

[Additional authority for the position of the officiating priest in primitive times is to be found in Bingham, "Ecl. Antiq.," vol. iii., pp. 89, 90; Fleury "Mœurs des Chrétiens," p. 150; Guéranger, *op. cit.*, vol. i., p. 31; Webb's "Continental Ecclesiology," pp. 204, 302, 303, 480, 485; *cf.* Mivart, "Essays and Criticisms," vol. i., pp. 192, 195.]

THOS. J. PULVERTAFT.

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ART. II.—PRESENT-DAY PREACHING IN THE  
CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

**D**URING the last few years the attention of the public has been called from time to time in the newspaper press to the question of preaching in the Church of England. The subject was selected as part of the programme of the Folkestone Church Congress, and was ably dealt with by Canon Twells, the Deans of Norwich and Rochester, Mr. Justice Grantham, and other speakers. We shall agree with the opening words of Canon Twells: "The efficacy of preaching in the Church of England is not what it ought to be, not what it might be"—and we shall each one echo his aspiration—"not what I hope and believe it ere long will be." I shall not waste moments by speaking of the attitude of the laity of the present day as listeners to sermons. Mr. Justice Grantham, in his speech at Folkestone, said he "believed that the laity listened as well, if not better, than they did years ago, if sermons were good." Canon Twells, on the other hand, expressed his "decided opinion that, while the average standard of preaching has materially improved of late years, the habit of listening has materially deteriorated." One thing is apparent, viz., that the times are changed since the sainted Henry Venn wrote to a friend: "On Sundays I am still enabled to speak six hours at three different times."

I purpose in this paper to state what I believe to be some of the reasons why present-day sermons are not what they ought to be: then, with bated breath, and with fear of disapproval if the cap should happen to fit the head of any reverend brother, speak of some of the faults of preachers; and, lastly, indicate some remedies for the improvement and development of present-day sermons.

I. WHY ARE SERMONS, SPEAKING GENERALLY, NOT WHAT  
THEY OUGHT TO BE?

I do not think that any clerical reader will contest the statement involved in the question. Bishop Barry, in a

lecture which he gave some years ago on "Study and Preaching," said: "Of the three elements of spiritual life, the element of devotional earnestness (thank God!) has been marvellously revived; the element of practical activity for good has had, if possible, an even greater revival; but the intellectual element has not kept pace." I quote these words because I am convinced that the great revival of practical activity in the Church of England is one of the main causes, if not the chief, of the feebleness of many present-day sermons.

1. Hundreds of large parishes have been divided and subdivided during the last few years. New districts have been formed, and the clergy in charge have been so occupied in making stakes and hurdles for the fold that they have had little time for feeding the sheep. In thousands of parishes to-day the clerical staff is insufficient. The clergy are like the laity, at least, in this—that each man has only one body and one tongue, and yet he is expected to be everywhere and do everything. If I may put the case in the plainest terms, the Vicar is the coachman of the parochial drag, who has not only to handle the ribbons, but also to groom the horses, wash the coach, look after the harness, and grease the wheels, and then is expected to act the part of host, and serve up at least two or three times a week a dinner for passengers whose palates have been educated up to present-day gastronomy.

2. The second cause of bad sermons is the almost entire absence of instruction in the preparation and delivery of sermons in the theological training of the clergy.

3. Again, in the great revival of musical services, for the most part carefully rendered, and in the reinstatement of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in its due and proper position—a position which was given to it by the early Evangelical Fathers—by a law of reaction, preaching has been discounted, and many of the clergy, especially of the younger ones, have mistakenly argued: "If the service is everything, why should I take much trouble in the preparation of a sermon, which is an unimportant adjunct of Divine worship?" The art of preaching, as a consequence, has largely ceased to be cultivated.

4. The fourth reason why sermons are not what they ought to be, is that many of the clergy are unable to purchase the necessary books. The poverty of the ordinary clerical library is something appalling. You will find on the shelves of some of our parishioners works of theology which have formed and moulded the main current of our Christian literature which you will not discover in the bookcase of Vicar or curate. You might as well "advise astronomers to reject all instruments and all the copious accumulation of facts in so

many observatories, and betake themselves to the study of the heavens with the naked eye alone," as to expect preachers to proclaim and expound the Word of God with continual freshness in the neglect of aid from Christian teachers and guides. Forgive simplicity. A cow cannot give milk unless it eats grass, and hence a vast amount of watery pap in present-day sermons.

