

Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!"
1 Cor. x. 16.

A FEW THOUGHTS ON

THE "ART" OF PREACHING

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— A FEW THOUGHTS —

ON THE

“ART” OF PREACHING.

IN seeking to set down a few practical reflections on the subject of preaching, we duly remember the saying, that “the perfection of art is to conceal art.” That is to say, it may not be desirable, even if it were possible, to tell all the secrets of powerful and effective ministry. Certainly these secrets will not always lie upon the surface; and he who is a master in the “art” of imparting heavenly instruction will not be ready to let people know “how the thing is done.” The great poets and prose writers often startle us by the simplicity of their language, even in their most telling passages, leaving the impression on the mind of the reader that “any one might have said that.” There seems to be no art about it. Yet *that* is what constitutes the

perfection of art. In the work of the ministry pertaining to preaching and teaching, who has not observed the same thing again and again? A message of remarkable power, and conveying remarkable instruction, is often as remarkable for its simplicity. The people are held, for a time, as by a spell. There is perhaps nothing startling, or "original," as the word is understood. Indeed, you perhaps anticipate what is coming. Yet the message comes with a force that is irresistible. Where was the *art*? It was invisible. There seemed to be none. Very likely there was none—none, that is, of that studied art which is carefully acquired to produce an effect.

A HEAVENLY ART.

Yet there is an "art" in the effective presentation of truth, but it is a heavenly art. It is not to be acquired in the world's schools, although these may play their part in the matter of externals. "He that winneth souls is wise." But his wisdom comes "from above." And he that would win saints—who would allure them to a

closer walk, and a more heavenly frame—needs no less of the heavenly wisdom.

Public ministry exercises a great and beneficent effect in the building up of the people of God on their most holy faith. Such, at least, is its true purpose. How, then, shall those of us who have any little gift for ministry so use it that our God shall be glorified, and His people fed, and sinners won for Christ? How shall we acquire the art? We do not say, "How shall we act the part?" for the part cannot be acted. Preaching, in its popular sense, is often a mere matter of acting. But the true preacher is no actor. He deals with realities—solemn yet blessed realities. His office has a far higher aim than merely to tickle men's fancy, or even to instruct the intellect. No one will dispute that there are those who evidently set themselves to startle people with things that no one ever heard of before, while there are others with whom the "Christian ministry" is reduced to a mere "entertainment" for those who care to listen. But the true aim of the ministry is to *allure to Christ*.

SELF MUST BE HID.

It appears to us that the great element in the art of preaching is the *concealing of ourselves*. "Not I, but Christ," is the motto for the Christian life; but it is no less the motto for the Christian *ministry*. If the people in Moses' day had found something very astonishing about the *pole* on which the brazen serpent was exalted, their eyes might never have got the length of the brazen serpent at all. There is such a thing as our "points" and hair-splittings being so astounding that they absorb all the attention, and Christ is not seen. It is an evil day for us when the messenger eclipses the message—when the treasure cannot be seen because the earthen vessel attracts all the attention. It fares ill with us though many say, "What a wonderful address—what a splendid handling of the subject!" while few, if any, are saying, "What a wonderful Saviour is Jesus the Lord!" or "How far away I am in heart from God!" These latter, we believe, will be some of the signs that follow true ministry. There will be a humbling of ourselves and an admiring of the beauty of the Lord.

CHRIST UNVEILED.

We never had a more signal proof of this than when an aged servant of Christ broke his journey at a certain place to have a few meetings "to help the saints." One night he spoke on the moral glory of Christ. The servant stood to one side, if I may so speak, that his Master might be seen. The teaching was *objective*, and the object was *Christ*. It was altogether different from a vehement succession of appeals as to the spiritual condition of the audience. Yet the teaching on this occasion was more searching than any appeal could be. The speaker was happy in his theme, and everyone eagerly followed the delineations of Christ. I could think of it as nothing less than an unveiling of the Son of God. We came away saying to ourselves, "What a wonderful Saviour!" And we felt abased as no personal appeals could have abased us. The preacher, carried away with his vision of the Risen One, felt that his had been the heavenly art on that occasion at least; for at the next meeting he said, "I think I was more sweet last night." And so he was. Those who were there must

have gone away laden with spoil ; and as for those who were absent—well, all I can say is this, that if I had not been there I would be poorer in a very real sense to-day. The ministry on that occasion was an illustration of the perfection of art. Yet I thought not of art, and almost forgot about the preacher, for the exceeding glory of that One who is fairer than the children of men.

