

ARTICLE III.

PROFESSOR MOORE ON MINISTERIAL TRAINING.

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THE discussion on ministerial training and education begun over a year ago in the *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA* has been continued with great zeal and with diversified results in various periodicals in different portions of the country, and the atmosphere is clearing, and there seems to be a definite idea of the modern conditions emerging. The "intemperate" utterances of the original article in this Review seem to have been at least effective enough to make almost everybody aware that the present conditions are impossible and their continuance ridiculous. And on all sides there seems to be a general recognition of the fact. This is a great gain, and it is likewise hopeful that many of the most thoughtful professors and ministers in the country are seeing that the solution of this particular question lies at the base of the whole question of the recovery of pulpit influence and church effectiveness. By far the most notable contribution to the entire discussion is the paper by Professor George Foot Moore of Harvard University read before the National Council of Congregational Churches at Cleveland. This paper, though reprinted in the *Hartford Seminary Record*, has not received the attention which it deserves, although it is in some respects a final utterance on one phase of the question. Professor Moore practically condemns the present system of ministerial training by showing that the ministry being a practical call-

ing, the accent which the present system gives on the training of "scholars in miniature" utterly fails to reach the point. It is worth while in this connection to recall that this utterance is from one of the first scholars in the land, considered by many both at home and abroad the greatest scholar now at Cambridge, and therefore, not at all a person likely to underestimate scholarly attainments and qualifications. Professor Moore says:—

"The ministry is a *practical* calling, like law or medicine; and preparation for it should be directed, unified, and limited by the practical end. Just as it is not the primary end of the law school to produce men learned in the history or philosophy of jurisprudence, but to train men to *practice* law in their own country and time; as it is not the primary end of the medical school to make men learned in the history or theory of medicine, but to train physicians to practice the healing art in their own generation; so it is not the primary end of a theological school to send out men learned in the history and philosophy of religion, but to train men for the practice of the ministry. The choice of studies, the extent to which they are pursued, the method in which they are taught, should all be determined by reference to this end. The teachers in a theological school may serve the same end in a larger way by publications which enable the working ministry to keep up with the progress of their profession; they may themselves contribute to that progress by investigation and discussion; the schools may offer opportunity for more advanced special study to those whose special work requires it; they may make provision for the education of those who are one day to fill professors' chairs; but their chief, and in many cases their sole, proper business is to prepare ordinary men for the ordinary work of the ministry."

And it will heighten the force of these words, if we recall again to the readers of this Review the words of President Eliot which he addressed to the students of Harvard Divinity School as his last word on the motive of entering the Christian ministry. Nothing possibly could show the strength, power, and insight of Professor Moore's words than this extract from Dr. Eliot's address:—

"It must be confessed, however, that in many instances the salary

of a country minister is too small to enable him to educate his family well, keep himself supplied with books and other means of intellectual growth, and acquit himself appropriately in his high function. Therefore, *well-trained young men who possess the needed mental gifts, and who also have some pecuniary resources either by inheritance or by marriage, ought to aspire to the occupation of the country minister, just as well-to-do young men are going into the profession of medicine not so much for the purpose of practicing medicine as of advancing medical knowledge and skill.*"

Here we have in a nutshell a distinction the failure to observe which has been substantially at the bottom of our whole trouble on the practical side, because the failure to note this distinction has, on the one hand, sent out men with a small headful of unworkable scholarship and no adequate sense of the ministerial calling on its practical effective side. It has chained men to an academic ideal, impossible of attainment by most of them, while destroying their chances for practical efficiency. On the other hand it has opened the churches and the pulpits to men with the gift of speaking platitudes effectively, of reciting poetry and anecdotes and dramatic extracts from novels and the like, but whose lack of intellectual attainments of solid quality steadily lowered the tastes, the thinking power, and religious grasp of the congregations. It cut both ways, in fact, because it presented an inefficient set of "scholarly" men, and placed a premium on a ready and more practical set of less soundly trained men. Of course the effective ones of both types survived, and did their work. But it was an impeachment of the very conception of the uses of scholarly knowledge and training itself, because it did not see the relation of scholarship and ministerial service clearly. On this point Professor Moore speaks with great clearness and authority:—

"The minister cannot be expected to possess the special equipment of the philologist, the critic, or the historian. All that can reasonably be asked of him is that he shall understand the methods of

specialists in these fields and be able to use their results, as the practical physician uses those of the anatomist, the physiologist, and the bacteriologist. Throughout his education, the ruling principle must be, not knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but the knowledge that gives power. Even if there were no question of time, we must recognize that the scholar's habit of mind is very different from that of the practical man, and that the cultivation of the former often disqualifies its possessor for the conduct of affairs; so that the prolongation of the period of study in the pursuit of the ideals of scholarship may diminish a minister's effectiveness rather than increase it."

This is wisdom of the first quality, and it is fortunate that a scholar of Professor Moore's standing and character is sponsor for it. This ought finally and forever to dispose of the cry that the demand for seminary reform is "obscurantism" or something worse. Nor will it now be styled a plea from a class of men who deride the value of the most intense and extended theological and philological studies. Is it not about time that the "scholarly" portion of the church proved that its scholarship is practically of more value than the mere exhortations of the often ignorant evangelist who knows nothing but the text of his Bible, but who really knows that? And are we to leave the most effective practical use of the Bible to socialist orators on the curbstones?

