

LECTURE III.

**STUDY OF MEN, CONTINUED. — ECCENTRIC PREACHERS.
— OPPOSITE RELATIONS OF LITERATURE AND THE
PULPIT TO THE MASSES. — POPULAR REVOLUTIONS
AND THE EDUCATED CLASSES.**

8. CONTINUING the train of thought introduced in the preceding Lectures, I venture upon another suggestion, which to some may seem questionable. Let it pass for what it is worth. It is, that we should be watchful of the ministries of certain eccentric clergymen.

In every age of religious awakening, there is a class of preachers who break away from the conventionalities of the pulpit lawlessly. They trample upon time-honored usages. They are apt to handle irreverently the opinions and the policy of the fathers. As a consequence, they originate new methods of preaching. In many respects they do evil. Whether the average of their influence is evil or good may be an open question.

Such preachers, though not safe models for imitation, are valuable subjects of homiletic study. Though they may be heretical in doctrine, they furnish instructive hints to sounder men. Specially they are apt to preach as men coming down to and into the homes of men. They have the knack of making men believe that preaching is a reality to them. The impression they make is that of a business of real life. Better men and wiser

preachers looking on may learn things from them which shall both broaden and deepen the reach of the pulpit. Those most dissimilar to them may be roused by them to feel the inanity of some things which were invaluable when they were original, but which the world has outlived, and which are now effete. The tendencies of the clerical mind to live upon routine are sometimes checked by one such comet in the clerical firmament.

A popular critic, a few years ago, observed that not one in twenty of the newspapers of the week before had failed to make some allusion to the Rev. A—— B——. When that can be said of any clergyman who has not committed forgery, and said after he has been in the public eye for twenty-five years, it is a sign of power in the man. Such a ministry as his is worth studying. It is an egregious folly to imitate him: his sermons no other man can reproduce. But it is impossible that they should not contain elements which can be transfused into the preaching of other men with advantage. We may well give time and thought to the ministry of any man who holds together by thousands, and for years, keen, clear-headed laymen in the church, and who reaches a corresponding class of minds outside of the church. The ministry of any such preacher is a legitimate object of homiletic study, whatever we may think or suspect of the man.

On the other hand, we have reason to be anxious about any ministry which is visibly producing no impression, — no evil, no good, perceptibly. I do not say that such an appearance is always real. But it should cause anxiety: it should set a preacher to searching for the facts, and to the righting of errors. That is never the normal attitude of the pulpit in which it barely

holds its own. In such a state of things it will generally be found that something new in the methods of the pulpit is practicable and wise. We should keep our minds, then, in a receptive mood towards the apparent successes of preachers unlike ourselves. Prove those successes, hold fast only that which can be proved; but study them. Be sure that you reject nothing that *is* proved.

An objection to the views here advocated deserves a moment's notice. We are said to be living in an age of unnatural excitements; and the pulpit, it is believed, ought not to cater to them. "Safe men" tell us that we must not be whirled out of the old orbits of the planets by cometary and centrifugal attractions.

To this it should be observed, in rejoinder, that the charge may be true, without damage to the clerical policy here commended. It may be that we are living in an abnormal current of social changes. It may be that we are passing through a period of transition in history in which one sea is pouring itself through a narrow channel into another, like Erie into Ontario. Niagara, therefore, may be the fit emblem of our modern life. We may be approaching very near to the last times. The world may be moving with a rush which is its ultimate momentum. But one of the first principles of Christianity is to take men as it finds them and where it finds them, and thus and there to adjust itself to them. Its mission is to do for men all that it can do under the disadvantages which sin or any other invincible fact creates. A Christian pulpit can not wait for men to come into a state in which they can receive its ministrations gracefully, tastefully, in a scholarly way, or even contemplatively and candidly. Least of all

has the pulpit any right to refuse to be received in any other way.

A preacher's first business is to find men, to go where they are, and then to speak to them as they are, and speak so as to be heard. We must speak to them anywhere and anyhow, so that at the least we get a hearing. That is not wisdom, it is not piety, it is not reverence for venerable things, it is stagnation, it is timidity, often it is mental indolence, sometimes it is a refined but intense selfishness, which holds a preacher still in ancient ruts of ministration through fear of ministering to unnatural excitements. We had better do some things wrong than to do nothing.