OUT OF THE ABUNDANCE OF THE HEART.

The man of the world has often expressed his surprise at the fluency with which the working-man preacher can deliver his soul. A hardy son of toil, he has done his "day's darg" like his fellows, and perhaps the same evening he is heard proclaiming the unsearchable riches. He has had no college training, and perhaps only a very ordinary education ; he never attended a school of elocution, nor took evening classes by way of a "preparation for the ministry" ; he had no previous experience whatever in public speaking, and up to the time of his conversion his voice had never been heard on a platform of any kind. Yet he is now

standing forth, calm and self-possessed, declaring the truths of the Gospel without a stammer, and with a command of language that causes the mere onlooker to wonder how it has all come about. What is the explanation? It is this, that *conversion to God* has come in; the man has been regenerated; a new monarch is established on the throne of the heart, and that monarch is Christ. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH.

We do not for a moment mean to imply that in every case of conversion the tongue is thus unloosed. It is only given unto "some"—yea, comparatively, unto few—to stand acceptably in the place of public testimony. We are just now trying to explain how it is that men of humble "parts," and often of a retiring disposition, are found proclaiming, with a wealth of untutored eloquence, the tidings of salvation for lost and guilty men. The preacher's heart has been won for Christ. As he reads and ponders the Gospel story a fire burns within him until he is weary with forbearing and

cannot stay. He seeks in a humble way to "say a word for Jesus." His beginning may be small indeed—the reading of a text, and a remark on something in the text that has been carried home with power to his own soul; or perchance an enlargement of heart comes upon him as he gives out a hymn in the open-air meeting at the corner. But who hath despised the day of small things? He goes steadily onward from strength to strength—line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little—until, almost without intending it, he finds himself acknowledged as one of the ministering brethren in the circle where his lot is cast.

HELP FROM ABOVE.

He never expected to be a preacher; and even now he feels that if it were not for the grace of God he would be utterly helpless in himself for this great ministry. Yea, even as he rises to speak, he realises that he is cast upon God for the sympathetic heart and the words of utterance. If he cannot have help from above, he feels he has none, and wants no other. He is a child of faith.

Whatever be the measure of his "gift," he knows that that gift will only be as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal if it be not immersed in the atmosphere of the upper sanctuary. Whether it be in the Gospel hall or the cottage meeting, or in "streets and openings of the gates, where pours the busy crowd," he finds himself saying: "If Thy presence go not with me, carry me not up hence."

TRAFFIC IN UNFELT TRUTH.

The mechanical preacher may get on, and seem to get on very well, without the presence of God. He has "got up" his subject, as they say. It may lie before him in black and white, or it may be in his head, neatly arranged in all its divisions and subdivisions. No matter what happens—let God's presence be realised or not—that address "comes off the reel." The thing is done in the easy, matter-of-fact style in which a joiner saws up a board, reminding us of the remark of an aged saint that "there are preachers who could preach just as well if there were no Holy Spirit of God." But this is far from

being the case with the man of faith. If he is not in touch with the things that are unseen and eternal, he does not attempt to do business for God by means of things merely seen and temporal. If he be not conscious that he has power with God, he does not want to have power with man. He prays to be delivered from the unholy traffic in unfelt truth.

HIGHER THAN ART.

