

LECTURE II.

STUDY OF MEN, CONTINUED. — CERTAIN CLERICAL INFIRMITIES, EFFECTS ON THE PULPIT.

3. RESUMING the subject of the study of men where we left it at the close of the last Lecture, let us now observe the fact that this study is often undervalued, because of a factitious reverence for books.

This must be recognized as one of the perils of studious minds engaged in a practical profession. True, the opposite peril also exists; but it besets only indolent minds. Mental indolence finds a very cheap pabulum in underrating scholastic learning. But studious men are tempted on the side of their scholastic tastes. We need to see the relations of the two in some approach to equilibrium. We will not say with Patrick Henry, "Sir, it is *not* books, it is men, that we must study;" but we say, "Books *and* men we must study."

A young man once inquired of me, "Can you direct me to a book which shall teach me to write a sermon?" I receive letters of inquiry founded on the same ideal of homiletic discipline. "No," must the answer be: "there is no such book. From the nature of the subject there can be none." Preaching is one of the arts of life, — as much so as the use of the telegraph. It never can be learned as an abstract science only. From books may be learned principles, nothing more.

tures can portray the theory of preaching, nothing else. Criticism is that theory in fragments.

The peril here named is often aggravated by an excess of the conservative temperament. This entices men of books and schools often to live as if the acquisition and classification of printed knowledge were the chief object of life, rather than the growth and the use of character. The clergy, therefore, are often charged, and sometimes justly, with reverence for the past at the expense of the present and in distrust of the future. One of the most seductive positions which can be offered to a scholar is a fellowship in a large and ancient university. But scarcely could a more perilous position be accepted by a man, who, like a clergyman, looks forward to a practical profession as the work of his life.

Whatever has been once crystallized and labeled in our cabinet of thought, we are tempted to prize at the cost of those creations which are still in the fluid state, and in the seething process before our eyes. Clerical tastes, therefore, often need a counterbalance to the conservative temperament. We must remember that a vast scene in the drama of human history is now acting. We and our cotemporaries are the *dramatis personæ*. A link in the chain of historic causes and effects is now forging.

Specially should this be borne in mind, that divine communications to the world have always been made through the medium of real life. Living men live a great truth, and so truth comes to the birth. The Bible is almost wholly history and biography. Abstract knowledge is given in it only as interwoven with the wants and the experiences of once living generations. God took out of the circle of universal his-

tory a single segment, and the result is a revelation. Men lived under special divine superintendence and illumination, and the product is — a Bible.

So all the great truths which have moved the world have been lived. They have been struck out by collision of thought with the living necessities of the world. Monotheism exists only as an experience vital to living men: it has come into being as a revolt from living idolatries. Liberty is a possession sprung from the pressure of living despotisms. True theory in all departments of civilized culture is a life. It has grown out of the brooding of thought over an experience of living barbarism. Scholarship, therefore, is always the pupil of Providence when it is the leader of men. It must be studious always of Providence in the experience of living generations, if it would hold its leadership. That mind lags behind Providence which studies only the past. It is always a little too late in its opinions, its tastes, its culture, and therefore in its power of adaptation to uses.

Why should we not feel for the nineteenth century somewhat of the respect which men of the twenty-ninth will feel for it? Why not place the ages abreast with each other in their chances for rank in our literary regard? Studying in this manner the phases of a living civilization, we shall surely learn something which no records of a defunct civilization can teach us. No generation of men, in God's plan, lives for nothing. Every generation is a positive quantity in the world's problem. It adds something to the knowledge or the power of the world which its predecessors never knew. The world's life is thus a growth, always a growth, without retrogression and without pause. We should

not allow ourselves, then, to undervalue for oratorical discipline the study of living men, through a morbid reverence for books as the sacred repositories of the past. "Books and men, men and books," should be our motto.

This view is enforced by the fact that accumulation is not the chief object of a scholarly life: if it were, we should never have been fated to spend one-third of our lives in sleep. The great object of life, and therefore of culture, is character,—the growth, the exercise, the use, of character. We gain, surely, as vigorous a character, and as much of it in amount, from the study of men as from that of books. No culture can be symmetrical which is restricted to either. Each needs the other as its complement.

