

Our Contributors.

THE REAL TEST OF ORATORY.

BY KNOXONIAN.

Fifteen years ago a student of Divinity in England wrote to John Bright, asking for information in regard to the best way to make eloquent sermons. It probably never occurred to the young man that Mr. Bright may know little or nothing about making sermons. Preaching and speech making on fiscal questions are different kinds of work, and though Mr. Bright may be able to give a great speech on the tariff, he might flounder considerably in delivering an address on justification by faith.

In his reply to the young man, Mr. Bright said some very uncomplimentary things about the speaking powers of the clergy. We give one paragraph.

It would seem that rules applicable to other speaking will be equally applicable to the pulpit. But in a pulpit a man is expected to speak for a given time on a great theme and with less exact material than is obtainable on other occasions and on ordinary subjects. And further, a majority of preachers are not good speakers, and could not be made such. They have no natural gift for good speaking. They are not logical in mind, nor full of ideas, nor free of speech, and they have none of that natural readiness which is essential to a powerful and interesting speaker.

It is possible, nay, probable, that if reading sermons was abolished, while some sermons would be better than they now are, the majority of them would be simple chaos and utterly unendurable to the most patient congregation. Given a man with knowledge of his subject and a gift for public speaking, then I think reading is mischief, but given a man who knows little, and who has no gift of speaking, then reading seems to be inevitable, because speaking, as I deem it, is impossible!

Mr. Bright thinks about as highly of the clergy as he thinks of Home Rule. His opinion in both cases may be far from correct. He never attends church, never hears sermons, but of course that trifling fact need not prevent him from giving a positive opinion in regard to the speaking powers of the clergy. Men who never attend public worship are usually the foremost in giving strong opinions on such matters.

About twenty years ago Mr. Bright delivered an eloquent eulogy on the Free Church of Scotland. That eulogy was published in many religious journals and quoted, or at least alluded to, in a speech in one of our Church courts by an honoured minister who has since gone to his rest. Had Mr. Bright's opinion of a majority of the clergy been known at that time, perhaps his opinion of the Free Church would not have been considered of so much value. He may have eulogized the Free Church, because, being a Radical, he disliked the Established Kirk. That may have been one reason. The Free Church was largely made by the class of men whom Mr. Bright describes as not logical in mind, not full of ideas, and not ready in speech.

Over against Mr. Bright's opinion of the clergy it is interesting and not a little amusing to put the opinion of Spurgeon on the oratory of English Members of Parliament. In one of his lectures the great London preacher says.

Usually of all tasks of hearing, the most miserable is that of listening to one of the common ruck of speakers from the House of Lords and Commons. Let it be proposed when capital punishment is abolished, those who are found guilty of murder shall be compelled to listen to a selection of the dreariest Parliamentary orators.

Most of us have heard and read a good deal about the dulness of sermons, but nobody has yet proposed that listening, even to the poorest sermons, be made a substitute for capital punishment. Electricity is the substitute for the gallows in the State of New York, and Spurgeon proposes that, when the gallows is abolished in England, Parliamentary oratory shall be used to execute capital sentences. Spurgeon's opinion of Parliamentary oratory is quite as high as John Bright's opinion of clerical oratory.

There is no absolute standard of oratory. Tastes differ in regard to public speaking as well as in regard to everything else. The only test worth anything is the result produced by the sermon or speech. The lawyer who wins the most verdicts is the best pleader. He is the man you want when you are unfortunate enough to have a case. The politician who carries the crowd is the best political orator. The preacher who gathers the largest congregation and has the largest accession to his membership is the

best preacher. The sermon that does the most good is the best sermon. What Lord Dundreary, or Lady Parvenue, or Miss Pinchbeck, or Mr. Pecksniff, M.A., may think about a speech or sermon is not a matter of much account. Utility is the test that will prevail in the end, where the people have common sense, and are expected to back up their opinions with their money.

Somebody asked Dr. Johnson if Burke's style of speaking resembled that of Cicero. "No," replied Johnson, "it resembles Edmund Burke's." Perhaps the one thing that may be affirmed with absolute certainty of any style of speaking is that the speaker who keeps his hold on the public and increases his influence for years is always a man who *speaks like himself*. The best of people will weary of affectation or imitation.

INTERROGATORIES AND REMARKS

ADDRESSED TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN REGARD TO THE PRACTICE OF FUNDING OR OTHERWISE INVESTING MONEYS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ECCLESIASTICAL FINANCE.

Beyond question it is the duty and privilege of Christians to contribute of their means for the promotion of Christ's cause, and that in proportion to the measure of prosperity that has been vouchsafed to them. It is well known that these contributions are often coupled with conditions that forbid their being appropriated wholly and immediately to the sacred cause for which they were professedly given. It has been fashionable for wealthy Christians to fund their contributions for religious purposes and allow only the usufruct or interest to be applied to the specified department of Christian work. Large sums have been thus sealed up; and it is hereby earnestly asked, is it right for the Lord's people thus to lock up the Lord's money so that nothing more than the annual interest can be employed in promoting the Lord's work? Is such policy compatible with loyalty to Christ and with Christ-like compassion for perishing men? These are questions that pre-eminently demand the earnest and prayerful consideration of Christians; because the honour of Christ and the eternal weal of earth's guilty millions are intimately connected therewith.