Saul may be able to go on without God, trusting in his armour and in those valiant men who had been carefully selected by his own hand (1 Sam. xiv. 52). But David—the man of faith—cannot move without God. None so weak as he if he be not conscious of the approving presence of Jehovah. And thus it ever is with those whom God hath owned in the proclamation of His Word. If they have studied the art of preaching it has been to discover that the highest art is to be in touch with God. If they have learned anything of that art it is this, that to let Christ have the dominion is higher than art. "He that is of God heareth God's

words." "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God." The opening of his lips shall be "right things." Being a true witness, he shall deliver souls, and his words shall "feed many."

PROVIDE IT WITH WINGS.

"When God means a creature to fly, He provides it with wings." This remark was made by an aged brother a number of years ago, when speaking on the subject of "Gift." We noted it carefully down on the tablet of memory at the time, and there it still remains. We believe the words we have quoted will be found to go to the very root of the somewhat vexed question of "gift" for ministry. In seeking to discover the particular line of ministry to which I should addict myself, I must not ask, "What line would I like to follow?" but "What line of ministry has God fitted me for?" If He means me to "fly," I may be sure that He has provided me with "wings;" and if He has not provided me with "wings," I may be sure that He does not intend me to "fly." We know that there may be such a

thing as a man neglecting the gift that is in him (see 1 Tim. iv. 14). At the same time there is such a thing as a man fancying he has a gift that he does not possess. In the one case the saints are deprived of ministry designed for their building up; in the other case ministry is inflicted upon them which is only a weariness of the flesh.

THE SPARK MUST BE THERE.

It may be said of preachers as of poets, that they are born, not made. You must have the celestial spark to begin with. If the spark is there, you may fan it, develop it, refine it; but if the spark is not there, you may save your pains. Perhaps you will make a preacher—after a kind; but he will exhibit the undoubted marks of a manufactured article. Our God is sovereign. He "hath set the members, every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him" (1 Cor. xii. 18). "*He gave to some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the*

Body of Christ" (Eph. iv. 11, 12, R.V.). Man can neither make nor meddle in this matter. It is God who has made the difference; and happy is it for the Church when she recognises those, and only those, upon whom the anointing oil has come—those who have been thus *given* by the great Head of the Church.

TO THE MANNER BORN.

These "gifts" have a wonderful "art" in their preaching, being "to the manner born." They are sent and they are furnished by their Master in heaven. They are not concerned as to how their style will "take," and as to whether their gestures and voice-modulation are in strict accordance with conventional rule. Their great concern is that *Christ* be exalted. Hence, in their case, what is known as "self-consciousness" is conspicuous by its absence. In the case of the speaker whose ministry is largely a work of art, it is a different matter. His self-consciousness is patent to all who have eyes to see. He is manifestly anxious about "how he is getting on." He delivers his address *before* the people, instead of speaking *to* them.

They view it as a panorama passing before their vision, instead of receiving it as something that has come from above. It is a *performance* rather than a *message*.

TARRIETH NOT FOR MAN.

In looking back over the great revival periods of the last fifty or sixty years I think we cannot fail to observe this striking circumstance, that God's chosen instruments in these great movements have, in the majority of cases, been men who were never inside a Divinity Hall, and who underwent no *systematic training* for the ministry. Students of the Bible they undoubtedly were—yea, even mighty in the Scriptures. But the point we wish to emphasise is this, that with very few exceptions they were men outside the pale of the so-called "ordained" ministry, and not even what are now know as "evangelists systematically trained for the work." They were specially raised up by God. By Him they were called, and fitted, and sent. Truly theirs was like that dew from the Lord that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men. Perhaps one was called

from the coal mine, another from his desk ; one from behind his counter, another from the quarry ; one from the lowest depths of the social scale, another from the highest circles of refined society. But they all went forth, a devoted band, impelled by the constraints of infinite love—willing in the day of power—and their hearts prepared by the hand of the great Master of assemblies to tell the story of His redeeming love. And they told it with a power and a pathos unknown to the art of the schools. Yea, the "chief priests and scribes" were compelled to stand still and look on in wonder while one revival tide after another swept over the land.

