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Unmaking the Preacher

THE lectures delivered this year on the Lyman Beecher Foundation at Yale University, were by the Rev. William Jewett Tucker, D. D., President of Dartmouth College. They have been published in a volume by Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin and Company, under the title "The Making and the Unmaking of the Preacher," and contain more common sense to the square inch than any book of the kind which has reached my table in years. The proper proportion between the constructive and destructive process is observed, for seven chapters are given to the making and development of the preacher, while only one is given to his unmaking. And this one chapter does not allude to those "great lapses from a faith or righteousness which completely undo the preacher: these are self-evident in their application." Dr. Tucker characterizes the preacher's foe, who lies in wait for him through his whole career, as unreality. He says that preaching consists in the right correspondence between the apprehension and the expression of a given truth; and that the power of the pulpit corresponds to the clearness and vividness of the preacher's apprehension of the truth and an adequate expression of it. Unreality comes into preaching, from committing truth to only one faculty, reason, imagination or emotion, through undue striving after effect; and too great stimulus from the audience. A man must believe with his whole nature in the truth which he preaches, or he cannot preach it successfully, and Dr. Tucker says truly and tersely: "The preacher who really believes the half-truth will have more power than the preacher who half believes the truth;" but neither of them will compare with the man who is able to say: I know whom I have believed and I know what I believe—with his whole heart.

Striving after effect produces artificiality and sensationalism. As soon as this is recognized the power of

the preacher as an ambassador of the truth is gone. Men may listen to him as they do to an actor in the theatre, they may be entertained and thrilled, and their emotions may be excited; but as they go away from the drama, without any moral lesson, so they will go home from the sermon with no purer sentiment, no higher inspiration, no holier purpose, than they had when they came to hear the preacher.

"When Robert Hall says that 'miracles were the bell of the universe which God rang to call men to hear His Son,' we see the propriety of the figure. Truth must have a hearing. But when we take unfit, exaggerated, unscrupulous methods to get a hearing for the truth, we rob it of its reality." And this preacher knows that he is a charlatan, that his method is false, that his success is not the triumph of truth, and the glory of the author of truth, but only a sensation, like the morning cloud and the early dew that pass away.

That a preacher becomes unreal because his audience excites or stimulates him beyond the bounds of truth, seems so slight a danger as to be hardly worth mentioning. A popular or political orator might be led to exaggeration or false statement by the applause or enthusiasm of his hearers, and an actor might be encouraged to overact his part by vulgar clamor, but in a solemn assembly gathered in the interest of divine truth, such influences must be rare, and the preacher who could feel and interpret them without their signs or utterance, must be unusually sensitive and responsive. A desire for such stimulus and an effort to obtain it would indeed deteriorate the preacher, and be hostile to his sincerity.

A more evident danger is that "which comes from the want of direct and wholesome criticism." We all know how rare is the wise and just critic of preaching, and how infrequently any helpful criticisms come to the preacher's ear. Who cannot recall the pleasing flatteries of friendly hearers about their sermons? One excellent man used regularly to greet me with "an eloquent effort this morning," and another with the phrase, "we ought to be better after such preaching," and many others with words all too fulsome and pleasing. Few can withstand the complimentary remark, and reply with the brusqueness of the old divine to a man who said, "you have given us a good sermon," "the devil told me that before I left the pulpit." Far more helpful to me than the flattering tongue, was the stern but kindly word of a plain man but a thorough Christian, whom I was visiting as a young pastor, "you are preaching over the heads of your people, come down a little and you'll do us more good." It was an excellent oil, and did not break my head, but only made me humble. President Tucker wonders at the liberties which men and women take in flattering the preacher. "They seem to assume that the preacher is a non-resistant. Appreciation is a virtue. There is none too much of it. It is not only grateful, it may be inspiring. But flattery or mere compliment, or even unthinking acquiescence, each and all are enervating to the last degree. As far as they have effect they hold the preacher to his lower levels. Far better the stimulus, the spur, if need be the goad. I count it the sure mark of deterioration when one begins to be content and satisfied with himself, because others are apparently satisfied with him and say so."

The late Prof. Roswell D. Hitchcock once said to a class of theological students, that laziness was original sin, and ministers had more than their share of it. Our author evidently agrees with him in the essence of the statement, for he quotes a very competent authority to the effect that "the two besetting sins of the ministry are laziness and lying," meaning by lying the "unreality" of which mention has been made. By laziness he does not mean vulgar indolence and doing nothing, but "the postponement of the hard and exacting duty beyond the one which is easier and more agreeable." No man has a better chance thus to accommodate himself than the preacher. How many deliberately form the habit of putting off pulpit preparation till the end of the week, and prefer the pleasant social engagement to the stern call of pastoral duty. All such self-pleasing un-makes the preacher. The whole social situation of preachers in city and town churches, and in settled communities, is fraught with perils and dangers to the minister of which the missionary knows nothing. Every preacher understands these as a part of his discipline. Some use them as means of grace, and others deteriorate under their pressure, society moulds and fashions some with its soft and jewelled hand, until they have lost all acquaintance with the apostles and with Paul except that which is rhetorical; but others grasp society with the force of duty and self-sacrifice and compel selfishness and pleasure, and even avarice to yield something to the noblest claims.

