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Art. III.—PREACHING.

WHEN we find an association formed for the avowed purpose of promoting improvement in the art of preaching, the public Press repeatedly, both by comments, suggestions, and communications from correspondents, recurring to the subject, and a distinguished Member of Parliament making it the subject of a well-considered lecture, we cannot be wrong in concluding that it is one in which a large section of the public takes an interest. It is therefore not unsuitable that a magazine such as this, devoted to the service of the Church, should make it the grounds of a few pages of reflection. And in truth, observations on preaching, whether considered in reference to its importance, its objects, its history, or its management, can never in such a Church as the Church of England be held to be out of place. Let us observe, however, that it is not our object so much to show how sermons should be made, as to demonstrate their necessity, and to determine why they should be delivered at all.

As to the importance of preaching, no one with the pages of the New Testament, of Apostolic effort and of Church history before him, can be supposed to question that preaching or addresses on religious topics has the highest of all sanctions, the act of our Lord Himself. When He would make full proof of His Ministry He systematically adopted it. His very first public appearance as a minister was in the attitude of a preacher. The Book of the Law was placed in His hands, in the Synagogue of Capernaum, and He searched out the page He wanted, delivered His text and entered upon His first sermon. It would, of course, have been a precious privilege to us to be in possession of our Lord's inaugural address, more especially as we may observe from the fragment of it which has been preserved that it contained the exposition of the whole of His mission. But we are dealing not with the way in which He unfolded His text, but with the fact that He opened His ministry by preaching. And in truth what other way was there of His doing so? His object was to reach the hearts, the intelligence, and the conscience of the people, and He approached them through the ear. He did not establish, as the great philosophers did, schools of theology, but He simply did what we must do, threw Himself on congregational attention, and taking a section of Scripture as a basis, went on to "open it" and to apply it. And that primary act of His ministry was but the example of it afterwards throughout His entire course. "He went through the villages teaching." "Seeing the multitudes He went up into a mountain" and "He opened His mouth and taught." Whether by lengthened

discourse or by incidental comment, or by the illustrative agency of parables, He was ever bringing himself by speech addressed to the ear, the emotions, the convictions, the ignorance, or the intelligence of the people of his day, in contact with them. And all this was preaching, without which there remained nothing but the force of example and the exhibition of miracles as instruments for the declaration of his mission. Wanting our Lord's addresses of every kind, His religion as far as we can see would have advanced but slowly. In fact, the three years of His ministerial life was principally made up of preaching.

And, that implement sanctioned by Himself he deliberately placed in the hands of His disciples. Sent out by Him on their defined limited commission, He delivered to them the means by which they were to fulfil it when He said, "As ye go preach." It is true that He armed them with miraculous power, which they were freely to exercise for the trials of the suffering many. But even those gifts were auxiliary to the principal effort of their mission, the recommendation and confirmation of the Word. As with their Master, so with them. They had no other way of getting at the minds of the people. The key of knowledge had been taken away by the priests and Pharisees, and the door outside of which lay masses of ignorance and superstition was closed, until forced open by hard outspoken truth. In duplicate arrangement these early homilists went through the villages and towns of Judea, and took their stand, it may be in the market-place, the broad street, the house which received them, and began to speak to the listeners. Of their sermons we know nothing, but may rest assured that they were not disobedient to the command under which they went forth to preach. And although all that they reported was "that devils were subject to Christ's word," yet doubtless had they told the whole tale, we should have had in it simply exhibitions of early Apostolic preaching.

It is in perfect consonance with all this that we find our Lord, when departing from this world He dropped his mantle on His disciples, declaring His reliance for the spread of His Gospel to rest on the agency of preaching. Apostles were sent forth; under Imperial decree they were to go "into all nations and teach." If our Lord's first ministerial act sanctioned, nay, consecrated the instrument of the pulpit, that was doubly consecrated by His last. Commencing with an open Bible in his hands, He laid down His earthly ministry by enjoining His followers to preach the Gospel to every creature. It was His essential mandate, almost His only direction. Whatever climes they visited, whatever veins or sections of mankind they came in contact with, that was the power on

which they were to rely, the function they were to fulfil. Whatever else the Apostles were, and whatever else they did, this they were by Divine command to do, to become preachers of the Word.