TAUGHT OF GOD IN THE WILDERNESS.

Surely all this has its significance for us. Our God giveth no account of His matters. If work is to be done for eternity He finds and fashions His own instruments. In our short-sighted wisdom we may be tempted to say, "Ah! we think we see how it is done. Why should not we have 'schools of the prophets' from which we may turn out men to preach after that fashion?" But

the men who preach "after that fashion" did not receive their inspiration in the "schools of the prophets." God took them into the wilderness with Himself, and taught them there. We fully concede the advantages of education, and have to thank God that it has seemed good unto Him to call many of His ministering ones from the ranks of scholarship and culture. But so far as "halls of divinity" are concerned, it is not without its significance that so few of God's witnesses in the revival movements of recent times knew anything of these! And in the cases in which they had been duly trained and "ordained" they had simply to *unlearn* a vast amount of "systematic theology" when the true light took possession of their hearts.

Let us continue, in the path of humble dependence on God, to look unto *Him* to meet the need of His people and thrust forth labourers into His harvest. His *sent* ones are ever His *furnished* ones, for when *He* sends them they "lack for nothing."

HINDRANCES TO EFFECTIVENESS.

We now proceed to deal with certain

hindrances to a preacher's effectiveness. One great element in the "art" of preaching is the art of getting rid of peculiarities that render our ministry dull and uninteresting. When some valuable metallic ore is brought from the bowels of the earth, steps are at once taken to separate the precious metal from all extraneous matter. This is exactly what should be done in the case of those who desire to do business with the "gift" with which they believe they have been endowed by the great Head of the Church. If the gift is there it will speak for itself—that is, if it is not obscured and held down by "extraneous matter" of one kind or another. Let these hindrances be removed, so that nothing but the "pure gold" shall be left, and the Church will find she has a wonderful heritage of ministry, notwithstanding the deadening effect of these lukewarm times.

ALL CONDITIONS FAVOURABLE.

In the case of "specially gifted" men, they seem to have leaped into freedom from deadweights of every kind. So far as they

are concerned, "everything is in keeping with everything else." And everything is beautiful and in its due proportion; so that style, manner, and the man himself, do not obtrude themselves on your attention. The *message* arrests you, and holds you: that is all. It is well known that the highest tides occur when both moon and sun are in agreement. If, in addition to this, a strong wind is blowing landward, the tide reaches its highest point, because all the conditions are favourable. Thus it is with him who is specially fitted for the work of the ministry. All the conditions are favourable for a high-water mark being reached in setting forth the eternal verities. He is manifestly endowed with a divine perception of Christ in His relations to the Church and the believer, "the personal apprehension of which by a saint, through the Holy Spirit, makes him a gifted man." He is endowed with fluency of utterance. Grace has been poured into his lips; and he may be even physically fitted for the arduous work of addressing, and continuing to address, vast gatherings of his fellows. But between that specially-

gifted brother and the "man of five words" there is a very great variety in the measure of gift. And it is with the object of helping to preserve in their purity these "lesser gifts" that the present papers are written. We will just jot down some hindrances as they occur to us. First there is what we may call the

MINISTERIAL DIRGE

in a preacher's style. He delivers his address on one tone, generally well up in the scale. He may occasionally drop to his "ordinary tone of voice"; but, as if feeling this to be a digression, he is back in a moment to his former style of address. With neither break nor pause he goes on, holding so tenaciously to the one chanting tone that a musician could easily determine the exact key-note on which his address is being delivered. This is to be deplored, for the result is that his matter (possibly good matter) utterly loses its legitimate effect. A drowsy and monotonous feeling settles over the meeting, and the only sign of real interest occurs when the address comes to an end. Then the people wake up, probably

