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Sermon Hearers  
and  
Sermon Makers.

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Rev. G. R. Wynne.  
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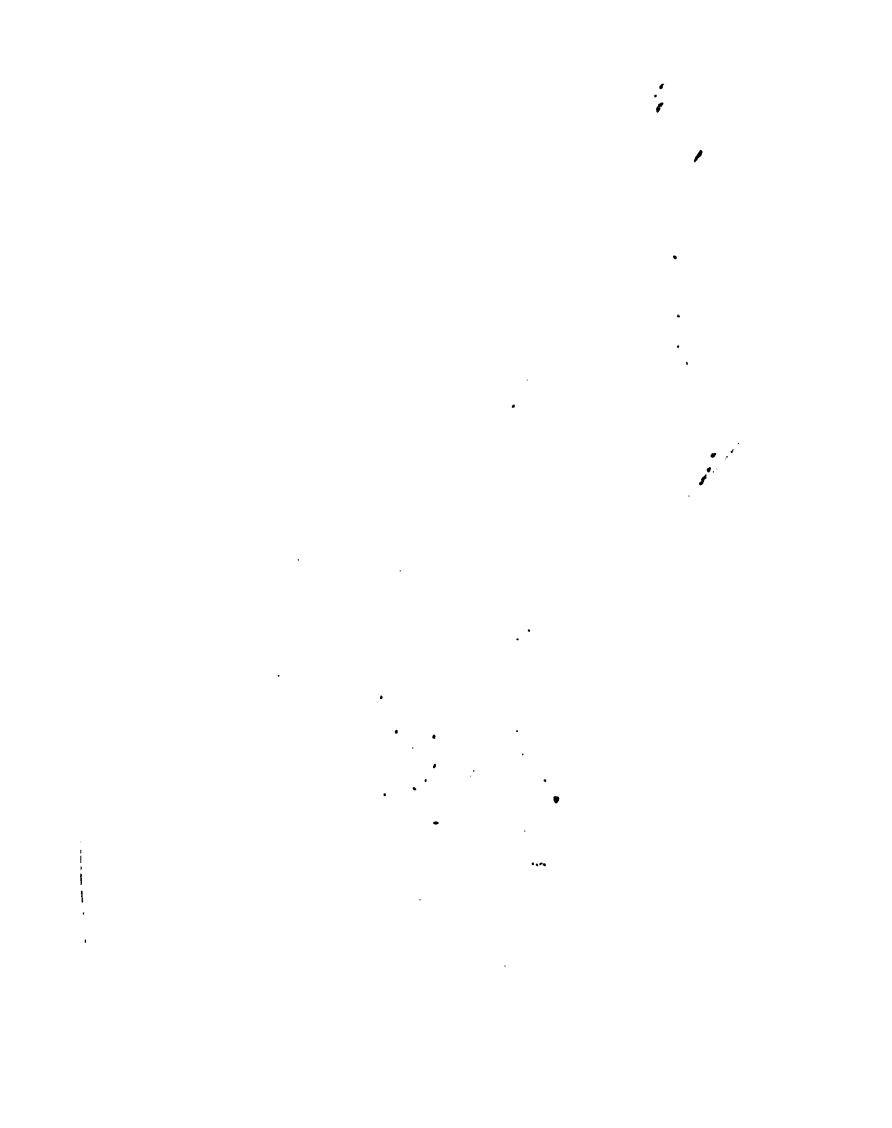
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# SERMON-HEARERS

AND

## SERMON-MAKERS.

BY

THE REV. G. ROBERT WYNNE, B.A.,

CURATE OF ST. ANNE'S, DUBLIN.

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"Ye shall call upon him to hear Sermons."  
*(Office for Public Baptism of Infants.)*

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LONDON: HOULSTON AND WRIGHT.  
DUBLIN: ANGUS MURRAY AND CO.,  
26 EUSTACE-STREET.

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1863.

100. S. 170.

DUBLIN: ANGUS MURRAY AND CO., PRINTERS,  
26 EUSTACE-STREET.



## A Prayer.

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**M**ost merciful Father, we beseech Thee to send upon Thy servants, *the Ministers of Thy Church*, Thy heavenly blessing; that they may be clothed with righteousness, and that Thy Word spoken by their mouths may have such success that it may never be spoken in vain.

Grant also, that *we* may have grace to hear and receive what they shall deliver out of Thy most holy Word, or agreeable to the same, as the means of our salvation; that in all our words and deeds we may seek Thy glory and the increase of Thy kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



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# SERMON-HEARERS

AND

# SERMON-MAKERS.



ALMOST every person in the community holds, in these highly civilized times, a Professorship of Sacred Oratory. We have plenty of material in the way of Sermons to afford subject for criticism, and there is no lack of critics. Amongst this class are to be found old ladies and young gentlemen; Sunday-school children, and boarding-school maidens; middle-aged men from their banks and clubs; and old men from their arm-chairs in the chimney corner of the cottage or alms-house, or by the fireside of the mansion, or the shop parlour.

