

The Man at the Other End of the Sermon.

AN ADDRESS TO MINISTERS.

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THERE is a man at both ends of the Sermon. There is the man who preaches, and the man who listens: the man in the pulpit, and the man in the pew. The man in the pulpit has received much attention. He is provided with a long and thorough training for his work. Many books have been written in his interests, and for his inspiration. And so, though I am addressing him just now, I will take him for granted, for my purpose is to speak of the man at the other end of the Sermon—the man who has to listen to it, who suffers under it, or who is redeemed by it;—the much neglected but *all-important Man in the Pew*. For, after all, we preachers exist for him; and unless we keep him clearly in view in all that concerns preaching and the education of the preacher, we shall altogether miss our way, and our most eloquent sermons will be still-born, or worse, a mere crackling of thorns under a pot, full of sound and (possibly) of fury, but signifying—nothing.

I.

THE MAN IN THE PEW—who is he? *He is just the average man, in all the multiplicity of his conditions, in all the variety of his experiences, in all the stages of his spiritual growth or decay.* Every congregation is a microcosm of the race, a miniature of humanity in all the grandeur and littleness of its nature. We see there old and young; rich and poor; cultured and simple; good, bad, and indifferent. Those upturned faces whom you and I meet week by week,—what do they stand for? They stand for all the tragedy, the comedy, the commonplace, the pettiness, the greatness of life. There is endless variety there, a perplexing mixture of faces, conditions, and experiences; so much so that we may well ask: How can any one man, however cultured, sympathetic, well-trained, meet the needs of any—even the tiniest—congregation, with its diversities of thought, intelligence, ignorance, alertness, dullness? It seems impossible!

Two or three elements in common, however,

meet us as we gaze steadily at the man in the pew.

1. A congregation is not a mere haphazard collection of human beings. It is, in the first place, *a company of souls*; it is *a religious gathering*. What has brought all here together is just this—that they are men and women whose *very presence testifies to a sense of spiritual need*. They have not come to be amused with a play, or to hear about the weather, or to listen to a lecture on astronomy or socialism. What has brought one and all to this one place is—*religion*. It is about religion, therefore, in some aspect of its many-sided reality, that they want to hear. That defines the preacher's function, determines his choice of topic, and settles his manner of handling it.

2. Secondly, they have not come here to hear about religion in the abstract, nor about any or every religion in the concrete; *they have come expecting to hear about the Christian religion*,—in a word, about Jesus Christ, who He is, what He is to man, what He has done for men, what He can do for them, what He demands from them. This seems a great restriction of topic. Yet no sooner do we begin to handle it than we find vast horizons of thought lifting upon us; heaven, earth, and hell swim into sight; time and eternity mingle their solemn notes; for in dealing with Jesus Christ we ere long discover that we are dealing with the universe from the highest point of view, and the deep mysteries of God, as well as man, unfold their hidden depths to our gaze.

3. Thirdly, there is one feature of a congregation—of any and every congregation—which never comes to my mind, without being moved the red-ripe of my heart. This company of men and women, young men and maidens, boys and girls, have all come together *in a mood of spiritual receptivity*. They have not come, primarily at least, to criticise and find fault. They may do that—some of them—before they go out, or afterwards; but they have not come there for that purpose. They have come 'to have their higher nature stirred, awakened, inspired, renewed.'

This impulse may be overlaid by many other sentiments. Superficially some may be there from mere habit; for social reasons; for example's sake; for some subsidiary benefit. These, however, are but the accidents of the situation; they are not the deep, underlying ultimate fact. The one thing that explains and justifies their presence is that one and all, in the last resort, are here asking us to do them good, to make them good. Is there a situation in life like it?

Here is a group of our fellow-beings assembled under certain pre-arranged conditions, in a building consecrated to this one end, with all the appurtenances and associations of worship to their hand, and, for an hour and a half, they hand themselves over to us preachers in utter receptivity of attitude, mutely saying to us, 'Give us of your best of spiritual instruction, incentive, enrichment.' This, brethren, is what the situation means which meets us every time we get up to preach. It is a solemn, an august, a magnificent situation; and the man who can contemplate it without being moved and lifted into a determination to do his utmost to meet it—and that every time—is no true shepherd of souls, but a hireling.

II.

