

Reader, you have seen an old coin, worn smooth so that there was no mark on it, not a letter; you know not whence it came nor whose it is; but you heat it in the fire, and the stamp of the die is plain as when the coin was minted first; you see the image, read the superscription. So the excitement of a sermon reveals the man's character in his oft-unwilling face, and the preacher, astonished, renders unto Cæsar the things that are his, and unto God his own. Sometimes one is saddened to see the miser, satyr, worldling in his many forms, under a disguise so trim and neat; but oftener, perhaps, surprised to find a saint he knew not of before; surprised at the resurrection of such a soul from such a tomb. The minister addresses men as individuals, the lawyer must convince the whole jury, the senator a majority of the senate, or his work is lost; while if the minister convinces one man, or but half convinces him—he has still done something that will last. The merchant deals with material things, the lawyer and the politician commonly address only the understanding of their hearers, sharpening attention by appeals to interest; while the minister calls upon the affections, addresses the conscience, and appeals to the religious nature of man—to faculties which bind man to his race, and unite him with his God. This gives him a power which no other man aspires to; which neither the lawyer nor the merchant, nor yet the politician attempts to wield; nay, which the mere writer of books leaves out of sight. In our day we often forget these things, and suppose that the government or the newspapers are the arbiters of public opinion, while still the pulpit has a mighty influence. All the politicians and lawyers in America could not persuade men to believe what was contrary to common-sense and adverse to their interest; but a few preachers, in the name of religion, made whole millions believe the world would perish on a certain day, and, now the day is past, it is hard for them to believe their preachers were mistaken!

Now all this might of position and opportunity may be used for good or ill, to advance men or retard them; so a great responsibility rests always on the clergy of the land. Put a heavy man in the pulpit, ordinary, vulgar, obese, idle, inhuman, and he overlays the conscience of the people with his grossness; his Upas breath poisons every spiritual plant that springs up within sight of his church. Put there a man of only the average intelligence and religion—he does nothing but keep men from sliding back; he loves his people and giveth his beloved—sleep. Put there a superior man, with genius for religion, nay, a man of no genius, but an active, intelligent, humane, and pious man, who will work for the human race with all his mind and heart—and he does wonders; he loves his people and giveth his beloved his own life. He looks out on the wealth, ignorance, pride, poverty, lust, and sin of the world, and blames himself for their existence. This suffering human race, poor blind Bartimæus, sits by the wayside, crying to all men of power—"Have mercy on me;" the minister says, "What wilt thou," he answers, "Lord that I might receive my sight." No man may be idle, least of all the minister; he least of all in this age, when Bartimæus cries as never before.