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and the Charybdis of pedantry. If he stumbles on a word which is new or unaccustomed, he has to adopt the method laid down by a Northern pre-School Board teacher—"Spell it (to yourself), say summut, and pass on."

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The Pulpit and the Stage.

By the Rev. A. J. S. DOWNER, B.A.

AMONG all the teachers of mankind the Christian Pulpit occupies a unique position. The Preacher is "a man with a message" not his own, and not at all depending upon his character or wisdom. His message has to be delivered, to be applied to life and circumstances, to be expounded and illustrated, and its facts and principles to be displayed in various relations with one another and with human nature; and in these ways there is endless room for originality. Still it is a message, neither to be added to nor taken from, lest God add to him the plagues which are written in it, and take away his name from the Book of Life and the Holy City. In so far as the Preacher is in his matter original he ceases to be a preacher at all, and descends to the lower level of a philosopher or lecturer. From being the accredited envoy of an Almighty Sovereign he becomes a maker of wise saws, a dull pedant, or a public entertainer. So far as the Preacher delivers his proper message, he is free from criticism with regard to his matter; and he can justly be criticized only with regard to the accuracy with which he presents it, and the manner in which he treats, explains, and applies it.

The message is one of humiliation, repentance, and rebuke, as well as of peace and hope, of security and joy. Indeed, it presents the former as the only means to the latter, and has no words of comfort and hope to such as will not humble themselves. He must speak of duty, of responsibility, of self-denial, and say: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in

the world. Ye must be born again both of water and of the Spirit, and must deny yourselves and take up your cross daily and follow Christ. Ye must heartily acknowledge yourselves to be vile earth and miserable sinners, to be unclean in heart and full of offence, and unable to do any good thing. Ye must give to God alone all the credit for any victory over temptation, or any good action or desire. To Him alone ye must seek for strength to do well; your will must be entirely submitted to His; your own efforts and your own devices ye must utterly distrust and despise." To *repent*, to renounce with shame many a darling sin; to *believe*, to accept and acknowledge truths that seem strange and unattractive till humility, love, and spiritual growth open the eyes to the linked bands of beauty which lift the dazzled soul to the steps of the Throne; to *obey*, to seek first the Kingship of God and His righteousness, for each to love his neighbour as himself, in honour preferring others; he who without fear or favour preaches these, and applies them, must expect to give offence sometimes.

Beside this the Gospel of the Kingdom of God works in the world as leaven in the lump, affecting its various parts gradually. Certain parts of the message appeal more readily to men than other parts; and, again, different parts appeal to different men particularly. The result is a deformed Gospel in the world, and in particular minds. This is especially shown in the common idea that if a man does well by his neighbours he does all that is required. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" is a doctrine which, in theory at least, appeals to the imagination of every man. Yet, so far from being the whole of Christian ethics, it is the second and less half. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and mind and soul and strength. Be filled with the Spirit, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." This is the first and great commandment. To be the disciple of Christ a man must be ready to hate father and mother and wife and children and all that he has, if need be, for the Master's sake and the Gospel's. This, or anything which jars on men's feelings, gives offence.

Therefore, the quest of popularity is fatal to the Pulpit, and the preacher whose aim is to please his hearers fails to promote true religion and holiness, which is its goal. For this reason it is to be desired that the preacher should be independent of public opinion, for not every man can be great with the greatness of the hero and the martyr. This quest is fatal in spite of the fact that in general the preacher is judged by his faithfulness to his message. For in the case of any particular preacher the power to present new, interesting, or startling matter, and to charm the ear and avoid offending the feelings of his hearers, receives far too great weight. He, then, who allows himself to desire and seek popularity is in danger of sinking to that worst of all hypocrites, the canting sycophant with a pretended zeal for truth.