And now, we will leave the aspect of variety presented by a congregation, and after the manner of those photographers who take a composite picture of many individuals with a view to eliminating their differences and presenting a portrait of their resemblances, I will ask you to take the composite man in the pew, the common humanity he represents, in the rough (or rather in the mass), and note certain distinguishing aspects of his psychology, for a practical purpose, which will emerge as we proceed.

It is fashionable in these days to speak of man not only as the product of a long evolution, but as the subject of an evolution that is still going on. Humanity, we say, is not *made*; it is in the making. The man that was in the long bygone ages, is not the man that is; and the man that is, is not the man that is to be. Prehistoric man was scarcely removed from the brute—he was half-animal; ultimate man, as some day he will become, will be half-divine. Is it not Tennyson who sings:

Red of the Dawn!

Is it turning a fainter red? So be it, but when shall we lay

The ghost of the brute that is walking and haunting us yet, and be free?

In a hundred, a thousand winters? Ah! what will our children be,—

The men of a hundred thousand, a million summers away?

It is a stirring thought, this, that we men and women of to-day are but links in a chain, stages in a process which the race to which we belong is undergoing, of advance, of progress, not only in outward circumstances, but of inner essential nature! There is so much we would fain get rid of which we have inherited from the past; so much of the animal, behemoth, ape, serpent, tiger; so much indeed of primeval ooze and slime clinging on us, that we would do away with, which so far we cannot do more than chain up or keep in leash, in ourselves,—but which our far-distant progeny will have sloughed off completely, so that they will be human through and through and without qualification.

Let us hope all this is true. But is it *all* the truth? If there is much in which we have thus advanced, almost beyond belief on our forefathers, there is another side to the case. Go back as far as you like, wherever you come on traces of mankind, man is still man, and with a brain farther removed from that of the highest brute than the highest man's is removed from the lowest; with a mind that is essentially human; with a heart that throbs with human, and not merely animal, pulses; with a soul that is already grappling with the solemn mysteries of life and death and the hereafter. And though there is a side of our nature which has been all these millenniums steadily and swiftly developing, there is another side which seems to have come into being full-orbed with man's creation, and has not changed in its essence ever since. Man as intellectual has, let us grant, been in a sense evolving, but man in his equipment as a religious and moral being appears to be fundamentally the same in all ages and lands. His mind has grown, but his heart has stood still, or rather, it *has always been full-grown*. There are anthropologists and psychologists, indeed, who tell us that we have no evidence that even intellectually man has really developed within prehistoric times; his progress has been due not to altered mentality, or to the evolution of new faculties, but to two

simple, though mighty facts: first, he has learnt to share his life with his brother-man through language, each individual being thus made a free-man of the social life of his fellows; and secondly, he has mastered the art of retaining the results of the experience of past ages, so that each age starts where the last left off.

The point I am after is this—that there are two sides to our nature: a dynamic side, a side whose mark is differentiation, contrast, individuality; and a static side, whose feature is that it is the same in all men. Intellectually we differ vastly from one another, and from bygone ages.

But I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are ripened, with the process
of the suns.

But on our affective, sentient, feeling, organic side, we are one with each other, and with all men that ever were. My philosophy is different from Plato's, even from Hegel's; but my human feelings, my impulses, cravings, satisfactions, motives, passions, are the same as those of the earliest man and woman. When a man thinks, he is different from any one else; when a man is in love there is no difference between the thrill which Jacob felt when he first saw Rachel, and that which you and I felt when we saw our first sweetheart; and that other Rachel who would not be comforted as she wept over her dead was smitten with the same anguish as the latest mother who has lost her child. Archimedes, leaping out of the bath, crying, 'Eureka!' as the meaning of specific gravity flashed on him, and running naked through the streets of Syracuse; or Newton solving the problem of gravitation in watching the fall of an apple,—were super-men, whose genius you and I cannot share; but David fasting because his little child was dying, and Paul crying in exultation, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?'—do we not know how they *felt*, for have not many of us gone through the same experience of human anguish or spiritual triumph?

