

# The Fraternal.

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## The Preacher in the New World of To-day.

*A Paper read at the B.M.F.U. Conference,  
Spring Assembly, 1914.*

By R. C. GILLIE, M.A.

There is, of course, no necessary connection between our arbitrary chronology and the psychological and spiritual crises of mankind; but it is not a little curious to observe that near the beginning of this century, just as was the case near the beginning of the nineteenth, there is a feeling of newness, an odd impression of the vitality and the crudeness of youth. Already many of us feel what a chasm separates us from the Victorian era. Soon we shall recognise how decisively we are looking in another direction from that of our immediate predecessors. The life-history of this twentieth century is clearly not going to be a replica of the nineteenth. We ought to take our bearings from time to time as we sail this uncharted sea. You may read the situation differently from me. At least I may help to ripen your judgment and to prepare you to read the signs of the times in other than apocalyptic fashion.

I am going to suggest to you, then, some of the main currents in the thought and feeling of our time, not necessarily the most prominent. When we see the crest of the wave, its power is on the eve of passing. The formative and eruptive influences deserve our special attention, especially if at present they are not obvious to all. We want to be preachers for the future as well as for the present.

### I.

*The defiant challenge to the old, the revolutionary spirit in morals and in art just as much as in religion.*

In the past there have been definitely anti-Christian movements which have always proclaimed that they had no quarrel with Christian morality, save indeed that it was too ideal. Their quarrel was with its theology, with its so-called facts, and its demand for faith. The ten Commandments they respected, and Jesus they accepted as the ideal of manhood.

What we have to understand to-day is, that this is no longer the case. The foundations of the old morality are being torn up. "Power" has taken the place of "Truth" in many eyes as the real god of this life. "The will to power" is praised as the topmost worthiness in a man. Our Lord's reputation for perfect character remains no longer unchallenged. Rather He is attacked for having given the vogue to self-sacrifice, and for having consecrated the service of the weak. This, of course, is the teaching of Nietzsche, but many to whom he is a mere name are feeling the drag and the swirl of the tide he in some measure created, and in some measure represented. In former days, men who broke moral laws never pretended they were discovering a new kind of righteousness. They were rebels, saying defiantly, "Evil, be thou my Good." But now people are often more subtle. Their published point of view is: "What people call Evil is really another kind of good. It is not so much what you

do, but the energy wherewith you do it, that really matters in a real world."

Then there are a good many who profess a moral anarchism, and to whom the one great sin is unreality. They cry : "Away with veils. Strip them off. Yes, even if the veils cling as closely as the skin, or are there for modesty's sake, away with them. Let us get in and down to the naked truth. Only thus can we escape decadence and senility." Hence all the things that people have got into the habit of merely saying, whether they were mere conventions or wise proprieties or statements of eternal truth, are cast together on the rubbish heap, because they have been muddled as platitudes. You will easily see who are the leaders of this movement. The name of Bernard Shaw will leap to your lips.

There are still others in revolt against the whole of the Past; its artistic dicta are just as much shibboleths to them as the ten Commandments. The one duty they recognise is self-expression. The only god they know is the god within. The one thing they fear is the restraint of any fixed principle or the compulsion of the past. Perhaps some of you looked into that strange picture show of the Futurists two years ago. Most men laughed and came away. Every law of perspective, of colouring, and even of ordinary vision, seemed to be defied. Houses leaned out of the perpendicular, the inside and the outside of streets and of homes were confounded; a fragment of a face with strange accompaniments was labelled a portrait, and so forth. To me there was something both moving and informing in this outpouring of tumultuous minds, in this urging of experiment to the verge of madness, in this fury of self-expression. It was in itself a cryptogram, and yet it furnished the key to a great deal in modern life which puzzles us, because it is as yet undeveloped. Individuality, my own individuality, is the one sacred and indefeasible thing—that is the central idea. Let me be a world to myself, and a god

to myself. The only things I have to fear are lethargy, the failure of energy, the loss of power, and disloyalty to myself, failure to say what I am, distrust of what rises in my breast.