Almost the only persons who do not now set up this chair of Sacred Oratory, and seat their own important selves therein, are the ignorant multitudes who never hear a sermon at all, and who never "darken the door of Church or

Chapel," and the few simple Christian folk who have not yet divested themselves of the belief that the ministers of religion are their teachers, and who are still so far behind the age as to regard it as the proper place of a layman to listen and learn.

Usually, to judge by the results, it would appear that congregations mostly attend to what is said for the purpose of furnishing matter for a desultory discussion at the Sunday dinner-table, a discussion which is prone to wander from the eloquence of the preacher to the elegance of some "new thing in bonnets," or to divide itself between the beauty of the singing and of the singers. And, by-the-bye, *Charity* is not always the presiding genius at these counsels.

In wide British Christendom, this professorship or censorship is open to all without competitive examination, and is actually held by members of every creed. No election is required, candidates are nominated and returned without opposition. I do not know how those sects who acknowledge no ministry can have acquired so thoroughly as *we find* they have, the art of judging the merit of

ministers. Certain it is that, as I have said, the office is held by members of all communions. Here are Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Primitive and Wesleyan Methodists, Quakers, Independents, and other Congregationalists, Baptists, and Free-Church men. Add to these the representatives of those other religious bodies, who, widely differing on almost every point, each assert with confidence that they only are the representatives in these degenerate days of pure Primitive Christianity. Among these latter, a certain sect ranks foremost—first in the field of criticism, and not prone to spare when opinions differing from their own are broached. They are free from this censorship themselves, for they own no ministry (so great is their primitive purity); but woe to the minister of any other Church who is stretched on the rack of this Protestant Inquisition!

I wish I could find some good, honest sermon-hearers, who would, for their own profit, and as an example to others, be content to listen and to learn when the minister of Christ addressed them. Were I in search of a congregation myself, I should willingly travel any distance to meet with such

an audience ; not in order that my idleness might be ministered to by the recollection that, preach as badly as I might, my stupid hearers would sleepily let me say my say, unaroused by my eloquence, unscared by my heresies, unmoved by my pathos, and enjoying each man his own dream—not for these reasons, but because in that Utopian Church or Chapel I might hope that, while I simply opened up the Word of God, hearts might be opened too; that the rising Sun of Righteousness might unfold the flowers, and many rejoice to learn the things which God has revealed; while all the time the critical function was laid aside, and the sermon was regarded as ordinary mortals regard bread—something which might indeed be analyzed, but which is intended to be used as food.

Countless and diversified as are the lay-critics, the objects of their approbation or reprehension are well nigh as numerous, and quite as varied. For we have to take into account, first, the *ministers* of all the above-named denominations, or of as many of them as have ministers, all of *whom* discourse every Sunday, once, twice, or

thrice, in every pulpit in our land. And these ministers represent, in each Church, all possible grades of opinion. There are as many doctrines as doctors, high, low, and broad—sticklers for forms and lovers of disorder—orthodox and heretical, earnest, apathetic, beloved, hated, despised, worshipped.

Moreover, the long list of preachers is lengthened by no meagre accessions from the ranks of the *laity*; the unauthorised teachers of religion are probably quite as numerous as the authorized, and well for many a spot in England that it is so.

When the sermon-hearer has reached a certain stage of development as a sermon-critic, he considers frequently that that self-conferred degree sufficiently qualifies him to move over into the body of the sermon-makers. He was a hearer, now he is a teacher, rising full-armed, as Minerva from the brain of Jove; he was unnoticed in the throng, now he is a greater object of remark than even the authorized teacher himself.

I am expressing no opinion here as to whether the hearer has or has not the right—in the sight of the One Ruler of the Church—to make and to



expositions, addresses, and "preachings," per Sunday, each of which is sent forth from pulpit, platform, or communion-rail, from chair or doorstep, omnibus roof, or theatre stage, as food for souls. But the hearers of these discourses would seem to belong mostly to the order *Carnivora*; they refuse to receive their food cooked ready for their eating; they cannot enjoy it unless they have struck their fangs or talons in it first; they spring on their prey as a lion on an ox, to slay and to eat; or more frequently as a terrier on a rat, to worry and dismember, and then to leave.

Imagine, therefore, a hundred and fifty thousand sermons on every day of rest thus pulled to pieces and left for the most part dead and dying in the land of forgetfulness. Add at least an equal number for week-day addresses, and you have every seven days three hundred thousand sermons, or fifteen millions six hundred thousand per annum thus delivered and thus received in civilized Britain. I think there cannot be a doubt that the total I have given is not exaggerated. Go where you will, in city or country town, and wait a little, you will hear that some one is going to preach,



and of course it may be assumed as a consequence that some one is going to hear. "To hear" a sermon! What fulness of meaning modern times have thrown into the word!

One might beforehand imagine that the hearing of such a vast number of sermons as I have set down, would exercise an untold influence for good on the teeming millions of our population; that the sinner would be turned from the error of his ways; and that the honest Christian man would arrive rapidly at perfection. But facts do not by any means justify such an anticipation. Millions of those who most need instruction never receive it at all. Thousands who go to hear have not the slightest desire to derive profit from what they are listening to; and, on the whole, the results regarded nationally are very trifling indeed. The portion of seed which falls on good ground, seems to bear but an infinitesimal proportion to that which finds its place amongst the thorns, or on the pathway, or the rock.