The same distinction runs through the great literature of the world. There are books (and great books) whose vogue is for the moment or the generation; there are greater books that are for all time; and the difference between them is that the transitory books, which presently will have only an historical or antiquarian interest, are

those that deal with the passing intellectual phases of life, while the books that abide for all time are those that deal with the communal, universally and changelessly *human* side of life. The former—to suggest at least a broad distinction—comprise the literature of thought; the latter constitute the literature of power. The science of the ancients bores me, for I have outgrown it; the love-poems, the sacred hymns, the tragedies, comedies, annals of these ancient peoples are perennially interesting, potent, moving, for in them I find echoes of my own failings, strivings, elemental emotions, loves, hatreds, ideals. That is why Æschylus, Plato, Horace, Augustine, Dante, Shakespeare, Bunyan, Scott, Dickens will always be read;—they strike the human note, they appeal to man as man. That is why the Bible is the greatest, the most perennial of books; from first to last, from Genesis to Revelation, it deals with the Universal Soul of the race 'in the light of God's countenance,' its fall, its rise, its aspirations, its spiritual triumph, its eternal destiny.

The question is, in preaching, *which of these two men*—the changing, intellectual man, or the unchanging, universal man—*are we after?* to which do we properly appeal? *To both*, you will rightly say. But to which essentially and primarily? I say most emphatically, not the man who *thinks*, but the man who *is*; not the man who doubts and questions, but the man who sins, repents, aspires, strives, falls, rises, conquers. Our essential objective (as preachers) is not the evolving brain, but the *heart*,—the troubled *heart*, out of which comes the bitter-sweet of life, and the *will*, the divided will, which aims so high in aspiration and effort, and often falls so low in attainment. The sermon, that is, belongs not to the literature of speech, of knowledge, of science; but to the literature, the speech, of power. Our essential aim as preachers is primarily not to *enlighten*, but to *move men to follow the light they have*; and though there is a side of light that is power, it is as power, not merely as light, we should handle it. The outward man lives by knowledge; the inner, abiding man, lives by love and hate, by 'aspiration and desire'; and it is *the inner man we are after*.

I call all the great preachers as witnesses on my side. Without exception, their sermons, however intellectual in mould, however illuminating in idea, are directed to awaken emotion, to quicken

the heart, to affect the conscience, to rouse the aspirations common to mankind. To repeat a phrase already used—they strike the human, the universal note. Great crowds follow these men, because they deal with that which is common to all crowds, because common to the race. They strike below the line of difference between one man and another, and reach that in them which makes them men. Luther, whose words were half-battles; Wesley, whose sermons subdued, controlled, persuaded, converted statesman and clodhopper, noble and plough-boy, scholar and boor; Beecher, who read the human soul like a book, and could play on all its strings of laughter or tears; Spurgeon, whose command over vast crowds was simply a command over the universal conscience and will; Robertson, whose delicate analytic gift was but a cloak for the impelling power of his human appeal; Parker, that Great-heart of the pulpit, whose rough humour and sometimes grotesque imagery concealed a tenderness and a pathos irresistible because so intensely and broadly human; these are a few of the men who made the pulpit the birthplace of souls and the nursery of nations, quickened to a new life under the spell of their potent and saving power. And their *differentia*, amid all their differences of creed, culture, and intellectual quality, was that they were above all *human* preachers; they struck the universal note and so touched the universal heart; they knew how to invest the ordinary facts and forces of life with eternal meanings;—they were one with the great Greek dramatist of whom Browning writes in his translation of *Balaustion's Adventure*:

Our Euripides the human
With his droppings of warm tears,
And his touches of things common
Till they rose to meet the spheres.

Why has this race of good preachers—for the time at least—died down? There are many reasons no doubt, the chief of which is that preachers like poets are born, and not made. When Nature makes great men, it has been said she breaks her moulds; 'there are no replicas of her frescoes.' But one subsidiary yet important reason is, I am persuaded, that we have for the time lost the right conception of the art of preaching. *We have unduly intellectualized the pulpit.* We are too much the exponents of religious problems, instead of being first and last