Well, this is only a fragment of feverish civilisation we have been studying momentarily. But it has its significance. Just because of its crude outlines, it helps us to see whither some tidal currents are setting. And it has its nobility. Such stupendous vitality and uncalculating daring ought to make an appeal to us. It has its deadly side also. Obviously, no tyranny would be so terrible as the tyranny that forbids humanity to have a past, and goads man everlastinglly towards the untried and unknown. Life would be like a perpetual procession of new houses, the plaster of each one newer than its predecessor. It reminds one of de Musset. When a child, a pair of red shoes were bought for him. The servant delayed to put them on his feet, fumbling with the straps. In a fever of impatience he cried: "Make haste, make haste! They will be old before I can wear them." This revolt against the old is obviously caused by an obsession that the new is likeliest to be true, and by a perfectly ungrounded conviction that only what emerges from within oneself is authoritative and valuable. But I state the tendency not to combat it or to disprove its vitality. My aim is to prepare us for a ministry in a world coloured, if not soaked, by this passion. How should it affect us? What can we learn from it? God has often had to teach His Church by the unorthodoxies. From the time of Jesus' parables the saints have had to learn from the energy of the evil.

(1). In the foreground I set this certainty. Things which are really of the texture of eternity are timeless. They are not old, they are not new. Or, if you will, they are as essentially modern as they are visibly ancient. Christianity should hail the demand for the new. In any such quest, it will be the first and the best, if only its essential quality, agelessness, is disclosed. We shall reveal this best by demonstrating its vitality, its preparedness to

put itself to the proof again and again. To hasten to re-clothe Christian truth in the language of evolutionary science or psychological philosophy is not a very convincing proof of the essential modernness of our religion. But unceasingly to let it speak for itself, to clear away the debris from the well-head so that the spring can flow freely, to conduct it in new directions and to open new channels for it, that is the most pressing business of the Christian preacher. There is no better illustration of this eternal vitality than that at which I have just hinted—the spring which has flowed for a thousand years or more. In the same site, with the same surroundings, yet every minute of the thousand years the water of the fountain has been new ; and this is known, not because it tasted differently, or because its source was constantly changing, but because it was always fresh, unceasingly present, though it unceasingly flowed away. It is almost fatally easy to be constantly asserting that the old Gospel is ever new. This is really as fruitless as the other expedient I have already criticised of dressing out Christianity in the latest scientific or philosophical fashion. Our business is to *show* that Christianity is new, that Christ is still an undiscovered Country in many directions, that His demands and His gifts have only partially been understood, that He is as immediately applicable to this day as to any year of the nineteenth century.

(2). To do this efficiently we must scrutinise the enemy at the gate. Quite certain he would not be there unless he had got possession of some weapon which is really the property of Christianity. Read aright, Nietzsche reminds us that we have sentimentalised Jesus. We had forgotten how strong He was, how stern, how resolute, how unflinching. Read aright, Bernard Shaw has compelled us to weigh our words and to reconsider the essentials of our moral life. We had got into the habit of thinking mere respectability a Christian virtue; we had learned to go blindfold and numb of nose amid loathsome and abominable things, though we really knew they were there. Christianity can

only gain with all the veils away. And latest of all, this tumultuous energy and the glorying in it ought to blow away out of our hymn books and out of our piety a great deal of the pleasant pensiveness and sweet melancholy which still haunts and enfeebles a good deal of religious life. Everything that is true in any of these revolutionary cries to-day is the echo of some note Christianity once possessed and has lost, or is the prophetic prelude of music always latent in Christianity and now only brought to ear.

(3). When we consider the more distinctly moral aspect of this earthquake movement of thought, we can surely rejoice, though with trembling. There will be deeper tragedy, and there may be more desperate devilry when men deny the old landmarks as well as forsake the old anchorage; but this is a moral universe, and morality is perpetually proving its truth afresh. One can do much to steady men and to help them to the true seamanship of the soul by showing patiently and thoroughly what moral anarchy in this direction or that involves. At the same time, more clearly than ever before, one can mark the distinction between the conventional, which one may throw away at any moment without compunction, and the moral which must remain inviolate at all costs. And here again we shall observe if any true conviction is held more firmly and wielded more unflinchingly by the non-believer than by Christ's people. We shall not hesitate to learn the one truth in a wilderness of error.