I do believe that society in Great Britain is growing out of its sermon-hearing days, the great *end of preaching* being all but forgotten. I would

like to send the educated and critical folk to their Bibles, as a silent, authoritative preaching which they dare not cavil at, and which can scarcely be made the subject of gossip or scandal. And I would do my best—and oh how hard it is to do it!—to collect within hearing of the *preacher's* voice, those who lie in ignorance of the plainest truths of salvation, and those simple people who still, even in those degenerate days, come to Church to listen and to learn. It may seem strange to say it, but I believe the thousands who habitually leave the Church after sermon, in order to absent themselves from the Lord's Table, would do better if they left half an hour sooner, and did not subject themselves to the intensely hardening process of hearing solemn truths preached year after year, which they have no intention of attending to, or profiting by.

It is commonly thought proper and poetical to say that it is easier to maintain true religious feeling in the country than in the city. There is nothing, say some, more conducive to religion than a walk home from Church through country lanes, where the scarce-stirring elm trees are just budding.

into beauty, while the air passes by laden with the odour of violets and primroses. The distant hills lying in the massive rest of centuries, with lights and purple shades following one another slowly across their sides, are supposed to lift the heart to the everlasting hills, and to speak to the Soul of Eternity. And in the Church itself, it is commonly believed that the preacher will impress his holy lessons better when the breeze wafts through the open windows the scent of lime trees, the rustling of silvery poplars, and the hum of bees, than when the noisy cab or passing omnibus awakes the echoes of the city street, and all the associations of the place call to mind that that congregation is assembled for worship in the heart of busy London.

Still in all this there is more poetry than truth. Pleasanter may be the associations of the country, but nothing more real. Life is not a rest, but a struggle, and religion is nothing if it does not teach us how to live. Better to be roused than to be stilled in the rough battle of the world!

Such scenes as a Sunday in the country smiles upon, are very different from those to which

the cultivated city folk are accustomed. Aristocratic chapels, whether in Hanover Square, Crown Court, or Pimlico, do not pour forth their hundreds into country fields and blooming lanes, but into smoky squares and dusty streets ; yet I venture to say that the impressions made by a sermon may be rivetted or chased away as well by one class of associations as by the other. And, indeed, a modern writer has with much truth declared that he believes mountainous countries exercise rather a prejudicial influence on real religion, tending to remove it from the arena of action to the cloud-land of romance. In every city there is that which, if regarded aright, would suggest the deepest thoughts. There is the sin and the sorrow ; vice evermore warring against virtue, and virtue, by patient perseverance, ceaselessly gaining its victories over vice ; there is the power of man brought face to face with proofs of his impotence ; evils against which he has struggled for centuries still raising their hideous arms untamed. Every scene of the kind recalls the thinking mind to the fact that a higher power must be brought to bear on all this sin and sorrow, or it will assert its rule

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of listeners, and never stir the heart, echo in the breast, or smite the conscience? The general reason of this, I believe, is, that the veil which nature has thrown, like the veil of the Temple, between man's thoughts and his affections, his head and his heart, becomes more thickly woven, and more closely drawn, by the hardening process of hearing truths which he makes no attempt to practise. Emotions are allowed to evaporate as soon as received, and the heart is seldom penetrated by the words which so frequently reach the ears. Into the hidden sanctuary—the heart—the high priest is seldom admitted. Possibly once a year, on some more solemn occasion than usual, the Saviour is invited in for a while, for a friend has gone to God in his sins, and judgment seems terrible and near. But in ordinary times each man keeps the veil close drawn about his heart, and preachers seldom have the skill, and sometimes scarcely feel the desire, to pierce it or draw it aside. Unless voluntarily, and by the help of a Higher Hand, the heart be thrown open, the hand of the preacher may knock and knock again, and the

careless soul be after a while scarce conscious that he is expected to open to the call.

And all the while the *mind* of the hearer may be busy enough—busy searching for the pointed remark, the clever hit, the interesting anecdote, the touching incident, the poetical illustration, or the half-disguised wit; and these are stored up to form subject of gossip in the religious world, or of merry-making in the irreligious.

To strip that close-drawn veil away, and expose the natural heart that hides behind it, is an unwelcome and painful process; it is like tearing plaister from a half-healed wound—men will not suffer it to be done if they can possibly prevent it; and this they do, either by steeling their consciences against the preacher's words, or seeking to turn them into ridicule. All the while every blow from the Sword of the Spirit, if it does not cleave or pierce the armour of proof, rivets and strengthens it on its wearer: he is either the better or the worse for every sermon that he hears.

The fault in all this lies on both sides; if many a heart is steeled to resist the strokes of the

preacher's word, so, on the other hand, many a sermon is so delivered as to be without edge or point, and is utterly unfitted to struggle with the apathy and obstinacy of the human heart.