In addition to these unfavorable influences the preacher loses power by frequent changes. President Tucker thinks "that the shortness and changeableness of the pastorate are doing a great deal at present toward the unmaking of the preacher. Permanency in the pastorate, other things being equal, is a tremendous source of power to the pulpit. It gives the preacher the advantage of the accumulations in his personality. The old rhetoricians used to say that one office of an introduction was to present the speaker and gain acceptance for him with his audience. The preacher who rises in the pulpit after years of preaching is a known man, and if known, probably honored and loved. If he has shown intellectual advance the congregation is expectant of more truth. When he applies that in hand his wisdom in the past enforces his application. And when he appeals to his people every influence upon character and association and personal kindness and sacrifice goes with the appeal. There is but one valid argument on the other side, speaking now in the interest of the truth, of which I am aware. It is the argument from the freshness, the chance for the new truth or the new setting of it. But this all depends upon the question as to whether the preacher's past is for or against him. If he cannot improve upon that, if he repeats himself, if he is no more to the truth than formerly, then he ought to go. But if he can keep himself abreast of the truth, continually in advance of his people, and maintain the good cheer and enthusiasm of his personal faith, then he ought to stay, so far as the interests of the truth are concerned."

There is much beside in the book, upon other aspects of the preacher's office, that is valuable for study, thought and practice, but I have room only for one striking incident, by way of encouragement. It is quoted from Canon Twell's "Colloquies on Preaching:" "A friend of mine, a layman, was once in the company of a very eminent preacher, then in the decline of life. My friend happened to remark, what a comfort it must be to think of all the good he had done by his gift of eloquence. The eyes of the old man filled with tears. 'You little know! you little know! If I ever turned one heart from the ways of disobedience to the wisdom of the just, God has withheld the assurance from me. I have been admired and flattered and run after, but how gladly I would forget all that to be told of one single soul I have been instrumental in saving!' The eminent preacher entered into his rest. There was a great funeral. Many passed around the

grave who had oftentimes hung entranced upon his lips. My friend was there and by his side was a stranger, who was so deeply moved that when all was over my friend said to him: 'You knew him I suppose?' 'Knew him,' was the reply, 'no; I never spoke to him, but I owe to him my soul.'" And this may be the experience of every faithful preacher.

AUGUSTUS.

Young Luther's Christmas.

'Twas grand old Martin Luther sa'd—
"There's naught on earth more sweet to see
Than a loving woman's tender ways,
Whose heart is filled with piety."

He'd found it so that dreadful night,
When, up and down the frozen streets,
He sang his choicest songs for bread,
'Mid biting winds and beating sleets,

Yet ever found he sang in vain,
And touched no heart, but only got,
Instead of bread to soothe his soul,
A "stone" for his unpitied lot.

When lo! from out a goodly house
A flute note on a mission sped:
He stopped, and, softened by the sound,
Yet once more sang his song for bread:—

"The foxes to their holes have gone,
And every bird unto its nest,
But I still wander here alone,
And still for me there is no rest."

"My Christ was hungry, He was poor,
And I but follow where He led,
And He will feed me from His store,
And daily give me daily bread.

"A child's voice surely," quoth the dame—
The weary wanderer found his rest:
Oh, good dame Cotta! dost thou know,
How by thy deed a world was blest?

Dame Uraula, an angel thou,
An angel didst from want relieve;
A world has shared in thy reward,
A world's deep gratitude receive!

God's love to Luther came in need,
God's love through love of woman true;
God's love can never fail His own,
Can we not be its channels, too?

Oh, men and women, to whose hands
The Lord commits His wealth to keep,
Remember that ye stewards are,
And not your own the gains ye reap.

Oh, men and women, for whose souls
The Christ has given His life, in love,
Give freely of your lesser things,—
He will not fail to mark above.

Princeton.

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD.

The First Christmas

HOW long the world had waited for that day. Abraham desired to see it, he saw it in vision, and was glad, when on Mount Moriah, he offered up his son. Jacob looked for the coming of the Prince of Peace, the Shiloh to whom the nations should gather. Moses counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. David in vision saw the glorious day when his Royal Son should reign from sea to sea, and from the rivers to the ends of the earth. Isaiah sang of Him who should be at once a babe, and yet the mighty God and Prince of Peace, and Malachi, had spoken of Him who should sit as a refiner of gold, to purify His church. Yet when the promised Saviour came, the world knew Him not, His own people received Him not. None were counted worthy to know of the great event or to visit the scene of His birth, but a few shepherds. That birth so quiet, so obscure, was the greatest event that had happened in the world's history; it filled Heaven with joy, while a glorious company of the Heavenly host sang songs of gladness over the lowly birthplace of earth's long expected King. Well may God's redeemed delight to look back to an hour which linked earth to Heaven,