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Religious Miscellany.

The Death of the First-Born.

BY GEORGE LANSING TAYLOR.
What will be that which rose from Egypt's land
A wild and loud heart-appalling cry
That smote the brazen altar of the sky
Upon that awful morning, when God's hand
In vengeance terrible, had waved the brand,
The viewless, soul-dissevering sword of wrath,
O'er all her homes, and with its noiseless sheath
Had touched and snuffed her every vital band
That bound her first-born life, unbound at his command.

Egypt stood staggering in that shock of woe,
Amazed, o'erwhelmed, till that wild wail went up,
As to her quivering lips was pressed a cup
Whose withering agony can no man know
Who has not rested in darkness while the throes
Of that same great bereavement stilled his soul.

With mortal anguish, which, o'er all control,
Burst in one black, bewilderer, whirling flow,
That drove him drunk with grief, stunned, stifled
By the blow.

O Egypt! Egypt! such a woe was thine,
And down the dim, long ages that have sped
I see thee stooping o'er thy prostrate dead
In that dumb agony, while ominous shine
The clouds of morn, all blotched with bloody wine.

As if the gory rite was sprinkled there,
As if o'er all the sky, and earth, and air,
In blood were written fearfully that sign
Of retribution dress and surferance divine.

In slaver's hut, and haughty grandeur's hall,
In regal dome, in stall, and open field,
Alike did Death his iron dominion wield,
And o'er all the land a fearful pall.

Was spread, and opened shadows, dark and tall,
Moved up and down her palaces and streets,
And goblin forms, in wondrous winding sheets,
Unsummoned by the Magian's potent call.

It takes possession of the whole man, time, talents,
And all, and lays them down at the foot of the cross,
To be used for the glory of Christ and the
salvation of souls. It dwells with intense interest
among the great truths of God's word; and
realizing their supreme importance, it takes them
into the pulpit, and there, with look and voice
and manner all breathing with the love of Christ
and concern for man, it presses them home on
the soul, and it is with demonstration of the
spirit and power. There is no standing against
it, deep, spiritual earnestness. The feeling on the
part of hearers is that they must surrender, and
whether they do or not, the truth is compelled to
the conscience, and they cannot well escape its
power.

Manhood stood mute, with awe and terror dumb;
But woman's heart broke down beneath her love
In wild and passionate wailing that might move
The hearts of marble sphinxes, cold and numb:
And glorious, dark-eyed creatures, in the gloom
Of Pharaoh's palace, on his floor of stone,
Lay faint and quivering, written by the doom
That made that gorgeous pile one vast and
mournful tomb.

O Egypt! Egypt! say, what was thy crime,
That God should breathe thee in his anger so,
And pour the baptism of such fearful woe
On thy proud head, and make thee through all time
A sad and awful monument sublime.

Of wrath and shame, of judgment, and of fear,
To all the ages ever known, and never
Teaching a starting lesson to every clime,
That thrills us like a knell with ever-echoing
chime.

O Egypt! Egypt! let thy grandeur tell,
Thy pyramids and sphinxes, for they can,
How, age on age, they rose on bones of man
And led the deep dread echoes rise and swell
From labyrinth and Catacombs, where dwell
Dead generations—one eternal groan.

That answers too significantly well,
Must'st thou ever need made for man to buy and
sell!

O ye who rear on unwarded toil
The glory of a nation or an age,
Know well a curse is writ on every page
Of every history of wrong and spoil;
It brands the brow, the soul, the very coil
Of the oppressor, with the mark of Cain,
And all the greatness tyranny can gain,
And all the luxury wrought from freedom's toil,
Shall sink by slow decay, or sudden, swift recoil
—The Independent.

Dr. Hawes on Preaching.

The venerable Dr. Joel Hawes, of the First
Congregational Church, Hartford, delivered an
excellent sermon last September in New Ha-
lifax, which has appeared in the *National Preacher*
for this month, under the title of *Decay of
Power in the Pulpit*. The views of so eminent
a servant of God, of one so experienced and so
engaged in character, are worthy of general
regard. The evils he deprecates are indeed, in
some instances, almost peculiar to New England
preaching. We quote such portions of the ser-
mon as are, in our view, of more general applica-
tion.