I am going to speak to sermon-hearers chiefly, and to try to point out to them some of the faults which render their church-going often so profitless. And I may say, in the first place, that when I spoke of the habit of criticising sermons which so prevails among us, I was not denouncing as wrong every criticism pronounced on a discourse; for we are in a free country, and our Constitution rests on liberty of conscience, liberty of the press, and liberty of discussion. And, moreover, we have been told to "prove all things," and not to take every word of the preacher on his own authority. You will allow, however, that *this* is a style of criticism differing from that which almost universally prevails. Our critics do not in general set themselves, Bible in hand, honestly to ascertain whether the preacher's words were true. Other standards are set up—that is commonly forgotten.

Even supposing the result of the most honest



criticism shewed that the sermon-maker had made and had delivered a thoroughly bad discourse, his hearers may have consolation in falling back on the aphorism—

“The worst speak something good; if all lack sense, God takes a text, and preacheth—patience.”

The duty of a physician is not only to prescribe medicine and diet, but to explain the way in which each should be taken; and following that example, I desire in my remaining pages to show how sermons should, and how they should not, be attended to.

I begin with a very elementary truth indeed. If you are attending to something else, you will not hear the sermon, and if you don't hear it, it certainly will do you no good. This is a proposition which I will undertake to maintain against all objectors—nor do I suppose it will be disputed. Now I must say this out plainly, that my eyes often fall on persons in Church who I am quite sure are not listening to, and do not hear, the sermon at all. Some one is having “a quiet chat” in that retired corner of the Church, as he imagines

unknown and unnoticed. But clergymen often have sharp eyes, and they cannot but be attracted even by their natural feelings as men, to observe persons who evidently have not the slightest interest in, nor even the least consciousness of, what their minister is saying. The last occasion on which I observed the indecorum and irreverence of which I complain, was on a recent Sunday, when a youth and maiden were enjoying themselves to their young hearts' entire content, in a dark pew away from the gas-light. They *may* have been speaking of the lessons of the day of course, but it certainly suggested itself to my mind that some bright dream of the future, to be spent possibly together, was occupying all their thoughts, and casting that very pleased expression (for it would be unkind to say they were laughing) on their countenances. The preacher, the mean time, I remember, was sounding in the ear of the careless and the trifling the solemn words with which I fear Christian people have grown but too familiar, "I swear in my wrath that they shall not enter into my rest;"—and the youth and maiden flirted on!

But you do not need a companion to speak to

in order to be quite unable to hear the preacher. I do not believe that men come purposely to Church as to a place where they can meditate on secular subjects more free from disturbance than at home. But in Church there must be either voluntary attention, or an involuntary listlessness, which invites thought upon business and secular cares. If no effort be made to attend to the preacher, the world will steal in to the unoccupied mind. The composition of some important business letters for Monday's post, the proceedings necessary for meeting some pecuniary engagements, the calculation of interest on a life assurance, a scheme of pleasure for the Easter or Midsummer vacation, then invade the unguarded citadel of the mind. It is while the owner sleeps that the enemy sows tares on the field.

Dismissing now the case of those who do not listen at all, let a word be spoken to that large class who do listen and attend more or less closely, but who sit in the attitude of *judges*, not hearers, of an address to themselves. Most persons listen as if the sermon were delivered as it is termed "before them," which means, I

suppose, that it was not intended to be addressed to them, as if they had any personal interest in its message. The minister, when listened to thus, is no longer speaking for God to men in order to save them, but he is, either intentionally or not, addressing a specimen of his powers to a number of *connoisseurs*, who are most experienced judges of his professional ability as a divine, a poet, a metaphysician, or a logician. If he is "making full proof of his ministry," it is by proving himself to be no common speaker, no every-day divine.

He has topics (with which, you know, every one is already acquainted) which it is his duty to work up as raw material into the most pleasing fabric possible: what matter if the topics which he handles be heaven and hell, righteousness and temperance, and judgment to come: his hearers "know all that already."

It is not usually by the general result, but by the use of certain minute but well-understood tests, that the preacher's ability and excellence are judged. In one Church the *Open-sesame* to the heart of the audience is the use of the

expressions, "Our Holy Mother the Church," the "Holy Sacraments," and something about "Baptismal waters;" if these are said all is well. In another building round the corner you will gain the hearts of your whole audience if you manage in your "trial sermon" skilfully to weave in the five golden threads of Calvinism; unless these glitter here and there, your fabric is contemptuously thrown aside by the hearers as unfit for their wear, and the Arminian teacher is hooted from the place. Some covert allusion to the sin of priestcraft, whether in the Church of Rome or of England, must be introduced, or the sermon will not take with a third congregation. Works must be the standard here, faith there, or all is error, and the preacher is on the high road to apostacy.

The exception to this rule is the case of a person who comes to Church to learn something to save his soul. Some old widow there may be who, crouching in a corner of a hidden pew, actually fully feels what she says when she uses the words, "We have erred and strayed like lost *sheep,*" or, "God be merciful to us, miserable

sinner." But I think you will allow that such a case is rather the exception than the general rule.