I must come at once to the second part of my subject :

## II. THE FAULTS OF PRESENT-DAY PREACHERS.

I earnestly hope that, if I may seem didactic, the reader will clearly understand that I myself have not attained even to my own poor standard, but "I follow after." I can say, with most men, I imagine, that I have learned more from my failures than my successes. A wise man is like a diamond, in that he is best polished in his own dust.

1. The great fault of preaching in this age is the lack of instruction.

Dean Goulbourn says men "have been exhorted to religion, but they have not been instructed in it. There is in our exercise of the ministry no systematic plan in which people are taught and brought on gradually towards the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The "full assurance of faith" and the "full assurance of hope" depend upon the "full assurance of the understanding." Canon Bernard, in his Bampton Lectures on "The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament," writes: "On the Day of Pentecost there was a mighty influence on the emotions of the members of the Christian Church. We feel the presence of the comfort, the strength, the glow, the fervour, the joy, by which we see the disciples animated in the exercise of their new powers, but we trace up the cause. The fervour of emotion had its origin in a sudden access of intellectual light. The collect for Whit-Sunday seizes at once the central idea of the event. God at that time not only stirred, but taught, the hearts of His faithful people, and sent to them, not only the warmth, but the light of His Holy Spirit." We value the *παράκλησις*, but in the present-day sermons there is a great absence of the *διδασκαλία*. A well-known preacher said that, as a boy, he heard a Non-conformist pray that God would grant the congregation "intellectual repose." The tendency of sermons in the present day lies in this direction. Mrs. Poyser, when describing the two parsons of Hayslope, said: "Mr. Irwine was like a good meal of victual, you were the better for him without thinking on it; and Mr. Ryde was like a dose of physic, he gripped you and worreted you, and, after all, he left you

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much the same." A sermon all physic, or, I may add, all stimulant, cannot build up and edify souls committed to our care. It has been said that the "formation of right moral habits and the discipline of spiritual life should be the supreme objects of pastoral preaching; but in the absence of ethical and religious knowledge we have no reason or right to look for the higher forms of moral and spiritual character." How can we expect the sheep to be fat when the pasture is bare? Shakespeare, in his "Henry IV.," puts the office of a preacher grandly when he speaks of the minister of Christ as an interpreter of truth, the distributor of the "bread of life," the "opener and intelligencer" of "the sanctities of heaven."

The absence of exposition in present-day sermons is one of the chief causes of their lack of instruction. The greatest preachers Christianity has produced were expository. "Polycarp was an expositor. Chrysostom brought Antioch and Constantinople to his feet by exposition. Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo were addicted to the same method." I am not surprised that intelligent laymen are crying out. No power of imagination, no vehement excitement, no natural eloquence, can compensate for religious instruction. Lord Bacon compared a sermon to an arrow: the steel point, the application; the shaft, the information, the instruction; the feather, the image, the figure, the illustration which wings and yet steadies the arrow's flight. In the sermons of to-day there are plenty of feathers and a multitude of steel points, but there is a great absence of shafts, and yet pastors after God's own heart, Jeremiah tells us, "feed" the people "with knowledge and understanding." "Moreover, because the preacher was wise," says Solomon, "he still taught the people knowledge."

2. The second fault of sermons to which I would refer is the great lack of variety.

It is true that we have in a sense only one theme. "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." But this fact affords no excuse whatever for uninteresting sermons. Very many of the clergy to-day cannot preach experimentally from that text, "Much study is a weariness of the flesh." They are "householders," but, as Charles Bridges says, "without a treasure." They are very ready in bringing forth the old, but very sluggish in producing the new. Their sermons are like the perpetual rice puddings of school-boy days; they may be nourishing when you get them down, but they are not appetizing. Jam, sugar, or honey are not to be found in the cerebral cells of the preacher, and I must add that the puddings are always served up in the same dish, or, in other words, cast in the