With the volume of the Acts of the Apostles before us we are not to question now how that command was obeyed. As if by instinctive impulse of fidelity, the opportunity afforded by the Feast of Pentecost to collect a miscellaneous congregation was eagerly embraced, and the once fishermen of Galilee stood forward as preachers. Preachers, too, in the accurate sense, for we cannot read the address of Peter and John without tracing in it all the elements of a duly constituted sermon. We have the introduction, the thesis laid down, the proofs in support of it, and direct and scriptural quotations brought forward in elucidation of the points made. And so throughout the whole of that eventful history. It is the history of the demand of truth to an ignorant and depraved world to accept God's message recommended by the eloquence of human preaching. Whether to individuals, as when Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian, or in courts, as when Paul pleaded before Festus and the Sanhedrim, or to congregations, as when the men of Athens were rebuked for superstition, or to households, as when Peter reasoned with the family of Cornelius, or to men already converted but wanting stimulus and encouragement, as when the Apostle of the Gentiles continued his speech till midnight, or to Imperial despots, as when he made his first answer to Nero, or to fastidious, philosophical Greeks, as when his "speech and preaching" reached the ears and hearts of luxurious Corinthians—it was all preaching, the thunder of the pulpit sounding forth in the ears of sinners that God was waiting on a guilty world with the proffer of reconciliation in His hand.

It would carry us beyond our just limits to extend these proofs of the importance of this ordinance. But we cannot but glance at the fact of which the pages of Christian literature are the proofs, that beyond the Apostolic age the Church felt that the same implement was her chief weapon of defence and aggression. The tomes of the fathers of the early centuries still exist, ponderous and voluminous, but consisting in a large degree of sermons and expositions. Through their pages Chrysostom and Augustin still speak; the latter the acute rhetorician, the man of close argumentative power; the other the "golden mouthed," the master of that Christian eloquence which fascinated Constantinople, and made the Roman Empire of the East acquainted with the treasures of revelation. These men and their contemporaries wrought no miracles in support of their propositions, but they enforced them by the force of their sermons. The ground won by the Apostles was maintained by

the pulpit; the triumph of the first age sustained and consolidated by succeeding ones. No doubt there were schools of catechumens in which the young were indoctrinated, and untaught inquirers built up in the elements of Christian theology. But where would youthful Christianity have stood either for her defence or for her increase but for the ordinance of preaching? Sacraments and ceremonies might have done much to sustain and invigorate Christian life, but they could hardly displace the old recognised process, "that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." It is surely open to us to add to this historical review as to the importance of this ordinance the consideration that time, though it has made many changes in the mental condition of the world, has not removed the ignorance and apathy of the masses of men. Education may have done much, but no one acquainted with the lower strata of society can be unconscious that they are still submerged in the deepest and most lamentable ignorance. And no one acquainted with the upper stratum will be prepared to deny that a deep indifference as to spiritual things largely overspreads it. The nominally educated man is very often an unimpressed man, immersed in business, pleasure, and professional care, seldom throughout the week coming in contact with religious thought, and never caring to open a religious book. The agricultural labourer, the hardworking mechanic, the anxious tradesman, if catechised, would find it difficult to give a reason for the hope (if any) that is in them. How are such classes and such masses to be dealt with? What is to be done by way of dropping if but a single grain of truth on minds untaught and souls unrenewed? It is true that they may read and think, but will they do either? Is it not something that on one day of the seven the "inevitable sermon" should thrust truth on their minds, insinuate an anxiety, suggest an inquiry, implant a dogma? The individual minister would be probably repelled if he attempted personal remonstrances, but the Pulpit has a sort of privilege of presenting to men of all kinds even unwelcome truths; and if it be a matter of importance to make men think any how, then surely to other arguments we may add this in demonstrating the importance of preaching.