The evil I speak of is highly developed just at the present day, but it is not the prerogative of one communion more than another. Certain topics must be spoken of or people will not hear; but these topics are used by the hearers not with a view to personal appropriation (far from it; why, they knew all that long ago!), but as a Lydian stone, on which the preacher is rubbed to prove his party. All is well if he has the true sound. Every Church becomes the ford of Jordan, the hearers are Gileadites, and woe to the unhappy son of Ephraim if, through forgetfulness, ignorance, or a fixed resolution to speak only what he believes, he suffers his lips to say—"SIBBOLETH."

There are a few truths which must form the basis of all our sermons, and, therefore, in a certain sense, it is correct to say that what we hear we *knew* before. But we are apt to say, "We knew this already," when our knowledge is no more than a mental acquaintance with that which was designed to be a *heart-truth*. We do not know a truth unless it has reached that por-

tion of our nature which it was meant to influence, and religious truth is intended to cure our hearts of the sore disease of sin, and "to lead our feet into the way of peace." Body, soul, and spirit may all know a truth, each in its own peculiar sense. We know a rule in algebra when we *understand* it, and can work it out on a slate. We know a friend, as a friend, when we *love* him in our hearts. We know a trade when we can work at it skilfully with our hands. But in the case of religious truth all these meanings are included. We do not know a truth aright unless we apprehend it—I do not say comprehend it—with our minds, love it in our hearts, and practise it in our lives. Now, in view of this description of knowledge, who will say of the truths even of the poorest sermon which is Scriptural, "*I knew all that before?*"\*

The tests which are used are infinitely varied in their nature and application, and the terms

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\* Be sure of this. No part of your belief is really yours save that by which you live—that which has wrought itself into all your life, and struck its roots into *all your being*.—*Magee's Lecture on "Scepticism."*

used to express approbation and disapprobation have a very peculiar character. "Oh, Mrs. W., was not that a very *sound* discourse?" asks Mrs. X., when to the ears of Mrs. W. it may have been the wildest heresy. "That young man is a very *faithful* preacher, dear Mrs. J." Probably this character was earned by the young divine at the cheap rate of having as a faithful mirror reflected just the pet opinions of Mrs. K.

The tests of preachers commonly used are infinitely varied, various as the human mind, and new ones are continually being discovered in the progress of religious feeling, and in the development of new truths. I am going to say a very commonplace thing, but do not, I pray you, throw away the truism, unless it contains no truth for you—the only test which we should use in ascertaining the merit of any preacher, or of any sermon, is the whole Bible.\*

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\* Of course the test of true allegiance to any particular Church or party must be the formularies of that Church, or the watchword of the party; but here I speak of the preacher in the more general, and as it would seem to me, the more important light of a minister of Christ.



I do not say "the Bible," for such is the expression used by every sect and class of Protestants. But I say the *whole Bible*, in order to show that I would have respect paid to no portion of it in particular above the rest. They who use, in practice as well as in theory, this test, will not refer to the Epistles as opposed to the Gospels, to the Law as distinguished from the Prophets, to the Old Testament as distinct from the New, the Epistle of Paul to the Romans as contrasted with that of St. James to the twelve tribes scattered abroad.

No one who can strictly be said to belong to any *party* in the Church, or out of it, is really fit, so far as he is one of a party, to use the Bible thus. I wish we could and would strictly train up our children to belong to this whole-Bible party rather than to any other. The ear is weary with the incessant use of the party terms—High Church, Low Church and Broad Church—Calvinist and Arminian, Zwinglian and Lutheran, Conformist and Nonconformist, Preterist and Futurist, Evangelical and Puseyite; every one of ~~which~~ terms has had its baneful effect in keeping

men from the unbiassed study of the Word of God in its entirety. If these endless party names have done good by keeping some of us together as in a "pen-fold," they have done incomparably more evil by keeping most of us apart, separating us by a series of barriers which few have strength or courage enough to break down.

The only way to prevent our children from growing up in the midst of a still more bitter party strife than that in which we have been engaged, is to lead them all early to join that one party which I have named. A party without a party cry; one which does not waste its strength in crying—"The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible;" but which makes these words the practical law of its life, the unvarying rule of its judgment and belief.

And if you desire to see your children growing up thus, the influence of school and home must tend the same way. Do not send your children to a school conducted on Evangelical principles, and loudly heralding this as an additional bait in its advertisements. Do not have anything to say to that seminary where cook and parlour-maid

are declared in arresting type to be truly pious; and forbear to place your son with that clergyman who proclaims in double-leaded lines that the youths entrusted to his care will be brought up as "true sons of the Anglican Church." Wherever money is sought to be made by the use of a party cry, eschew that place, for dishonesty is at the bottom. Try to find a school where solid learning, nature, and the Bible in English, Hebrew, and Greek, are the tutors; but where neither one nor the other is prominently displayed in the advertisements. If you cannot do this, teach your youths yourself, and make your wife teach the girls, if she has time and ability to do it; but if you do this, be sure you both belong to the whole-Bible school yourselves. I have little doubt that you think you do so already. Of course, as I have never seen you, I cannot say whether your opinion of yourself is true or not; but if it be true, I only wish I could refresh myself by half-an-hour's talk with you—a rare enjoyment.

