

John Jasper, the Negro Preacher of the Ante Bellum.

BY W. E. HATCHER.

It has been the study of the ages to determine the secret of the orator's power. The problem still defies solution. Who can tell what is that subtle charm that makes some men masters of assemblies? It needs not be said that it is not the possession of natural graces which makes the orator. It is not denied that a kingly physique, a full, rich, resonant voice, a brilliant, penetrating eye, and a responsive face are pleasing and effective accompaniments of a public speaker. But they do not make the orator. Men possessing all these are often stupid and tiresome. Sometimes men of contemptible stature, misshapen, shrill of voice and clumsy in movement are found to have the orator's mystic spell.

Nor is it art at its utmost refinement that imparts the orator's power. As a fact, art if discovered is fatal to the highest achievements of the platform. I heard Edward Everett deliver his famous address on Washington. The vast audience sat in mute admiration, for every word was aptly chosen, every gesture the result of long practice, and even his smiles and tears were made to march in on time. But the lecture lacked the essential thrill of true oratory. It revealed a superb actor, but it was wanting in the burning heart. Plain and weaker men have sometimes stirred me far more deeply.

I have a story to tell of an eloquent man who died in Richmond, Va., a few weeks ago. He was a negro preacher and his name was John Jasper. It is utterly beyond me to state with authority what it was about him that made him the king of the platform. Indeed there were many things about him which would have been condemned in advance as fatal to his success as a speaker. He was an odd and absurd organism. He consisted principally of arms and legs, with sufficient trunk to hold these appendages in place and to afford them perch for action. His hands were long, narrow and thin. He was high of cheek, with a nose without a hint of strength, a face black without alloy, a forehead in full retreat, and a mouth undistinguished except in its use. His shoulders dropped from his neck as if overcome with fatigue, and sloped away along the curves of his arms. His voice was misused until it was cracked, wheezy, and terrible in its grunts and noisy breathings. Nor did his motions or dress add anything to his appearance.

And yet I declare that this man was almost peerless on the platform. He carried the keys to the hearts of his people. They fell easy victims beneath his resistless charms. He knew exactly where the chords of their hearts were and he swept them with a master's hand. At one moment he would stir his audience to uproarious laughter, the next he would inflame them with indignant fire; the next he would subdue them to tears, and the next he would have them shouting, leaping, dancing and singing with ecstatic raptures. His pictures were so radiant that the spectator forgot the speaker and stood entranced before the creation of his flaming fancy.

It was known that I was an ardent admirer of this unique product of the ante-bellum civilization. Two of my friends once chided me for flattering the old negro preacher by my frequent attendance upon his ministry. They thought that he was eccentric and unworthy of countenance. My answer was a demand that they should hear him before they delivered their verdict, and they consented to go. We went in company and reaching the church late we were put on the platform in front of the pulpit, with our backs to the speaker. One of my friends had brought his ten-year-old son with him. The preacher's topic was the "Raising of Lazarus," and as he approached the point of bringing forth the dead from the grave, his imagination took fire. He grew intensely dramatic, and his canvass glowed under the light of his soul until the painting was fast becoming real to the audience. The little boy was sitting next to me and he turned with a pained face and asked that we would "go home." I whispered to him that the sermon was almost finished and that he must wait a little longer. Meanwhile the old preacher was coming to white-heat, and once more the boy insisted with much feeling that we should go at once. His father noticed the lad's uneasiness and drew him into his arms and quieted him. After the service was concluded and we had reached the street I said to the boy somewhat brusquely that I would like to know why he was in such a swivet to leave before the sermon was over. "Oh, my," said the still excited boy, "I thought he had a dead man under the pulpit and was going to take him out, and I wanted to get away." Demosthenes never had a higher tribute to his oratorical power. The other gentleman who had chided me for frequenting Jasper's church was silent for a season after we left the church, but finally stopped suddenly, and fixing his eyes on me, declared: "I never saw a man with such matchless mastery over the hearts of men as that man has." It was no exaggerated compliment.

