

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

tions of the flesh or temptations of the spirit, and what did she do for others? The only results that she effected were that the poor Sisters of the Order should henceforth go bare-footed instead of wearing sandals, and that they should get up at twelve o'clock at night for a midnight service. In other words, Philomena lived her unnatural life without doing any good to others—unless it was a good to be “the first to propagate through the world the worship of the new Trinity, the very Sweet Heart of Jesus, His Mother, the Immaculate Virgin Mary, and the Archangel St. Michael”; that is, to introduce a new fashion of religion only slightly based upon Christianity. In the case of Philomena I., the Church of Rome shows that she is entirely careless as to the truth of the existence or non-existence of the saints whom she canonizes and makes objects of worship. In the canonization of Philomena II., she shows us what is her ideal of the spiritual and religious life. Not such is the ideal of the Church of England, and may it never be!

F. MEYRICK.



ART. VI.—BISHOP CREIGHTON'S SERMONS.¹

FOR the intrinsic value of its contents this is a volume of sermons which should be studied. And if only the clergy will profit by the opportunity of studying it, its publication may, I believe, be an event of very great usefulness. Such a recommendation does not, of course, bind us to agreement with every statement or argument it contains; nor do we say that the various sermons are equally valuable. But were we asked what kind of preaching we believe would most probably prove to be really helpful at the present time, we should answer, “Preaching similar to that which is here offered to us.”

However painful the recognition of the experience may be, we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that in various quarters very severe criticism is at the present time being passed upon what is termed the “average preaching” in the English Church. At the last London Diocesan Conference the Bishop of Stepney said: “Surely it would be a libel on the Church of England to say that the average sermon represented the average capacity of the English clergyman—he was sure it did not.” If a Bishop can speak like this, can we be sur-

¹ “University and other Sermons,” by Mandell Creighton, sometime Bishop of London. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1903.

prised if the "average layman" speaks somewhat freely on the subject?

But what, it may be asked, is the value of the criticism of the average layman? Is there not just now a wave of unpopularity passing over the clergy? And if a cause is even temporarily unpopular, is there not a temptation, to which all but the strongest and wisest will succumb, to join in the popular depreciation? Doubtless much of the criticism of preaching, like other criticism, is ignorant. Much of it, again, is no doubt a mere echo of a present popular cry. But not all this criticism can be said to be either ignorant or thoughtless; if it were so, we should not find the subject so frequently or so seriously treated as it is at diocesan conferences and other gatherings of responsible Churchmen.

Let me give a recent personal experience. Within a month I heard three sermons: the first in the parish church of a fashionable watering-place; the second, though not technically a University sermon, was delivered to a large congregation in the University Church of one of our two old Universities; the third was addressed to some hundreds of hearers in one of the most popular of continental pleasure resorts. No right-thinking man ought to be able to address even a few uneducated people without feeling the responsibility of his position. But there can be no harm in saying that some opportunities are greater than others, and the greater the opportunity, the greater the responsibility. I do not wish to be hard upon these three preachers. But the first knew so little of the art of public speaking that it was with the greatest difficulty that, from a position about two-thirds down the Church, I could gather sufficient to enable me to understand that he was attempting, not very successfully, to criticise and unravel an extremely involved argument in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The second preacher had very evidently read a sermon which during the previous week had been reported verbatim in the *Guardian* and the *Church Times*; out of this sermon he read several lengthy extracts practically verbatim, without any acknowledgment that he was quoting. These extracts were joined together by matter presumably original, but whose nature was such that it went far to prove that he had almost entirely failed to understand the sermon from which he was quoting. But the third experience was even more painful. The preacher was young, but his want of experience he had evidently determined to atone for by an almost boundless self-assurance of manner and language. The subject upon which he scorned the idea of any difficulty of solution was, he forgot, one upon which *an apostle* had been content to express his inability to come to a definite conclusion. In the

course of his sermon this preacher accused "scientific men and materialists"—the two classes were regarded as conterminous—of certain opinions which were, if I remember rightly, attributed to a few scientific men thirty years ago, but, so far as I am aware, are held by no scientific man to-day.

As I said, I do not wish to be hard upon any one of these preachers—perhaps only those who have regularly had to produce more than one in a week know how difficult a task the composition of a sermon may be—but even when judged from the most charitable point of view, I failed to see how any one of these three sermons could be called "helpful"—that is, as conducing to the edification of the hearers.