It is, naturally enough, easiest to avoid *extremes of religious belief* in a Church which

keeps a happy mean itself; and, even though many of the representatives of the Church of England have proved unworthy sons, I have little doubt that there is no communion in which it is so easy to be a whole-Bible Christian as in this Established Church. To be a layman of that Church—weekly to hear sermons spoken by one who has not identified himself with any of its extreme sections, but who labours to know and to speak the will of God as it is revealed in the whole Bible, and whose energy and life are devoted to carrying out that will of God in the spirit and according to the order of the Church to which he belongs—that is to be in a position which seems to me to be a most hopeful one, if any person desires to be himself a Christian of the type I speak of.

And in that position to read your Bible through with the help of patient study, earnest prayer, the use of parallel references, and of the original tongues, omitting no part, favouring no special section, carefully guarding against admitting a bias in favour of any particular class of texts in preference to others, forgetting what "school"

you have belonged to, and what men will think of you if you sometimes fail to give the genuine "ring" of their party, comparing your heart with Scripture, and the Scripture with the whole human race, and then ending all as you commenced all, with prayer. This, it would seem to me, is the true means of becoming a whole-Bible Christian.

If *now* you come as a hearer to Church, you will come, not to compare what you hear with the special creed of any party, but with the "analogy of the faith." The general teaching of Scripture will form your test. You will calmly take to the bar of Scripture, with the helps I have before enumerated, the particular views enunciated in the sermon, and even though those views upset your previous predilections, you will adopt them, if you find that the preacher had the written Word of God on his side. This is a hard lesson to learn, for there is nothing for which we entertain so strong an affection as for our own beliefs. Your views and impressions of the Sunday sermon will not be introduced at the Sunday dinner; but *like Mary* you will ponder in your heart, with a

view to practising in your life all that was true in what you heard.

I am old-fashioned enough to suppose that if we deliberately went to Church with a desire to come back wiser and better, and if we habitually turned that desire into a prayer, we should have fewer complaints to make of empty and tiresome sermons, and preachers would not be accused so angrily of "saying the same old thing so often."

Were the design of the pulpit the same as that of the stage, to minister to public taste by introducing exciting novelties for the interest and recreation of the million, I believe its best friends must acknowledge that the pulpit has reached a very low stage of decline indeed. Or were Christianity something intended to gratify the modern representatives of those men of Athens, whose ceaseless cry in market-place and Areopagus was, as Demosthenes says, "Λιγέται τι καινον;"\* "Tell us the news," our preachers must be confessed, on the whole, to have fulfilled their mission very poorly. But ministers are neither men sent to gratify public curiosity, nor to pro-

\* Dem. Philipp. I. See Acta xvii. 19-21.

vide public amusement ; nor are they missionaries sent to speak to the people words they never heard before. They are not sent to announce something new, but to enforce and illustrate something old and well-known. I do not say that they always do this in a manner either the wisest or the most attractive, but I merely remind my lay brethren that they must not object to a preacher because he tells his people very old truths, and presses on them very well-known obligations. Were we living up to our profession, and to our so-called knowledge, the preacher's office would be a sinecure. But this it never can become till our Christianity becomes, more than it now is, the rule of our lives. The preacher is ceaselessly striving to bridge over the gulf which separates so widely our theory and our practice.

It is a common saying, that the same sermon will be interesting or uninteresting, according to the state of your own mind, and the attention which you give to it. I may add, that a sermon will almost certainly be profitable or unprofitable according as you have previously prepared *yourself or not to hear* it. In nine cases out of ten

you will not be gratified if you go to Church to be amused, or moved to tears, or stirred up by eloquence ; but, in nine cases out of ten, you will not be disappointed if you go there in order to be made a holier, and a wiser, and more humble man ; to understand better the love of God, and to value more the cross of Christ. It is more than probable that your own appointed clergyman, even though he have not the outward attractions to offer which some other teachers may possess, nevertheless says those things to you every Sunday which if you went in the right spirit, determined to be profited and not to cavil, would satisfy your desire, and send you on your way with your heart full of the good you sought.

Fifty years ago such a report as this could not have been passed on the preachers of our land. But there are now few pulpits altogether without this light of God's own kindling, and I believe the number of these latter is daily diminishing. The alarm raised by the various modern heresies has thrown preachers back upon the old truths.

One further piece of counsel I have for my friends the sermon-hearers of the land—it con-



cerns their conduct *after* the sermon. There is a common and a most just piece of advice given to preachers—your work is only half done when you leave the pulpit. Go to your knees then, and commend your efforts to God. In all earnestness I give this same advice to the hearers.

Sermons might become a new and mighty engine in the land for good, did all preachers, and all hearers who had any desire to be profited, commence and carry out this practice. Will *you* who read these pages begin this habit this day? When a sermon is over, speak little and avoid exciting or distracting thoughts until you have had time for quiet, earnest prayer. The Sunday evening will afford to most who desire it an opportunity for this exercise, and if diligently carried out, it will bring down tenfold blessing on your head. And let the topics of your prayer relate chiefly to those of the sermon you heard that day, and to its practical bearing upon yourself. The whole week may be the better of that half hour.

