

THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

VOL. XX.—SEPTEMBER, 1890.—No. 3.

REVIEW SECTION.

I.—THE POSSIBLE FEDERATION OF THE EVANGELICAL PROTESTANT CHURCHES.

BY PROF. WILLIS J. BEECHER, D.D., AUBURN, N. Y.

THE question of church unity is being more and more pressed upon us. In 1886, the Bishops of the American Episcopal Church adopted a declaration that they were ready "to enter into brotherly conference with all or any Christian bodies seeking the restoration of the organic unity of the Church." Many responses have been made to this; committees of conference exist, and correspondence is actually in progress. This is a single group of facts, one of several groups. In that most notable of the American ecclesiastical movements of the past year, the revision movement in the Presbyterian Church, the idea of closer union with other churches has prominently asserted itself. The measures taken for securing a formula that shall express the consensus of doctrine among the several Presbyterian bodies, were much more eagerly adopted than those for securing the revision of the present standards. Many Presbyterians are anxious that revision shall take such a form as to lower the barriers between them and other churches.

Among possible modes of greater unity, that by federation is prominently mentioned. The term federation is conveniently elastic for this purpose. We need not define it more closely than by saying that it indicates something less than the consolidation of existing churches into a single body, having governmental functions, and something more than the mere recognition that all the churches are in reality one. It implies, perhaps, a council of some sort, common to the bodies composing the federation. It implies some kind of accepted organization, some kind of official community. The common organization may have only advisory power, but it must be the power of advice that comes from a regularly accepted source.

It is a thing by no means to be taken for granted that such a federation, if feasible, should be confined to the churches that are com-

find ourselves compelled to countenance means and methods of raising funds for church purposes which, fortunately for them, city and town pastorates have little or no occasion to use. Divested of all exceptionable features we are expected not merely to countenance, but actually engineer to successful results such expedients as egg sociables, pink sociables, oyster-suppers, pound parties, fairs, etc., etc. *We* country preachers don't like these things any more than our dear brethren whose congregations don't need them, to prevent the church from becoming bankrupt. *We* know as well as they that we were not ordained to "serve tables." But, if Drs. Funk and Sherwood will allow in the dignified HOMILETIC REVIEW a query quoted from the parlance of the street Arab, "What are you going to do about it?" In a thousand instances if the country pastor utterly refused to sanction such means of keeping his church afloat, he would be compelled to stand by and see it sink into extinction.

But this paper has grown long enough. We might appropriately end it with several suggestions to our co-laborers in country pastorates as to "ways and means" by which we may avert possibly the threatened extinguishment of our dear Zion, or at least indefinitely postpone it. But there is not space enough given us to include them. Meanwhile, let us earnestly ask these wise men who, from an outside point of view may be able to suggest really practicable methods, as the Philippian jailor, who, also, felt that he was about to be extinguished, asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must we 'country churches' do to be saved?"

IV.—DREAMS AND THE MORAL LIFE.

BY PROFESSOR BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD, D.D., PRINCETON, N. J.

It is almost impossible for us to understand in these later and perhaps wiser days, since science has entered in "with disenchanting step," how great a part dreams played in the lives of our forefathers. We all (without his temptation to think otherwise) agree with Bacon "that they ought all to be despised; and ought to serve but for winter talk by the fireside;" though we are prone to forget the succeeding words: "Though when I say *despised*, I mean it as for belief; for otherwise the spreading or publishing of them is in no sort to be despised." The physician and the psychologist have learned to bend their ear to the message they may bring and to seek among the stuff of which they are made for sterner materials than airy nothings and misty shadows. The moralist and physician of souls must not lag behind; for to them, too, we cannot doubt, dreams may come laden with weighty lessons which they will despise to their loss.

Of course, we need but to have our attention called to it, to recog-

nize it as a familiar fact that dreams often play a very great part in the development of the moral life. The personal experience of each will certify to him what a strong impression on the mind an evil dream may make, how prevalent a source of temptation it may become, what a sturdy effort of will it may require to overcome its effect. How often men who boast that they hold dreams to be but toys, wake, "affrighted much," like Antigonus, or basely delighted much, to collect themselves and think "this was so and no slumber" and to determine, against every whimper of outraged conscience, "for this once to square their actions" by it. Poets' intuitions outrun scientific analysis; and what full use they make of dream-temptation every reader knows. One of Shakespeare's finest touches, for instance, is the contrast which he draws between the characters of Banquo and Macbeth as reflected in their attitudes towards the temptations of the night: both receiving them, but the one fleeing from them and fearing to return to his couch, lest they should once more "abase the curtained sleep," crying—

"Merciful powers!

Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose!"—

while the other gloats over them and hastens to fulfil them. If we may take it in this sense, sleep truly oftentimes

"Before a deed is done, has tidings of it."

We are moving here in a region, few of the travellers in which publish reports of what has chanced to them; and we are therefore much thrown back upon our individual experience. But it is safe to assume that there are none who have not been conscious of evil influences in their lives, arising from evil dreams. And we can scarcely help suspecting that some of the curious instances of gradually debasing lives we see about us, may find their explanation, in part, in the influence of debasing dreams—dreams which vividly picture the subject in actions, which in waking moments he would never "dream of," and so gradually familiarize him with himself as vicious, perhaps lead him to gloat over vice, and thus steadily sap and undermine his character. The first of such visitations would no doubt produce a dreadful shock, which may, however, wear away with repetition, until the moral nature receives irretrievable injury.

Now, whence come these hideous visitants which like foul night-birds attack us in our helpless moments and suck the blood from our virtue? It can scarcely be doubted that some of them are to be directly attributed to the cruel cunning of him whose weapons are now as ever "deep guile and heartless craft." When the arms of the will that guard the portals of the soul are lowered in watchless sleep, what more opportune moment could the tempter find to instill the poison of his suggestions? The poets are in advance of the moralists here too.

“The malignant power, which lies in wait to destroy us,” we are told in *Undine*, “loves to sing sweet songs and golden fairy-tales to his selected victim, in his sleep.” And Milton, as we all remember, not inappropriately pictures his first essay at temptation as,

“Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve
Assaying by his devilish art to reach
The organs of her fancy, and with them forge
Illusions as he list, phantoms and dreams.”

The last day of the revelation of the secrets of men alone will disclose into the walled-up gardens of how many souls Satan has first made successful entrance in their sleep, “inspiring venom” and taunting their spirits in dreams, and thence raising

“At least distempered, discontented thoughts,
Vain hopes, vain aims, inordinate desires.”

But we must not so magnify the work of Satan as to forget that man’s greatest tempter is himself, and that “each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed.” In general, dreams are made up of the loose *débris* of our past experience; and in all ordinary cases,

“In bitter dreams we reap
The sorrow we have sown.”

Dreams, in a word, may not only become factors in our moral development; much more significant than that, they may be revelations of our moral state. *In vino veritas* we say, and we may just as truly say it of sleep. Sleep like wine casts off the rein of will by which we habitually guard and govern the working of our most intimate dispositions, and gives play to the undirected affections of our real hearts. We do not know ourselves: living calm and untempted lives, enshrined in habits of self-control and cleanness of thought, we think ourselves, throughout, the pure beings we seem. Who can estimate the shock of disillusionment when the pure-minded find themselves pursued in the dark watches of the night by thoughts and suggestions, then calmly entertained and fully acted upon, the very imagination of which would be impossible in waking hours, and the memory of which is enough to suffuse the cheeks with blushes of mingled shame and anger? Who can doubt but that in such phenomena as these, the veil is violently torn away from our artificial self and that deeper self that lies behind and that existed before all action of our individual will, is displayed in all its corruption? So that we may adapt the poet’s words to a new and fuller meaning and say of ourselves,

“Asleep and dreaming fearfully,—
Fearfully dreaming, yet I wis
Dreaming that alone that is,—
Oh sorrow and shame!”