These sermons of Bishop Creighton's may not, when judged by some standards, be regarded as eloquent; they may not be models of artistic arrangement; they may not even contain much brilliancy of exposition; but I cannot believe that even a "moderately attentive" hearer can have listened to a single sermon in this volume without being able to carry away at least some thoughts which he would find it useful to ponder over and to test the value of in the course of his daily experience. The "moderately attentive"—in other words, the *average* hearer—must be interested; and these sermons are certainly extremely interesting.

Now, interest is generally aroused by what may be termed "everyday subjects" being at once freshly and practically treated—in such a way, that is, that the average man feels that, besides their being put in a new light or in new clothing, they have a meaning for him, that they have a direct connection with, and a practical applicability for, his own daily life and experiences. In order to throw fresh light upon everyday subjects a wide range of knowledge is required; in order to apply this knowledge to various human needs, a deep insight into human nature—and especially as we find it in the men and women of to-day—is essential. That Bishop Creighton not only possessed, but that he also knew how to exercise these two qualities, and that in a degree rarely equalled, these sermons amply prove.

As an example of deep insight into human nature and of the particular conditions of the present, we may take the following words from the first sermon in the volume, upon "Peace."

"Peace, is it not in some form or another the aspiration of us all? . . . Peace for the weary hands and the exhausted brain, freedom from excessive wear and tear, opportunities at least for quiet and repose—it is the aim of all classes of society; it is what we all want, though we own with a sigh

that it seems almost unattainable, that the necessities of life which spring up in increasing number around us every step we take in advance are inexorable in their demands, and that we cannot hope permanently to escape such remorseless masters" (p. 2).

I would draw particular attention to the last few lines, and I would ask to how many hard-working and struggling professional and business men must they not have gone home? There are multitudes of men who to-day are inwardly groaning under the burden of having not merely to "keep up" what are termed "appearances," but of having to provide for their families and their households what the world at present regards as necessities, but which these men at heart know are certainly not essential either to health or to happiness.

The same thought is again brought prominently forward at the end of the sermon, where the causes of "want of peace" are enumerated. Among these the Bishop places *cowardice*. "Many are afraid," he says, "to act up to what they know; they see that genuinely to act up to their highest duties, really to do all that might be done, would set them in opposition to prevailing prejudices or habits, would require a strength of character towards which they feel indisposed to make the first efforts."

Again I would ask, Have we not here an extremely stern, if an indirect, rebuke, and at the same time a plea which must have touched the hearts of many of the hearers? One of the chief aims of the preacher must be to compel men to view themselves—their thoughts as well as their actions—in the mirror which he (like the Bible) holds up before them. How well I remember the secret of the power of a well-known preacher being described for me by one of his hearers. "That man," he said, "reveals me to myself, until I am utterly astonished to see what kind of a man I am, and what I really believe I might be."

Another sermon which must have made men think is that upon "Prayer." The subject is one which causes "difficulties" to thousands of thoughtful men and women to-day, and in one sense those difficulties seem constantly to increase; for as the area over which law rules is ever widening, the sphere in which prayer is possible seems constantly to decrease. The subject might be described as a "pitfall" for the preacher. There is probably none which is more frequently treated, there is none upon which it is easier to utter platitudes, which to hungering and thirsting souls give absolutely no satisfaction. Bishop Creighton's treatment is open to no charges of this kind. He recognises at once the importance and the difficulties of the subject. He takes a far more comprehensive

view of the nature and office of prayer than is usual; at the same time, he is not afraid to limit the sphere in which its exercise is justified. He shows quite clearly that it is the test and touchstone of the religious, in contradiction to the merely moral, life.

"The Christian lives that he may become like God. . . . How is he to do this unless he lives his whole life in God's sight, unless he brings all his actions before God, and offers them to Him . . . unless his whole soul is always open before God? How can he do this? How will this show itself in ordinary life? In what way will prayer influence daily life? . . . The moral man and the religious man would probably act in the same way under many circumstances, but their motives would be quite different. The one would act from a feeling of duty towards his fellow-men, the other from a feeling of aspiration towards the Divine. . . . And this continual aspiration of the soul to God is prayer in its higher sense." The Bishop then proceeds to show that "we tend to lose sight of the real meaning of prayer in its broadest sense by the many divisions we have made of it for convenience of practice and reference: public prayer, private prayer, prayer for ourselves, intercessory prayer for others." But these divisions, while tempting us to forget the great, broad, general meaning of prayer as aspiration, are not only necessary, they are, if rightly regarded, actually helpful for ourselves. Dr. Creighton then proceeds to deal with these in order:

"Unless we set apart each day certain times for private prayer, we should tend to neglect it altogether, we should be giving a terrible opportunity to the world to take advantage of a day of forgetfulness to encourage us to forget God altogether. . . . Private prayer at definite periods reminds us of our aims, enables us to judge of our actions, brings back our life into God's presence, from which it has too often strayed.