To sum up my desultory words, I have tried to *tell sermon-hearers* something of their duty

before, during, and after sermon. Before Church, before anything, see that your rule of criticism (if you must be a critic) is not the watchword of any party, but the whole Bible, interpreted as I have above directed. Moreover, make up your mind (and turn the resolution into a prayer) that you go to Church, not to be amused or gratified, but to be taught; and assume therefore the position of a hearer rather than of a judge.

While in Church do not talk nor look about you, nor suffer your mind to wander to week-day business; for there is a business on this day to be done more important than that of the whole week. Look at *the preacher*; try to gather his real meaning, and make a constant reference of his words to yourself, not to others—like the honey bee, who carries from every flower its sweetness home to her own cell; and if you have occasion to doubt the truth of your minister's statements, recollect that there is only one standard of their correctness, and that you have the right, and are under the obligation, to use that, and that only.

After the sermon is over, speak as little as you

can on any subject, in the pew, in the porch, on the road home. Do not gossip at the dinner-table, about the preacher or any one else. Nay, I would say this—Make no remarks about any one you saw in Church. Every such observation diminishes the profit you are likely to derive from what you have heard.

And before the day is very far advanced seek a quiet hour—it may be the most precious of the whole week—to offer up for yourself, and the preacher, and your fellow-worshippers, your most earnest prayer for a blessing on the day. The prayer which you will find in the beginning of this book may furnish a guide to the nature of the petitions which I recommend.

The lesson of these pages which I desire principally to impress is this—We must, if we would make sermons real means of grace, give up, nationally and universally, the habit of asking one another after every sermon, “How did you like Mr. G. to-day?” or the remark, “That was a fine sermon,” or, “That was a poor discourse.”

Every such remark on a sermon tends to *dissipate its possible good results* from our own

minds, and the minds of those to whom the remark is addressed. It puts the hearer into the false position of a *critic*, and as long as he occupies that position, sermons will be preached in vain to him, at least as regards any actual profit which he is likely to derive from them. The impressions of sermons are volatile enough already. Let no habit be indulged in which tends yet more to dissipate them.

I would give to *all* the advice which St. Paul gave to the women of his day, and in doing so would not be supposed to speak against his command to "prove all things," namely—

"LET THEM LEARN IN SILENCE,  
WITH ALL SUBJECTION."

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## PART II.

AND now, my Reverend brethren, in turning to give a word of brotherly counsel to you, you must in all candour confess that I have done my best to gain for you an attentive and favourable hearing on the part of your people; still, the

best way to ensure attention is to speak so as to arrest the mind of the hearer, and if we would do this we must constantly watch over the spirit, the matter, and the manner of our preaching—the spirit, that we may go before our people glowing with the earnestness that becomes Christ's ministers; the matter, that we may never speak save to declare such things as we believe Christ would approve; and the manner, that we may not spoil the great subjects which it is our object to recommend, by careless composition, bad delivery, inaudibility of voice, or that light and rapid mode of utterance which produces the impression that we either do not believe, or are not interested in what we declare. Cicero summed up his counsel to orators under these three heads, *Docere*, which relates to the matter; *Placere*, which refers to the manner; and *Movere*, which depends on the spirit of what is said.

I am not going to dwell at any length, or systematically, on these three points, which should, nevertheless, form continually the subject of our thought and meditation as preachers. But *I may be suffered to conclude these pages by*

some general counsels, which, if followed by us all, would, I feel quite satisfied, gain for our message an attention far beyond that which it commonly receives.

As to the matter of preaching, that is laid down for us in the Scripture. We cannot alter it without proving faithless to our Master. The subject-matter of our preaching must be CHRIST. Suffer then a few words of practical counsel.

In unfolding any text, seek to view it as it bears on the scheme of redemption through Christ Jesus; for most parts of Scripture *have* this reference, and if it be sometimes difficult to trace it out, this is not because the reference to redemption is not there. Avoid the logical or argumentative, and incline rather to the experimental method of explaining and enforcing passages of Scripture. Long experience has shown that congregations are always arrested, interested, and, it may be hoped, profited, by such a way of handling texts.

Let your aim be to see how your subject can be brought most closely in contact with the human heart. Take, therefore, the broad general

lesson of your text ; see that you grasp accurately what that lesson really is, in order that you may not hinder the general effect by dwelling much on minor points and sub-divisions. Having gained a clear insight into the leading thought of the passage, do your best, by every art which reason and experience suggest, to bring that lesson into direct contact with the hearts of your hearers. To pass to subsidiary matters wastes time, and interferes with the general result you desire to obtain. A gaol chaplain in London declares that it is his object in each discourse to bring home one idea, and only one, to the minds of his hearers. But this end he sets himself to attain, by every art he can possibly devise. Some similar plan should guide us. If our hearers go away without any definite idea of our leading subject in the sermon, what good can we hope to effect ?