purveyors of religious power. We deal in 'aspects' of the gospel, instead of with its marrow and blood. We view life from an angle instead of full-orbed. We puzzle our hearers, instead of moving them to their depths. This is partly a reflexion of the transition-period in religious thought through which we are passing (through no fault of our own), but it is partly the result of a thoroughly vicious habit of mind—the habit, that is, of dealing with life analytically and piecemeal, instead of synthetically and as a whole. I sometimes wonder whether our methods of College training are entirely guiltless in this matter. We must beware of fostering the fallacy that the aim of our academic training is to make thinkers and theorists, and not men whose essential function is (*through thought*) to reach and renew the palpitating, suffering, sinning, aspiring *heart* of humanity. If so, we must recover our poise, and while thinking as earnestly, as clearly, as thoroughly as we can on the great mysteries of thought, remember that all our intellectual discipline is meant only to equip us for a better understanding of the actual life around us, which is the greatest mystery, and the most glorious reality the world contains. We must finally concentrate on *that*, and learn how to tap the fountains of power; how to rouse its capacities for holiness, love, purity, and passionate self-sacrifice, if we are to recover the great note in preaching. We do not need to think less, but to feel more. We do not need less criticism, but more constructiveness. We must not be less conscientious about our ideas, but more anxious about our ideals. Life is our subject, fundamentally, not thought; thought certainly, but only that we may the better grasp life in its solid content. A lady once told William James that she divided all philosophies into two classes—the 'thick' and the 'thin'; the thin were the intellectual systems; the thick were those that viewed life in its three dimensions of thought, feeling, will. That was a flash of intuition it would be well for us preachers to bear in mind. For there are *thin* and *thick* preachers as well as philosophers, and for the same reason. To the first class belong the preachers about whom, when we have described them as 'thoughtful,' we have said all there is to be said; to the second, those whose thought is contributory and ancillary to their gift of moving the whole living man to response to the appeal of the living God. I hope I am far from depreciating the place

of the intellect in the pulpit, but we have been its slaves long enough to know its desolating tyranny when allowed to usurp the throne. We do not live in ideas, however sacred a place they take in every fruitful life; it is our heart-throbs, not our brain-cells, that keep us humanly alive.

III.

Such a conception of preaching as I have thus imperfectly sketched is one that makes an enormous demand on our resources. It is quite easy—after a while—to develop two or even three trains of thought every week; but to *deal fruitfully with life in its manifoldness*,—that is a problem which will tax the best of us to the utmost. There is only one way of doing so. It is by *studying the man at the other end of the Sermon*, rather than the books that have been written about him. The true preacher is more interested in life than in literature—for literature is but the reflexion of life. Our pulpit will be effective only as we follow this principle; but if we do, if we study our people's minds, and find out what they are thinking about; if we study their concrete life, and realize its struggles, its difficulties, its happiness, its sorrow, its sins, its upward strivings; if we study their circumstances, and unthread the warp and woof of their daily doings; if in sympathy and love we vicariously live their lives with them, rejoicing in their joy, sorrowing with their griefs, sharing in their infinitely varied experiences,—if we do this on the one side, and then on the other master the secret of showing how the gospel meets them in all their need and longing after God, we shall not fail of a rich reward. For one thing, we shall find our work inexhaustibly interesting; and what is still more important, we shall master the secret of power as preachers.

I do not think I can afford to leave this point just there. There is *one* book—the Preacher's Book—which we must study patiently, eagerly, prayerfully, if we would attain to full knowledge of the Man in the Pew. That book is the Bible. It is a wonderful volume in every sense; but in nothing more wonderful than in the way it enables us to interpret that common human nature which makes all men akin. I have said that literature is only a reflexion of life. That is true of nearly all the books we read. It is scarcely true of the Bible. There we do not so much find life's

clearest mirror, as life itself, *under the light of God*. We may say what we like about its inspiration,—what we cannot get rid of is its *truth*. In it we find a marvellous portrait gallery of human life in all its phases, individual, social, national, cosmic. Its words find us in the innermost place. In sorrow, in joy; in elation, in disappointment; in despair of self, in passionate surrender to God; in every phase and mood of the soul,—the Bible finds us, haunts us, and masters us. We see there men in love, and in mortal combat; we see them befriending one another, and outwitting each other; we see them plotting each other's destruction, and we see them spending themselves for each other's salvation; we find them here blaspheming or ignoring God, there seeking Him and serving Him with their whole heart. And then on the other side we see God's search for and wrestling with mankind; His power over-awing them; His anger consuming them; His love wooing them back to Himself. There is no essential relationship between God and man which is not presented to us between the covers of this great book, which is the story of man's quest for God and of God's finding of man, and this not in abstract phrases, but in concrete historical movement. You will find no subject germane to the pulpit that is not suggested, illustrated, enforced in this miraculous book. Therefore if we would become effective preachers, we must be Biblical preachers through and through. There is no indictment which is more damning against the modern pulpit than that it has so largely neglected the Bible as its textbook, its *vade mecum*—and if I read the situation aright, there is no fact that is resented (even if he does not formulate his resentment into a definite criticism) by the man in the pew. The great preachers have been without exception Biblical preachers—whether topical or expository matters little—and we shall have no new race of preachers deserving the epithet 'great' till we return to the book and make it our treasury once more.