It should be further remarked, that symmetry of culture in this respect is essential to a hopeful courage in the ministry. A minister who studies only the past is almost sure to be distrustful of the future, and despondent of the present. He sees the future in a false perspective: therefore to him the former times were always better than these, and the future is doomed to be worse than either. He is an incorrigible pessimist. Two clergymen, once companions in this seminary, met, after twenty years of labor in the ministry, in which both had had a fair measure of success. Said one in a brisk, cheery tone, "I have a hard life of it, but I enjoy a hard life. It pays to have a hard life. I have such a glorious trust in the future!" Said the other, unconsciously sinking his tone to the habit of his mind, "I have a hard life too. I try to endure it patiently, but I shall be glad when it is over. The future looks dark, very dark, to me. My chief satisfaction is in the

past." This man was the more learned of the two, but he had worn out his courage by excessive conservatism. He was weary and footsore from walking backward. A few years later he was gathered to the fathers with whom his mental life had been buried for twenty years. His friend, I think, still lives; and, if so, I venture to affirm that he still has a hard life, and enjoys it as hopefully as ever. Such men never grow old. Which of the two men illustrates the better ideal of a clerical scholar? Which has been worth the most to the world? Which has the most brilliant record of self-culture to carry into eternity?

4. Enthusiasm in the study of men should be stimulated by that which is well known to be, in this respect, the popular idea of a clergyman.

The popular conception of a clergyman is that he is, *ex officio*, in respect to the knowledge of mankind, an ignoramus. Be it true or false, this is the popular notion of the clerical character. It produces not a little of that feeling towards the clergy which vibrates between amusement and contempt. In the popular faith we belong to a race of innocents. If not all Vicars of Wakefield, we are cousins-german to that reverend greenhorn. Men of the world feel it to be refreshing when an able preacher breaks loose from the hereditary conventionalisms of the clerical guild, and thinks and talks and dresses and acts as *they* do.

This popular notion is, of course, a caricature; yet to some extent the habits of the clergy foster it. For instance, no other body of men are in so much danger of excessive seclusion from the world as are the clergy. Relics of the theory on which clerical celibacy was founded yet linger among the ideas which clergymen

have of the clerical office. We do not avow it, yet many feel a special reverence for a celibate minister. So long as the Romish clergy keep alive that fiction in the persons of godly and faithful men, some Protestant ministers will make unconscious concessions to it.

The idea of a priesthood, also, yet remains in the Protestant conception of a clergy. So long as the Church of England keeps alive that notion, and makes it respectable by the culture and the industry and the piety of her clergy, the ministry of other churches will insensibly be drawn towards it. Seclusion from men for the sake of communion with God is the conception which lies at the bottom, not only of many of the popular ideas about the ministry, but of some of the notions which the ministry entertain of themselves.

One consequence of this drift of things is, that the ministry often stand aloof from the real world. Men often do not act themselves out in our presence. They do not express all their opinions in our hearing. Principles and practices grow up in a community, and pass unnoticed by the ministry for years, in some cases, because the ministry know nothing of their existence.

For illustration, take the change which has been going on for the last twenty years in the Christian theory of amusements. That change is a very significant one. It is one to which the ministry, whenever they recognize it, will find that they must yield something of the clerical theory of fifty years ago. Yet one may well be surprised at the apathy and apparent ignorance of some of our ministry on the subject. A certain Methodist conference once adopted a minute against the playing of croquet, and were supported in it by so clear-headed a man as President Finney; ap-

This was true when written in the 1800s and is even more true today, 2011, when the world is going entertainment crazy.

parently ignoring the fact that Christian opinion in a multitude of our churches only laughs at such relics of a monastic age. The rising generation are in some danger of being swept into an extreme of license in popular amusements, for the want of an intelligent handling of the subject by their ministry.