chiding themselves for their own listlessness. But, if a recent scientific lecturer is right, it is not the people who are to blame. According to natural law the "ministerial dirge" is bound to "make for sleep." What is the remedy for this? It is simply to abolish the ministerial dirge from our style, and speak in our *natural tone of voice*. Why should a brother's gift be virtually made of none effect by adopting a drawling and artificial style of delivery? It is not so much a development of gift we want, as a getting rid of the "foreign matter" by which gift is obscured. When an honoured American evangelist first set foot on these shores and began a Gospel campaign, it was remarked that he preached just as if he were speaking to some one on the other side of a table. People at once perceived the difference between this natural way of speaking and the dreary intonation they had been accustomed to hear. The one was felt to be natural: the other was believed to be artificial. We have observed one of the "intoned" preachers drop, in a moment of happy forgetfulness, into his natural tone of voice, and in an in-

stant the meeting was all attention. "Ah," we said to ourselves, "if he were just to speak *always* in his natural tone!" We are persuaded there is many a brother with a message to edification who simply buries that message in the ministerial dirge.

KEEP WITHIN YOUR MEASURE.

Another serious drawback to effective ministry is what is known as *going beyond your measure*. Among brethren who are fitted in any degree to minister the Word, every man has his measure; and he is a wise man who knows what that measure is, and who is careful to keep clear within its boundary line. There is room in the field of service for the one-talent man as truly as for the ten-talent man; but it unfortunately happens that the one-talent man seriously impairs his own usefulness by attempting to do as much business as the man with five, or even ten talents. The result is that the faces of the righteous are made sad whom the Lord has not made sad. The wheels of service go round, but the work is not done. If the brother had kept within his measure

he would have been accepted; but having gone beyond his measure, his whole ministry comes under suspicion. He fails to do the work of the five or ten-talent man, while his own proper work is not done.

Perhaps in this matter we want a revival of humility which shall teach us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. One brother may be able to speak for ten minutes with considerable acceptance, and yet prove a veritable infliction if he attempts to fill up half an hour. It is not a question of "How long can you speak?" but "How long can you speak *to profit?*" A man's measure in the ministry is determined by the length of time he can *hold his audience*. The moment he ceases to hold his audience, his time is up. Some preachers hold their audience for a certain space, and go on for a long period after the hold is lost. There are also preachers who seem never to hold their audience at all: yet they preach, and often at considerable length—perhaps on the plea that they have as good a right to speak half an hour as brother So-and-so! All this goes to show that many have never perceived

the difference between a heaven-bestowed ministry and the mere spinning together of words. Even in true ministry a point is reached when the anointed ear can hear a voice saying, "Ye have compassed this mountain long enough." The wise man hears, and stops. If preachers were to keep within their measure, there would be less ministry, we admit. But this decrease in quantity would be a distinct gain. Edification would then be the rule; for the ministry left to the Church would have the undoubted stamp of the pure gold of heaven.

LET THE PEOPLE HEAR.

It is wonderful what can be effected by even a "humble gift," provided it is exercised within its proper sphere, and is freed from influences which would seriously hamper its due operation. In this matter it is to be feared that many ministering brethren habitually neglect the most self-evident "rules" in their public ministry. For example, if you are addressing an audience, say of five hundred persons, it is yours to see that the people *hear what you*

are saying. Some speakers have a habit of dropping their voice almost to a whisper every now and again. The result is that the whispered passages are heard only by those sitting near to the platform. The great majority of the hearers thus "lose the thread" of the discourse several times in the course of the address. This is most tantalising. The audience, through their vain efforts to hear, are rendered irritable and impatient. They feel that they have not been fairly dealt with. If you could let them hear every word for ten minutes, you could easily have let them hear the whispered passages which perhaps four hundred people did not catch a word of! There is nothing wrong in merely dropping to a lower tone of voice. This may be perfectly fitting and natural. But see that the tone is not too low for the people to hear. Your words cannot edify if they are not heard. If they are inaudible, you might as well be speaking in an unknown tongue.