Dr. Mark Hopkins furnishes us with an illustration of the revela-

tory character of evil dreams, drawn from an analogous sphere. After referring innate corruption "to the action of those involuntary powers of the mind which are analogous to the involuntary powers of the body" he adds: "We all know with what force and persistency thoughts of evil and temptation will sometimes come to us. What is possible in this direction may be seen in those cases of madness in which the voluntary power wholly loses its control, and the utterances express whatever is presented by the involuntary power. When this is the case those utterances are sometimes nothing but a continuous stream of shameless indecencies and appalling blasphemies. This is utter corruption, and there may be corruption analogous to this to almost any degree while the personal power retains its control."* Here too, however, the poet is before the philosopher. Who can forget the scene in the Cairene madhouse when that monster of self-hood Peer Gynt dropped the common remark that the madmen were "not themselves." "Not themselves!" exclaimed the doctor, "now there you are deeply mistaken! Here, I assure you, people are most damnably themselves. Themselves and not a jot beside: here they all go at full sail as themselves. Each one shuts himself up in the cask of self, plunges deep down in the ferment of self. . . . Ourselves,—that's what we are in thought and speech: ourselves to outmost plank of spring-board." In a truer sense, because undiseased and normal, ourselves is just what we are in our dreams: and the self that is thus revealed to us is often a self to shudder at, and demonstrates to our unwilling belief that beneath the calm exterior of our outward conduct, beneath the habituated purity of our innermost thought, beneath the very reach of our waking consciousness, there ebbs and flows a great black sea of evil that threatens to overwhelm, at any unguarded moment, the whole fabric of our moral lives. Satan has indeed an easy task in inciting us to sin; he has but to blow upon our souls that the waves may rise, and what a fluid horror do we find their substance to be—hidden so long under the calm and sparkling surface on which the lights of heaven alone had seemed to dance and play.

We have purposely laid stress, thus, on our evil dreams, in the belief that they would most pointedly illustrate the two truths upon which emphasis needs to be laid, viz.: that dreams touch upon our moral life (1) by revealing to us our underlying moral nature, and (2) by supplying starting points or impulses to moral development. Fortunately, however, there is here too a good as well as a bad side. We have consciences as well as corruption: and Satan cannot penetrate with temptation where the Spirit of God may not enter with sustaining and renewing grace. We may discover in our dreams the strength and activity of our conscience and the sustaining love of

* *The Scriptural Idea of Man.* p. 122.

God ; and he may derive from them impulses to good—impulses which may rank in nature and effect as merely natural movements of conscience, as special providences or even as creative effluxes of regenerating grace. For sleep is not vacant of spiritual impressions ; and not only may the proposition of old Dr. Ezra Stiles, “That regeneration may take place in sleep, as well as in waking hours,” to which some modern writers strangely object, be successfully defended, but we may be empirically led to maintain that even many of the processes of conversion may go on while we are asleep.

It has, indeed, been strangely asserted that the moral distinction is wholly absent in dreams and conscience entirely extinct.* If this were true the testimony of dreams would be a hopeless one. But every one has had a contrary experience ; and literature is saturated with instances which disprove it—instances in which men have awakened after dreams of judgment affrighted into new endeavor, after dreams of the hollowness of life enheartened into higher purposes, after dreams of the greatness of God’s love won to love him. The history of the Church, from Origen down, is full of conversions through the instrumentality of dreams ; and many of the best Christians have traced their better life to their leading. Bunyan’s case is one precisely in point. He tells us in his “*Grace Abounding*,” how, at the time when it was his delight to be led captive by the Devil, at his will, and he was so rooted in evil that it was a second nature to him, yet the Lord did not wholly desert him, but “did scare and frighten him with fearful visions.” “For,” he continues “often after I had spent this and the other day in sin, I have in my bed been greatly afflicted, while asleep, with the apprehension of devils and evil spirits, who still, as I then thought, labored to draw me away with them, of which I could never be rid.” No doubt these dreams are explicable as the reflection of his waking fears, for he tells us that, during this time, “he was greatly affected and troubled with the thought of the fearful torments of hell-fire.” But they illustrate clearly both the workings of conscience in sleep, and the reaction of dreams on the fears that arise by day, to give them increased poignancy and force. The experience of Elizabeth Fry is similar. It was apparently through the influence of a dream that she was rescued from the indecision and doubt into which she fell after her conversion. As her recent biographer describes it :—

“A curious dream followed her almost nightly, and filled her with terror. She imagined herself to be in danger of being washed away by the sea, and as the waves approached her she experienced all the horror of being drowned. But after she came to the deciding point, or, as she expressed it, ‘felt that she had really and truly got real faith,’ she was lifted up in her dream above the waves. Secure upon a rock, above their reach, she

* E. g. by Dr. Edward H. Clark, in *Visions, a Study of False Sight*. Prof. Kedney, *Christian Doctrine Harmonized*, II., 291, bears a similar testimony to our own, in opposition.

watched the water as it tossed and roared, but powerless to hurt her. The dream no more recurred; the struggle was ended, and thankful calm became her portion."