The Stage is often claimed as a moral force. It is said to promote righteousness by showing the consequences of sin, the rewards of virtue, the loathsomeness of vice, the nature and workings of the human heart. Now, all who go to church know and expect that the loftiest morality will be the whole topic and purpose of the Pulpit, and many judge preaching in general by this test, and desire nothing else. On the whole, then, judgment is formed, and the verdict passed on the Pulpit, according as it endeavours faithfully and earnestly to promote the highest righteousness. The Stage is judged on other principles. All who go to the theatre know and expect that amusement will be its chief, almost its only, aim and purpose, and many judge it by this test alone and desire nothing else. Common speech testifies to this distinction, which will hardly be questioned. The church is "a place of worship," and worship is the zenith of morality; the theatre "a place of amusement," and amusement unconsecrated relaxes moral fibre.

Those, therefore, who are to occupy the position of leading playwrights are chosen by a jury which judges them solely by their aptness to entertain, and their plays are sifted by the same jury on the same principles. The effect of this difference is far-reaching. If even those who, on the whole, are judged by

their aptness to promote righteousness fail to do so if they court popularity, how much more must they fail who are judged by their aptness to entertain, and whose success is measured only by popularity! Morality is the science of righteousness, and requires special study, like any other science. They who without such special study set out to teach morality are but quacks, whether playwrights, critics, actors, writers, clergymen, educational experts, political agitators, County Councils, or any others. The qualities by which the men of any calling are tried and selected are those which will be perfected in that calling, and others will be developed only as they can contribute to those.

The duty of the Pulpit is to lead and inform public opinion, by putting before it those Divine truths and principles by which it ought to be governed. The Stage, at its best, can only reflect public opinion on any question of morality; or rather follow behind average public opinion, for the section of the public which most seeks after entertainment is not that which maintains the highest standard of morality or the most advanced ideas on religion. The Pulpit must be ever in advance of the average standard, "whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." By following the pleasure of its hearers it falls from its high estate.

Dr. Macnamara once said that if the parson could not compete with the music-hall, so much the worse for the parson. The Pulpit enters on no such competition with the Stage. If men prefer the music-hall, it is so much the worse, not for the parson, but for them.

Even, then, as the Pulpit which seeks popularity fails to promote righteousness, so the Stage, depending upon popularity for its very existence, can never be a moral force in society. It may to a limited extent remind people of certain obvious duties by appealing to their emotions, but emotional teaching is dangerous and unstable. Also, stage teaching is misleading because the spectator of a play expects to see the stage people act as he thinks he would act, or he himself, with

the addition or subtraction of certain traits of character, forgetting that the way in which one imagines he would act in given imaginary circumstances is seldom the way in which he really would act, and that if certain qualities were added to or taken from his character he would be so much another person that he cannot tell how he would act. It needs the judgment of several generations to determine whether human nature is justly reflected by any book or play, except in so far as it can be tested by common experience or universal principles. Moreover, the contemplation of an evil life is not the way to learn morality, but because it gives a prurient excitement, a morbid sensation, it is the method constantly employed by the Stage. A certain worldly prudence and kindliness, and a sort of commonplace morality of a middling type, may be, and are, presented by the Stage; but even this is constantly misleading, both because in no sphere so much as in morality is the result of a little knowledge and a middling standard disastrous, and also because the theatrical, spectacular, sensational development of any idea or situation is always preferred, as being the most entertaining. The following critical notice provides such a good instance of this that we cannot forbear to quote it, though it was written as long ago as January 2, 1906, when a play called "The Irony of Fate" was produced at the Shaftesbury Theatre. The dramatic critic of the *Standard* wrote:

"Mr. McLellan has imagined a man . . . at the point of death spared by Death . . . a braggart, a weakling, a coward, an egoist, guilty of crimes against himself and crimes against those who loved him and leaned on him; but he declared, as the sword was about to fall, that he had been unduly tried, that Life had been unfair to him, that the burden was greater than he could bear—and he asked for another chance. . . . The idea is magnificent. We waited for what the dramatist would make of it. And then came the disillusion. . . . In living his second life, knowing what the verdict must be, having warning, he is once again braggart, weakling, coward, egoist. He drank his wits away before, again he drinks; he was a faithless husband before, again he is faithless; intoxicated with success before, again he lives only for self—without hesitation, without a struggle. Mr. McLellan's play fails here. It is the struggle we want. We have a picture of a man wholly bad and wholly weak, going down the same hill. And what we should have seen would have been a man, infinitely stronger, making a struggle of Hercules against Fate, seeing the old pitfalls, and avoiding them, recognizing