IV.

I come to my last point. Brethren, there are reasons for believing that there is a great hunger for the Word of the living God in the world just now. The old materialism, which made the thought of God impossible, is dead; agnosticism, which made it uncertain, is but a refuge for blinded

souls; naturalism, which would make it irrelevant, is dying. Through the fields of philosophy a fresh wind of spiritual freedom and enterprise has been recently blowing. Science has lost her crass note of gnostic self-sufficiency. Literature is 'seeking after a sign.' Poetry is wistfully sweeping the horizons of faith. The world is tired of negations, and is sick of the east wind of doubt. There is thus a clearer field for our sowing and reaping than for a long time past. If we rise to the occasion, there is a great opportunity of unknown possibility for preachers who have a full, glad, satisfying message, and who know how to deliver it. Truly, there is much on the surface of life just now to discourage us, especially since the devastating world-war; our churches are cold, our congregations meagre, the great world sweeps past our doors in apparent oblivion of our existence. Nevertheless, I hear 'the sound of abundance of rain.'

Oh Wind,

If winter comes, can spring be far behind?

Are our young preachers ready for the coming opportunity? Their sufficiency is of God, and

not of themselves. Let not their academic training be a substitute for that inalienable self-training of mind and heart and spirit for their high calling without which all will be in vain. Remember that old Greek myth—how Prometheus could kindle no sacred flame on earth till he snatched it from heaven; he must needs climb where the gods were before he could light the fire which has never gone out on human hearths. He indeed stole the fire from an unwilling Olympus. We are in a better way. Our Prometheus came forth from the Father of lights; 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' And we are His messengers commissioned to carry the gospel light to every creature, and to kindle the responsive flame in human hearts the wide world over. Let us pray that we be worthy torch-bearers of the gospel. Torch-bearers?—nay, may our *lives* be the torches we carry, incandescent with the truth we proclaim, and the love we would share; so may we burn to the glory of God and the redemption of men till we burn out, and, dying, pass it on to a new race of preachers, who shall in turn pass it on to other ages.

Joshua and the Miracle of the Sun.

BY THE REVEREND GEORGE P. WALLACE, B.D., WARRINGTON.

ON reading the account of the battle of Gibeon as described in our version of the Old Testament (Jos 10¹⁻¹⁴) two points challenge attention by their peculiarity. The first of these is the mention of the moon in Joshua's prayer; the other is the extraordinary rendering of the Hebrew by 'and lasted not to go down about a whole day' (v.¹³). According to the view of the incident generally held, Joshua, anxious lest the day should be too short for the complete destruction of the enemy, prayed that the sun, already in the height of heaven, should not proceed to its setting as in the ordinary course, but should stand still. This prayer was answered, the sun remaining where it was for the space of a day. We can understand Joshua's prayer, wrung out of a passionate desire to complete the great work. It has often been our fate to desire the same thing and to wish that the sun would stay his course and prolong his blessed

ministry so that some pressing piece of work might be completed. But it is certain that on such occasions no thought of the moon was in our minds. Why should Joshua in the height of day think of the moon? Or of what assistance could the moon be to him? Further, to turn to the second point, why should the translators, even of the Revised Version, have rendered נָסָה by 'go down'? Few verbs in Hebrew maintain so consistently their simple root idea. נָסָה is always 'come.' Occasionally it may be rendered 'go.' But on all such occasions it is because the writer is regarding the action from the other end. The going from here is the coming yonder. And the other end is always mentioned, as in such expressions as, 'Whither shall I go,' 'to go to one's fathers,' which could be almost as well rendered, 'Whither shall I come,' 'to come to one's fathers.' In writing to arrange visits to friends at a distance