"Similarly, too, with public prayer, it is a necessary corrective to private prayer, which, if that were all, would tend to spiritual selfishness, would isolate the individual believer from the great company of his fellow-Christians, would limit his conception of his Christian duties by rendering him liable to think only of some and forget others—would, in fact, leave him one-sided in his character, just as solitude makes a man one-sided in his social character. For the same reason, too, the observance of a public form of prayer is useful in order that each Christian assembly throughout the land may express the same desires for the common good of all, and that the idea of a Christian country with common aims for mutual good, and with common aims towards our heavenly Father, may grow

up. And not only so, but a form of prayer binds us with the ages long gone by, prevents our desires from becoming dwarfed merely to those of the age in which we live, and makes us feel the unity of our aims with those of the generations that have gone before us."

Upon the very difficult subject of the limits of the object of prayer, Dr. Creighton speaks most wisely. He recognises, as every clear-thinking man who is conversant with the growth of our knowledge of natural forces must recognise, that the domain wherein irrefragable laws are known to act is being constantly enlarged. "These laws," he says, "we may learn, these laws we must obey, knowing that the laws of Nature, which science from age to age makes known to us, are as much revelations of the Divine laws of the universe as are any others which we have been more accustomed to call by that name. We do not now pray for miracles to happen amongst us, we do not pray for the suspension of the law of gravitation, because we are, all of us, thoroughly convinced that the action of gravitation is uniform, and that for our own good God has shown us that it is His law . . . it is our absolute conviction of the undeviating uniformity of gravitation that causes us to class it amongst natural laws. . . . In consequence of our recognition of this fact, we are sometimes told by those who investigate the laws of Nature that it is useless to pray for the sick, because their condition depends on natural laws which cannot be altered. Are all diseases the same? Does every sick man die within a certain time as surely as a stone thrown in the air falls down again within a certain time? If it were so, we would not pray for the sick, we would have no hope for them, and the absence of hope would stifle our desire for their recovery, and we should no more pray for them than we should pray that the sun might set. But so long as their recovery is doubtful, the length of their days uncertain, so long is their life an object of eager desires which must be poured forth on high. . . . Surely our teachers of science are guilty of a foolish pedantry when they wish to hinder us from praying for the sick. . . . Surely the remedy is in their own hands if our prayers annoy them. Let them establish quite surely the laws of disease, and we shall cease to pray against what has become certain.

"Our prayers proceed from our desires, our desires from the uncertainty of the event; if the uncertainty were to disappear, so would the desire. Men who would not hesitate to say in private talk, 'I hope my friend may recover,' need not hesitate to say, 'O Lord, look down from heaven; behold, visit, and relieve this Thy servant.'"

Another very valuable sermon is that upon "Public

Worship"—a sermon which, if carefully studied, should do much to allay the bitterness of controversy which at present seems to surround this subject. The sermon is the composition of one who is a master in the history of the past, as well as being thoroughly conversant with the needs of to-day; and among these needs we should assign a chief place to a wider recognition of the usefulness, in the highest sense of the word, of participation in public worship.

In the opening sentences of the sermon, Bishop Creighton admits that "the duty of public worship may be enforced on the authoritative ground that it is a Divinely-appointed means of grace, which a man neglects at his own peril." But this is not the ground of appeal which he chooses to take; he thinks "it is well to consider the reasonableness of the thing in itself."

This word "reasonableness," together with the sentences which follow, is in exact accordance with what we believe to be the chief merit of the whole volume. In other words, these sermons are addressed by a *reasoning* man to men whom he asks to exercise their *reason* upon what he places before them. The preacher proceeds: "It is noticeable that the Apostles never argue from authority as to the duties of Christian life, but appeal to the convictions of those whom they address. It were well if their example were more often followed, and if Christian duties were more often traced to their root in the inner life of men, rather than referred to the authority of an ecclesiastical system."