What made him so resistless? I know not, and yet there were facts in the case which I was forced to note. He saw things with a cloudless eye. What he read became living facts to him. If his theme was Knoch walk-

ing with God, he saw the two together and made you see them. If he told of the death of Moses, he saw him ascend the mountain, saw his spirit in its sudden flight, saw the burial and saw the angel guarding his tomb. He was never obscure in his conceptions. His sermons were visions. The true orator must be a seer. He will never make things plainer to others than they are to him—hardly so plain. Those who cannot see truth in its proportions and relations cannot teach others. Just to the extent one sees what he says, will he be able to communicate it to others. In this respect Jasper was pre-eminent. He came to his pulpit with his message full and clear before his own eyes. Indeed he was instinct with his sermon—it was wrought into his personality, and went out of him in the currents of his own life. He and his message were one. It was this thorough identification of himself and his subject that helped to clothe him with the orator's dash and fire.

Jasper was a glorious hater. The power to hate is a part of humanity's title to honor. In speaking of the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes—whatever that was—Jesus said: "Which things I hate." No man can move people who does not hate things. Of course all depends on the things hated. Jasper hated injustice, hated sham, hated treachery, and did not lack much of hating his enemies in moments of heat and fight. It was something terribly sublime to witness the volcanic bursts of his wrath and to see what bolts of vengeance he could hurl at those who dishonored God. He was of the Elijah sort, and David's denunciatory Psalms were good reading for him. His moral aversion to things evil and mean was fearful. It may at times have been mixed with personal feeling and colored by his prejudices, but not in a measure to weaken him seriously. Those who heard him could not fail to see the persuasive religious strains in all he said. He was jealous for the honor of his God, and his fight was for the truth. This imparted strength to his utterances.

This fine old man had a great soul. He was a fountain of tenderness. The things of God and the sorrows of men "got hold upon him," and his whole being trembled and melted before the truth. If he preached on the cross he was there at Calvary, saw it all, and cried like a little child before the spectacle of dying love. If he preached on grace, his own sense of that grace would overpower him and his sermon was made of shouts and tears. If he preached on heaven, he stood inside of the gate of pearl, saw the throne, the living creatures and the redeemed, and carried his people with him far out of sight of earth. If he preached on the Judgment, he stood uncovered, a sinner at the bar, asking for pity and glory. If it was a funeral, his soul went down to the mourners, wept with them, anointed them with heavenly balm and told them of glory to come. A tender heart is an orator's best equipment.

Thousands of things in the Bible puzzled him, but no doubt as to the truth of the Bible ever vexed him. In his eyes the Bible has no blemishes, there was nothing common or unclear in it, and his soul ate it as bread. Men who have no positive convictions as to the truth of the Bible cannot preach. They may deliver discourses and be sprightly entertainers, but it takes convictions with long roots to make preachers. Jasper's unmeasured love of the Word of God made him mighty in preaching it. He could not serve the gospel in the modern restaurant style dressed in herbs, on flowered dishes, and silver-ware, but he put it up in the old way and always served it hot. Those who went to him for food and not for the dishes found Jasper's table the place to eat.

His vocabulary was limited, but his gestures, tears, smiles and odd movements were his vernacular, and were always available when his dictionary failed him. He could construct a syllogism out of a laugh, administer rebuke by the crook of his long finger and fix a truth into a sure place by a pause or a look.

This strange man—so out of joint with his times—was nearly ninety when he died. He was almost fifty when the Civil War came and had already been a preacher for twenty years. He never fell in with the new dispensation, and was of the old order to the day of his death. Jasper had no school education, but he had the good fortune to be reared in a refined family, to have contact with choice and cultured people. He also learned to read and lived with his Bible. Those things made him an educated man. When the new order came and the school-taught man came to the platform they sneered at him and he had no pride in them. This brought war between the old and the new, and the old won. He was the prince of the house, made so not by ignorance nor prejudice, but by genius, simple loyalty to the truth, and an honest use of what he had.

What would he have been if born under the reign of freedom? I cannot answer the question. He was a distinct product of the old civilization. Take him as he was, and show a greater than he if you can.—The Baptist Standard.

Who would not enter into God's plans and purposes? He will bless those who will.

Delightful Studies.

JESUS BEFORE AND AFTER.