The beacon light we must always keep before men's eyes is this. Morality is not simply the police code and the police work of society, necessary if it is to hang together. Moral forces are creative forces. Immoral forces are destructive forces. Morality conserves and develops life. Immorality—in the wide sense of the word—dissipates and corrodes energy. It is quite true that sometimes when men overleap the eternal barriers between right and wrong, we seem to see a great generation of force. But it is like the force in the flames of a burning house. As the flames

leap to the heaven and the roof crashes to the earth, we see force, terrific and affrighting; but it is a destructive force. Tomorrow there will be blackened walls, and smouldering ashes, and the ruins of a home. There was far more real force, productive force, in the fire of the blacksmith's forge, which had to be quickened from time to time by the bellows. Let us write this deep on men's spirits, then. Morality is in the interests of life, of fulness of life, and we are not going to be betrayed by any sudden display of activity and vigour, the end whereof is death. Immorality devitalises, therefore it is our enemy. Not in the name of respectability or security—but in the name of life and truth we stand for the eternal principles of goodness and righteousness.

(4). When the warfare on moral principles is transferred to the site of Christ's character, then we can rejoice without fear. This is a question which ordinary human honesty and intelligence can solve for itself. Was Jesus of Nazareth as pictured in the Gospels perfect man or not? There is no question as to the answer in the end. Men might be confused with the question of His historicity: they might become entangled in questions of His Deity; but when the really decisive battle is fought to-day on the question of His fundamental moral convictions as He lived and taught them, then the issue is certain. We ought to be glad to fight this battle, and welcome all the aspects of this discussion. We shall emerge, enriched by our knowledge of Christ through contrasts men sought to prove disruptive, but which are seen in the end only to be the completion of His full-orbed being.

In this imperfect fashion I have indicated to you how we ought to be affected by the transformations of moral bases we are seeing, and may see, to-day. At least it is a day pulsating with life; a day when the preacher cannot easily drowse. The horn is ever winding, the trumpet sounding. Wearied he may be; ennuyed he should never be; and despair is forbidden by the grace of God.

## II.

*In the striking phrase of Hugo Munsterberg, the storm-centre of thought has passed from Physical Science to Psychology.*

The arrogance of Physical Science has been humbled in recent years. Its theories have had to be revised, and it is less inclined to issue sovereign commands to both religion and philosophy. It is very busy reconstructing its own world. Like ancient conquerors who were called home from far campaigns because of intestinal conflicts in their capital, science has been called back to its own proper work of investigation and hypothesis and revision of hypothesis. And on the other hand, Christian thinking has been able to assimilate what is highly probable, and to disregard what is still problematic in scientific teaching. Far fewer people find the theory of evolution a bar to Christian faith, and whether they can adjust the doctrine of a fall or not to their scientific thinking, they at least find that Jesus Christ is not explained away, but rather illuminated by the latest discoveries and discussions. No; where the stress of conflict is found is in psychology. Thence come the most serious menaces; thence, too, are coming the most fruitful suggestions. Personality, Divine and human, how far is it a final conception, and how far do we receive it rightly, and to what degree does it remain dark? These are the questions which quicken us and shadow us, if we are standing at the vantage point of thought.