We pass from this to another aspect of the subject, that is the uses which preaching subserves. And there can be little doubt that one of these is to make men understand better the foundation of all preaching—the Word of God. Confessedly a difficult book and abounding with things hard to be understood, it is no doubt the minister's duty to attempt to make it plainer. In other words preaching is exposition—the result of that study by which the preacher masters the difficulties and unties the obscurities of the Scriptures. To do

that is something, for it prevents the Bible from being a "sealed book," and if it goes no deeper than the discharge of this critical and intellectual lesson, the Pulpit has done something to give the Word of God an intelligent place in the minds of hearers. But such an intellectual exercise falls far below the real intention, and that which ought to be the aim and effort of the preacher. It is something to enlighten minds, but it is more to rouse conscience, to excite the affections and confirm resolutions. The Pulpit may, if it stops short of these, be an excellent adjunct to the lecture room, dealing with men as a scientific professor might with his subject; but it does not fulfil its destiny, for it does not aim at the conversion of souls. That minister will have but a painful recollection of life on his deathbed who has not striven by all means "to save some." That was the very genius and object of our Lord's mission. "He came to seek and save that which was lost." A sermon which does not aim at hastening reluctant Lot and forcing him out of Sodom, which does not seek to pluck sinners as brands out of the burning, which does not meet in some shape the inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" whatever else it may be—learned, elegant, critical—has not risen to the point burning in the heart of Christ when he told Apostles to "preach the Gospel." It is that ministry of reconciliation, the proffer of amity on the part of God, and the seeking of trust and submission on the part of man, which has given in all ages to Christianity her persuasive and commanding power.

Times there are when the Pulpit is called upon to fulfil a function distinct from this, for not only should truth be preached, but error combatted. The Epistles of the New Testament, while elevating, spiritual, devotional, are at times eminently controversial. Those to the Hebrews and Galatians are clear instances of this. For truth may be implanted, and yet error may overgrow it. Wheat may be in the field, and tares may be choking it, and therefore are our ministers under the necessity of guarding, as well as enforcing, truth. There have been seasons in our Church's history where she could not well have done without this office of the Pulpit. At the Reformation, Protestant and Papal creeds could not have been separated from each other, but by the keen definitions of controversy. The saintly Taylor felt himself compelled to write his "Dissuasive," and the devout Hall his "No Peace with Rome;" the bulky volumes of Gibbon's "Preservative" retail some of the most masterly discourses in the English language, by dignitaries of the Church, who, moved by the dangers of their times, buckled on their armour and stepped down into the arena of conflict against the inroads which Popery was making on the faith. The spread of Arian and Socinian opinions, the revival

of heresies which menaced the atonement and reinculcated Pelagianism, the bold assaults of infidelity, as at the end of the last century, were all occasions which compelled the Pulpit to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered. We say not that it is desirable that the minds of sinners should be, even by those provocations, drawn away from the great point of personal salvation; but if Paul made Timothy a controversialist, and even passionately declared himself one, it is surely requisite on grave occasions that the trumpet of the Pulpit should utter its sound.

There are also occasions on which the Scriptural simplicity which should distinguish ordinary sermons (and which become a necessity from the fact that congregations are of all classes, whether social or mental) may well be departed from. For there are congregations of highly intellectual and scholastic character to whom the handling of abstruse subjects is applicable, and who perhaps would nauseate truth if presented to them in a simple and elementary form. To them truth must be not simply stated, but elaborately and comprehensively reasoned out. The Hulsean and Bampton Lectures delivered at our universities may be regarded as illustrative of this distinction. To present them to an ordinary congregation is to assume that the ordinary capacity was competent to receive and follow the train of deep thought in which the practised minds of those seats of learning delight to revel. And profound is the debt of gratitude which the Church owes to men who have taken under their protection some disputed or disputable topic of theology, and proved that high scholarship may be an ally and not an antagonist of religion.

The question has often been debated of the construction which a sermon should present, and the manner in which its topics should be handled. With specimens before us presenting features of the greatest opposition on this point it were presumptuous to dogmatise. The well-known treatise of Claude on the Composition of a Sermon was long regarded as laying down the best rules on the point, and shows at all events that one idea had strong hold of that writer's mind—viz., that great care both as to the selection of topics, their arrangement, their proportion, their balance, was necessary for the proper performance of the duty of sermon writing. In much probability the rules laid down by him are much too artificial, and if carried out by all minds would perhaps produce something so stiffly methodical, so sharply guarded by laws and restrictions, as to be unnatural and decorously laboured. Nothing can be more different than the rules which appeared to have governed the great masters of public eloquence in times past. The French school, as exhibited by Bossuet, Massillon, and Bourdaloue, is

