

LECTURE IV.

RELATIONS OF THE CLERGY TO REVOLUTIONS OF POPULAR OPINION, CONTINUED.

(3) THE views already presented suggest, further that sometimes popular revolutions of opinion become distorted and corrupt for the want of an educated Christian leadership. Then come mutterings of anarchy. These, if not heeded, swell into bellowings of revolution. It is my conviction that ponderous questions of right and wrong are now seething among the masses of the nations, which have been started by truthful ideas. They are, at the bottom, legitimate problems of Christian inquiry. They are such questions as socialism strives frantically to answer. Among them are the social problems which are chafing some of the Southern States of our republic. In all the great nations of Christendom questions of this nature are threatening to turn the world upside down. A blind sense of wrong is buried under the enormous inequalities of our civilization, which the first influence of Christianity tends to lash into frenzy over the first principles of government and social order, with a recklessness which breeds civil wars. Looking at the facts as they are known and read of all men, and as they are suffered by the great majority, human nature cries out against them. It declares, that, if Christianity

means any thing, it means something very different from this. Then follow, the world over, the questions, "What and why and how and wherefore," down to the roots of things.

Yet this entire volume of popular questionings of the drift of our civilization might be answered so as to promote the peace of nations and the brotherhood of races, if the educated mind of the world would accept them as questionings which ought to be answered, instead of beating them down by a repressive conservatism, by pride of race, by the tyranny of wealth, and by bayonets. Because those questions are ignored, or falsely answered, by the educated classes, they continue to inflame the unsatisfied mind below. That low-ground of humanity, ignorant and debased as it is, can not rid itself of them. It surges around them angrily and blindly. The more obstinately the mind above crowds them down, or holds still in contempt of them, the more tempestuously, often deliriously, and in the final result demoniacally, the mind below clamors for a settlement of them. At length, in the fullness of its times, the mind below breaks loose from established institutions. The laws and usages of centuries give way. Rabid diseases of opinion take the place of healthy and quiescent faith,—all for the want of a dispassionate, scholarly, Christian leadership.

(4) At the root of almost all the intoxicated developments of popular opinion, there is a truth. It is a truth distorted, but still a truth; a truth tainted by error, but a truth nevertheless; a truth bloated by intemperate defenses, but a truth for all that. A mysterious power has set it fermenting in secret in the inexpressible intuitions of ignorant minds, as if in the

bowels of the earth, where the sun never shines. It must work its way up to light and air. If there is no other way for its ascent, if the repressive forces above are so ponderous and so compact that it can not lift them off gently, then it must spout up volcanically. It will not be smothered passively. A man buried alive will beat the coffin-lid. So these undying truths, pent up in the souls of ignorance and debasement, will struggle for egress. They will find their way out wherever they can discover the weakest spot in the shell with which conservative society becomes crusted over. The Providence of God certainly works sometimes in this seemingly anomalous neglect of the educated powers of the world.

I say "anomalous," because it is not the normal way of Providence to ignore culture, or to work without it. But sometimes, when culture, as represented in the upper classes of great nations and ruling races, is false to its mission, and treacherous to its origin, God starts great truths into life in the hearts of the masses, not in the heads of the few. He lets them work a long time there, in a half blinded way, before the few discover and embrace them.

An episode illustrative of this in literary history was witnessed in the origin and early fate of the "Pilgrim's Progress." Who wrote the "Pilgrim's Progress," and where? A tinker in Bedford jail. By whom, and why, was the tinker shut up in Bedford jail? The upper classes of a great empire put him there to prevent his preaching other such things as the immortal allegory. And how was it received by contemporary opinion? Thousands of colliers and peasants and humble tradesmen read it, and admired it, and loved it, long before

the literary and social magnates of England found out that it was literature, and that a great prophet was born among them.

God's method of working is marvelously democratic. If there is one idea which takes precedence of all others in the divine choice of times, localities, instruments, and methods, it is not the idea of rank, it is not the idea of sect, it is not the idea of birth, it is not the idea of culture: it is the idea of *numbers*. To an aeronaut, at a very little distance above the earth, mountains and valleys are indistinguishable. So, it should seem, to the eye of God, distinctions of class are invisible. Humanity is spread out as a plain. The most attractive spots to the divine eye are those where are to be seen the densest clusters of being. The apostolic policy in laying the foundations of Christianity is the divine policy through all time and the world over; "beginning with Jerusalem," and advancing thence to the conquest of the great cities of the world.