There is certainly potential dynamite here. If some assertions concerning personality could be proved, we should flounder in a deeper scepticism than has been yet known. It was one thing to try and identify mind and brain, it is a more subtle course to admit the reality of mind, and at the same time deny the finality of personality. So one philosopher argues the reasonableness of the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, and the sum total of his influence for the people as a whole is to dissolve belief in

personal immortality. That is perhaps the chief interrogation of men of religious temper and sceptical temperament which we are called on to answer—Do we live again? And we shall answer it not so much by elaborate arguments for continued personal existence, as if men had no impression of it, but rather by continual underpinning of the foundations which are there. The most helpful address I ever heard on the subject was entitled, "*Verifications of the instinct of immortality.*" The conviction in our nation and in individuals exists; but part of the foundations have been clay and part have been swamp. We must renew the foundations. We shall constantly be going back to Jesus as our great Witness as well as Authority. By His demeanour as much as by His teaching, He convinces us that He really knew. We have to communicate that daylight certainty, that abiding practical conviction to our people.

But besides this, we must be alert for the new teachings of the Spirit of God through this particular study. An acute thinker said to me lately, "Psychology is the path of the Holy Ghost." I want you to ponder that. As we know more about personality and the influence of personality, and the leakage of personality, and what causes personality to be conducting or non-conducting of energy, we shall learn better how to do our work. And is there not a new view-point for the whole New Testament to be found here? Supposing we go back to the Gospels with this leading thought in our mind, shall we not be more ready to meet the practical psychology of Jesus with far deeper interest, the truest form of respect? And when we pass to St. Paul, will it not be to learn that the deepest mysticism and the best informed mental science agree? This is a world still dim to us, over which the dawn is only creeping, through which preachers of the future are meant to grope their way. And with the New Testament for a clue, I doubt not they will oftentimes meet Jesus Christ there, and return to the older world of outer-action more fit to do His errands.

## III.

*A wave of religious mysticism has swept over our nation, especially over the well-to-do part of it.*

It is often ill regulated and unguided, but it is quite marked. Faith as an attitude of mind has been rehabilitated in the last quarter of a century. A cultivated man is not expected to believe in nothing; rather he is expected to have his own little esoteric doctrine, or to be dallying with one religion or other. One sees how far this has gone when one hears men like H. G. Wells or Bernard Shaw proclaiming their own religion which is their own invention, perhaps intuition. It has no external basis. It does not seek proof. It is presented as having a right to exist. Such a phenomenon would have been impossible in the seventies of last century. In its extremest form this crude mysticism is seen in the tendency to accept eclectic faiths, amalgams always with some tincture of Christianity, and they are accepted purely on the testimony of experience and intuition. I am thinking, of course, of Christian Science and of Theosophy. But in more reputable, indeed wholly admirable forms you can observe this mystical tendency, which is always focussed before us in the sharpest form in the Society of Friends. It may be illustrated in different ways, in the recoil from the rigorous application of mere logic to religious thinking, in the increasing interest in mystical literature, in a deepened desire and higher expectation in connection with the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The flowing tide at present is with the mystical rather than the evangelical type of Christianity. The distinction is a real one, though of course an Evangelical may be mystical, and a Mystic may be evangelical. Evangelicalism, at least in its narrow sense, does rest on a somewhat definite view of what was accomplished at the Cross. The Christian mystic depends directly on Christ as the avenue to God and the guarantee of God. He does not define very far, or at all, what the solemnity of the Cross includes.

Now there is much in this new attitude which ought to be

very helpful to every Christian preacher, for the truth is that there must be a strand of mysticism in the wider sense in all personal experience of Christianity. Reason can lead you along the road of the Spirit, or Authority can guide you there; but the time comes when the road ceases and both Reason and Authority have to say: "Now venture to leap the gulf. Use your wings. You possess them." That is an essentially mystical act. It may be justified by reason because of the high probability that your faith will not be deceived. But the fact remains—there has to be a plunge of faith, taken either swiftly or slowly, either consciously or half-consciously as is sometimes the case. The tendency to mysticism ought to make it easier for the really earnest seeker to touch hands with Christ. For this final action of the soul that has followed the path of reason or authority is what the mystic does all the time. The Christian who depends at first on a chain of thought, whether evangelical or sacramentarian, is like a swimmer who treads the bottom until he has to trust himself to the water, the mystic may be said to dive in at once. There is no graduation. He leaps from the solid and material straight into the invisible which, he contends, is the more real. To complete the analogy I may add that the Quietist is like a man content to float, so delighted with the certainty that the water upholds him, that he is not anxious about his progress in the water. If there are more and more who are prepared to plunge straight into the unseen embrace and invisible upholding, there is greater encouragement for people in general to make this final act of committal.

