

THE POWER OF THE PULPIT

the evening, and in the open air to great multitudes. On one of these occasions he says, 'All was hushed and exceedingly solemn. The stars shone bright; and then, if ever, by an eye of faith I saw him who called them all by their names. My soul was filled with a holy ambition, and I longed to be one of those who shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.' Just think of a man who has even the common gift of utterance, holding forth the word of life in such a state of mind as this! At another time he says, 'I lead a pilgrim life; you will pray that I may have a pilgrim heart. Ere long I hope my Heavenly Father will take me home. I am ambitious: I want to sit upon a throne. Jesus hath purchased and provided a throne in heaven for me.'

That beloved man of God, too, Henry Martyn, was a lovely exemplification of personal piety. 'Let me praise God,' he would say, 'O how great is his excellency! I find my heart pained for want of words to praise him according to his excellent greatness. I look forward to complete conformity to him as the great end of my existence, and my assurance was full.' Again he says: 'Nothing seemed desirable but to glorify him: all creatures were as nothing.' And again, 'O my God, it is enough. Hasten, O hasten the day when I shall leave the world, and come to thee; when I shall no more be vexed, and astonished, and pained at the universal wickedness of this lost earth. But here I would abide thy time, and spend and be spent for the salvation of any poor soul, and lie down at the feet of sinners, and beseech them not to plunge into an eternity of torment.'

There is something in such a state of mind as this, which gives to **the pulpit that which nothing else can give.** To be effective, its ministers must live near to God, be filled with his fulness, and reflect his glory. Men must take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus, and that it is not they who live, but Christ who lives in them. It was the remark of one who was familiar with Archbishop Leighton, 'If none shall go to heaven but so holy a man as this, what will become of me?' It is easy to see that the religion of such a preacher is the most effective preaching.

When one that holds communion with the skies,
Has filled his urn where these pure waters rise,
And once commingles with us meaner things,
'Tis e'en as if an angel shook his wings;
Immortal fragrance fills the circuit wide,
And tells us whence his treasures are supplied.

[152]

The Personal Piety of Ministers

It is this which makes an able and powerful preacher. Such a man will always be listened to, and prove himself a commanding and authoritative messenger of the Master who sent him. The spirit of his office rests upon him, and he will make impressions upon the conscience and heart, even though he may not excite admiration and applause. Even though he be not great, he will be greatly useful. His ardent piety will give a charm to his preaching even beyond that which is imparted to a less pious but more consummate orator.

While the personal character of the American ministry will not suffer in the comparison with that of any other portion of Christendom, it is quite obvious that the present is not the age of pre-eminent piety. The piety of our fathers puts us to shame. The church participates largely, not only in the prosperity, but the spirit of the world; and her ministers, because they have not more faithfully rebuked this sin, have themselves become infected with it. It is not with us now as it was 'in the kindness of our youth, in the love our espousals, and in a land that was not sown'. Our hearts are not softened in the fountain of God's love. We do not live as holy men of God were wont to live, 'as pilgrims and sojourners on the earth', and declare plainly that we seek a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. God himself is too much a wilderness to us, a land of darkness, and the world too much our home. Would that we mourned over this state of mind with bitter tears! We grope in darkness, sometimes in thick darkness; and we lose our relish for our work, because we savour so much of the things that be of men. The Gospel we preach has not its counterpart in ourselves. We teach others what we ourselves have not practically learned. Our outward man perishes, but our inward man is not renewed *day by day*; our renewed nature does not become newer and fresher as we go onward. Oh, it is dreadful to live thus, to preach thus, with the dead weight of our corruption dragging us down to the earth! It is unworthy of the Master we serve, and of the cause we advocate; it is unworthy of ourselves. This inconsistent piety is the plague-spot of the pulpit. It is the polluting, the infectious thing. It makes the preacher ashamed to look his people in the face; his conscience smites him; his heart trembles; and he may well feel that he can never more open his mouth, because of his shame. His energy is weak and pusillanimous; his holy daring is faint-hearted; his affectionate

[153]