9. An educated ministry needs to consider the study of men for rhetorical culture by the side of another fact; which is, that the literature of the world is not constructed for the masses of society. This is true of the great body of literature in any language. Books for the masses are comparatively a modern idea.

(1) The old theory on which national literatures have all been founded was, that readers must inevitably be few. The chief popular forms of any classic literature are the ballad and the drama. Prose literature has not had till recently much of the popular element in any language. In the main, it has never been designed either to represent the common mind, or to be read by the common people. The ballad and the drama also have not been created for readers. They were designed, the one to be sung, and the other to be witnessed on the stage. This was for the very necessary reason that they grew up at a time when the people did not know how to read, and were not expected to become readers. It was a time when in England

it was sufficient to save a man from the gallows that he knew how to read. This was English law till the time of George IV. Therefore select classes of mind have been the object aimed at in English literature.

(2) The reading classes have been select not only in numbers, but in character. They have been exclusives. They have been contracted fragments of nations. Their distinction has been, that they were unlike the bulk of the people, and not in sympathy with the people. Their exclusiveness was their glory. Their own social position demanded the popular ignorance as a background. Authors treated them as a superior class. They were cajoled by an obsequious recognition of their caste. Both authors and readers held themselves as retainers of the nobility with an abjectness which often intensified the contempt they all felt for the herd of the people. It is a humiliating fact; but such were the soil and the atmosphere from which the bulk of modern literature grew.

(3) The English literature has a larger infusion than any other of the popular element; but it is not and never has been thoroughly popular. Such a literature is yet to be created. Look into the prefaces of the standard books in our language, turn to the correspondence of authors, peruse the books themselves, and you will discover how oblivious authors have been of the actual numerical majority of the nation. Read John Foster's essay on "Popular Ignorance." In the dialect of the English press the "reading public" and "the nation" have never been synonymous, nor approximately so. Even so late as when Addison and Swift were delighting a select public of readers, the masses of the English people never heard of them. The masses

at that period found their chief excitements at country fairs and boxing-matches and dog-fights and bull-baitings. The only gleam of literary thought which found its way to them, aside from the pulpit, shone from the footlights of the strolling theaters.

John Foster records the following fact as well authenticated to his judgment by direct testimony from that golden age of English letters: On one Sunday morning, in one of the rural churches, the service was read with unusual rapidity, and every legal expedient adopted to shorten the time during which the people should be detained in the house of God. At the close of the service the officiating clergyman gave publicly his reason for thus abbreviating the duties of the hour. He said that "Neighbor B——" was about to bait a bull in the afternoon, and he wished to give the people ample time to prepare for the enjoyment of the scene. So distant from the enjoyment of the literature of England were the masses of the English people.

One reason which has made the poetry of Homer the favorite of English scholarship is the intensely aristocratic spirit which breathes through the Iliad and the Odyssey. Not a trace of the democracy of literature is found in Homer, nor indeed, so far as I know, in any ancient poetry, except the Greek drama and the poetry of the Hebrews: hence the English aristocracy intuitively exalt Homer in their estimate of libraries. English noblemen translate Homer, and write laudatory criticisms upon him. It may reasonably be doubted whether the intrinsic merits of the Odyssey and the Iliad would ever have lifted them to the rank they hold in English criticism, if they had not chimed in so harmoniously with aristocratic tastes in English scholarship.

(4) In the history of English literature the readers who stood between authors and the people at large did not by any means stand midway between. They were much nearer to the guild of authors than to the level of the nation: therefore they were not good conductors of intellectual stimulus from the upper to the nether regions. A gulf as impassable almost as that which separates Dives and Lazarus shut off the masses of the people from the privileges, the occupations, the sympathies, and the ideas of the authors. The project of sinking a shaft of intelligence from above down into the torpid strata of the national mind was never originated by the old standard productions of our language. No trace of it is to be found in the general conception of the mission of literature, even so late as a hundred years ago. Publishers are yet living who remember when such an idea was in its infancy. They can recall the time when a sale of five thousand copies of any thing was deemed a prodigious success in their trade. The sale of Walter Scott's works in his own lifetime — and Scott died in 1832 — was deemed a miracle of literary achievement, and it bankrupted his publishers, after all. When the process of stereotyping plates was invented, it was thought by the more conservative publishers to be of doubtful value, because the sale of so few works would justify the expense of plates. But now a publisher hesitates to accept a manuscript which is not worth stereotyping. Books the sale of which is less than five thousand copies are regarded as the small enterprises of the press.