A mystical tendency is also a very welcome check to the intellectualism to which much of Protestant Christianity has yielded during the last thirty years and more. I do not say we have thought too much, but we have often addressed people too much as if they were philosophers. We have disregarded the elemental man which is in the thinker as surely as in the athlete or the craftsman. We have gone in fear of being too simple and

too direct when we were speaking of the big and the deep things. We have confounded a little the intellectual and the intelligent, and have felt that our work must bear the stamp of intellect. So there has oftentimes been a lack of personal impact and contact. Now the mystical is not the contradiction of the intellectual, but the one does transcend the other. And we are encouraged to appeal more immediately to the elemental needs and desires of the soul when the mystical is in the ascendant. I am sure this ought to be a growing element in preaching. Perhaps the most open gate is through the Unseen Presences of the soul; the Presence without, companioning and overshadowing; the Presence within, dwelling in the innermost. There is an immediate response to George Macdonald's lines in every Christian breast—

O Son of Man, to right my lot  
Naught but Thy Presence can avail;  
Yet on the road Thy wheels are not,  
Nor on the sea Thy sail.  
  
My how or when Thou wilt not heed;  
But come down Thine own secret stair,  
That Thou mayst answer all my need,  
Yea, every bygone prayer.

Remember there is nothing monkish or unpractical or non-moral about Christian mysticism. The greatest Christian mystics have been the truest and often the most practical moralists. The Quakers as an example immediately occurs. Therefore the present trend to Quakerism is to be encouraged and used. It will only make our Christianity more robust as well as more profound.

But just because mysticism has taken extravagant forms and credulity has limped back to life in the wake of faith, there is this problem set us—to teach people to differentiate between the true and the false mysticism. There is great need for this. I recently examined a number of very intelligent laymen on Dr. Dale's, "The Living Christ and the Four Gospels," the burden of which is the testimony of Christian Experience. I don't think

ten per cent. had grasped the fact that the new rival faiths all offer in name the same argument as the Christian does, namely, the testimony of experience. They had no idea that for their argument to be triumphant they must provide a test between the true mysticism and the pseudo-morphic. To justify such a differentiation, one must on the one hand appeal to the Rule of Faith, the norm provided by the highest religious experience; and on the other hand to the moral results of any mystical belief. That will be the final test. I cannot resist mentioning the testimony which the employees in a large Conference Hostel volunteered to a friend of mine the week the Theosophists were there. They kept the staff up very late, never offered to assist in any way to lighten their labours, and generally gave the impression of selfishness. The next week the Quakers came. They were simple in manner, considerate to the servants, anxious to be in human relations with them. No doubt was left on the minds of the servants of that Hostel which kind of mysticism was genuine. Life is like that. These modern mystical faiths have yet to be tested as Neo-Platonism and Mithraism were tested. Argument can only go a little way. As Dean Swift said, "You cannot argue a man out of a thing he has not been argued into." But the sieve of time is ceaselessly at work. The results can be waited with patience.

#### IV.

I have made these suggestions to you, not that you may be constantly preaching about such topics. Need I say that this was farthest from my intention? But that you may know the accessible vantage-ground and the best view-points in preaching the Gospel of our Lord to men. The line of least resistance is the right road for the Christian preacher, unless it is forbidden by some principle of truth. We must learn to approach men where they are approachable, and not be too proud to copy the adaptability of the Apostle Paul. Every minister has his face to the rising or setting sun of applied and applicable truth. Some ministers were perfectly adjusted to the contemporaries of their youth, but the

adjustment has never been renewed. Some, indeed, were adjusted to the contemporaries of their parents—I had almost said grandmothers—and have never read the signs of the times since. We want to be the children of the Dawn, we preachers: our faces towards the coming forces and the opening truths. Only so shall we be able to bring the timeless message of God's love and mercy into intimate relation with all types and grades of men.