I said, our subject must be Christ. And what is it to preach Christ ? To speak of Him, not as a subject on which much may be said, but as a Living Person, whom it is the aim of our *whole* life to make known to men—this is to *preach Christ*. To preach the Cross, not in

opposition to Socinianism, or any infidel scheme, but in opposition to that sin of the human heart, which first refuses the doctrine altogether, and then labours to add something of its own to the humbling freeness of the Gospel message—to lay bare human helplessness; and when the stricken heart is made, in some measure, to feel how absolutely hopeless it is to try to save itself, *then* to offer the Saviour and to demand no price: this is to preach Christ. Be sure if you thus bring Him to your people, you will bring them to Him, for His spirit always blesses such preaching as this.\*

To uphold Christ's fulness is one part of your office, but to open up the depths of the treachery and evil of man's heart is another. In order

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\* Some men think they preach Christ because they name Him every two minutes in their sermons. But this is not to preach Christ. To understand, to enter into, to open His various offices and characters, the glories of His person and work, His relation to us, and ours to Him, and to God the Father and God the Spirit through Him—this is the knowledge of Christ. This is the aspect in which religion should be presented to mankind—See "Cecil's Remains," Art. *On Preaching Christ*. Edn. xii., p. 216.



thus to unlock the secret chambers of other hearts, it is necessary that you should be one deeply acquainted with the intricacies of your own. "The School of Temptation," says Luther, "is that in which the ministerial character is formed." There it is that you must learn to know yourself; and one touch of nature drawn from your own heart will infallibly find a thrilling response in some, at least, of your hearers.\* An arrow which has not been taken from that quiver will not pierce the mark you aim at. The Great Teacher "suffered, being tempted, that he might be able to succour the tempted." And so, the minister's own tempted heart is his best study. Well acquainted with that, he may dispense with commentary and controversy. His library may be reduced to three books, the Bible, the world, and the heart,† and

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\* A man that talks much with himself will find out what suits the heart of man. Some things respond; they ring again. Nothing of this nature is lost upon mankind; it is worth its weight in gold for the service of the minister.—*Cecil's Remains*.

† See Rev. John Newton's *Plan of a Minister's Library*.

learning by the help of these to sympathise with and to understand humanity, he will gain the best key of success.

Experience in the heart is power in the pulpit. To speak experimentally of Christ, and of the human heart, this is to ensure success. And these topics are inexhaustible. Half a century of preaching will not empty that minister's stores who makes Christ and the heart of man his theme. But, in order to *impress* these things, what is needed? To gain more pulpit influence we do not need more pulpit eloquence; we do not need to make the pulpit the scene of political harangues, as was the custom in the days when Leighton urged that while so many were preaching to the times, one poor brother, surely, might be permitted to speak for eternity; we do not need to introduce mere learning there, nor to return to the old habit of weaving Greek and Latin into our sermons. Nay, we want in pulpit and pew, in glebe and cottage, in study and farm, and field and street, the presence of One who cannot be present without being felt, and who, when he comes upon a waiting people, thrills even

their very hearts, and stirs them up to ask, first, "What must I do to be saved?" and then, "What shall I render to the Lord?" Yes, the great want of all—of sermon-hearers, and of preachers, is the Holy Ghost, to teach us with his pleading voice, what we should be and what we should do; how to preach and how to hear.

If any one asks, "But what about the *manner* of preaching?—who can teach us that?" I reply that many things must be studied (of which this is not the place to treat) in order to attain this end. But there is one comprehensive rule which I may enunciate even here. There is no eloquence like the eloquence of the heart. No practice, no artistic skill can equal that. He who feels deeply will speak earnestly. He may not be able, like Kirwan, "to shake one world with the thunders of another." Simple his words may be, plain, and unadorned, and few, but they have come from the heart, and they will reach the heart. They are too precious to be *lost*. The hearers will attend breathlessly, and *listen with solemn awe* to the Word, when they

are thus forced to confess, "This man believes in what he speaks; he means what he says."

If the preacher speak thus, there is no doubt of the result. Hearts will be touched, men will be awakened, souls will be saved; and if ministers say what they do not feel, and scarcely believe, they not only fail to attain these results, but they do *positive* harm to the cause of Christ. For they lead the hearers to say, If my minister does not believe, why should I? If he treats all these things as trifles, why should I give them a serious thought? O fearful would it be if our careless *manner* in the pulpit led any one hearer to speak thus! Brethren, let us look to our *manner* as well as to our matter; if it be nothing else, let it be *earnest*.

And one word more. The preacher is also a pastor. Let the two characters be brought into close connection. The preacher should be in the parish what he is in the pulpit. Christ should be all—in his visits to the houses of the poor—to the beds of the sick—to the tables of the wealthy. If he be not, men will note the difference, and ask, Why is this? And they will

say the lower standard is the real standard of this man's life, the pulpit character is merely an assumed one.

But he should also be in the pulpit what he is in the parish—kind, sympathising, never harsh; and he should deal as directly with the conscience from the pulpit as he would do by a sick bed, or a cottage hearth. The people should not be led to say, He is kind and attentive to us in our homes; he feels for us; but in the pulpit he seems to forget that we are individuals, he only makes an oration *before* us, he does not speak *to* us.

Our personal character will be our most eloquent and our most impressive preaching. Chrysostom uttered this long ago when he said, "All are preachers; all may preach by a holy life." Let people and ministers each strive for this, "Be ye holy as I am holy." Then sermons will be marked by earnestness, truthfulness, interest; and then will they be listened to with attention, and crowned with success.

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