The facts here noticed should be taken into the account in judging of the limited rewards which some of the most illustrious English authors have received in

their own lifetime. Critics are fond of contrasting the contemporary with the posthumous fame of authors. We are reminded, as if it were an anomaly, that no collected edition of Shakspeare's plays was demanded during his life; that Milton received but five pounds for "Paradise Lost;" that Bishop Butler, the most profound of English prelates, was not known outside of his own diocese; that Spinoza's works, though they played an important part in revolutionizing the philosophy of Europe, brought no income to the author. Mr. Froude says that it is only by accident that a work of genius becomes immediately popular. I doubt this assertion. What is there, what has there ever been, in the great works of our literature which is fitted to make them popular? They are not addressed to the people, not fitted to the popular taste or comprehension. To this day the actual readers of Milton are few. Those who heartily enjoy Shakspeare are but a fragment of the reading public. Even on the stage, no manager succeeds in resuscitating the great dramatist for any long period. Let a work of genius, like "The Pilgrim's Progress," be *made* for the people, and the people recognize it. But the great bulk of our literature is made for the few; and it has its reward in being appreciated by the few.

A change is in progress. A popular literature, good and bad, is in the process of growth. But the old standard literature of our language, that which has grown venerable with centuries, that which contains the classic models of English thought and speech, and that to which, therefore, all scholarly minds turn for literary stimulus and refreshment, is a literature, which, for the most part, has known no such thing as the peo-

ple in the process of its creation. It does not represent the people; it is not of the people; it has never lived among the people; it is not dear to the people; it is not known by the people.

(5) The exclusive character of national literatures exposes the clerical mind to obvious peril in respect to clerical sympathy with the people. It is clear, on the face of things, that such a literature must be in some respects what the Christian pulpit ought not to be, and that a successful pulpit must, in some other respects, be what such a literature is not. Yet it is equally plain that a mind formed by such a literature alone is in danger of acquiring tastes which are averse to popular modes of thought, to popular habits of feeling, and to the study of popular necessities. A preacher may so study such a literature as to be dwarfed in his aptitudes for the pulpit. If he forms his mental character by the study of such books alone, he will inevitably reverse the process of his education for the ministry. Disintegration may take place in his natural tastes for the popular service. Culture itself may unfit him for the pulpit, except as an arena for literary achievement.

I have known instances in which this disorganizing process has been fatal. A student's clerical tastes have been demoralized. He has become disinclined, and therefore unfitted, to the work of the ministry, by an abuse of the very process which was designed to fit him for it. He has shrunk back on approaching the practical labors of the pulpit, through the force of acquired tastes which had the tyranny of instincts over his moral purposes. Such a revolution in the character of a candidate for the pulpit is usually irremediable. The best thing we can do with him is to make a pro-

fessor of him. The inspiration of the pulpit has gone out of him to return no more.

We need to face this fact squarely. The very discipline of literary culture to which we subject ourselves in a course of collegiate and theological training is attended with this incidental peril. Like all other great benefits of culture, literary discipline is gained at costs. It becomes us, therefore, to know that the danger exists, and that, for full growth in fitness to the pulpit, we need a study of men to which no extant literature invites us.

(6) We should never lose sight of the fact, that, while there is a literature *of* the pulpit and *in* the pulpit, the pulpit still has objects which no other medium of literary expression has. The pulpit is identified with the people in the very groundwork of its construction. It stands in among the people. It exists for the people. It depends for all its legitimate uses and successes upon the sympathies of the people. It reminds one of the Pantheon at Rome, which stands down among the shops and hovels of the poorest poor, partly buried in the rubbish of ages, but, for all that, a symbol of the history of a great people for ever.