If we are to be preachers for the future as well as for the present, we must sometimes speak a language unfamiliar to our older hearers, and set forth ideas and aspects of ideas which are strange if not alarming to them. Let it be our ambition to carry with us our whole congregation as we face the East, and welcome new truth, and adjust ourselves to new demands which others do not recognise. How is this to be accomplished? Make evident and make secure in the first place the common basis and bond. Convince our older office-bearers that we care supremely for Christ and for the souls of men. So preach the Saviour of men that they will know this thing for certain, that we believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and love to preach Him. Enlist them in prayer and in sympathy as we feel the burden of the souls for whom we watch, and for whom we must give account. Then when we present our new thought, or speak with a new accent, do it boldly and modestly, but do not throw bombs about.

There is a great deal of unsettlement already. We have done a good deal of housebreaking in the religious world recently, and some souls are shivering who would have been well sheltered in our forefathers' day. There is no special virtue in evicting people from the resting-places of mistaken religious thought. Far better woo them into a new house before we destroy the old. Therefore, as far as possible, present alternatives when we are setting forth the fresh point of view. Let people see we have no desire to drive them at the point of the bayonet from one home of thought to another, but that we feel it a duty to help those

to find a roof who have left the old homestead because they feared it would fall about their ears.

If a minister has given guarantees of his loyalty to Christ and to the Gospel of Salvation, conservative hearers will give him great liberty of expression, though unwilling to stir one step themselves and entirely without any sense of need of change. Nay, more, without unworthy compromise a preacher can often convince people who have been wedded to the old phrase and thing that they lose nothing spiritually by a change of view or of horizon. That ought to be a serious consideration for them and for us. We must seek and teach Truth at all costs, to be sure; but one test of truth in the religious sphere is its spiritual content and implications. We ought to have a tender thought for those who fear to lose their God when they lose a certain theory of inspiration. Patiently, finger by finger, let us unclasp their hands until we can give them a stronger and freer view which makes both God and man more wonderful and the truth of God none the less sure. St. Luke records a saying of Jesus which the other Evangelists omit, a saying which I treasure greatly, for it reveals in an exquisite way our Lord's consideration for those who cling to the old. When He spoke His brief parable of the new wine in the old bottle, you remember how He added, "Some will say 'The old is better.'" How understanding He was. Be like Him.

I think I have made plain to you, then, that I am an apostle of the middle way. I am entirely unashamed of it. I want the old and the new; I want to combine the opposites; I want the ancient Gospel in the modern setting: if I am big enough I think I should be able to include both. I lose something if I lose either. This middle path is not a knife-edge. The preacher in the middle path is not sitting on the fence. There is a whole continent for him to occupy, and much of it is unexplored. If men pursued the middle way with as much ardour as they pursued extreme

views, if they proclaimed its splendid spaciousness with the passion which they devote to the defence of the old or the exploitation of the new, the church would swing forward with a new impetus and with less friction. And I think I have the mind of Christ. Jesus was not a John the Baptist, neither was He a Gamaliel. Two unforgettable sentences shine out with mild radiance over a broad land—"He that is not for us is against us." "He that is not against Me is for Me." He is the Mediator in an incomparable and unrivalled way. But I think we are not farther off but nearer to Him when we, in another fashion, are mediators too. Let us be ready to incur blame and, if need be, shame, while we declare the truth of the wide central lands, and seek to hold the middle path for Christ.

## From the Secretary's Desk.

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The Secretary of our Fraternal Union enjoys the envy of many people during the Spring Meetings. On all sorts of occasions men can be seen approaching him and surreptitiously slipping a piece of silver into his hand, generally a half-crown, and on-lookers wonder why this man should be so blessed. This means, however, of collecting subscriptions is not always a convenient one. I have managed to keep a record in every case save one, of money I received during the Union Meetings. In one case I am at a loss; I received a half-crown, and I don't know the man who gave it to me. Pray don't all of you write up and claim it. I have the name, but it doesn't help me much. "Williams" was the name given me, and on referring to our list of members I found so many Williamses *who hadn't paid for 1914*, that I gave it up in despair, and the receipt awaits the identification of this one honourable member of the clan of Williams.