11. The object for which I dwell, perhaps at needless length, upon this peculiarity in the divine method of procedure, is to observe specially that the natural leaders of these movements of the popular mind which are started by the first principles of religion are the Christian ministry. The legitimate teachers of the people in the ground-principles by which such movements should be regulated are the ministry. Christianity has conservative as well as quickening and progressive bearings upon social order, which it is the province of the ministry to teach. The wisest statesmanship of nations does not teach them in forms such that the popular mind can take them in, and appreciate the truth of them. It falls to the clergy to represent

them in moral rather than in political principles, tending to the regulation of progress and the moderation of change, and thus to the prevention of sanguinary revolutions. The divinely chosen friends of the people to do this service for them are the ministry. It is theirs to win popular confidence, to calm popular passions, to restrain popular vices, and to teach neglected virtues. It is theirs to teach popular *rights* as balanced by popular *duties*. These duties find almost none to proclaim them among the political leaders of the people. They are such as these, — respect for superiors, obedience to authorities, charity to evil-doers, patience under wrongs, freedom from envy, intrusting government to intelligence and virtue, election of superiors rather than equals to high places of trust and power. These things, so vital to republican life, political chiefs, for the most part, ignore. The only order of men who will or can teach the people this divine balance of rights and duties in self-government are the Christian ministry. Yet to perform this mission wisely, or with any chance of success, the ministry must know the people, must sympathize with the people, must recognize the rights and wrongs of social life; and to do either of these they must study the people.

Probably there is not a country-village in the land, which has any considerable history, in which there is not some mind, or group of minds, which represent the kind of mental inquiry here described. They may be within the church, but more probably are outside of the church, yet are superior material for the growth of the church. The pastor of such minds should be beforehand with them. He may be assured that they represent a movement which extends to other minds in

adjacent villages. The pulpit should be brought down and planted alongside of them. The geographical locality of the church should be in the midst of their homes; and its structure should be such as to seem homelike to them. But, most of all, the pastor should be able to win them by his obvious knowledge of their condition, and his friendly appreciation of their wants.

12. These suggestions naturally introduce another in the same line of thought. It is that a certain portion of the clergy of every generation seem either insensible or hostile to popular movements of inquiry which have their origin in Christian ideas.

(1) This, it should in justice be observed, is not true, generally, of those portions of the clergy which are free from State control. History will make distinction in this respect between the ministry and the priesthood of Christendom. Still, in the ministry of free churches, the exception occurs frequently enough to indicate a peril to clerical character and a hinderance to clerical usefulness. It is not a very rare exception that the clergy is represented by a man who suffers popular inquiries, which are rooted in the gospel which he preaches, and which therefore, as a Christian teacher, he ought to understand and to answer, either to go by him unheeded, or to encounter from him an unqualified hostility. He thus permits the activity of the common mind to outrun him in new channels of thought.

(2) Delay in assuming leadership of popular inquiries often results in consigning the people to an infidel leadership. Infidelity in this respect is often enlightened, and to some extent, vitalized, by Christianity. While the clergy are busy, as in the main they ought to be, with teaching and applying the gospel in its

spiritual relations to individuals, infidel lecturers and writers, knowing nothing and caring nothing about the salvation of souls, do detect the bearings of the gospel on social questions. They often advance ahead of the clergy in the public declaration of those bearings. Hence comes to pass that phenomenon which history repeats over and over, and which is so perplexing to a candid observer; viz., that the infidelity of a country or an age seems to be wiser than the Christian ministry, and more successful in obtaining the leadership of reforms which owe their origin to the gospel, yes, to the preaching of the very men, some of whom fail at last to assume their natural right of leadership in those reforms.

(3) Sometimes the leadership of reforms which were Christian in their origin becomes so identified with skepticism in religion, that to follow it is to be treacherous to Christ and to his church. Then, for a time, the clergy are constrained by their religious convictions to stand aloof from such reforms, lest they should degrade the pulpit into an auxiliary to anarchic infidelity. That is a fearfully false position in which to place the Christian ministry. Yet it may come about from a want of alertness in the clerical mind to see the wants of the popular mind seasonably, and to supply those wants by assuming promptly the leadership which is the clerical prerogative.