The pulpit is not designed for select audiences. Its object is not to furnish entertainment to luxurious minds, or scholarlike enjoyment to tranquil minds. Its object is to meet the necessities of minds, which, for the most part, must be engrossed in a care for their necessities. The pulpit addresses chiefly the millions who are struggling for a living, and who find the struggle so severe, that books are as dreamlike a luxury as a coach and livery. A man of books ranks in their minds with millionaires. On this great low-ground of society the

pulpit stands alone. Literature has no other department, which in its very nature, as growing out of the aims for which it exists, is so intensely popular as that of the pulpit. The modern newspaper, even, does not bear comparison with it in this respect. The newspaper does not strike so deep as the pulpit does in its theory of popular necessities. It can not, therefore, reach so profound and permanent a style of thought.

(7) The only thing I can recall which deserves to be termed literature, which is at all suggestive of the pulpit in the ideal on which it was constructed, is the old Greek drama. The Greek drama was oral in the form of its communication: so is the pulpit. The Greek drama discussed the profoundest problems of human destiny: so does the pulpit. The Greek drama expressed the ideas which lay deepest in the most enlightened theology of the day: so does the pulpit. Above all, the Greek drama existed for the people; and so does the pulpit.

In this respect the Greek drama was exceptional to almost all other ancient literature. The people of the ancient cities of Greece were the auditors and the judges of the drama of their times. The entire body of the free citizens of Athens — not a literary *coterie* alone, not the members of a university alone, not the pupils of a school of philosophy only, not a set of pleasure-seeking idlers, but the entire citizenship of the metropolis — heard the plays of Sophocles and Euripides. The accomplished professor of the Greek language and literature in Amherst College is of the opinion that probably Grecian women were permitted to attend the exhibition of the tragic drama on the Greek stage, and that even the slaves were not forbidden to attend.

The most magnificent triumphs of Grecian genius were popular festivals. This department of Greek literature grew up with the Greek people. Their minds awakened it; their demands stimulated it; their tastes passed judgment upon it; their sympathies made it what it was. So far as any Pagan literature could foreshadow a Christian institution, the Greek drama foreshadowed the Christian pulpit. It did so with an approach to resemblance which has never been equaled by any subsequent literature of equal dignity.

This idiosyncrasy of the pulpit, in comparison with the great mass of the literatures of the world, should, therefore, never be forgotten in the ardor of our literary pursuits. The pulpit exists for the people. It depends for its existence, in any broad growth, upon its union with the popular sympathies.

* 10. The relations of the pulpit to the people are affected, further, by the fact, that, in the moral history of the world, great popular changes often take place independently of the educated classes of mankind as such.

This is a phenomenon in history which is exceedingly prolific of suggestion. I am not confident that the philosophy of it is wholly intelligible, nor that it represents abstractly the normal method of the progress of the race. But of the fact there can be no question in the mind of any thoughtful observer of real life. The fact is most obvious, in respect to changes for the better, in popular sentiment. Evil works most frequently from above downward, — from the head to the heart of society. The bulk of mankind are more receptive of evil than of good from their superiors. A licentious court can make a people licentious more

readily than a moral court can make a people moral. An infidel aristocracy can make a nation infidel more easily than a Christian aristocracy can make a nation Christian. The most destructive forms of evil do, in fact, usually begin in high places, and work downward. On the contrary, it very frequently happens that profound moral movements for good begin low, and work upward.

(1) Let us group the cultivated classes of mankind for a moment, and observe how the fact stands. First we have the class of royal and aristocratic birth, — the class represented by the crown and the court. Then comes the military class, represented by the sword. Then we have the literary class, strictly so called, — the class represented by the university and the library. Then follow the clerical, the legal, and the medical classes, represented by the three liberal professions, to which must be added, in our day the fourth profession, the journalists, represented by the most powerful of all printed literature, — the newspaper. To these succeed the small but very influential class of artists, represented by painting, sculpture, and music.