strikingly different from the English. With all their elegance and deliberateness, there is a mannerism about it which, though acceptable to a French, would be distasteful to an English audience. Of our own preachers we find a striking dissimilarity between Chalmers of the Scotch, and Hall of the Baptist Church, both confessedly masters of the craft. The former, compared by the latter to a door swinging on its hinges, always moving but never advancing, laying hold with characteristic power on one great idea, and presenting it in all lines of aspect, and helping it by all kinds of illustrations, sweeps the mind irresistibly onward to the conclusion, and compels it to feel that that one main subject had been brought out to a demonstration and riveted for ever in the convictions as "a nail in a sure place." The other, on the contrary, judging not only from the skeleton notes from which he preached, but from the finish of most masterly sermons left behind him, appears to have broken up his main subject into several divisions and treated it in reference to many collateral points. His sermon on "Modern Infidelity," and that entitled "Sentiments on the Present Crisis," present not only grand specimens of the highest eloquence, but traces of the previous arrangements on which the whole magnificent structure was built. In somewhat later days, the characteristics of Chalmers meet us in the sermons of Melville, less pointed and illustrative, but sweeping on in a mighty cataract of gorgeous phraseology. Of those of a more distant age, Taylor, Barrow, South, Sherlock, and many others, it is difficult to speak. Confessedly in the highest rank in their own class, their style and habit of thought are so unsuited to our days, that probably to reproduce them in the pulpit would be to dismiss the congregation. Of nearly the same time there is one man of the Dutch school whose sermons appear more than any other destined to be immortal. From the mixture of scholarly criticism, his power in the exposition of his text, the various lights in which he places it, the force with which he demolishes error, and the pathetic brilliancy of his application, there are few (if any) who rise to the level of the great preacher of The Hague, Jacques Saurin. All have their excellences, and yet it were hard to say which of them would bear a second appearance in the pulpit. Each age has its own tastes, its own conceptions of elocutionary excellence, and cannot transmit its own canon of approval to generations following.

The old adage in this as in other things holds good, "That which is best administered is best." But if our divines are to make the Pulpit an instrument of edification and of usefulness, an attraction and a power, they must see to it that the sermons be representatives of the word of truth, and so accompanied by earnestness of manner, by persuasive tenderness

and gentle force, by an unmistakable solicitude for their hearers' best interest, and such an effort to commend themselves to men's conscience in the sight of God, as will carry home to every soul the conviction that the appeal is not a mere customary discharge of a professional duty dryly and respectably fulfilled, but a real effort to bring God, through His Word, in contact with the human heart, and immortal spirits to the cross of Christ. That is the very temper in which Paul wrote and spoke, "Knowing the terrors of the law we persuade men." "My heart's desire and prayer for Israel is that they might be saved." "As though God did beseech you by us we pray you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled to God." When the Pulpit breathes out such a spirit as this, unmarred by any such uncouthness of manner, or vulgarity of diction, or incoherent statement, or affectation of sentiment as might pain the listeners, it will matter comparatively little after what example of ministerial oratory the sermon is constructed; for as "charity covereth a multitude of sins," burning and intense love of souls expressed in voice, manner, thoughts and words, will condone many defects, and send away a congregation if not excited by the brilliancy of oratory, at least dissatisfied with themselves and a step nearer to God.[1]

B.

Art. IV.—ENGLAND IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

AMONG the valuable collection of State Papers relating to English affairs in Venice, now being ably calendared by Mr. Rawdon Brown, under the auspices of the Master of the Rolls, is a most interesting report upon the state of England at the time of the accession of Queen Mary, which was drawn up at the instigation of the Doge, by the Venetian Envoy accredited to our Court. Early in the February of 1551, Giacomo Soranzo was appointed to succeed Daniel Barbaro as the representative of the Venetian Republic at the English Court. A man of considerable scholarship, a keen observer of life and character, and endowed with that taste and polish which a long career in the diplomatic service usually develops, he was cordially welcomed by the great, and every facility was afforded him for the performance of the duties of his mission. These duties were to "execute with all diligence the different commissions received by him," to send "detailed and speedy advice of

[1] This Paper, in type last month, through an accident was unavoidably postponed.—Ed.