More than once, for instance, in the religious and political history of Germany, popular liberty has been so identified with infidelity, that the best Christian minds throughout the empire have felt compelled to range themselves on the side of despotic re-action on the part of the government. The "Liberty party"

were "Red Republicans," sympathizing with the Socialists of France, and the Carbonari of Italy, and the Nihilists of Russia. They taught, as many of them who are now refugees in this country are teaching, the tyranny of property in land, the usurpation of marriage, the inhumanity of the Christian religion, and the necessity of abolishing the idea of God. In defense of these monstrosities, they believed in no silken power of free discussion, but in the musket and the guillotine. Law, from God or man, was despotism.

The consequence has been, that such men as Trendelenburg and Hengstenberg, and with them and after them the most eminent leaders of German thought in both the Church and the State, have been driven, in defense of social order, to sustain the government in the establishment of, with one exception, the most rigid military despotism in Europe. In this they have done only what we should all have done in their place. When things have come to such a pass that liberty means anarchy, and the abolition of despotism means the abolition of God, there can be no question where Christian and clerical authority ought to stand.

Where, then, lay the mistake of the religious leaders? I answer, It probably lay farther back, in not watching and detecting the popular restlessness in its beginnings, instructing its infancy, and creating ideas of liberty which were scriptural and rational, and thus aiding in building up a public opinion which should have deserved the sympathies of Christian men. Probably it was once in the power of the Christian thinkers of Germany, clerical and laical, to control the popular inquiry on the one hand, and the policy of the government on the other; for it is well known that the

government of Germany has been largely in the hands of kings, emperors, and statesmen who personally have been religious men.

But that time, once passed unimproved by the clergy, left them no alternative afterwards but the wretched choice between despotism and atheism. They chose, as they ought to have done, the lesser evil; but in so doing they threw an immense weight into the scale of infidelity. German atheists to-day have this to say for themselves, that all the religion they know any thing about is a religion of aristocrats and bayonets. Who can compute the dead weight which Christianity must carry in such an unnatural alliance of truth with error? Christianity, in its normal working, never creates a state of things in which the best that good men can do is to make a choice of evils. Where that is the situation, something has always been wrong in the antecedent management.

The question is often asked in this form, "Ought the clergy to lead, or to follow, in the agitation of moral reforms?" In my judgment, it does not admit of compact answer in this form. The question of leadership is a question of *dates*. It is in the beginnings of such movements, before they have reached the stage of agitation, that the work of the clergy is required. When reforms are in their germination is the time for the clerical hand to insert itself in methods of wise and temperate control. That *then* the clergy should be leaders, not followers, does not admit of question. The people have no other leaders whose prerogative is so sure.

(4) This leads me to observe, that, if the clergy wait in inaction till the popular mind is so profoundly agitated on a great moral reform that it will hear

nothing else, it is then often too late for the pulpit to be a power of control in that reform. A preacher then seems to speak in self-preservation. The current has rolled in around him, and has risen to the level of his lips, and he speaks because he must speak. His speaking then is the sputtering of a drowning man.

Moreover, the *status* of the community is then fixed. Opinions are settled, prejudices are full grown, the stream is set immovably, and probably some new fountain of opinion is already opened. Popular opinions of the kind now in question do not become popular till about the time when new opinions are forming underneath. A man who wakes to the discovery of a truth at the last moment of its general adoption is still behind his age. That truth is still green in his hand, when it has ripened, and shed its seeds, in the hands of others. Its fruit is germinating in other forms, which are likely to meet from him the same hostility or neglect with which he encountered their forerunners.

Have you never known a pastor whose entire ministry had the look of a losing race? He was not only not in advance of his age, not even abreast with his age, but a little, and only a little, behind his age; so near that he could always be in at a victory, but never there in the fight. A clergyman subjects his professional prestige to a heavy discount, if he permits any popular excitement which is rooted either in Christianity, or in hostility to Christianity, to escape his knowledge, or to advance to its results without his care. To be a power of control in such excitements he must lay a magnetic hand upon them in their beginnings.

(5) The principles here affirmed are not limited in their application to moral reforms technically so called.

They have a much broader range. To illustrate this, let several things be specified to which they are germane. A revival of religion, for instance, ought never to take a minister unawares. Dependent as revivals are upon the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, they do not come without premonitions; that is to say, signs of their approach are visible to eyes which are open, and watchful for them. There is nothing in the philosophy of a revival which locks it up to occult causes. It will commonly foreshadow its approach in certain spiritual experiences, either within the church, or in Christian families, or in sabbath schools, or, it may be, in spiritual changes in a preacher's own soul. A wise pastor, studious of the laws of the Holy Spirit's working, will often discern tokens of his special presence on the eve of a work of special power.