John Newton's remarkable dream of the precious ring entrusted to him, heedlessly cast away, and restored and preserved for him by a stranger, which he records for us in his "*Authentic Narrative*," is quite of the same character. He did not himself doubt that it was from God; and it came to him at a time when, after a period of almost ascetic religious life, he had fallen again under bad influences and was fast "making large strides towards a total apostasy from God." Its chief peculiarity is that it presented a view of salvation (Christ keeping us for ourselves) to which Newton was not yet himself fully awake. Coming nearer to our own day we may cite the case of Alexander Duff's dream of judgment, probably given form by his familiarity with Buchanan's poems on that subject. His biographer's account is as follows: "In vision he beheld numbers without number summoned where the Judge was seated on the Great White Throne. He saw the human race advance in succession to the tribunal, he heard sentence pronounced upon men—some condemned to everlasting punishment, others ordained to everlasting life. He was seized with indescribable terror, uncertain what his own fate would be. The doubt became so terrible as to convulse his very frame. When his turn for sentence drew near, the dreamer awoke shivering very violently. The experience left an indelible impression on his mind. It threw him into earnest prayer for pardon, and was followed by what he long after described as something like the assurance of acceptance through the atoning blood of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

All these are but instances (which any reader of religious biography might multiply almost endlessly) in higher regions, of what is experienced by all of us in lower measure. There is no one of us who has not been conscious of the effect of vivid night visions in deterring him from evil or in leading him to good. Need we doubt that—whatever may be the materials out of which their imagery is built—their producing cause is the grace of God, ordinary or extraordinary, shielding his beloved even in their sleep? Surely such dreams as those we have recited rank in character with what are called special providences, and a remembrance of them may lead us to pray with new meaning to our Father to keep us in the night season, and give new zest to our song,

"E'en in my dreams, I'd be
Nearer my God to Thee."

Of this much at least we may be sure—that the sleep of those who keep sound wisdom and discretion, the beginning of which is the fear of the Lord, shall be peculiarly untroubled of evil, so that they may say

“I will lie down in peace, and forthwith shall I sleep, for Thou, O Jehovah, though I be left all alone, wilt make me to dwell securely.” And this much may we hope—that sometimes while we sleep, our heart may wake and hear the voice of the beloved knocking and saying, “Open to me!”

One single word further. May not what we may call the ordinary providential use of dreams as vehicles of moral impression—whether for initiating or helping on moral growth—have supplied the basis for the occasional extraordinary use of them of old, as the media of direct revelation? May we not at least say this much: that our observation of the force of the moral impression made by them every day, may enable us to understand better how God could have chosen them as channels of revelation, and may thus remove our antecedent difficulty in thinking of him employing such airy and usually untrustworthy messengers? “He maketh the winds his messengers.”

V.—SENSATIONALISM AND THE PULPIT.

BY REV. A. MCELROY WYLIE, BROOKLYN, N. Y.

NOT a little is said in these days on Sensationalism. It confronts us in literature, challenges our attention in art, meets us in society, is extreme on the stage, is demanding a place in the pulpit. It is one of the signs of the times, and deserves the study of our ablest and most conscientious thinkers.

As usual we hear the wholesale eulogist, and the uncompromising assailant. The former can see little evil, the latter can discern little good in it. As it often happens, the truth runs between and not wholly with the one extreme or the other.

If the artist insists that Sensationalism is the realistic in art and defends it as more true and desirable than idealism, we may ask, what do you mean by realism? What range do you admit and what is the purpose? Whether art shall exert a moral power or its opposite, will depend on how these questions are answered in the practice of art. So in literature, so in society.

Then how, we may ask, is it as to the Pulpit? What shall be the bounds? How shall Sensationalism be defined, and to what extent admitted as permissible or a welcomed means? To-day these questions are seeking their answers as never before. The correct solution, if ever attained, must come after a thorough restating of the entire subject.

The awakening of any of our emotions into expression is sensationalism and has its bearing upon the *principles* of our nature. Pity is coupled with benevolence, fear with courage, awe with reverence, abhorrence with hate, admiration with love, and so on. Looking narrowly into the constitution of our nature we shall see that the