BY M. E. SHAW.

It is confidently affirmed by some that our blessed Lord was radically changed in many important particulars by his experience in death and resurrection. Before his death, they say, he was subject to limitations, and liable to make mistakes, and only lived up to the light he had.

An illustration is sometimes gravely used, in the two instances of a miraculous draught of fishes. Before his death, as recorded in Luke 5: 6, there was a great multitude of fishes "and the net brake." After the resurrection, as recorded in John 21: 11, the fishes were "an hundred and fifty and three and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken." It is astonishing how far this kind of an argument will go down with some "learned" men. But let us examine this proposition a moment. Before and after, he was anxious that his disciples have peace. In his last recorded conversation in the upper room he said: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace." His first recorded words to the eleven: "Peace be unto you."

He was always troubled at the unbelief of the disciples. Before his death time and again he chided them because of their lack of faith. After the resurrection it was just the same. He chides Cleopas and his companion, and to the eleven he says: "Why are ye troubled? and who do thoughts (reasonings) arise in your hearts?"

In that last evening before his death Jesus ate with the disciples. He partook of bread and the fruit of the vine. In that first evening after the resurrecting, taking a bit of broiled fish, and a piece of honey-comb, he ate before them.

But, most important, as a nut to be cracked by our "learned" friends, is the fact that Jesus regarded Moses and all the prophets in exactly the same light before and after his passion. Again and again in his ministry he endorses all the Old Testament worthies,—Moses, Job, Jonah, and all the rest. After his resurrection he delivers two discourses in the same day, that first day, with the text: "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets." See Luke 24: 27, 44.

Jesus had the same spirit of zeal before and after. Before his death he was always on the move, going to Samaria, Nazareth, Sarepta, Perra, Gadara, and the cities of Juda. After the resurrection he says, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached among all nations beginning at Jerusalem."

What did the angels mean when they said, "This same Jesus?" It must have been, that, "Jesus is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever."

"The Religion of Humanity."

Mr. Frederic Harrison, the great English positivist, is expounding the principles of the religion of which he stands as chief representative, on the platform and in the press of this country. He is too great and too excellent a man to have any slight or slur made upon him or his cause. He preaches a religion with God left out of it, for he believes that a conception of God or a belief in a hereafter is not essential to religion. He seems to cling to the word "religion," and has no sympathy with those who would extirpate religion from the world. Why he should be so insistent in calling his code of ethics and scheme of life a religion is hard to tell. But he likes to do it and why should we object? He labels a thing religion which is little more than morality, with some philanthropy added to it. The end of it is the progress and good of humanity, therefore it is called the religion of humanity. He thinks that a theological religion, with a creed that includes supernatural facts and transcendental truths, can have little to do with human life; that it is lacking in sympathy with the world weighted down by its wants and sorrows.

Let us see how far this is true. In last week's Literary Digest all this is set forth in Mr. Harrison's own words quoted from his article in the North American Review. And then in a contiguous column we find a summary of the activities of a single church in New York, a church which believes in God, in the supernatural and in the world to come. Among the works of humanity wrought by this single church are missions and fields for Swedes, Germans, and Chinese; loan associations; employment bureau; saving fund; clinic which treats 7,000 persons in one year; fresh air fund, and numberless charities and ministers for the poor, sick, friendless and helpless in the districts around the church.

We could not help comparing such a church ministry to the world in the love of God and because of the love of God, with other societies which have no belief in God or a revealed religion, but simply preach ethical humanitarianism. We are inclined to think the church we refer to, subscribing to the apostles' creed and calling Jesus Lord, is doing more for humanity than all the positivists of Christendom put together, though they claim theirs is a religion of humanity. Real humanity springs from a belief in God who is the Father of us all. They who most firmly believe in the supernatural, and live as serving the invisible, are the best friends and helpers of the race. It is common to decry creeds but it is a fact that nearly all the work for the fallen, the outcast, and the barbarian is done by those who hold most strenuously the articles of faith which are found in the word of God. Those who love God most serve man best. A genuine humanity has its roots in a spiritual life and a personal aith in Jesus Christ.—The Commonwealth.