

Present Day Preaching.

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There is a tendency in the present day to speak of preaching as an institution of the past, the need and utility of which are passing away before the march of intelligence and the superior influence of the press. Preachers and sermons are the favorite topics of social grumblers. "The foolishness of preaching" is a favorite text of the satirist; and even in the conversation of middle class society—the class that still attends public worship—nothing is more common than a flippant tone of criticism and disparagement, in regard to the inflictions of the pulpit.

The favorite explanation of this decreasing respect for the pulpit is that the press is largely taking its place, and doing more efficiently what was formerly the work of the preacher. It cannot be for a moment doubted that the press is doing a vast work—good work—and some part of what was once the province of the pulpit. All the intellectual side of religious culture is shared by the press. Books, tracts, and newspapers, now diffuse information which men once learned from the preacher, and diffuse it far more widely and effectually than the latter was ever able to do.

The pulpit has no longer any monopoly even of moral or religious subjects, but we find topics discussed by the press, and reflections given, which once would have been thought trenching upon the peculiar province of the ministry. Theology is discussed in books with a fulness and thoroughness beside which any sermon must seem flimsy and incomplete. Even the great foundations which were left for the preaching of special courses of sermons on points of Divinity, such as the Boyle and

Hulsean lectures, have gradually come to be, in reality, the mere reading from the pulpit of works prepared for the wider audience and the closer study which books attract.

Now all this may, it is true, point to considerable changes in the relative place of the pulpit to the wants and the agencies of the time, but not to its being superseded. Indeed, many of the changes are rather such as to help the true preacher in his work. They clear the ground for him. They enable preaching to be made more interesting and effective. The increase of education, if it takes away the preacher's monopoly of instruction, gives him a far more prepared soil in which to sow his special seed of religious and spiritual thought.

The preacher can now take much more for granted as known by any ordinary congregation than he could fifty years ago. To those who preach a Christianity affecting all the relationships of life, this must be a very great encouragement. Acquaintance with literature has indeed made men far more critical of the pulpit, and far more expectant from it. The habit of finding every topic of the hour discussed in newspaper articles in a terse, lively, and varied style, makes society intolerant of mere common-places in the pulpit, to an extent unknown in "the good old times." This will be regretted only by those who have no living thought to give forth, and whose prosy platitudes, however they might be tolerated, were just as useless in the past as now.

The true preacher of to-day feels it a great help to him in his work that his hearers are familiarised with many subjects of deep vital interest; and he may now adopt and cultivate a less formal style of expression and illustration. No change however can rob the preacher of the largest