Our Spring Conference was a great success in every way. The address by the Rev. R. C. Gillie, M.A., on "The Ministers' Work in the New World of To-day," was greatly appreciated by the large company of our members present. We are grateful for the privilege we have of publishing his paper in this issue of our *Fraternal*. Many of our members who were not able to be present at the Conference will be glad of the opportunity of reading it. Those of us who heard Mr. Gillie will read it now with the greater avidity.

I should like to express again our thanks to Mr. Henry Hurrell, of Plymouth, who so graciously entertained us to tea. About 150 of the brethren partook of his hospitality.

The Election of Officers for 1914-15 resulted as follows—

<i>Chairman</i>	...	A. W. B. Emery.
<i>Vice-Chairman</i>	...	P. T. Thomson.
<i>Treasurer</i>	...	J. H. French.
<i>Secretary</i>	...	T. J. Whitman.
<i>Prayer Union Sec.</i>	...	J. E. Martin.
<i>Editor</i>	...	J. Landels Love.

Committee:—

J. H. Brooksbank	G. H. James	T. Phillips
C. Brown	H. G. Hoare	W. H. Pratt
C. T. Byford	W. E. Hurst	A. M. Ritchie
J. C. Carlile	F. A. Jones	J. E. Roberts
A. Dakin	W. Joynes	J. H. Rushbrooke
E. D. de Rusett	R. M. Julian	J. R. M. Stephens
W. Y. Fullerton	T. J. Longhurst	H. V. Thomas
G. P. Gould	J. M. Logan	E. E. Welton
W. Hackney	W. S. Lord	W. T. Whitley
C. M. Hardy	S. G. Morris	T. Woodhouse

A very hearty vote of thanks was passed to Dr. Gould, our Chairman of last year, who amid all the pressing duties of his office as President of the Baptist Union, served our Fraternal so splendidly.

## Do we Preach too much?

By W. J. CLEAL.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge said to his friend Charles Lamb: "Lamb, did you ever hear me preach?" To which Lamb answered, "I n-never heard you d-d-do anything else!" To such a position are some of our congregations in danger of being reduced.

When one considers the number of sermons and set addresses in sermonic form delivered by the ordinary minister in the course of a year—shall I be within the mark if I say 150?—and then multiplies that figure by the number of ministers of all denominations in these islands, one is tempted to the cynical suggestion that the practical result of all this pulpit talk is in inverse ratio to its volume.

We are faced with a serious situation. We have a dwindling church attendance, a lamentably uninstructed church membership, and in many places almost wholly inefficient Sunday School teaching. The conception of membership in the Church of Christ is more and more evacuated of its vital content, and the church as a whole is terribly inadequate as a moral guide to society.

Is our present method the best we can invent for doing our work? Do we not preach too much? Does not the quality, spiritual as well as intellectual, of our preaching suffer because of its quantity? And are not a number of other ministries necessary to supplement our preaching, and to make true preaching more possible?

I plead for *one* central and crucial preaching service a week, and another gathering of a distinct kind for “edifying the saints unto the work of ministering,” and for the “building up of the Body of Christ.”

And I plead for this—

1.—For the recovery of the ideal of *worship*. How often do our people meet for the purpose of quiet, deliberate worship? Are we sufficiently conscious in our gatherings of the hushed adoration, the wondering awe that touch our spirits in the hour of intimate communion, when

“Heaven comes down our souls to greet,  
And glory crowns the mercy seat?”

How much opportunity do we give our people for reverent, intelligent, articulate participation in the common worship of the House of Prayer? Have we not unwittingly fostered the feeling that prayer and praise are the comparatively unimportant preliminaries to the main event—the sermon?