Then follow these words, which can hardly be too well remembered just now: "Observances and duties ought sometimes to be looked at with reference to the conditions of the time, and to the state of feeling and opinion among different classes of society."

Then Bishop Creighton goes on to notice how different conceptions of "worship"—of its meaning and its object—and how also different conceptions of "public worship," have prevailed at different times and under various social conditions. His treatment of the subject is historical, and a better example could hardly be found of a full and clear knowledge of history in the preacher. "Histories make men wise," and a knowledge of history, if wisely used, may make the preacher both interesting and convincing to his hearers. Dr. Creighton commences with public worship in the Apostolic age, and reminds us of what we may learn of its objects, as these are either expressed or implied in the Acts and the Epistles. Public worship then "united the little bodies of Christian converts"; it "strengthened the weak by the example of the strong"; it was also "a formal profession of Christian faith";

it was, again, "the means by which the Christians could testify to unbelievers the reality of their own conviction."

When Christianity had won its way to what was practically a general acceptance—we are speaking now of the period extending from the conversion of the Empire almost to the eve of the Reformation—"it could not but be that those primitive ideas changed." In the place of "the need of testifying to the heathen, by a severe and simple worship," had come "the more difficult task" of trying "to make all Christians realize to the full the meaning of their Christian profession." We find "the excited feelings and burning zeal of ardent souls seeking for a more decided testimony to mankind than the ordinary rites of Christian worship could afford." "We come to the examples of the hermits and the earlier monastic orders, and we see the ceaseless prayers of the few accepted as, in some degree, a satisfaction for the carelessness of the many. The conception gradually grew up of worship as a service due to God, and which ought to be regularly rendered."

The following words deserve to be very carefully noticed: "This idea is at the root of the worship of the medieval Church. A materialized conception of man's duties towards God rapidly gained ground. The formal organization of society in feudal times tended to assimilate the public service of God to the homage paid by the vassal to his superior lord. It was something which had to be regularly paid by everyone who wished to maintain a secure position."

I have no wish to imply that these sentences mean more than they state. But no one can have carefully read medieval Church history, and at the same time be conversant with certain tendencies in the Church to-day, without recognising (1) how true is their account of the origin and meaning of public worship in those days, and (2) how they explain why we feel so strongly moved to do all in our power to stem the current of the revival of medievalism in the Church to-day. One of the most learned of living theologians has taught us that our "worship" is really the expression of our "religion," and our religion must ultimately be based upon our conception of God. If we object to the revival of medieval forms of worship in our services to-day, it is not to these in themselves that we object, but because we believe that the "religion" which they express is false, and that it is false because it is based upon a false conception of God. Medieval forms and ceremonies are but the symptoms, the surface symptoms, of a false theology—a theology which is not that of the New Testament, but a strange compound of Judaism, heathenism, and Christianity.

Bishop Creighton proceeds: "The reaction against the materialism of the medieval Church again altered men's views of public worship. It was no longer regarded as a service due to God, but as a means for the edification of the individual."

Is this quite a sufficient account of Reformation worship? We know, of course, that as the result of the Reformation the individual again found his true place in public worship, as he did in the Christian "economy" generally; but did this necessarily, or even actually, imply that the idea of the "church" or of the "congregation" was therefore lost? We must not enter upon this question; but I think the charge of individualism brought against the Reformers of the sixteenth century and the Puritans of the seventeenth is often based upon a very insufficient knowledge of their ideas and of their teaching.

The next sentences give an admirable explanation of another aspect of the change of ideas consequent upon the Reformation: "The object of Divine service was to advance the spiritual life of men, to put at the disposal of all the zeal of a few, to enforce upon all their duties, and make them better fitted to perform them. Outward pomp faded away before severe simplicity. The glory of God was to be indirectly procured by the edification of man, not by any direct efforts to offer Him human homage."

These last words might be quoted to explain how preaching and listening may be regarded as at least parts of Christian worship, though to-day it is the fashion to deny to them this office.

After considering the Apostolic, the medieval, and the Reformation aspects of worship, the preacher proceeds to consider the conditions of the present day. Bishop Creighton believed that to-day opinion "tends to combine" the last two ideas. He thought that the tendency towards a revival of medieval practice has been modified and broadened by the antagonism to which it has been exposed. At the same time, "those whose aim is primarily edification are driven, in spite of themselves, to recognise, to some extent, in public worship the direct service of God, and to try to combine the two objects."

