

Our Contributors.

SENSATIONAL PREACHING.

BY KNOXIAN.

One of the modern ways of condemning a preacher is to look unutterably wise, solemnly shake the head, give a disdainful wave of the hand, and say—*He is sensational*. Well, supposing he is what of it? It may be a good thing to make a sensation. Everything depends on what you mean by a sensation. Or rather we should say, everything depends on the effect produced by the sensation. If the sensation leads proud, hard-hearted sinners to the Cross, wakes up drowsy believers, unmasks hypocrites, puts new life into the congregation, increases the contributions for religious purposes, promotes the welfare of man and the glory of God, then the sensation is a good thing. It is just the thing we need, though it may not be the thing we all wish for. The best men that serve in the Church are all in favour of a sensation of this kind. In a recent sermon, Dr. John Hall said:—

We do not object to the preaching that produces a sensation. I am sure, for my part I wish I could produce a sensation of alarm and terror in the careless, of responsibility in the believing, or joy and irrepressible gladness in the saintly. Whitfield surely produced a sensation. So did Nettleton, and Edwards and Tennant. So did Erskine, and Henderson, and Knox. So did Luther. So, in earlier times, did Paul and Peter, when whole cities were moved, and thousands owned the irresistible power with which they spoke.

There is, of course, a kind of sensational preaching that every man of ordinary honesty and good taste—not to speak of piety—should condemn. If the object of the sensationalist is mainly to draw a crowd and make them burn incense under his nose; if his sole or principal object is to advertise himself, to increase his own popularity, to put money in his own pocket (there have been and are such cases), or magnify himself in any way, then he cannot be too severely condemned. In that case, he is not a preacher at all, in the Scripture sense of the word. Whatever his work may be called, it should never be called preaching. Whatever he may be called, he should never be called a preacher. This bad kind of sensational work is thus described by Dr. Hall:—

But the true and well-founded quarrel is with the sensational preaching that does not aim at this end—that, indeed, does not aim at any higher end than the producing of present excitement of the lower portions of our mental nature—of wonder, of surprise, of delight, of admiration. This effort terminates on itself, so to speak. It opens men's eyes in amazement—not in the sense of spiritual illumination; it leads the hearers to follow not Christ, but the preacher, and its immediate impression is not "what a wonderful Saviour is Christ!" but "what a wonderful man is that preacher!"

That touches the very nerve of the question. If the people leave talking about the peculiarities of the man rather than about the sermon he delivered the sensation is mainly about the man—and probably about a very small man. If the messenger occupies a much larger part of their attention than the message, then the sensation is decidedly unwholesome.

Though a rather grave and dignified gentleman himself, and a perfect model of propriety and simplicity in the pulpit, Dr. Hall would go a great length in allowing other preachers to indulge their peculiarities provided good results were produced. In this regard he goes very much farther than some much smaller men would dare to go. He says:—

If vivid painting—in words or deeds—if dramatic presentation, if quaint manner, and queer titles would do it, even though they offended taste and shocked the refined, we should be willing to make a sacrifice for the sake of the imperishable results. To hesitate about it, to stand up for literary propriety and the canons of taste, when disregard of them would reclaim souls, would be as base and contemptible as to refuse help to a drowning man or the terrified inmates of a burning house, because it would derange our dress or necessitate awkward and ungainly attitudes. I hope I should be willing to sacrifice any preferences for correct taste and sober expression, if souls could be saved by the sacrifice—and the mass of mankind would approve the act.

No doubt one reason why many people are ready to call certain kinds of preaching sensational is because they think all preaching should be done in one way. They have been accustomed to one pulpit style, and consider any departure from that style sensational. The number of people in the world, yes, in the church, who think everything wrong that they have not been accustomed to, is painfully large. These people think a sermon ought to be arranged in a certain way, and delivered in a certain tone; that the prayer ought to be just so long and in just such a tone. Everything must be done and said in a stereo-

typed way, and the slightest deviation is condemned as sensational. A preacher who wishes to "stand well" with these people is afraid to act in a natural way, and because he dares not do so he is often stilted, weak, insipid. Much of the pulpit weakness and dullness complained of arises in this very way. It is the fault of the people as much as the preacher. If he do not speak in a "pulpit tone," and pray in a whining strain, and do everything just so, ignorance and bigotry are always ready to shout "sensational" or perhaps something worse. Intelligent people have no sympathy with the cry, but the majority are not always intelligent. If we are to have life and power in the pulpit we must allow individuality to display itself within reasonable limitations. This idea is well wrought out by the President of Victoria University in a recent paper from which we quote the following:—

No living man is like another, whatever system he may hold; dead men are soon much alike. If we will have living men in the pulpit, we must tolerate diversities. Many kinds of preaching might be mentioned, all of which are good, perhaps equally good. "Every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, another after that." An affectation of eccentricity is always bad; but where the manner is the natural outcome of the character, and is accompanied by real excellences, we should bear with some peculiarities which may not be pleasing in themselves. Almost any manner that is natural to the man is better than tameness and insipidity. The dignity of the pulpit is, no doubt, to be preserved; but what is more undignified than to sleep in public, especially in a church; but, above all, in the pulpit? Colloquial freedom and uncouthness may be forgiven when there is an impressive presentation of God's truth. The important thing is to convert the people and build them up in the ways of holiness. All kinds of preaching not conducive to this end are, of course, radically bad; and foremost among them we must put that dignified and solemn dullness which from time immemorial has been the dry-rot of the pulpit. A slipshod sensationalism is an opposite error of which we are now in danger; but even that will not prove an unmixed evil if it should at last render obsolete the old proverbs, "As dull as a preacher," "As prosy as a sermon."