same mould. "The mischief is," says Dr. Dale, "that some preachers build all their sermons as though they were to stand side by side in a street. The front of No. 264 is precisely the same as No. 265. The door is always in the same place; the rows of windows are faultlessly uniform; there is the same number of floors in every one of them between the foundations and the roof; three principal divisions with three subdivisions under each, and then an application; they are all nine-roomed houses with attics at the top." Another large class of uninteresting preachers are the skeleton-sermon preachers. They are always producing Charles Simeon's bones without Charles Simeon's flesh and skin and life, and their sermons, like the bones in the prophetic vision, "are very many and very dry." I would say, in passing, that I am not urging the younger clergy to discard altogether the use of skeleton sermons, although I believe that they have ruined far more preachers than they have ever helped; but I would remind them of a good saying of the late Bishop of Carlisle: "A sermon should have a skeleton, as the human body has one; but it should not wear it outside, as a crab or a lobster. The skeleton should be known to exist by the symmetrical form which it gives to the whole body." There is no excuse for lack of variety in the sermons of the clergy if they would but follow the lines marked down in the Book of Common Prayer in the order of the Church's services. If a man selects his text one day from the Psalms, another day from the Epistle, another from the Gospel, one day from the first lesson, another from the second, he cannot lack variety of subjects. In the well-known lines of Keble:

"Along the Church's central space  
The sacred weeks, with unfelt pace,  
Will bear us on from grace to grace."

The late Mr. Spurgeon, in his admirable "Lectures to my Students," allows that "there may be some advantages connected with this pre-arrangement"; but he goes on to say that "the Episcopalian public do not appear to have been made partakers of them, for their public writers are always groaning over the dreariness of sermons, and bemoaning the sad condition of a long-suffering laity who are compelled to listen to them." I should imagine that Mr. Spurgeon must have thought of one advantage of this pre-arrangement when he states in one of his sermons which I read many years ago—I think that I am correct in stating his words—that he had never heard a sermon on the Second Advent from the lips of any Baptist preacher.

3. I believe that one of the reasons why the intelligent

part of the community is calling out against present-day sermons is the giving up written sermons, and especially amongst young men. In a subject so wide and suggestive as the one which we are considering, I should not have taken up this point, deep as my convictions are, were it not that the strong and, I must add, exaggerated statements made about written sermons at the Folkestone Congress did at the time and have since, I fear, largely increased the number of fugitive preachers—and by fugitive preachers I mean men who have the habit of running away from their text. I know that the average hearer prefers an extempore sermon, the reason being that a written sermon, in his mind, is associated with a monotonous delivery, a droning, bee-in-the-bottle hum, a rock-the-cradle, soporific tone of voice, or the unnatural twang which sometimes the best of men put on the moment they enter the pulpit. I am not arguing against extempore sermons when I desire to hold a brief for written sermons well delivered, for, as it has been well observed, for “want of good delivery some men make gold look like copper, while others, by the sheer force of a good delivery, make a few halfpence pass for gold.” The sermons which may attract and bring in outsiders are one thing; the sermons which are preached to settled and intelligent congregations are another. The friars of the thirteenth century, who by their fervid appeals brought religion into the fair and market-place, soon found the necessity of a more scholastic form of theology. Clarendon defined true eloquence to be a “strange power of making one’s self believed.” This power can be seen and felt in a written as well as an extempore sermon. The four greatest preachers of the last century, apart from Spurgeon—Chalmers, Melville, Newman, and Liddon—preached from manuscript, so did Hook and Wilberforce, Stanley and Lightfoot. The list is endless. I am told by one who ought to know that leading Nonconformist ministers are beginning to adopt this mode of preaching. I cannot dwell on the fact that a large number of preachers can never become effective extempore speakers, or speak of the painful exhibition of newly-ordained clergy trying their fledgling flights before an intelligent congregation, but I do stay for a moment to state that the men who have the greatest extempore gifts are the very men who ought to read at least one sermon a week. There are many extempore speakers who in their sermons are like Abraham, as it has been said, “who went out not knowing whither he went,” and of whom Archbishop Whately said they “aimed at nothing, and hit it.” I know no greater snare than readiness of speech. Freedom of utterance is a gift, and no gift has been more greatly abused; and over and

