

Pulpit Power.

THE question is often asked by earnest men, as well as by self-constituted outlook committees—"Is the power of the pulpit on the decline?" The answer to this usually varies with the state of the nervous system, the condition of the atmosphere, or the direction of the wind. The power of the pulpit, like the state of religion, depends largely on the mental structure or personal success of him who estimates it. Perhaps there are very few of us capable of giving a reliable opinion on the point. One affirms that it is not on the decline, and in proof, refers to the fact that during the last year, *seven* members have been added to his communion roll, while only *six* were removed; apparently oblivious of the fact that there is a considerable extent of inhabited territory on the globe outside of his diocese. Another declares that it is on the wane, for we have no men in our day to compare with those of the past; forgetful, meanwhile that the greatness of any man is largely the creation of circumstances; that there are now thousands of men who could fill the places in history of Luther or Knox, if called upon to do it.

Leaving this question where the millennium is likely to find it—unsettled—in so far as it is a matter of opinion, a question of greater interest presents itself. It is of more practical moment to us to know how pulpit power may be acquired and maintained than to speculate as to its extent. To the preacher it is everything. The pulpit is his throne. With it are associated his fondest hopes, his loftiest aspirations, his dearest interests. There he stands, in an especial sense, as the ambassador of the Most High. There he speaks on matters of thrilling interest and transcendent importance, and expects there, of all other places, the blessing promised by the Saviour just before his ascension; for it was with his disciples, as *preachers*, that He promised to be "even unto the end of the world." To be powerful in the pulpit is, or ought to be, therefore, the supreme aim of every preacher of the Gospel.

The great primary source of pulpit power is "the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven." Of course, without this we are shorn of our strength. But, to leave this out of view, and to contemplate preaching simply as an *art*, there are certain elements of power which, though secondary, are nevertheless essential:—

(1.) *A profound knowledge of the Scriptures.* The Bible itself is to be studied. It is an unfathomable mine of truth. No sane man in this enlightened age imagines that all truth is ascertained or that there are no new discoveries of truth to be made in the Scriptures. The humble pastor of Leyden was right when he said, "God has yet many new truths to break forth out of his word." There are new aspects and relations of truth yet to be described. There are adaptations of truth to truth, and of truth to human necessity never yet discovered. The man who supposes that all truth is bound up in the "fathers," or expressed in our own creeds and confessions, belongs to the last century and should have been left there. The Gospel will bear to be studied till time shall be no more, and even then we shall not have reached the bottom of the mine. And yet how many preachers of the Gospel there are who are comparatively ignorant even of the English version of the Scriptures.

People speak flippantly and thoughtlessly of Moody as an uneducated man, but the fact is that Moody is edu-

cated and well educated. Anyone who has heard him speak to enquirers or address converts must have been struck with the thought that, after all, Moody is a man "mighty in the Scriptures." And who will doubt that this is one secret of his power? And who can question that just in proportion as the profound *study of the Bible* is neglected, whatever else may be done, is the efficiency and success of the ministry lessened.

(2.) *A philosophical presentation of the truth.* The idea is, not that we should preach *philosophy*; but that we should preach *philosophically*. There should be no begging of the question, no mere declamation where sound reasoning is required. Whatever our forefathers may have been, *we* must be logical. The spirit of the age requires it, and it will not do for preachers to fall behind other men in this matter. It is to be feared that the logic of the pulpit is often regarded with much less respect than that which is employed in other professions. It is quite true that the subjects on which our reasoning is employed are distasteful to the natural heart, and that reasoning is always liable to be regarded as weak and inconclusive which is employed to convince men that they are in error; still, there can be no doubt that much of the reasoning of theologians, and especially of preachers, passes for very little among large classes of men. Is it not true that many go to hear a preacher with a different expectation from that which they have when they listen to an argument at the bar? The pulpit has been charged with the use of infirm logic, and under that imputation we must not let it lie. It is easy to see how the preacher *may* fall under the charge. Unlike the lawyer, he has no keen opponent to detect and expose the flaws in his arguments. There is no one to examine his position. He uses arguments which have been hallowed by the usage of ages. Sainted men have employed them, and they have for centuries been associated with expressions of piety from the good and the great. And, above all, with gown and cassock, with surplice and bands, who can call his word in question? But we have fallen upon an age that will not accept such things as substitutes for logic. The merest schoolboy in our day laughs at Turretin's argument against the Copernican system of astronomy, and the fact simply is, that the preacher who expects to succeed in this last quarter of the nineteenth century must post himself in science and philosophy, and must accustom himself to the use of relentless logic.

In this connection, every thoughtful Christian must hail as unspeakable boons the arrangements for post graduate courses and the foundation of travelling fellowship in our colleges. Nor could we estimate the benefit likely to accrue to the rising generation of ministers and to the church at large, should we have a distinct professorship in each of our colleges for the purpose of discussing the relations between theology and science. The day is not far distant when we *must* have such chairs; when men of the heaviest calibre can devote all their time to research in this department, when our young ministers shall be able to meet all opponents on their own ground. Now my point is this; that a man in order to be a preacher of power in our day, must use such language and such arguments as cannot, in all fairness, be called in question on literary grounds. The counsel of Paul to Timothy is not yet out of date:—"Use sound speech that cannot be condemned."

(3.) *A third and indispensable element of pulpit power is common sense.* By this is meant the *habit* of perceiving