Men who would feel that a sin almost unpardonable had been committed if they saw a smile of satisfaction ripple over a congregation, when a capital point was cleverly made, go soundly asleep every Sabbath without feeling that they have done anything not in keeping with good taste. They would never enter the church again if the congregation gave approval in the way of a little applause; but they think nothing of snoring loud enough to be heard in the gallery. Snoring in church is just as undignified as smiling or mildly applauding. Stupor is as much to be avoided as sensationalism.

ON TAX EXEMPTIONS.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM MOORE, D.D., OTTAWA.

There is in the present day a strong drift of opinion toward the taxing of Church property. It is not a little curious that the first attempt of a nation to tax property set apart to the service of God should be made in Christendom.

No heathen nation, as far we know, ever thought of such a thing. Imposts, prohibitions and persecutions have been plentifully used against alien gods and so-called heretical forms of worship, but no nation has ever imposed burdens on its own God, or upon its own worship, but rather the reverse.

The causes of this movement are not far to seek. This, however, is an enquiry upon which we need not enter. Before proceeding to the special subject of this paper, it may not be out of place to glance at the general question. The items at present exempted from taxation may be classed under two heads, viz.:

Real estate and income or personal property. The tax on income or personal property is just in theory but unjust in practice. The burden falls chiefly on the poor or on persons who receive a stated salary or fixed income.

The persons at present exempt are, members of the Civil Service, judges, ministers of religion whose stipend is \$1,000 or less per year, and mechanics and labourers whose wages are \$400 or less per year.

If the spirit of patriotism were so strong, or if the public conscience were so far educated that every man was anxious to contribute his full proportion of State or municipal expenditure there could be no ground for complaint. But this is notoriously not the case. In many instances, men who spend thousands every year, pay little more income tax than others whose slender income is counted by hundreds. Outside two or three cities into which the requirements of Government business have gathered the members of the Civil

Service, the repeal of the existing law would effect chiefly mechanics and preachers.

It might be well for those anxious for change to suggest something better before attempting to disturb the present settlement. The equitable distribution of the public burdens is, as every statesman knows, an exceedingly difficult problem. The mere abolition of the existing law touching exemptions is not a remedy for the present state of affairs.

The exemptions under the head of real estate are somewhat as follow:

(1.) National and Provincial properties, such as Crown lands, Parliament buildings, custom houses, post offices, court houses and jails, reformatories and asylums, institutions for the blind and deaf, Normal schools, the Provincial University buildings, etc., etc.

Whatever difficulty there may be in dealing with the Crown lands scattered here and there through the settled parts of the country, it is not too much to say that good cause can be shown why each and every one of the above named properties should not be placed on the rateable list.

Take, for example, the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa or Toronto. There is not a city or town in Canada which, if the opportunity were given, would not gladly offer the Government perpetual exemption from taxation in order to secure the buildings and the trade, and the increase in population and rateable property, which they necessarily carry with them, and think it a good bargain. To take all these benefits at the expense of the country, and then ask the country to pay taxes for the privilege of bringing these benefits into the city is, to say the least, rather a selfish proposal.

(2.) Municipal buildings and properties, such as city halls, fire stations, police courts, public squares, parks, public schools, collegiate institutes, etc.

The rate-payers were taxed to buy the land on which these buildings stand. They were taxed to erect the buildings, they are taxed to keep them in repair, they are taxed for the salaries of those connected with them, and if these buildings and properties should be assessed the rate-payers will have to be taxed in order to pay the taxes on them, which is absurd.

(3.) Hospitals, orphans' homes, houses of relief, and colleges and schools which, though they do not form an integral part of the public school system of the country, have been founded and are maintained by private munificence, not for the purpose of gain, but for the public good.

Let us speak first of the hospitals and orphan's homes and similar charities. There must be such institutions. We cannot possibly do without them. They must be built and maintained by municipalities, and with money raised by taxation, or they must be built and maintained by private benevolence. It is cheaper to the municipalities or State to have this work done by private benevolence, and the work is in this way done far more efficiently than it could be done by officers of the city. If, then, municipalities lay a tax on such institutions, they are guilty of a double meanness—they first allow private individuals to do their own work, and then tax them for doing it.

Let us now turn our attention to the various institutions of learning which were not founded by the State but by private munificence.

They are such institutions as the denominational colleges in Kingston, Cobourg, Belleville, Toronto and elsewhere; the theological schools of all the Christian Churches of the country, and the ladies colleges. All these colleges work under charters, and yet are in a sense private property—that is to say, they do not form part of the educational system created by the State and supplied out of the public funds. Nevertheless, they are public institutions. They were founded for the public good.

Their existence is a clear proof that they meet a felt want; that they fill a place in the educational work of the country which must otherwise have remained unoccupied. It is, therefore, to the interests of the State that such institutions should be encouraged. But the least possible encouragement the State can give such seats of learning is to grant them perpetual exemption from taxation. It should also be remembered that every one of these institutions creates trade and causes a large expenditure of money every year, and is thus a source of profit to the town or city in which it is located.

To lay a tax on such charitable and religious institutions is both inexpedient and unjust. If it do not