

The Preacher and the Dying Man.

BY DR. OWEN JAMES.

Last week a young man died in the house opposite to mine on Potts place. The day before his death those around him remarked with some asperity: "Here he is dying and not a minister has called to see him!" What made the situation more aggravating was that five or six preachers lived within sight of his residence. Why did we not call to see him? Answering for myself I would say: First, I did not know he was there. It may be argued that I ought to know—still the fact is that I did not know. Johnstown is getting to be a large city. And people in large cities do not know their next door neighbor. We preachers are pastors of churches. We live to minister to our churches and congregations and their friends. We are ever on the alert so know the conditions and needs of all who in any manner belong to the sphere of our responsibility.

On the other hand the entire population is supposed to have some sort of a relationship, near or distant, to some one of the churches or denominations. We take it for granted that every person in the city has a preference, strong or feeble, for some church or sect. The pastors, gladly and with avidity, assume the responsibility for all those whose preference leans towards their several churches or denominations. Not one of us will be found a shirker on this point.

Moreover, there is a keen sense of honor and professional courtesy among us clergymen. He would be a rarity among physicians who would push himself unasked to visit the patient of another physician. The code of honor is equally stringent among ministers. We are always eager to help one another. We would at once inform a brother pastor of any special need that might arise among those who might be in the sphere of his responsibility. But we would never think of obtruding ourselves unasked to render service to such persons. In some cases this may result in hardship, yet, speaking generally, this spirit of mutual regard and mutual helpfulness among ministers is worthy of all praise.

Second: If I had known that the young man was there and dying, would I have called to see him? No, I think not. I would take it for granted that he was in some other pastor's sphere of responsibility. But if I knew that he had no church preference, that he was really in no one's sphere of responsibility and that no one was ministering to him, would I then have called? Yes, if I were sent for. Otherwise I would still hesitate. Why? I am speaking entirely for myself. I do not know what any other pastor would do. But I would hesitate. I am sure that no one will accuse ministers of careless indifference or selfish indolence. We preachers are the servants of all. We are glad to be the bond slaves of the community. There is no time of night or day, there is no intensity of heat or cold, there is no severity of wind or rain that will keep us from running anywhere to help any man in whatever condition. Our hearts throb with a perpetual yearning to help. As a class we have but one design on humanity, viz.: to render service. I know it is presumptuous for us to say it, yet the truth is our souls groan under the burden of our fellows. Still I would hesitate to visit my dying neighbor uninvited. Let me give you a few reasons for my hesitancy.

(a) A man's relation to God and man's condition before God are of all things the most private and sacred. Nothing can be more personal and more delicate than these matters. A man has a right to resent intrusion by strangers into his financial and domestic affairs—his bank account and his relations to his wife and children. How much more would he have a right to resent intrusion by strangers into this most intimate sphere, his relation to God? It is fashionable in some quarters to blame Christian people who fail to speak to sinners about their souls. Occasionally there is heard a man who has the effrontery to attribute his neglect of salvation to the fact that no one has ever spoken to him about his soul. Christians, certainly, ought to be loud in their praise of the Saviour and instant, in season and out of season, to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation in his name. But to tackle a strange individual in a state of helpless sickness, or in any other casual relation, is a matter, in my opinion, of extremely doubtful delicacy and propriety.

(b) I would want to avoid the impression that I could do anything for him in virtue of my office. The state confers on the minister the right to celebrate marriages. The churches—I am speaking of those with which I am connected—have appointed him to conduct public worship, to preach and teach publicly and to administer the ordinances. But he is an ordinary man. He has no access to God that other men have not. He has no grace to confer. He can do nothing for a dying man that other men cannot do. He cannot save. He cannot forgive sins. His prayer will not be answered any sooner than that of others. God has not made him the custodian and dispenser of any of his gifts. Because of the preacher's education and experience he may teach, guide, persuade, entreat and pray with more clearness, fervor and unction than many others and for that reason be more helpful everywhere. But he is in no special sense an intermedi-

ary between the sinner and God. He is not a spiritual attorney to carry the cases of men to the bar of heaven. He is not a prime minister that is entitled to any privileges in the court of the king. I should hesitate therefore to invade the room of a dying man lest he should be deceived to think that I could be depended on to bring him salvation at the last moment. If I were sent for I would explain and point out the way of life, I would persuade and entreat to the best of my ability, and I would endeavor to lead the man's prayers to God. Yet so common is the priestly conception that I would have to be very particular to turn the man's attention from myself to Jesus Christ.