The use of tobacco is not a sign of a heavenly mind. But that was a woful diagnosis of the condition of earthly minds which led an American publishing society to bear its written testimony against tobacco at the very time when men were boiling over at the refusal of that society to utter its testimony against American slavery. "What is this Christianity," men asked, "which shuts its eyes to the public sale of a woman on the auction-block, and opens them so very wide at a pipe in the laboring-man's mouth?" Such misuses of Christian truth involve a cost to the cause of Christ which would bankrupt it if it were any other than the cause of Christ. In ways which I have not time to detail, changes may come upon the opinions and temper of a people, which a secluded clergy may not detect till those changes develop themselves in some overt revolution at which we stand aghast.

In milder form the same error shows itself in the fact that the theory of religious life taught in some pulpits is not recognized by the people as a reality. That is one of the saddest illustrations of waste in clerical power, in which the people quietly shove aside the teaching of the pulpit as nothing but perfunctory deliverances. The preacher is imagined to preach them because it is his business to do it, he is paid for doing it: not that he believes it, not that he expects the people to believe it, as a matter of heart

and life; but it is the proper outflow of professional routine. Is it not sometimes obvious that the theory of the pulpit has no even approximate representative in a living church? Do not instances occur in which preachers themselves, who are vicegerents of God in the pulpit, do not meet the people out of it as if they expected their vicerojal authority to be heeded, nor as if they were at all aware of the fact that it is not heeded in real life? Souls are lost, for which somebody must give account, by means of the contrast which the people sometimes feel between the intense fidelity of the preacher in the pulpit and the apparent obliviousness of it all by the man out of the pulpit.

5. This defect lies at the foundation of that notion of clerical character which is most common in the literature of popular fiction. The clergyman of literary fiction is the secular parson. He is a priest, or something equivalent, whose business is to perform certain official functions, and nothing more. He plods in routine; his preaching is routine; his prayers are routine; his parochial service is routine; his whole life is routine. The vital, rather the fatal, point is, that his life is chiefly outside of the life of his parishioners. They feel no sense of reality in any thing that comes from him to themselves. Substantially they live and die without him, except that he baptizes their children, and buries their dead. He may be a fox-hunter, and it shall make no difference that reaches them. If he is of upright character, he is an innocuous saint, who is but half a man. He knows nothing of this world, and he has no business here when men have any earnest work on hand. In whatever the people feel to be a reality such a clergyman is always in the way.

An engraving was exhibited for sale in London not long ago, in which a nobleman was pictured in the last gasp of life, having been fatally injured in the hunting-field. By his bedside stands a white-haired but ruddy-faced and smirking clergyman in gown and bands, with closed prayer-book under his arm. His professional duty to the dying man is over. His eager face shows that the departing soul is forgotten in his interest in the story of the hunt, which is going on in the chamber of death. A caricature, this, doubtless; but could it ever have found spectators to enjoy it, or a purchaser to pay for it, if it had no original in real life? Caricatures which men laugh at and pay their money for are caricatures of *something*.

So is it with the parson of literary fiction. He is not nearly so vital a character in the affairs of life as an old Roman augur was. The augur did something to the purpose of real life. He told the people when to fight a battle, when to raise a siege, when to launch a fleet. The clergyman of fiction has no such dignity. Doubtless the clergyman of fiction is an exaggeration. Upon large numbers of both the Romish and Protestant clergy it is a libel. Still, that it exists is evidence that more or less foundation for it exists. We give occasion to such a caricature by every word and act and silent usage by which we suffer the pulpit to become a sublimated institution, aloof by its elevation or its refinement from the life men are actually living, the thoughts they are thinking, the habits of feeling they are indulging, and the pursuits in which they are expending the force of their being.

An opinion was reported to me a few years ago as coming from the superintendent of the police of one of

our Atlantic cities, to this effect; that, so far as his observation went, there was no other class of men who knew so little of real life as the clergy. This judgment was not uttered in bitterness of feeling. I did not understand that the author of it belonged to that class of men, who are not few in any large community, who are best known as haters of ministers. He spoke from his experience of the phase of society with which he was most familiar. Whatever might be true of the clergy elsewhere, down there where he saw men and women in need of those influences which the clergy are supposed to represent he thought they were the least effective workers. They were easily imposed upon. They started impracticable methods of working. They could not get access to the vicious and degraded. I, of course, do not indorse this criticism. I give it as one of the waifs indicating what the world says and believes about us. We need to face the facts of the popular theory as they are.