over again are we reminded, in listening to these ready preachers, of the orator Henley, immortalized by Pope in his "Dunciad," of whom the poet says: "How fluent nonsense trickles from his tongue!" Many men preach extempore to save themselves trouble, and then they make a grievous mistake. Phrases take the place of matter, sound takes the place of sense, idle platitudes of solid truths, and the intelligent layman can see poverty of thought like a skeleton peering through an abundance of words. Such sermons are like a shell which a child puts to his ear: it makes a sound because there is nothing in it. These sermons are an abomination. Someone says, in any case, the preacher has "a fine command of language"; I answer in the words of Whately on Rhetoric: "His language has a fine command of him." In favour of written sermons, I would remind my brethren of Hooker's well-known words in the fifth book of the "Ecclesiastical Polity": "Extemporaneous sermons spend their life in their birth, and may have public audience but once." If a man writes and reads, he can preach his sermon over again; and if a sermon is worth hearing once, it is worth hearing twice, and it is always pleasant when the congregation asks for its repetition. We must not, however, follow the example of Charles Page Eden, who fastened his eyes on his manuscript, and began: "My brethren, my sermon last Sunday afternoon struck me as being so very important that I propose to-day to read it over again." If extempore speaking is a difficulty to any man, let him take all means to acquire the power, and persevere until he succeeds, but let him not practice in the pulpit. A Bible-class is a capital opportunity for learning the art. You are expository then, and not topical, and if you find a twig giving way, you can hop on to another like a bird.

The longer I live, the more impressed I am with the importance of well-delivered written sermons. With practice, a written sermon may be so read that it will seem to be delivered extempore. Bacon says: "Reading makes a full man, speaking a ready man, and writing a correct man," and inaccuracy is one of the sins of the age. May all preachers be like the Rev. Tom Short, of Christowel, who addressed his flock, as they said, "on papper"; but "no other preacher could say so much in the time allowed, . . . and no other congregation in the diocese listened with attention so close and yawns so few." I have spoken strongly on behalf of written sermons, because I fear that what Bishop Stillingsfleet said in his day is largely true of the present age: "There is got an ill habit of speaking extempore, and a loose and careless way of talking in the pulpit, which is easy to the preacher and plausible to less judicious people." I close this



point in the words of good Charles Bridges: "The conscientious minister will consider the nature of his situation, the temper of his people, the character and suitableness of his individual talent, which mode is most adapted to subserve his own ministerial efficiency."

I can only mention other faults of present-day preaching. Lack of adaptation to present-day circumstances is one; affectation of intellectualism is another. Lack of sympathy, said the late Bishop of Wakefield to me, is the fault of many sermons—the want of putting one's self in another's place, and realizing the other's standpoint and thoughts and feelings and difficulties. I dare not leave the subject without stating what I believe to be the gravest fault of nineteenth-century sermons. I refer to the lack of clear doctrinal teaching about sin and the spirituality of the law of God; the deity of Christ; His offices and character as the God-man; and, above all, the absence of the atoning blood—the most precious blood, the eternally precious blood, of Jesus Christ. We lack faithfulness and fearlessness in dealing with souls. Let the thought of popularity, the greatest snare to which the preacher is liable, be blown to the winds of heaven. Yet none the less the conscience of the hearer is on the side of the preacher. "I am sure," said Lord Cairns to his family one Sunday, "the sermon this morning was a good one, it has made me so uncomfortable." As Louis XIV. said to Bossuet after Massillon's Advent course at Versailles: "When I hear other great preachers I am satisfied with them, but when I hear Massillon I am dissatisfied with myself." How can we strain after the reputation of being original preachers and intellectual preachers and eloquent preachers and interesting preachers and popular preachers—thank God, I need not add political preachers when speaking of the clergy of the Church of England—when we are face to face with immortal souls? Our sermons suffer because we have so little time for preparatory prayer. "*Bene orasse est bene studuisse.*" We need to realize a more absolute dependence upon God the Holy Ghost, and to give all our endeavours to say with St. Paul to the elders at Miletus: "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you . . . testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

### III. REMEDIES.

I shall of necessity be brief on this last part of my subject.