While this thought might, perhaps, have been more happily expressed, it is valuable in serving to remind us that in "public" worship—in a worship in which people with different views are asked to combine—both ideas should find at once a place and an expression, for neither view can be said to have a monopoly of the truth.

But the main object of the sermon may be regarded as a plea, in face of the present tendency to neglect public worship altogether, for a revival of the Apostolic view.

Here, again, Bishop Creighton appeals to the reason. He says it is not sufficient to tell the non-church-goer that "public worship is a means of grace which a man neglects at his own peril." The non-church-goers "have minds which demand a reason, and it is right that a reason should be given to them. It is right that all men should have set before them the reasonableness of the course of conduct which they are called upon to adopt."

The portion of the sermon which follows is so closely reasoned, and at the same time so packed with excellent advice, that it is impossible with justice to condense it. It must be read and pondered. And it is worthy of the most careful study. The following are just a few of the thoughts on which the Bishop dwells: The duty of the clergy—in not preaching "stupid" sermons or indulging in "affected postures"; the duty of the men in not giving way to a narrowing individualism; life at its best cannot be lived in isolation from our fellow-men, neither can worship be best so practised; the need of tolerance, which public worship may teach, for the feelings of others.

The conclusion to which the preacher comes, that "the great benefit of public worship now, as in Apostolic times, is the realization of Christian brotherhood . . . the feeling clearly brought home to us of our common destiny, of our common duties to God and man. . . . Men might surely be ready to confess their recognition of one another as children of a common Father, as bound upon a common quest, as willing to help one another and to learn from one another, as having common wants, common aims, common aspirations. Surely the least imaginative heart ought to be impressed by the simple grandeur of the symbol embodied in the assembling of themselves together in the presence of God."

I have drawn attention to only three out of the nineteen sermons which this volume contains. And these three are not in any degree that I am aware of superior to the rest. Had I the space, I could, by quotation from the other sixteen, multiply the length of this article sixfold. The volume is one to be read and studied in its entirety. It would be a happy day for some congregations could their clergy be induced to do this.

To-day, for good or for evil, the temper of the time is largely utilitarian. And this spirit has affected religion as every other sphere of life. "Prove to us," men and women are saying in their hearts, "that religion, that Christianity, is *useful*, that it will help us in our difficulties, that it will aid us to solve our perplexities, that it will assist us to overcome our temptations, that it can enable us to live more happy and

more useful lives, that it will really conduce to our welfare. Show us this, so plainly that we cannot help seeing it." These, I believe, are the unuttered thoughts of thousands of weary souls to-day.

Why do we hear so many objections, not only to "doctrinal," but to "spiritual" sermons to-day? The first term is generally opposed to "practical," the second to "the real." Why is this? Simply, I believe, because the average preacher is not careful to translate the "doctrinal" into "the practical for the present necessity," and to show that the "spiritual" is of all the forces of life the strongest and the most real. Bishop Creighton has admirably performed both these tasks, and for this reason these sermons should be studied by all upon whom the same task has been laid.

W. EDWARD CHADWICK.

THE MONTH.

THE ecclesiastical interest of the month has centred in the Church Congress, which has been unusually successful. We must return to two or three of the chief discussions by which it was marked, as they will probably lead to further debate, and may be the starting-point of further action. The President's introductory address was full of historical interest, and brought out in a striking manner the historic claim of the Church of England upon the nation. Its effect at the moment was somewhat marred by its postponement to the reception of a deputation from the Nonconformists of Bristol. These gentlemen were not content with presenting an address of welcome, which was conceived in a Christian and courteous spirit, but must needs put forward one of their ministers to give an address to the Congress, which took the form of a kind of opening sermon, and almost usurped the place of the President's opening address. These courtesies between the Church and Nonconformists are very agreeable, and we hope they are useful. But when a Nonconformist address takes the place of the President's address, and postpones the opening of the Congress by a good half-hour, the true proportion of things seems to be somewhat inverted. We are much disposed to think that, for the future, the formal address alone should be received and replied to, and that all supplementary speeches should be suppressed. As the President said, if he had attempted to reply to Mr. Arnold Thomas a great part of the first meeting would have been consumed. Churchmen do not meet in the Church Congress in order to