(c) I would want to avoid the impression that any act performed on him, or in his behalf, would secure his salvation. Whatever the origin of the belief the fact is that a large portion of the human race has come to believe that baptism, the eucharist, prayer and anointing with oil are acts that contribute in some way to the preparation of the soul for passing out of this world. All this is, in my estimation an error and a snare. It is a sad reflection on the character of God to suppose that man's relation to him and a man's destiny for eternity should be made to depend on outward ceremonies. It tends also to lower the tone of a person's moral life if we teach that his eternal happiness can be secured by some performance on his deathbed. So decided has the tendency always been in this direction that I feel I ought to be extremely careful to avoid every appearance of giving it encouragement. Hence I would not rush uninvited into a dying man's room.

I would not want to do anything that would create the impression that religion was merely a preparation for dying. That impression has a wide vogue already. A man said to me yesterday, speaking of a mutual friend, who had been killed: "It is a pity that he had no time to repent before going hence." As a matter of fact Christianity is not a preparation for dying. It is rather a set of divine forces projected into this world for the awakening, rectifying, cleansing, strengthening and polishing of all that is best in human nature, for making the most of human life in all its duties, trials and experiences and for the development of all that is noblest and most blessed in human character. To become a Christian is to put one's self sympathetically and actively in contact with these forces—to permit these forces to do their work on one's heart and life.

Let me be specific. To obtain the most possible and to attain to the best possible a man must be brought to a right relation with God, his maker, friend, father. A right relation with God means the mind, heart, will, life thrown into union and accord with the mind, heart, will and life of God. There can be no fiction or false pretense about this. The union and accord must be real and vital. A man must feel that he hates that which God hates and loves that which God loves. Like God he must commit himself to antagonize all that is evil and to champion all that is good. This he does because he feels that the evil is hateful and the good lovable. The change that takes place when a man turns from a life of self-seeking, self-pleasure, self-aggrandizement into this life of union with God is called repentance. When this repentance is sincere and hearty God forgives a man. It is impossible for God to forgive a man who does not genuinely in his heart abandon all evil and commit himself to all good.

This gives an idea of how remotely related the end of life is to the Christian religion. Both the purpose and the motive of Christianity are independent of death. The impelling reason and motive in all is that righteousness and holiness are in themselves right and worthy. It is true that holiness brings blessedness. But he who seeks the holiness for the sake of the blessedness will not get the blessedness because he does not have the holiness. Those who die in Christ will go to heaven. But those who seek Christ in order to go to heaven will not go to heaven, because they do not find Christ. If Christ is not sought for his own sake, but only for the sake of some benefits he has to confer, he is not sought at all. It is his gifts that are sought. And those who seek him for the sake of the gifts he has to give neither find him nor get his gifts. A child that tells the truth for a reward is not truthful. He would just as soon lie for the reward. A man that is honest because it pays is not honest at all. He would steal if that was what paid. A genuinely truthful and honest man cares nothing for consequences. He is truthful and honest whether it pays or not. A child that obeys his father because his father has promised him an estate does not really honor and obey his father at all. He is scheming to get the estate and if the father could read his heart he would not let such a child have the estate.