1. More time for preparation. The laity must be taught that the clergy, like doctors and lawyers, have times when they cannot be seen save under exceptional circumstances.

Nothing is more common than for laymen to call upon the clergy upon Saturday, with the naïve remark: "I called this morning because I was sure to find you in." Vicars must see that their curates, apart from the time given to the Scripture lesson in the day-school or to Morning Prayer in the Church, have their mornings to themselves for steady, persistent reading. I am not surprised that some of the younger clergy to-day are like shopkeepers who put everything in the window and have nothing in stock. No curate ought to preach more than one sermon a week. If he does not make use of the opportunity afforded, the fault is not the Vicar's; but the Vicar must remember that his curate's future depends very largely upon him. All patrons know that there is no difficulty in finding men for vacant livings who are good parish priests, but there is a difficulty in finding this in combination with reading and learning--of finding men who after a year or two will not have given out all they know. The reign of King Edward is like that of Asa, the good King of Judah, in one respect: there is a dearth of "teaching priests."

2. Sermon preparation and the delivery of sermons must form an important part of clerical education in our Universities and theological halls. The Bishops have this matter in their own hands.

3. We must put an end to contraband sermons by letting it be clearly understood that the younger clergy, and the older, too, if they like (and they sometimes secretly do), have the Bishop's public sanction to preach other sermons than their own. Let the Vicar select, if he will, but let him lead off by reading one himself. I tried this course in my late parish each Lent, and the sermons were greatly appreciated. My experience is different from the humorist who sang:

"To church once I went,  
But I sighed and I sorrowed;  
For the season was Lent,  
And the sermon was borrowed."

A lady friend said to Archbishop Whately: "Will Dr. D. preach this Lent?" "My dear," said His Grace, "he always preaches Lent sermons." Of course I always announced the writer. The sainted Fletcher of Madeley, than whom few men have been more greatly blessed, says: "I preach on Sunday morning and Friday evening, and on Sunday evening I read one of the Homilies or a sermon of Archbishop Usher." I know that George Herbert in his "Country Parson" says: "Every man's own is fittest, readiest, and most savoury to him." I observe that he says to himself; he does not say to the congregation. Neither had George Herbert a large parish in the year 1904. Nor are there many George Herberts in any age.

4. In every diocese one of the Bishop's chaplains should be selected for the special work of instructing the clergy in sermon preparation. Why should it not be the work of the Rural Dean, or, better still, of the Archdeacon? Then, in addition to being the Bishop's eye, he would be the curate's tongue. I have tried it in a small way; the junior clergy who attended my class were good enough to be pleased, and I deeply regretted that pressure of work compelled me to give it up.

5. In every town or other leading centre in the country there ought to be a theological library for the use of the clergy—a library composed, not of old folios and the remnants of the shelves of deceased Bishops and other dignitaries, but of modern theological literature. I am perfectly aware that to a few of the clergy this library would be of no more use than a present of a comb to a man who is absolutely bald; but speaking generally it would be of the greatest service.

I must conclude. I have raised many points. I have had no space for elaboration or for safeguarding some remarks from misunderstanding. I cannot close without stating my belief that one class of sermon has certainly not deteriorated in recent years. I refer to the clergy as "epistles read and known of all men." The best sermon, and one that we can all preach, is the example of a holy and consistent life. "Longum iter est per præcepta, breve et efficax per exempla." Aristotle in his "Rhetoric" says that "your power of persuasion will depend upon the opinion your hearers entertain of you." May God give His grace to all ministers of Christ in this realm to remember St. Paul's injunction: "Take heed to thyself and to the doctrine." As we think of the great and serious responsibility of our office, we cry: "Who is sufficient for these things?" As we grasp the truth of the Apostle's answer, we face the future calmly, courageously, hopefully, for "Our sufficiency is of God."

J. W. BARDSLEY.

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#### ART. III.—THE FUNCTION OF THE LAITY UNDER ST. CYPRIAN.

"THE Convocational Report on the Position of the Laity" seems to me to wholly misjudge the passage in the history of the African Church under St. Cyprian, which relates to the case of the *lapsi*, when the Reporting Committee infer on p. 9, near bottom, that "at the councils of bishops the