God ever adapts means to ends; and if we are in His leading it will be our care to see that there is a "fitness of things" in the

exercise of our ministry. We must say we do not see the fitness of things in our undertaking to address an audience of a thousand people if our voice cannot possibly reach beyond a few of the front benches. If five hundred of those present have scarcely heard a word, this is serious. Even our voice and our physical strength have their measure; and it is vain for us to press them beyond their measure, and to attempt what is manifestly out of our reach.

MESSAGE LOST IN SOUND.

On the other hand, a brother's message may suffer from the *loudness* of tone in which it is delivered. His voice may be so unnecessarily loud as to completely distract attention. The message is thus lost in the sound. When the drum of the ear is continuously assailed by a penetrating voice, the hearer becomes absorbed, not in the teaching, but in the thunder by which the teaching is accompanied. In this connection it is as well to say that an audience should have its attention absorbed by nothing except the message. If everything were as

it should be, or even as it might be, scarcely anything distracting would obtrude itself on our hearers. They would be left free to hear the message and concentrate their attention on *it*. In a certain true sense the words would be fulfilled, "And they saw no man, save Jesus only."

TWO KINDS OF ATTENTION.

If an audience is giving you its close attention, do not presume on that circumstance, and go on "for a while yet." Whatever his gifts may be, he is poorly endowed with the "gift of wisdom" who pursues his subject till everybody is wearied. Charity itself, not to speak of good manners, may lead people to give you considerable attention, even although they are heartily longing for the end of your address. Deliver your message and sit down, remembering there are two kinds of attention—the attention of appreciation, and the attention of courtesy. "You gave that speaker very close attention," I remarked to a friend on one occasion. "Yes," was the reply, "I did not want to appear rude,

but really I never was so glad as when his address was finished."

MADE SICK BY HOPE DEFERRED.

Another serious defect in the exercise of ministry is seen in the speaker who leads everyone to believe he is just finishing—"one word more," and he will be done. But he is not done. A new thought suddenly occurs to him. He seizes it, and beats it out for a time. Then he leads you to believe he is going to close now, for certain. But the end is not yet. He makes a new start. Every fugitive thought is pressed into the service. His audience feel they are being trifled with. Hope deferred has made them sick at heart. At last the end comes — painfully attenuated and long-drawn-out. There is a sigh of relief. How shall we designate such ministry? Instead of calling it a ministry of edification, we are constrained to term it an undoubted ministry of irritation.

CHARY OF MAKING PROMISES.

Be chary of making promises as to how

short you are going to be. We have observed that four out of every five who say they are going to be very short go on to a considerable length. Why bind yourself by uncalled-for vows? Again, how often we have heard a brother rise and say, "I will *merely read* this passage." As a matter of fact he spins a fairly long address out of it! He certainly should not have hemmed himself in by the intimation that he was *merely* going to *read* a passage from the Word.

KEEP TO YOUR ALLOTTED TIME.

If you are allotted a certain time in which to address an audience, you should not exceed your time, unless in very exceptional circumstances. If you take twenty minutes to your first "head," while you have other four "heads" to come, that is no reason why you should go on till you "finish your work." If there are other speakers, you must "consider one another." A message from the Throne may come through one of these other speakers as readily as through you. Why should any of them be crushed

out or hampered for time by your taking part of their time as well as your own?

INDICATIONS OF WEARINESS.

It is also well to note any indications that your audience is longing for you to draw to a close. A wise man will never shut his eyes to these signs and tokens. It is simply useless to go on if your hearers are wearying for you to sit down. Yet we can all recall instances in which a preacher, with dogged determination, has threshed out the remotest detail of his subject in face of the most palpable evidence that he was only beating the air, so far as the attention of his audience was concerned.

NO CARNAL WEAPONS.

In the exercise of ministry in an "open" meeting—that is, a meeting open for ministry "as the Lord may guide"—we believe the "man of God" will be content to "bide his time." He who waits on the divine guidance will observe no undue haste to let his voice be heard. Neither will he use any carnal device in order to get in before another

speaker. He may be crushed out by a rush to the platform—by the use of weapons which he feels he dare not touch. Yet he calmly waits. His time will come. The door does not need to be pushed open if God sets before you "an open door." It may be truly said that when God wants a man to speak, the door of opportunity (like the gate of Acts xii. 10) opens "of its own accord."