Further: it should be observed, in illustration of the same point, that portraits of character given in the pulpit sometimes do not seem to the people to be true to real life. Preachers often paint character in the general. Depravity is affirmed and proved as depravity is in the abstract, not as it is softened and adorned by Christian civilization. Piety is illustrated as sainthood, not as it is deformed by infirmity and sin. Hearers sometimes, therefore, seem to themselves to be described as demons, when they know that they are not such, and other hearers to be described as saints, when they know that they are no more such. Have you not listened to sermons which no living man who knows what the world is would be likely to accept as true to life? Such work

in the pulpit appears to hearers as a work of art. It is a fancy sketch. It may be praised or censured, as one would criticise the Dying Gladiator, by the very men of whom it ought to have been a breathing likeness.

It has been said of the old New-England ministers, that they knew being in general more thoroughly than they knew man in particular. So the modern world often believes of the modern preacher, that he knows man in the abstract more thoroughly than he knows men individually. A consequence of this popular idea of the ministry is a widening of the distance between the pulpit and the pew. Sometimes you will find the laity settled comfortably in the conviction that the pulpit does not mean to reach them. They may live as they list, and may repose in their immunity from rebuke; and yet their clergy shall be firing the shot of a sound theology, or intoning the periods of a venerable liturgy, over their heads all the while.

6. This sense of security from the aims of the pulpit is often at the foundation of the antipathy of hearers to that which they call "political preaching." Generally that antipathy is morbid. They are so unused to feeling the ministries of the clergy as a reality touching the vital affairs of life, that when, on the eve of a national crisis, they listen to a sermon on the duty of Christian citizens, they are disturbed by it as an innovation. It breaks up the repose they have been accustomed to enjoy in the sanctuary. To many good men it appears sacrilegious to discuss such mundane affairs so near to the sacramental table. They call it desecration of the pulpit. What does this mean, but a confession that they have been so long used to regarding the pulpit as standing on the confines of another world, that it is a

novelty to them when it presumes to concern itself with the affairs of this world by any such methods as to make itself felt?

This is one of the most astonishing distortions of Christian opinion which our age has witnessed. The extreme of it came to my notice, a few years before the civil war, in the case of a very worthy man, and an advocate of reticence in the church on the question of American slavery. To test his principle in the matter, I inquired of him whether he thought it the duty of Northern Christians to send preachers to Utah. "Certainly," was the reply. "What should a preacher do in Utah?" — "Visit the people, hold meetings, preach, as he would elsewhere." — "But what about polygamy?" — "He should let that alone." — "Do you mean to say that a preacher should go among a people who are living in a state of legalized adultery, and be silent upon that sin?" — "Yes." — "Then, what would you have him preach about?" — "*The gospel.*"

The courage of the man was refreshing. But what of the opinion? An instance not dissimilar came to my knowledge in Western New York on the day of the national fast following the assassination of President Lincoln. On the morning of that day the pastor of one of the churches in the village had ventured to utter in his sermon a few very moderate and saintly words, somewhat in the style of a bishop's benediction, on the guilt of rebellion to the powers that be. The language was not positive enough to disturb any but a morbid mind; but it ruffled the placidity of some of the audience very perceptibly. It was the theme of considerable comment after the service. Said one who had heard it, "That was a bold sermon, a very bold

sermon." I ventured to suggest that it might have been bolder without disturbing Enoch. The reply of my companion was, "It was a great deal for *us* to hear. We are not used to hearing any thing from our pulpit that *means anybody*." Contrast this theory of the pulpit with the observation of Coleridge: "If I were a preacher at St. Paul's in London, I would not preach against smuggling; but, if I were a preacher in a village of wreckers on the coast, see if I would preach against any thing else!"