the precipice, and taking a safer path. But his struggles would be vain; another pitfall, another precipice would be at the end of the new paths, the old weakness would be there, but, known, would have apparently, materially, been conquered—but, really, the old weaknesses would themselves have been the conquerors. There would have been metaphysical value in this, *the dramatic appeal of tension and suspense and wonder—to see this frail human soul battling against Fate*, making a hopeless fight, because of the seeds of selfish egoism in the marrow of him; avoiding the old sins, but falling into new ones. That would have given us *the clashing of brain and heart*, of inclination and duty, which are the very life and breath of drama. But in the new play at the Shaftesbury last night there were none of these. *There was only the sense of repetition, of the expected happening, of weakness becoming mere futility—for the fear of Death, which was the impulse of the play, leading to nothing. The man was the same man, the sins were the same sins, and all the effect of the great idea was lost.*"

Now, we have no hesitation at all in saying that on the point of difference Mr. McLellan is entirely right, and his critic entirely wrong. The author depicts human nature as it is, the critic stage human nature. The Herculean struggle, the clashing of brain and heart, and the rest which we have italicized in the critic's notice—these would doubtless be the better drama. They would be more thrilling, spectacular, "theatrical." Truth is stranger than fiction, but not nearly so stagey; though, for such as have eyes to see and a heart to feel, the disappointment described in Mr. McLellan's play is incomparably, infinitely deeper tragedy than the sensational "metaphysical" struggle imagined by the critic, as well as deeper truth. But the truth is not always amusing, and the play is condemned for its truth.

It is only from this stagey point of sight that "the idea is magnificent." In fact, it is commonplace, and the working out commonplace also, because it is true, because it is the commonplace "expected happening." Why should Réné Delorme have been portrayed as "infinitely stronger"? What source of strength, what stimulus even, had he after that he had not before? The fear of Death? But he knew always, no less before than after, that Death would come to him, and had not been restrained. Warning and reminder? Life is full of warnings and reminders, and he had not heeded them. Was it likely that, when the immediate pressure of fear passed, he would maintain

his resolution to reform? None with any knowledge of human nature could for one moment think so. The thing described is happening every day, and always ends, and must end, as described by the author, unless the man has more than fear and more than warning—some source of strength not sought by Réné Delorme. Sinners less feeble and hopeless than he are brought face to face with death, and even terrified into seeming repentance, and when health returns, and the new chance is given, continue their old life, exactly as Delorme, "without hesitation and without struggle." Sin is a dead-weight in every person's life, and they who try earnestly and strenuously, by the best means known to them, to shake it off are few. All others are fairly represented by Réné Delorme in kind, though not in degree. All know well, and are incessantly warned, that death is real, certain, and terrible. Does that alone check them? Never. Visions and threatenings, denunciations, entreaties, apparitions, the very Valley of the Shadow of Death are of no avail. If they hear not Apostles and Prophets, if they reject the Saviour of man, they will not be persuaded though they are plucked themselves from the very clashing of the teeth of Death.

Studies in Texts.

Sermon Suggestions from Current Literature.

By the Rev. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

Suggestive book: "Apocalypse of St. John i.-iii.," by F. J. A. Hort.

Subject: *Christian Testimony.* Text: "*Who bore witness.*"—Rev. i. 2.

PECULIAR prominence of idea of "witness" in both Apocalypse and Fourth Gospel (p. xxxviii). μαρτυρία and cognates nineteen times in former book. The thought of testimony emphasizes the Christian principle of passing on spiritual benefits; see in illustration the chain of five links in i. 1—God, Christ, angel, John, bondservants (p. 7). When did John bear the "witness" indicated in text? Not in writing of Apocalypse. The Greek indicates "a previous bearing witness" (p. 8). "Most natural