Again: a renewal of popular inquiry upon any doctrine of our faith ought never to be ignored by the pulpit. A few years ago the doctrine of retribution started a wave of popular interest in many sections of this country, which is still in progress. Believers and unbelievers felt a fresh desire to investigate that doctrine. In a multitude of cases, opinions have been revised. Conflicting opinions upon it have agitated many communities. Theories have been broached respecting it which were locally new. Old errors have been revived, and re-adjusted to suit modern tastes. Believers in universal salvation have become believers in a non-eternal retribution through their faith in modern necromancy. In some localities Restorationism is thus intrenched in the popular faith to-day more strongly than it was twenty years ago.

What, now, should be the policy of a Christian pulpit

during such a decade of revived inquiry? Evidently it should not be a policy of reticence. The pulpit should not ignore such a revival of popular interest in one of the standards of the faith. We should not retire from it in disgust at its origin. What if the wretched flummery of Spiritualism is in some cases at the bottom of it. That is no reason why the clergy should hold themselves aloof and aloft from it as a thing of degraded birth.

A case to the point occurs to me. In a certain parish in Massachusetts, Spiritualism had stolen a march. Starting with a fortune-teller, it crept into a group of respectable families. An educated physician gave it prestige. *Séances* were held every fortnight. Soon Dr. Channing and Benjamin Franklin began to dance on the tipping tables. The intermediate state and eternal retribution were revised. Several church-members dropped their ancient faith at the bidding of the ghosts of their grandmothers. Their pastor, when inquired of about the still revolution which was going on in his parish, scouted it because of its origin. He was preaching that winter upon the parables of our Lord. He could not descend from so lofty a height to contend with the twaddle of the *séances*. But his people could. Ought he not to have followed them? Ought he not to have known what they were thinking of and talking of, and whither they were drifting under the lead of the skeptical physician?

Christianity never stands upon its dignity. It descends wherever man descends. Its mission is to save the lost. And to save, it seeks: it does not wait to be sought. The clergy are *ex officio* guardians of Christian doctrine. They should claim instant leadership of

popular discussion, and should show by their mastery of the subject their ability, and therefore their right, to hold that leadership. Never should such a revival of popular inquiry upon a Christian doctrine be allowed to come to a head in a reconstruction of opinion, without the wise and winning voice of the pulpit.

It is on the same principle, and no other, that any question of practical morals which arouses a community should summon its pastor to the van. Temperance, the desecration of the Lord's Day, reform of the "social evil," the ethics of trade, the evils of caste, the relations of capital to labor, should be watched narrowly by the clergy whenever and wherever they are attracting the thinking of the people. It will never do to turn these topics outside of the church, and consign them to strolling lecturers in lyceums and music-halls, and to wire-pullers in political conventions. If the clergy let these things alone, on the plea that the pulpit has more spiritual functions, those spiritual functions can not long hold any leadership of the people.

13. The relations of the clergy to the popular mind have still another phase in which they need review. I refer to that condition of things in which it sometimes happens that the clergy become identified with the cultivated classes of society to the practical exclusion of the lower classes; and the point to be specially noted is, that, in such a state of affairs, the pulpit ceases to be a spiritual power with any class.

The Rev. Dr. James Alexander laments the tendency of some ministers to seek chiefly "the society of the rich and the lettered," as he describes them, "instead of being lights to the world." He adds, "The democracy

must be reached. People must be made to feel that the heart of the minister is with *them*. Common people require this. The age requires it. Young men require it." He was not the man to put on record even so mild an expression of the facts as this, if he had not seen evidence of the need of it, and more, among the clergy of which he was an honored representative.

(1) But this view is enforced by a deeper principle than any demand of classes or of the age. Upon it depends the very existence of the pulpit as a moral power. Aim at the educated classes exclusively, or even chiefly, and you lose mastery of all classes. Isolate a Christian pulpit from the sympathy of the uneducated masses, and you forfeit respect for it as a power of control among the ranks of culture.

You may sometimes detect evidence of this in the history of individual churches. There are churches which have allowed themselves to become representatives of the refinement and the wealth of a community to the practical exclusion of its laboring classes. They have aimed at the heads of society to the neglect of its "hands." They forget that to every "head" there are two "hands." The ministry of such churches are not respected even in those churches as a power of spiritual control. They are not recognized as an authority. Their churches, standing themselves aloof from the simple feelings and relationships which constitute the plane of humanity in real life, expect their pastors to minister to their pleasure, and be guided by their opinions. They expect preaching to meet their tastes rather than their necessities. Their pastors commonly do as they are tacitly bidden. Such churches will not long retain pastors who will not do it.