Professor Moore points out, too, the two focal points toward which this more effective training of the minister is to be directed, and here his words, especially on the side of ethical training, are of highest worth:—

"Religion demands a twofold interpretation: men want to know, first, what Christianity is, and, second, what it requires of them; or, to recur to the words of the catechism which I quoted a moment ago, What man is to believe concerning God—*theology*, and what duty God requires of man—*ethics*, in a broad sense, personal and social. These two parts of the task are inseparable; the practice of religion depends upon the fundamental religious conceptions; and, on the other hand, worship and conduct powerfully react on those conceptions. Practical Christianity without an adequate and effect-

ive theology would be only a decadent superstition,—a survival of practices when the ideas which gave them vitality and significance had ceased to actuate men, carried on for a while by the momentum of an impulse once imparted, but inevitably running down, because sustained by no continuous power; and a theology which does not produce and maintain a practical Christianity accordant with its fundamental conceptions is doomed to death by its own barrenness.”

“In preparation for this task, the first thing to be attained is a clear and comprehensive understanding of the Christian religion; for a man to assume to teach others what he does not know himself is, to speak bluntly, immoral. The primary sources are the New Testament writings, the teaching of the Master himself and his apostles. To the understanding of primitive Christianity as we find it in the New Testament, the knowledge of the Old Testament, of Judaism, and of the religious condition of the Gentile world in which Christianity was first preached, is necessary. To understand contemporary Christianity, a knowledge of its historical development, especially in the great critical periods, ancient and modern, is necessary. Exegetical and historical studies are not pursued, however, in the practical curriculum, primarily for the sake of knowing the Bible and Church history, interesting and useful as such knowledge is, but of understanding the Christian religion. The historical apprehension of Christianity is itself only a starting point. What Christianity meant to the Apostles or the Nicene Fathers, to the Schoolmen or the Reformers, is from the practical point of view important because it helps us to answer the vital questions, what Christianity essentially is, and what it means to us.”

The social problem of the church and the world comes in also for treatment in this highly interesting paper. The following should wake up a good many people to an appreciation of what is actually going on in the world. Says Professor Moore:—

“The Good World is the ideal of our age. Socialism is inspired by it; the trade unions are striving to achieve at least some of its physical conditions; the modern state is made an instrumentality for its attainment; men of all classes feel a deepened sense of responsibility for the welfare and happiness of their fellows. The good world is, indeed, often conceived in crudely material and eudæmonistic fashion; it is the good world of man’s satisfaction rather than of God’s purpose, but the ideal is there, however inadequate the conception may be. Nor is this state of things found in Christendom alone, as is sometimes complacently imagined. Buddhism, for example, in progressive lands, is being revived by it.”

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And, following on, here are serious words which are nothing more or less than the unvarnished truth:—

“The Christian Church stands at a crisis in its history; it is being put to the crucial test. Will it keep in the front in the progress of humanity, or will it, unworthy of its mission, be left behind, as the Jewish Church once was? The outcome depends in great degree on the ministry, who by their office are the leaders of the organized forces of the kingdom. Will they rise to the higher conception of the mission of the church and of their own calling? Will they have the knowledge, the wisdom, the devotion, the courage, to be real leaders in the struggles of the modern time for human rights, not merely political or legal, but economic and social; for human welfare in the broadest sense; for the honest business, clean politics, impartial justice, social purity, public health, as well as in moral and religious education,—in a word, in the practical interpretation and application of religion? For such leadership the modern minister must be trained. Unless he is to be the blind leading the blind into the ditch, he must have not only zeal of religion and the passion for humanity, but adequate knowledge of actual economic, social, and moral conditions, and of their causes; of the resources which society possesses to make good triumph over evil, and the way in which they may be made effective.”

Nor does the great Cambridge scholar overlook things which have in recent times held a slight place in the esteem of the “scholarly” portion of our ministry, with its wretched pulpiteering, its mumblings hard to understand, its sneerings for the decencies of public speech, and its general contempt of the “platform” style and habit, its nose stuck to a manuscript while the rear seats wondered what it was all about. Let it be remembered, in reading these words, that it is no “cheap rhetorician” who is speaking, but one of the most erudite men in the land. Every preacher and intending preacher in the land may well take these things to heart.

“The modern minister must be an effective preacher, and training for his task demands a large place in his education. It is often imagined that if a man’s head is well stored with knowledge and his heart filled with a desire to do good, he need not give himself much trouble about learning to preach; or that preaching is a talent which cannot be taught. Both errors lead to neglect of one of the most im-

portant parts of the minister's preparation. The training given is not always of the most effective kind; didactic instruction sometimes concerns itself too much with the formal precepts and caveats of style, or the precosities of phrase-making, the mint, anise, and cummin of 'sacred rhetoric.'

"The fundamental task of the teacher of 'practical theology' is not to give the formula for making a sermon, but to show his students how to translate, or transmute, the facts, truths, principles which they have learned into their practical uses for religious instruction and edification, in the pulpit and out, and into their application to the activities of the church. The inexperienced beginner cannot be expected to make this mediation for himself; he sometimes does not even realize that any such thing is necessary, and pours out in his sermons, now 'higher criticism,' now Biblical theology, now metaphysics, undigested and indigestible.

"Preaching is a form of public speech, and the cultivation of ability to speak forms an essential part of the minister's training. It is not enough that he has something to say that is worth saying; he must be able to say it not only with intellectual and moral impressiveness but with physical effectiveness. The speaker who cannot speak is as bad as the singer who cannot sing. No one is vain enough to imagine that the possession of a good voice, a passable ear, and a song book, will make a singer; but many entertain just this delusion about speaking."

There are other points of importance in this excellent discussion, but enough has been given to show the general trend and purpose of the whole. If this is more "temperate" than the paper in this Review which started this discussion anew, it is none the less drastic and severe upon all who uphold the present impossible system, with its costly results to the church and the ministry. But we are persuaded that light is dawning all around the horizon, and that a new day is at hand. It will not come by cheapening the scholarly quality of the ministry, but by heightening its effectiveness and making it once more the premier calling in the world for influence, power, and uplifting among men.