The present writer can find nothing in the Word of God to sanction, or lend the slightest countenance to, the generally-approved, yea, lauded, practice of contributing to the cause of Christ under the condition that the principal or capital sum shall remain in perpetuity intact, and that the annual interest only be available for the promotion of any department of Christ's work—a work that consists in meeting the clamant need of guilty and perishing men. The precepts and practice of Christ and His apostles appear to warrant and urge the immediate application of the entire resources of the Church for the evangelization of the world.

Analogy may, perhaps, somewhat aid in discovering the path of duty in regard to this most important matter. Well; suppose an earthly sovereign engaged in a righteous, yea, a most benevolent war,—a war on the speedy success of which depended not merely the liberty but the lives of millions. In such circumstances, would it be worthy of loyal subjects and merciful men, whose duty it was to vote, as well as raise the necessary supplies, to allow their king nothing more than the annual interest of the revenue for the prosecution of this most necessary war? Would not loyalty and compassion unitedly demand that the entire revenue be placed at the disposal of the sovereign, so that the war might be vigorously prosecuted and brought to a speedy and successful issue; thus saving the lives of millions? And has not the Son of God, the King of Zion, gone to war to rescue from spiritual bondage and eternal death myriads of our fallen race? And is not every day's delay death to untold numbers? If so, may Christ's subjects fund the revenue of their Sovereign, and allow Him only the interest thereof for the prosecution of this most merciful war? Would not piety toward God and pity for perishing men imperatively demand that the whole revenue—the entire levy of love—be placed at His disposal to be immediately utilized that those doomed to death might be delivered? Aught else would be treason to King Jesus and unpardonable

and pitiless parsimony as well. But take another illustration. Suppose a famine-stricken land, in which want is daily numbering multitudes with the dead. And suppose, further, that there is ample store of food to supply the wants of all; but it is at a distance, and needs to be conveyed to the starving, and the sovereign has enjoined his servants to utilize all the money in the treasury to have provision forwarded as soon as possible. What would be thought and said of the conduct of these servants were they to expend merely the annual interest of the money in the treasury in providing conveyance of food to the famishing, thereby supplying the need of only a few families, and leaving untold thousands to pine and perish? Such conduct would be universally denounced as unheard of heartlessness, yea, as monstrous cruelty! But no analogy, however pointed and forceful, can exhibit the criminality of laying an arrest on money, professedly given to the Lord, so that it cannot be expended, be the need ever so urgent, and it is urgent beyond all language to express. More than two-thirds of earth's inhabitants are "perishing for lack of knowledge," and the command of Christ is sounding in the ears of His disciples to "go and teach all nations," yet they deliberately lay an embargo on funds, which, if wisely employed, would go far to speedily supply the world with that knowledge which is able to make wise unto salvation."

Is there not something fearfully wrong in the past and present financial policy of the Church, or of many of her wealthy members? If ever "the King's business required haste" it is in this very matter, viz., in executing the great trust which Jehovah Jesus committed to His people. Surely the onward roll of the Gospel chariot should be impelled by the force of all the funds available to the saints; so that at the end of each year it could be truthfully said of those who are entrusted with the Lord's money that "they have done what they could." But this cannot be said of them so long as untold millions of money lie locked up, and that too, by deed of the donors, and in most cases with consent of the Church.

There is a pressing propriety in requesting Christians to solemnly examine and see whether lack of faith in the promise and power of the Saviour does not underlie all religious endowments, whether provided by secular governments, or by the individual or combined contributions of the Christian people? Is there not implied a suspicion that Christ may prove unable or unwilling to fulfil His promise in the fact that very many of His professed disciples have recourse to other and earthly guarantees for the support and extension of His kingdom? And it may be asked further, does not the history of religious endowments prove that a curse cleaves to them, akin to that which befell the hoarded manna in the wilderness? Is it not a patent and a painful fact that religious endowments have the effect of lessening the liberality of God's people—of stinting the outflow of that benevolence and generosity peculiar to all who come under the saving and sanctifying power of the Gospel? Proofs of the benumbing and deadening influence of endowments have been, and still are, woefully abundant. It is undeniable that those churches and Christian institutions unencumbered by endowments enjoy greater spiritual prosperity and are honoured to do more work for Christ than those that are.

Viewing the subject in the light of the Saviour's command and promise, and bearing in mind the world's crying need, it does seem that Christians are so far faithless to their Lord and merciless to men, in funding their sacred gifts so long as there remains a corner of heathendom unvisited by a herald of mercy, or a church struggling to support ordinances. Even after the earth is "full of the knowledge of the Lord," the endowments of religious institutions will imply doubt of the Saviour's promise and power, and at the same time inflict a gross wrong on succeeding believers; as the civil funds of the nation or the interest of the funded gifts of the past generation of Christians would rob future generations of the precious privilege of "honouring God with their substance." Thus to deprive Christians of the future of "the luxury of doing good," is to do serious injury to their spiritual interests, as giving for Christ, as well as working for Christ, is a special means of growth in grace, and fruitful of mental peace and joy.

The endowments of Christian institutions are manifestly not "of faith." They are born of doubt, and