

crucified for the sins of mankind, will continue the blessed victories which have been won by those who found in Him perfect remission and forgiveness of their sins, and proclaimed this truth to their brethren who were in the darkness of paganism.

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PREACHING: SOME SUGGESTIONS.

ONE need not be a pessimist to admit that few things in this world are so good that they cannot be made better; and if a thing can, then the most elementary dictates of morality require that it ought, to be made better. Of the many things in which improvement is possible, preaching is not the least important. It is common knowledge that we stand in need of better preaching among the rank and file of the clergy. We need to maintain in the Church that high standard of sound learning which was once spoken of as the *stupor mundi*: we need to be at least abreast of the intellectual tide that flows to-day; but we need quite as much the power to interest congregations who—it must never be forgotten—do come to church to be interested, and to be interested in the highest subjects which can occupy the minds and consciences of men.

It is the way with many people nowadays to disparage the sermon, to insist on the obvious truth that the hearing of a sermon is not an act of worship, and to assert—what, indeed, none will deny—that there is something painfully ludicrous in a man's going to church, which is a house of prayer, with no higher end in view than to gratify itching ears. But it is easy to exaggerate that evil. Our Church in various ways dwells on the importance of sermons in the general scheme of the religious life; and, although the hearing of sermons may degenerate, in the case of some, into a more or less innocent diversion, yet experience does show that men are often aroused, helped, instructed, and edified by sermons as by no other intellectual or spiritual instrument.

Clergymen complain loudly of the apathy of people towards religion, of the decay of public attendance at church, of general spiritual indifference; but are they not themselves sometimes partly to blame? Is not the dulness and feebleness of much of their preaching, if not a cause, yet a contributory condition to this apathy? What is needed to-day is not, as some seem to think, less preaching, but more

preaching. I do not say more sermons—there is abundance of these—but more preaching, more of that quality which, for want of a better word, we must call “unction”; more real and earnest appealing to souls. The congregations of to-day are sick and tired of mere sermonizing; they have had enough, and more than enough, of the conventions of the pulpit; they are bored with the so-called dignity—often another name for dull pomposity—of cut and dried discourses, delivered in the ridiculous and lugubrious cadences of the pulpit voice. But they will listen, as men always have listened, to what is real, actual, earnest and natural.

In considering the question of preaching, and in offering some suggestions, two points arise for discussion: subject and method—what is preached, and how it is preached.

If we ask what is being preached to-day, what are the subjects which are being treated in the pulpit, it is not easy to answer. On the one hand, it is asserted that present-day sermons neglect to treat of the things which really agitate men's minds; that they are out of touch with modern life, its special needs and special problems; that they bear no closer relation to the real facts of present-day life than a mummy does to the living being it once was; that even their language, once the expression of living truth, is now a pure convention.

On the other hand, complaints are urged that preachers, with increasing restlessness, choose subjects for treatment in the pulpit which do not tend to spiritual edification—subjects to which the more serious and sober hearer listens with surprise, not unmingled with pain. We hear of preachers so “adjusting Christian truth to the thought of the age” as to lead their congregations to doubt whether there was any form or standard of Christian truth at all. The story is told of a popular French preacher, the secret of whose popularity Louis XIV. was curious to discover. Accordingly, he asked the poet Boileau if he could tell him. “Sire,” said the poet, “it is the novelty of his subject which creates the attraction: he preaches the Gospel!” So, if we are to believe some people, the Gospel is as rarely preached now as it was said to be then, some burning question of the hour or some topic of the day usurping its place.

Here, then, are two judgments based ostensibly on the same experience, but contrary the one to the other. Some men tell us that the pulpit is behind the times, occupied with theological abstractions of no living interest; others, that it reflects the influence of the press, being busied with things of the hour, to the neglect of that truth which is eternal and immutable.

Between two such opposite generalizations it is impossible to decide conclusively. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that they represent two opposite frames of mind in the critics themselves. Some of those who come to church do desire on Sunday to hear those things discussed which have been occupying the general mind during the week ; others prefer to leave all thoughts of the world—even its latest intellectual or moral puzzle—behind, and to be instructed and edified in first principles.