WHY PREACHING FAILS OF EFFECT.
Instead of coming right out in the strength of
God, with the linked sword of the Spirit, to do
battle with sin and error, it is too common for
the preaching of our day to study to be ingenu-
ous, original, eloquent; to make literary ser-
mons, great sermons, popular sermons, as one
says. To do this, instead of confining itself
within its proper commission, that of delivering
God's message in God's way, it ranges abroad over
creation to find novel and strange subjects; and
then it seeks to handle them in a new and origi-
nal way, decking them out in tropes and figures,
and all fine things; just suited to make the whole
elaborate and popular, it may be, but utterly
ineffective and powerless as to all spiritual
impressions. Preaching, it seems to me, of
late has been a mere show, not aimed at effect.
It says in itself, or is satisfied with doing its
task, without aiming so to construct, to point
and press it home, as to make it felt by the hear-
er. It is not every day walks and wants, as re-
lated to God and eternity. It has not enough
of the lawyer-like element in it, which having
stated his case to the jury, bends all his energies
to it. It is too abstract, too much in the form
of an essay or dissertation, stopping with the
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This is like preparing a medicine without admin-
istering it, or like planting a battery and fixing
the guns, and then spiking them lest by letting
them off they should do execution in the ranks
of the enemy.

SKEPTICISM AMONG THE PEOPLE.

There is a large infusion of skepticism in the
minds of men at the present day, which operates
as a powerful obstacle to the progress of preach-
ing, and greatly to prevent the proper effect of
the Word. The skepticism here referred to is not
the open infidelity of a former age, but it consists
rather in a half-believing, half-doubting, unset-
tled state of mind about religious truth. This
type of skepticism, I am persuaded, is much
more fatal in its influence on the interests of re-
ligion than is generally supposed. It is circu-
lated and cherished by much of the popular litera-
ture of the day. It is spread abroad through
the medium of the newspaper and the pamphlet,
and the popular lecture, and in a thousand dif-
ferent ways works itself into the minds of the
young and unreflecting, making them indifferent
to God and his truth, and preventing all just im-
pressions from the ministrations of God's word.

Another thing demanded to render the pulpit
more effective is an increased earnestness, a larger
share of what the French call *conviction*, in its
ministrations. By earnestness I here mean not
the mere warmth and energy of the secular
orator, or of the advocate at the bar, or of the
statesman speaking before the Senate of his
country, but the tender fervor and serious enged-
ness and determination of purpose which spring
from a lively sense of divine things, from faith
in God and a constraining love to Christ
and the souls of men. Earnestness in this sense
is always connected with a spirit of deep, living
piety; it is not noisy, declamatory, or affectively
eloquent; it is tender, solemn, impressive; it is
fed by sensibilities alive unto God and divine
things; it is an inward fire, kindled by the word
of God's altar, which glows with a steady
flame and warms into activity and zeal for Christ
and his cause all the powers and affections of the
inner man. There is nothing like the earnest-
ness here indicated to give life and efficiency to
the pulpit. It turns into feebleness all the at-
tainments of mere learning and genius. It
takes possession of the whole man, time, talents,
and all, and lays them down at the foot of the cross,
to be used for the glory of Christ and the
salvation of souls. It dwells with intense interest
among the great truths of God's word; and
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part of hearers is that they must surrender, and
whether they do or not, the truth is compelled to
the conscience, and they cannot well escape its
power.

Another thing necessary to remedy the great
evil of which I have been speaking, and to in-
crease the power of the pulpit, is to bring into
greater prominence and force the peculiar doc-
trines of the Gospel. There are many who seem
to think that these doctrines have become old
and worn out, and can no longer be made to in-
terest and move the minds of men. No mistake
is greater. These doctrines old! so is the
Bible old, and the plan of salvation, and God's
perfections and ways of dealing with men. Are
they therefore obsolete and useless, and to be
laid aside as old wives' fables? No; the great
distinctive truths of the Gospel, the truths which
relate to God and his Government, to Christ and
his salvation, to the soul and its destiny, to sin
and redemption, to life and death, heaven and
hell—these truths are as fresh and new as fresh
grass; as important to men now living as they
were to the men of old; and to the men of to-
day they are just as important, and just as
newly first announced, and just as well fitted
to each successive generation to the end of time.
They are not abstractions, not speculations and
fictions of men, but everlasting principles and
facts, revealed by the God of infinite wisdom and
grace, as perfectly suited to the nature and wants
of man, and indispensable, under all circum-
stances, to his enlightenment and salvation. We
need have no fear that men will ever become so
wise that the truths of God's revelation cannot
enlighten them, cannot subdue and save them.
They are God's appointed means of impressing
and moving the heart, of awakening and saving
the soul, of the great elements of power.
And all the while, the great elements of power
which have appeared in the *National Preacher*
for this month, under the title of *Decay of
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