Finally must be appended a class peculiar, for the most part, to our own times, so far as it is distinct from the rest. It consists of those whose chief distinction is their wealth, and whose culture springs from the consciousness of power which wealth creates, and from the leisure which wealth renders practicable. This last class have a refinement which is often diverse from that of court, or school, or camp, or studio, or profession. It is a refinement in which manners take the precedence of mind. These several classes are all of them, in some sense, educated. The idea of culture is prized among

them. We may, without essential error, speak of them as the cultivated portions of mankind. Beneath them, in respect to educated thinking and whatever else that implies, lies the great bulk of the human race. Numerically estimated, these cultivated classes are but insignificant fragments of the whole.

The point I wish now to emphasize is, that often great changes of moral sentiment take place in that vast low-ground of society, with which not one of these educated classes, as such, has any visible connection. Individuals from the educated classes are reached by such changes, but not the classes as classes. Religious awakenings of vast reach often start down there before they become visible in the aerial regions above. Advanced ideas of liberty and of national policy, which are rooted in moral principle, often exist in the popular feeling down there, long before they have worked up high enough to find the general voice to speak them from the cultivated strata of thought.

(2) We have a notable illustration of this truth in the history of the antislavery controversy in this country. Looking back to it, now that the main question is determined, do we not discover that the masses of the people have been generally in advance of their leaders on that subject? Where both classes lagged behind the purposes of Providence, have not the many been less distant in the rear than the few? Have not the intuitions of the people been, at almost any time, more far-seeing than the statesmanship of the Senate? Have not the people been, at almost any time, ready for progress which our wise men thought unsafe, but which God at length hurled us into, as if in the anger of his exhausted patience?

The masses of the people never heartily supported the *compromises* which made up nearly the whole of our statesmanship on the subject for half a century. Compromise — that miserable burlesque of wisdom where moral principles are at stake — was the sum total of the vision of our wise men through all that period; but the instincts of the people were never genial to it. When President Lincoln said, "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong," the conscience and common sense of the people responded, "So say we all." President Lincoln himself was a child of the low-grounds. His ideas of political economy and of social rights he got out of the woods. His nearest approach to metaphysical culture was splitting rails. His knowledge of books was almost limited to the Bible and Shakspeare. All that he knew of history he learned from Abbott's histories for children.

If the cultivated mind of our country had been more childlike in its wisdom, and had followed the intimations of Providence more swiftly, it would have had no difficulty with the common mind in executing peaceably the plans which God at last thrust upon the nation in carnage. Carnage is not the normal and necessary instrument of great revolutions. In this also the masses of our people were right in their convictions. "Slavery is wrong," said they, "and it must die; but it *can* die by peaceful means." In this conviction they were nearer to the ultimate principles of God's government of nations than were the few fanatical leaders who ignored the reformatory potency of time. They were nearer to the old Mosaic wisdom on the subject, — that marvelous system of jurisprudence, to which we owe so many germs of the world's latest and wisest states-

manship. History in future ages will tell this story more truthfully than living chroniclers are now doing it.

Even up to this hour, is it not the rude instincts of the people which are taking the lead of political opinion in the solution of those problems, consequent upon the civil war, which have a moral and religious basis? The cultivated classes as a whole are not leading this people: they are following. The real leaders are men of the people, as distinct from, and to some extent opposed to, the men of culture. Such, at least, is the horoscope as I read it. How, otherwise, could the phenomenon ever have been possible, which we have witnessed within the last decade,—that the government of a great nation hung in suspense upon the votes of a few negroes in the backwoods of Louisiana and the everglades of Florida, who could not write their own names, nor distinguish their ballots from circus-tickets?

One is reminded often, in observing such phenomena, of the declaration of the apostle, "Not many mighty, not many noble, are called." It appears as if men of culture did not generally read Divine Providence aright till they are needed as leaders of great movements which have, in the main, been originated without them. After a certain growth of reforms we must have the leadership, either of high intelligence, or, in the absence of that, of miraculous inspiration. God does not permanently abrogate the law by which the superior governs the inferior mind; but temporarily, and when inspiration and miracle can not be interpolated into the system of affairs, he does suspend that law by making the low-grounds of society the birth-place of great ideas.

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