When we go on to ask what ought to be the subject of preaching, the answer is much less difficult. Now, we may lay it down at the outset as an indisputable proposition that the preacher's first aim must be to interest. Without this he can do nothing. Equally true is it that there are many things which interest all men. But there is an order in such things ; you may interest men in subjects of higher or lower dignity and importance. This being so, there cannot be a moment's doubt in the mind of a faithful Christian pastor that it is his duty to interest his hearers in that which is most worthy of their interest ; and, although he may call to his aid various topics of passing importance, yet these will always be treated as subsidiary to the one great subject of never-failing interest to men—the relation of God to the soul of man, and all which is implied in this. He will never fail to bear in mind the cry of the greatest of all Christian preachers : “ Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel ! ” The Gospel—the whole scheme of God's revealed truth, and not a cherished fragment of it—must be proclaimed. The regular recurrence of the holy seasons of the Church's year is a priceless aid to the preacher, as, indeed, it leaves him no excuse for omitting any essential feature of that truth.

But one thing at a time. The capacity of the ordinary congregation is such that it cannot listen with profit to a sermon that deals with a variety of subjects. It is bewildered, perplexed. Many otherwise good sermons fail of their effect when the preacher does not keep to one main theme. Adolphe Monod in his first sermon on “ Woman,” after showing in an admirable manner that it is to the Christian Gospel that woman owes the statement of her true position and dignity, goes on for two long pages to show what a treasure we possess in the Scriptures, and to exhort us to read them. The exhortation is eloquent and beautiful, but it is out of place. To show the Christian conception of the dignity of woman is one thing, to exhort men to read the Bible is another. When the two subjects find a place in one single sermon, neither is as impressive as it would be treated separately. Treated together, the impressiveness of both is seriously weakened.

When we pass on to consider methods of preaching, we are prone to think that we have to deal with something of infinitely less importance. "Provided the Gospel is preached, it matters little how it is preached!" Thus cry some. It is a grave mistake. It matters a great deal how the Gospel is preached. "Dites merveilles," writes S. Francis de Sales: "mais ne les dites pas bien, ce n'est rien. Dites peu et dites bien, c'est beaucoup!"

"Dites peu!" The fashion of preaching long sermons has passed away. In these days of rapid travelling, of quick lunches, of general hurry, a long sermon is an anomaly. Our impatient congregations will not tolerate long preaching from any but an orator of the first rank. The average preacher must be short. Come what, come may, the preacher must never bore. The counsel is needed, for, as has been well said, we are all convinced that other people speak too long; we are slow to believe it of ourselves.

The sermon must be clear as well as short. Ambiguity may be the refuge of the politician, profundity may be necessary to the philosopher, technical language may be unavoidable by the man of science; but clearness, directness, simplicity are essential for the preacher, otherwise the common people will not hear him gladly. A preacher who aims at fine speaking and not at clear speaking has mistaken his profession. And nowhere is clearness of language more important than in statement of dogma. Preaching—whatever may be said by the hasty and slovenly half-thinkers of to-day—must needs be dogmatic; in other words, there must be a declaring of "those things which are most surely believed among us." Often in his anxiety to relieve the doubter and to persuade the unbeliever, the preacher will discuss the fundamental truths of Christianity as though they were as debatable as the last new scientific hypothesis or economic theory. It is both difficult and dangerous to enter upon such discussions in the pulpit—difficult, because the pulpit is not the fittest place, nor have many preachers the special equipment requisite for the enterprise; dangerous, because for one soul that is helped there will be a score that only discover an unsuspected stumbling-block. Thus the story is told of a working man who, on leaving a church where a sermon had been preached dealing with arguments about the future state, said: "Why, I thought there was no doubt about a future life; but the preacher to-day said there were arguments for and against it!" Preachers are perhaps too prone to preach to unbelievers who are not in church, to the neglect of the faithful who are.

