absolutely new in their contents. Apply the principles of criticism to them, which some apply to sermons, and the lustre to their brightest gems would soon be tarnished.

As to the pulpit being behind the age, it is needless to say much. Truth is truth, and facts are facts, whatever be their age. The sins of the present age, both in matters of opinion and practice are the same as the sins of former times, and the preaching that was suited to sinners of old, must, in its substance, be suited to them still. It is the same old disease, and the same old remedy must be applied to it. But what, after all, is the change which our reformers wish to effect? What are preachers to speak about, if these old common-place things, to which there is so much antipathy, are to be discarded? Are they to lecture on science and literature? Are sleepy workmen to be kept awake, by detailing to them the speculations of dreamy philosophers? Are preachers to give their own authoritative dictum on solemn and important topics, instead of expounding the teaching of 'holy men of old'? Are all who occupy our pulpits to be permitted to say whatever they please?