Why should not the usage of the pulpit be such, that, as a matter of course, hearers shall understand that we mean somebody? Why should not preaching be always so truthful in its biblical rebuke, so intelligent in its knowledge of men, so stereoscopic in its power to individualize character, so resonant in its responses to the human conscience, that hearers shall be unable *not* to understand that we mean somebody? The pulpit should be a battery, well armed and well worked. Every shot from it should reach a vulnerable spot somewhere. And to be such it must be, in every sense of the word, well manned. The gunner who works it must know what and where the vulnerable spots are. He must be neither an angel nor a brute. He must be a scholar and a gentleman, but not these only. He must be a *man*, who knows men, and who will never suffer the great tides of human opinion and feeling to ebb and flow around him uncontrolled because unobserved.

7. Not only in the way of rebuke does the pulpit often fail in its mission, through the want of a masterly acquaintance with mankind. Often the failure is more marked in respect to its mission of comfort. If there

is one thing more obvious than another in the general strain of apostolic preaching, it is the preponderance of words of encouragement over those of reproof and commination. In no other thing did inspired preachers disclose their inspired knowledge of human conditions more clearly. The world of to-day needs the same adaptation of the pulpit to its wants. We preach to a struggling and suffering humanity. Tempted men and sorrowing women are our hearers. Never is a sermon preached, but to some hearers who are carrying a load of secret grief. To such we need to speak as to "one whom his mother comforteth." What delicacy of touch, what refinement of speech, what tenderness of tone, what reverent approach as to holy ground, do we not need to discharge this part of a preacher's mission! and therefore what rounded knowledge of human conditions!

Is it a cynical judgment of the pulpit to affirm that in our times it has reversed the apostolic *proportions* of preaching in this respect? It is vastly easier to denounce rampant sin than to cheer struggling virtue. Preaching to the ungodly is more facile than preaching to the church. And in preaching to the church it is less difficult to reprove than to commend, to admonish than to cheer, to threaten than to help. Hence has arisen, if I do not misjudge, a disproportioned amount of severe discourse, which no biblical model warrants, and which the facts of human life seldom demand from a Christian pulpit. Look over any large concourse of Christian worshippers, number the stern and anxious faces among them, — faces of men and women who are in the thick of life's conflict. Where shall the cunning hand be found to reach out and keep from falling these weary ones? Very early in life, commonly, does the

great struggle of probation begin. The buoyant joy of youth is short lived.

“Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing *boy*.”

Probation, more than any other word in the language, tells the story of every human life. With this one feature of human experience the mission of the pulpit has chiefly to do. Above all other things, therefore, in the clerical character, this world craves the power of helpfulness. The Master walking on the sea in the night, and stretching forth his hand to the sinking Peter, is the emblem of that which a Christian preacher must be in every age, if he would speak to real conditions, and minister to exigent necessities.

Intelligent laymen are often sensible of *waste* in the ministrations of the pulpit, growing out of the want, either of knowledge, or of tact in adapting them to the facts of human experience. The conversation of such laymen will often disclose this. Their criticisms, it is true, are to be received with caution, as are all the popular criticisms of the clergy. They are sometimes thrust upon our notice by vain men, by men who ignore the real claims of the pulpit upon their respect, occasionally by men whom it is not uncharitable, and may not be unwise, to rebuke for their unconscious envy of ministerial prerogatives. It is generally to be presumed that the clergy, like masters in other professions, know their own business better than such critics know it. But, with all reasonable deductions, it will be found that this sense of waste in the pulpit is felt by men of sufficient character, and in sufficient numbers, to deserve attention. They believe, whether truly or not, that the

failure of the pulpit to reach certain classes of society is attributable to a distance between the pulpit and the pew which a more thorough knowledge of men would do away with.

Said one of these lay critics, speaking of the sermons of a certain pastor in Massachusetts, "Mr. B—— always seems to me to be just about to begin, to get ready, in prodigious earnest to do something; but the something never looms in sight." The criticism was true. The radical defect in that pastor's sermons was not want of culture, not want of piety, not want of power innate; but, relatively to the character of his hearers, it was an excess of scholasticism. He commonly preached, either from or at the last book he had read, often at the last thrust of skepticism from "The Westminster Review." This he did to an audience made up chiefly of tradesmen and mechanics, and operatives in a factory, who never heard of "The Westminster Review" outside of their pastor's sermons. To them he seemed always to begin a great way off.

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