Short, clear, dogmatic—the sermon should be all these, because these are qualities which awaken and sustain interest.

A word may be said about the use of illustrations. Every public speaker on any subject knows well the value of comparison and illustration. So generally is this recognised in the case of preaching, that a whole library of books have been published to supply the preacher's need in this respect. I do not know whether preachers ever get any help from such books, but I am persuaded that no illustrations tell except those which come naturally to a man in the regular course of his reading. We read that the late Bishop Creighton was once asked to recommend a book of illustrations to a clergyman as being useful in the composition of sermons. He replied by reminding his questioner of the existence of the Bible. No one can read the great masters of preaching without seeing how inexhaustible a store-house for illustrations is there; it is a barrel of meal that wastes not, a cruse of oil that never fails.

Napoleon said that there is only one rhetorical figure of serious importance, and that is repetition. If repetition be a fault, it is a good fault, and one to be cultivated. There are many people who do not take a thing in, or begin to believe it can be true, until they have heard it twice over. A preacher is often nervously anxious not to say the same thing twice for fear of having it said, "How he repeats himself!" It would be better, perhaps, if he regarded such a dictum as praise, and strove rather to provoke its utterance.

On the subject of delivery many remarks suggest themselves. Much might be said on the necessity of speaking in the natural voice, on the cultivation of the speaking voice, on the acquisition of a pleasing and sympathetic tone, and of distinctness of enunciation which shall be exact without being pedantic, and effective without being mechanical. Is it too much to ask of preachers that they shall, at least, attempt to acquire a decent delivery; that they shall study the art of public speaking at least as seriously as singers? Even the veriest amateurs study and practise the vocal art.

Finally, preaching, to be popular with the ordinary congregations of our parish churches, to be attractive and to be influential, must be extemporaneous. This is not to be interpreted to mean that the preacher is to neglect all preparation, and to speak the first words that come into his head as soon as he has entered the pulpit. The most careful preparation is needed for such preaching. The preparation must be both general and special. By general preparation is to be understood the cultivation of the habit of clear, exact, and careful speaking at all times. He who allows himself to fall into a slipshod style in ordinary conversation will not find it easy to speak with grace, to say nothing of correctness, when he

comes to address an assembly in public. Special preparation cannot afford to dispense with the labour of writing, if not the whole of the sermon, yet of those parts of it which are the most important. It does not come within the scope of this article to do more than offer suggestions, but it will not be deemed to be out of place if we conclude with some words of sound advice on this point coming from Pusey. Liddon, who at first wrote out all his sermons, asked Dr. Pusey, soon after he was ordained, whether it was necessary that he should always write his sermons in full and preach from the manuscript. Dr. Pusey replied as follows: "There can be no ground against your preaching extempore. I wish the gift was more cultivated. It is essential to missionary work in the Church. Only you should prepare for it well; know accurately what you should say; pray for God's Holy Spirit; say nothing about which you doubt, nothing rashly. Labour for accurate thought altogether, that you may not overstate anything."

W. J. FOXELL.

"IN COMPARISON WITH ——" ¹

UNTIL within recent years the vast majority of Englishmen have known little—and, I fear, have cared equally little—what Continental people were doing—that is, so far as their ordinary *every day* life is concerned. We have been satisfied with ourselves, with our own ways and methods; and that an Englishman might learn anything really worth knowing from a Frenchman, a German, or a Swiss has hardly struck the mass of the people of this country.

But from a variety of causes our "insularity"—which was too often a synonym for a somewhat self-complacent, if not contemptuous, pride—is being slowly broken down. We need not enter at length into these causes; but certainly our knowledge of what other nations are doing and thinking—our knowledge of their ordinary life—has within the last few years immensely increased. And as we have learnt more of that life, we have realized how much there is in it which it would be to our advantage to copy.

Necessity, if a somewhat hard teacher, is often a very admirable one. And recently it has dawned upon a very

¹ "A Comparison: the Brassworkers of Berlin and of Birmingham." London: P. S. King and Co. 1s. net.