As a consequence, such a ministry loses all mastery. They lose their liberty as public teachers, and their authority as public leaders. They deserve to lose them. They are in an unnatural position as it respects the masses of the people; and a subtle instinct in the very classes of culture which have tempted them aloft pronounces the position a false one. Nobody looks up to them as men of apostolic power. As men, such preachers may be loved; as social equals, they may be respected; for the truths they do utter they may be commended. Smooth and pleasant things may be said of them for their fidelity in preaching "the gospel," as they call it. In quiet times, in the routine of worship, in pastoral functions, they may fill a place of seeming honor. But they are not revered by their most devoted friends as spiritual superiors. They are not looked up to as men whose opinions are an authority, whose approval is a reward, whose rebuke is feared as carrying the weight of a message from God. They are the very last type of a Christian ministry which the people will feel to be a power in the land.

(2) In further explanation of this phenomenon it should be remarked that the influence of the clergy with the cultivated classes of society is to a considerable extent a moral as distinct from an intellectual influence. The time has long since gone by when the clergy were *ex officio* the intellectual superiors of all their parishioners. They minister now to many who are, in point of intellectual force and general culture, their equals, and to some who are their superiors. The pulpit is criticised now with a freedom which springs from the conscious power, and therefore the right, to say what the pulpit ought to be, and to judge of what it is.

Laymen as a class know less of theology than they did a half-century ago, but they know more of some other things. They do not listen to preaching as conscious inferiors to the man who is addressing them, so generally as they once did.

As a consequence, the influence of the pulpit with the cultivated classes is pre-eminently a religious influence. It is the influence of the man, of his personal weight, of his devotional spirit, of his self-forgetfulness, of his eminence in all the passive clerical graces. The most intelligent hearers are those who enjoy most heartily the simplest preaching. It is not they who clamor for superlatively intellectual or æsthetic sermons. Daniel Webster used to complain of some of the preaching to which he listened. He said it was too severe a strain upon the intellect to be sympathetic with the spirit of worship. "In the house of God" he wanted to meditate "upon the simple verities and the undoubted facts of religion," not upon mysteries and abstractions.

The distinction between religion and theology is one which such hearers prize highly. While they want thought, not ranting, in the pulpit, they do not crave abstruseness, nor is it the intellectual character of the ministry which chiefly wins their respect. That must not be beneath their respect, but neither is it nor can it be now an eminence to which they look up with painful awe. This class of hearers think much of the devotional services of the pulpit. They look there for much which wins and holds their confidence in the clergy. For their personal help in a religious life they want a religious teacher whose prayers uplift them.

The Episcopal Church of this country, relatively to

its limited numbers, embraces a larger proportion of culture than any other sect of Christians. Yet its pulpit as a whole is intellectually inferior to that of any of the other great sects of the American Church. What is it that holds such an amount of educated mind in its allegiance to the Christian faith? It is mainly their respect for and attachment to their ancient liturgy. They know, and it goes to the hearts of thousands of devout believers among them every Sunday, that the Litany is the most sublime, comprehensive, and affecting piece of liturgic expression in the language. They will bear almost any amount of commonplace in the sermons of a clergyman who so puts his soul into that incomparable production as to make them feel his heart in equal pulses with their own.

In our own denomination the fact is not always so obvious; but the evidences of it are still abundant, that the culture of our congregations is moved by the religious more than the intellectual spirit of the pulpit. The clamorers for sensationalism in our pulpits are those who really know least about good preaching, and are the poorest judges of it when they hear it. The more ignorant a people are, the more fuss they make about the want of mental gifts and acquisitions in their pastors. They will dismiss a really learned pastor, and complain that they are not "fed," when his sermons have "meat" enough in them to gorge such hearers to repletion.

It is to be hoped that you will not experience this evil; but the chances are that some of you will. If you do, I trust that the council which dismisses you will be faithful enough to put on record, as one council did in such a case, "Resolved that our brother, the Rev. Mr.

A—, in our judgment has given to this church and congregation meat fully equal to their digestive powers.” Yes, it is the commonplace mind that complains most loudly of commonplace preaching. The black congregations of our cities and the South are notoriously the most censorious critics of simple preaching. They often feel themselves insulted if a man who *can* write preaches to them an extemporaneous discourse.

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