The Christian religion is not a scheme to avoid hell and go to heaven when we die. It is, as I have said, a set of forces to awaken love for God and for goodness and to lighten a man with God and bring him into possessions of goodness. The nearness of death, for this reason, is rather an impertinent consideration. He would indeed be an ignoble son who, during the entire period of his minority, would disregard his father and squander his life in wantonness and then, a day or two

before his majority, would cry and cringe and plead for mercy in order to get his portion of the estate. It would be deplacably mean if he deliberately counted on his father's leniency and purposed all along to ignore the father and all filialness until the last minute when, as a part of a scheme, he would put in his cries and tears for his pardon and his portion.

I fear that there are men who presume on the leniency of God, who allow themselves to think that God is so lenient that he will, at the last moment and least cry for pardon, turn from a man the consequences of a life of sinning and bring him at once into perfect happiness in heaven. Acting on this presumption they abandon themselves to a life of sin, intending to make it all right at last through the prayers of some priest or preacher. It is needless to say that in such conduct there would be no sincere turning away from evil to good, but only a craven method to dodge the evil results of a bad life. It is also needless to say that such a fiction would avail nothing with God, who knows the heart. To be sure it is possible at any time to turn genuinely from evil to good. If such true repentance should take place at the last moment I am sure that God would pardon to the uttermost for Jesus' sake. Every preacher, that I know of, would be glad to bring the gospel message home to a man at the last moment in the hope of producing the true repentance. Yet very many of us are constantly afraid that men may cheat themselves with the notion that Christianity is a preparation for dying and that heaven may be won by a spurious repentance.—Sel.

The Higher Critic of Ten Hundred Years Ago.

BY J. WEBB.

This was the title of a lecture given in the Theological Institution at W— on June 7th, 1902 by the Rev. Thomas Orthodox, M. A.

There was a very large gathering. Every available seat was occupied. The lecturer, being called upon by the chairman, stepped to the front and, without making any apology, said: "Ladies and gentlemen; after gathering up, at a large expense, hundreds of ancient books and manuscripts I have found out why there was so little progress made, in regard to the evangelization of the world, during the latter part of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries. The story as I have made it out is as follows:

"There was a man whose name was Darwin, a naturalist and author. He was born in the year 1809. His numerous works had an immense influence, whether for good or ill, throughout the thinking world. When he reached the advanced age of sixty-two years he startled the public by the announcement which was to the effect that there was monkey-blood running through his veins. He claimed that his forefather, away back hundreds of millions of years, was a full blooded monkey. Of course, as might be expected, all human beings were greatly shocked when they heard it. One would think that when he found it out he would have kept it to himself, but, strange to say, he seemed to be quite proud of his ancestry, for he wrote a book to prove his claim. In this book he not only made a claim for himself but tried also to show that there were others of the same blood and from the same stock.

Darwin's work had a marvelous influence upon some minds. There was a mysterious something in it, which, while it did not appeal to the minds of human beings, had an almost hypnotic effect wherever there was monkey-blood, for, every now and again, after reading this wonderful theory, a number of men would suddenly make a leap and climb right up into the Darwin theory-tree and hang on to its branches in a very peculiar manner.

The remarkable talent of mimicry, which is so noticeable in the monkey tribe in their natural state, must have been largely developed in these men, for they certainly did act very much like human beings. The monkey-spirit also seemed to predominate to a very large extent in them, for nothing pleased them better than to take the things which human beings greatly prized and, out of sheer mischievousness, tear them all to pieces.

One day, while they were leaping from tree to tree and from branch to branch, in the great forest of literature, on the lookout for the 'missing link,' one of their members came running into their midst crying, "I have found the book!" "What book?" asked the wonder-stricken brotherhood. "The Bible! the Bible! the book that the human beings believe in! The book which contradicts our brother Darwin's theory!" Then, with a graceful bound which, was so like his forefathers of millions of years ago, he made a leap high up in the air, and alighted upon a platform, which the brothers had already erected, and, in an eloquent and passionate address, told all that he had seen and heard of the human being's religion. The brotherhood were quick to see that there was at last some important and delightful work for them to do. They would make a desperate attempt to pick this great book to pieces. Many days and nights were spent in reading the contents, and many a warm discussion was indulged in. They chattered and fought, and went through many