COUNTERFEITED EMOTION.

In the ministry of the Word nothing is more despicable than *counterfeited emotion*. The world's stage-player simply is what he professes to be—an actor—and no one is deceived. But, in the sacred work of preaching, the man who "puts on" the broken voice, as if he fain would weep, is wanting to appear what he really is not. It is a deliberate attempt to deceive. Yet it is to be feared that "working up the feelings" is one of the things which, in some quarters, are considered a desirable accomplishment for a preacher! As if dissimulation could work out the purposes of God! As if hypocrisy could do service for Him whose

eyes are as a flame of fire! No, the "strange fire" of pretended pathos and manufactured tears shall never ascend unto God, nor be the channel of blessing to men. We cannot conceive of any man "sent of God" having recourse to such arts. He who feels he is not in touch with God may use these devices to gain power with men—and it is very questionable if even that end is reached. But he who is consciously under the power of the Unseen and Eternal has no need, as certainly he has no wish, to introduce the dissimulation of earth into the service of heaven.

IDOLISING GIFT.

This is a day of the itching ear. Among the saints there is a strong desire to listen to able ministry. This has begotten a tendency to what we may call the idolising of gift. That is a tendency to revere, or perhaps adore a man for his gift of utterance, no matter what the man may be in character and conduct. Now, a man's facility in the matter of utterance is not a part of his *character*. A painter may produce a splendid picture—even of Calvary itself—but that

gives you no insight into what *the man* really is. Notwithstanding his fine picture he may be of a selfish and repelling disposition. And the public speaker—the artist who paints with *words*—may produce a splendid representation of the most sacred theme, while his life and ways are antagonistic to the truths he heralds forth. Many seem to fancy that if a man can preach fluently and eloquently he must of necessity be a good man. There never was a greater delusion. God never tells us to esteem a man apart from character. It is not a man's cleverness we are to esteem, nor his eloquence, nor his ability. These are externals. You must go deeper to find the man himself. So far as we see, the test to be applied is a very simple one. *Abstract*, as it were, the man's gift of preaching. Take away the mere externals for the time being, *and see what is left*. If there is so little left that the preacher would never have been heard of if it had not been for his "gift," then we humbly submit that he is nothing more than a speaking machine.

And it is surely an evil day for the Church

when such preachers are pitchforked to the pinnacle of the temple of service. If the "gifted" preacher is a "good man," like Barnabas of old, if his manner of life spells "Christ," then it shall be our privilege to esteem him as one truly sent of God. When the Church is rejoicing in revival light and revival discernment, she perceives, as by an intuition, the ministry which comes from above, and will not be charmed by an imitation, let the charmer charm never so wisely.

PREACHING AND CONDUCT.

You may be a recognised authority in scientific matters and yet be an infidel. You may lecture on geology and be, at the same time, immoral in your own private life. Yet you may be reckoned a "savant," notwithstanding. That is to say, there are many things in which *conduct* has nothing to do with *fitness*. In the Christian ministry it is entirely different. *There* you cannot have fitness apart from conduct. He who professes to be an ambassador from God to man must himself first come under the power of the truth he proclaims. The

messenger must be assimilated to his message. It is easy to see the futility of a temperance orator declaring the benefits of total abstinence while he is himself addicted to liquor. And it is as easy to perceive the futility of one proclaiming the transforming power of the Gospel while scarce any transformation is visible in his own life. The world knows right well—even the scoffing and unbelieving world—that Christianity is not a mere set of theories which you may hold in the same way as you hold the theory of the gravitation of bodies. The man of the world knows that Christianity is *a life*. He wants to see, and he holds he is entitled to see, Christianity in the life of those who claim to have come under its power. It is a solemn thought that every one who stands forth to speak for God virtually says, "I have come under the transforming power of that almighty Saviour who saves to the uttermost, and takes the throne of the heart, and transforms the life."