2—For the recovery of the true Church Fellowship—the genuine church meeting. This—or its equivalent—we must have if our churches are to be really influential. Somehow we must establish a really warm and friendly meeting for the realisation of fellowship and the close and quickening touch of life upon life. I am not sure that in this direction we have not something to learn from the “Plymouth Brethren,” in their practice of one meeting in the morning for “The Breaking of Bread,” and another in the evening for the proclamation of the Gospel.

3—Do we not need some readjustment for the sake of the more adequate instruction of the Church itself? What do the majority of our people know about the Bible—about the real meaning and message of its various books? How many could clearly

outline the events even of the Great Biography itself? How many church members could give anything like an accurate account of the teachings of Jesus, or of the ethics of Christianity? Now the sermon is obviously a clumsy and ill-adapted instrument for the doing of such supremely necessary and important work, and the preaching of one man can never be a real substitute for the earnest and concerted study of a whole community. As things are in many places, church membership becomes more and more a convention, and *the Church is represented in the popular mind by the image of a parson talking in a pulpit*, "six feet above contradiction," and perhaps six miles above—or below—effective contact, instead of the continuous pressure of a whole community, rich, warm, vital, adequately equipped and efficiently directed.

When one remembers the decay of family worship and the neglect of home Bible study, and the fact that most of those whom we ask to become Sunday School teachers have received no other instruction in the contents of the Scriptures than that which is given by continuous but disconnected preaching on isolated texts, can one wonder at their ineffectiveness? To those who have wrestled unsuccessfully with a separate Teachers' Training Class, I suggest that the remedy lies farther back—in making one of the regular gatherings of the Church a training school in Christian knowledge and Christian service.

Someone may suggest that this can be done by meetings and classes on weekdays. But it is becoming more difficult every year to secure attendance at these. Why not make the Sunday the great rallying-day of the Church for all its main purposes—the constant centre of the true Church Fellowship—and then, radiating from that centre, let there be, if you will, smaller groups for special purposes and for intensive study throughout the week?

Doubtless, the absence of many from our public services is due to sheer indifference; but is not the absence of some a mute

and semi-conscious protest against the unreasonableness of two "preaching services" in one day?

Let us once begin to seriously attempt the equipment of our whole membership for its varied ministry to the needs of men, and I am persuaded we shall attract many detached but earnest spirits, and add immensely to our power and effectiveness.

4—But I plead especially for the restriction of preaching for the sake of its redemption. If there were one central, crucial sermon in the week, one great evangelistic opportunity, it might be filled with a new sense of crisis, a new note of reality, a new flame of passion. It might mean much more to our people, and it would mean more to the preacher. He would go to his work with a new sense of its urgency, and would preach better because he preached less. Our preaching has lost in depth and intensity because we have attempted to cover too wide a range. We have tried to do so much.

Said Professor Johnston Ross some time ago: "We are passing through an epoch of fuss . . . . one by-product of that epoch was the almost unconscious increase in the content of the public demand for speech on the part of the clergy. Breathlessly endeavouring to meet this absurd demand, ministers by the hundred have been forced to give a secondary place to meditation and the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom; and, giving out more than they were taking in, have degenerated into hucksters of cheap speech, chattering with rapid and unholy fluency of the things of God."

I am not pleading for one sermon a week in the interests of rhetorical display, or the production of an elaborate literary essay, but for one channel into which a man may pour all the power and passion that have been gathering through the week in the reser-

voir of his mind and heart. If we compress the force we shall increase the momentum.

The highest kind of preaching is the delivery of a real, prophetic "burden"—a genuine word of God that comes to a man in the silence of his soul, and is shaped into speech in the fire of his own personal experience. But can a man carry *two* such burdens of prophecy on his heart at once? What preacher has not had an experience like this: the one, inevitable message of the week has leapt at him and gripped his heart, and filled his mind; and he has longed for, yet dreaded, the hour of its delivery. But the necessity of the second sermon involved a long search for a subject, and a tame and passionless utterance.

We shall preach better if we preach less.