SPIRITUAL CONDITION.

Perhaps the most important element in the

preacher's equipment is his own spiritual condition. This is one of the fundamental rules of service, "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. lii. 11). I may have matter for any length of an address, and all the eloquence of an Apollos. But if there is a dead fly in the apothecary's ointment (Ecc. x. 1)—if I am not clean—my service is vitiated. Instead of being in the place of public testimony my true place is the secret place, to deal with God as to the cleansing of the temple. You may find men who can preach—no matter what their spiritual condition may be. But he who *has a conscience*, and who has ever known anything of communion within the veil, cannot get on if there is sin in the camp. He knows well that it is only mockery to preach deliverance to the captives if he is himself in the house of bondage. While others are longing for the power of *eloquence* he is longing for the power of *purity*. Apart from that power he is like Samson shorn of his locks—weak as other men.

But let the self-judgment and the cleansing come, let him tread once more that path of purity which no fowl knoweth, and which

the vulture's eye hath not seen (Job xxviii. 7), and all is changed as by the stroke of a magician's wand. A voice, as from the excellent glory, is heard—Christ is exalted, His beauty is seen, and people are made to feel—they know not how—that they have been brought very near to the gate of the upper sanctuary.

HEARD AT THEIR BEST.

Many preachers are heard at their best when they have only ten minutes or a quarter-of-an-hour in which to "deliver their soul." They are compelled to do without any introduction, and to avoid all mere "padding." They are into their subject with a single plunge. A few striking thoughts, crisply and clearly put, take a manifest hold upon the audience. And before preacher or hearer is aware of it the time is up. Usually the remark is passed, "Yon was a grand word." Yes, we fear there is more than one "fifty-minute" preacher who would renew his youth and have many a grand word if he were rigidly compressed within the bounds of a quarter-of-an-hour.

PERSONAL MAGNETISM.

What is known as "personal magnetism" has a great deal to do with effective ministry. If the preacher is an attractive personality, besides being apt in the Word, he wields a special power as a minister of Christ. When we remember that personal magnetism is just another name for beauty of character, we need not wonder why it is that some men's ministry is so effective, while the ministry of others, though not lacking in ability, seems to fail of its purpose. He who is deficient in the bowels and mercies known as personal magnetism is deficient in one of the greatest elements required in those who would win either saint or sinner.

LANGUAGE OF UNBELIEF.

We are not clear as to a preacher telling his audience how utterly useless is all *his* preaching if God does not work, and that if the blessing does not come down from above the meeting will be a complete failure. This is the language of unbelief in the guise of assumed humility. We know quite well that, if God does not work, nothing will be

done. But why put it in the negative? Why not confidently count on God working? If a preacher has a secret misgiving as to his call, or his condition, he is tempted to trace possible failure to the sovereignty of God. But the man of faith launches out into "the deep" of the promises, saying, "And I am sure that when I come unto you I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ" (Rom. xv. 29).

NOT OUR DOUBTS.

We are never called to preach our doubts. If a preacher has any of these he should tarry at "the back-side of the desert" until he can come forth and say, "I have *believed*, therefore have I spoken." The preaching of our doubts will never strengthen faith in others. Doubts should all be settled in the closet. He whom God sends will ever be found dealing in certainties, saying, "*We speak that we do know.*"

THE TONE OF HOPE.

There may be the words of faith, and yet the tone of despair. True ministry has an

air of victory about it. You will often perceive a preacher's faith even in the sound of his voice. Throughout his message there runs the predominant tone of hope, saying to the careworn and oppressed,

"Ye tempted ones, there's refuge nigh."

In the Gospel field especially we believe that effective ministry is ever characterised by this "tone of hope."

I now close these "thoughts" on this great subject. I trust they may be found helpful in the case of those who are seeking to do a little in the work of the ministry. If the great Head of the Church is pleased to bless anything I have said, unto His Name be glory. Amen.
