

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

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I. THE ATTRACTIONS OF POPERY.

DR. JOHN H. RICE, with the intuition of a great mind, warned Presbyterians against a renewed prevalence of popery in our Protestant land. This was when it was so insignificant among us as to be almost unnoticed. Many were surprised at his prophecy, and not a few mocked; but time has fulfilled it. Our leaders from 1830 to 1860 understood well the causes of this danger. They were diligent to inform and prepare the minds of their people against it. Hence General Assemblies and Synods appointed annual sermons upon popery, and our teachers did their best to arouse the minds of the people. Now, all this has mainly passed away, and we are relaxing our resistance against the dreaded foe just in proportion as he grows more formidable. It has become the fashion to condemn controversy and to affect the widest charity for this and all other foes of Christ and of souls. High Presbyterian authority even is quoted as saying, that henceforth our concern with Romanism should be chiefly irenic! The figures presented by the census of 1890 are construed in opposite ways. This gives the papists more than fourteen millions of adherents in the United States, where ninety years ago there were but a few thousands. Such Protestant journals as think it their interest to play sycophants to public opinion try to persuade us that these figures are very consoling; because, if Rome had kept all the natural increase of her immigrations the numbers would have been larger. But Rome points to them with insolent triumph as prognostics of an assured victory over Protestantism on this continent. Which will prove correct?

brethren; nor would we fail to record our admiration of their recent testimony in favor of sound doctrine in a time of great peril. We still hail them as allies, but we feel assured that we can best accomplish our part of the work which God has given us to do by continuing our separate existence; and furthermore, we are satisfied that this course would promote harmony and brotherly love in the most effectual manner. Let us work on in our several lines and seek to preserve "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

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A FIFTY YEARS' PASTORATE.

A NOTABLE sermon on a most notable occasion is the "Semi-Centennial Discourse, delivered in the Presbyterian Church, Natchez, Miss., December 31, 1893, by Rev. Jos. B. Stratton, D. D., pastor," and published by that church. Bound with this sermon is a brief biographical sketch of Dr. Stratton, a sketch of the Natchez church, and a letter from Rev. B. M. Palmer, D. D., expressing regret at his inability to be present, and conveying a fraternal greeting. Add to these a picture of the pastor and a picture of the venerable and stately edifice in which he officiates, and we have a pamphlet of more than ordinary interest, worthy of a place in the archives of the church. The occasion of this sermon was the completion by this eminent servant of God of an uninterrupted pastorate of fifty years over the Natchez church, which occasion was duly celebrated by the congregation. We know of no other pastor in the South who has been honored of God with so long and continuous a service in one church as Dr. Stratton. A fifty years' pastorate in this restless day of short and shortening pastorates is phenomenal, and its completion well calls for commemoration. Present on either side in the pulpit when this discourse was delivered, and assisting in the solemn services, were Rev. J. H. Alexander, D. D., who only on the previous Sabbath had retired from a successful pastorate of thirty-eight years in Kosciusko, Miss., and Rev. T. R. Markham, D. D., whose consecrated ministry of thirty-seven years in La Fayette Church, New Orleans, entitles him to the honor accorded him by his brethren of being a leader in our southwestern Zion.¹ Had Rev. John Hunter, D. D., of Jackson, Miss., and

¹ The sad tidings come to us, while this number of the QUARTERLY is going through the press, of the death, on March 12th, 1894, of this eminent servant of God.

Dr. Palmer, whose respective pastorates are each in their thirty-eighth year, not been providentially prevented from being present, Dr. Stratton would have had around him the four of his companions in the Synod whose pastorates most nearly approximate his own in length, and the manifest blessings of God upon whose protracted ministrations in one field have been as conspicuous as in his own case at Natchez.

It may be a relatively short pastorate is better for some ministers and some churches. Leaders in the church, worthy of being heard, have declared that ten years is long enough in one pulpit. Certain it is, that few outrun a generation. Glancing casually over the rolls published with the Minutes of the Assembly for 1864, whose names do we see there that now, after the flight of thirty years, are upholding the banner of Christ in the same church and community as then? Besides the names above cited, we discover those of Burgett, in Mobile; Hoge, in Richmond; Park, in Knoxville; Ruple, in Salisbury; Smith, in Greensboro, and a few others.

But as rare as was the occasion that called forth this commemoration, the sermon itself is equally noteworthy, not only as revealing the quality of the man who delivered it, and so giving us some insight into the conditions on his part which made so long a ministry in one church both possible and useful, but also because of the decided testimony which the author, as one entitled by long experience and wide observation to speak, bears on many of the burning questions before the church to-day. As a voice from the past and yet in the living present, he speaks from high vantage-ground on current tendencies, and tells us, his younger brethren, how most effectually we may handle the word of life in these times of upheaval and resistance to the truth.

The text was, "For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Cor. i. 2.) Referring to the expertness with which Paul so frequently focalizes the contents of a great circle of truth in a single centre, the sermon opens by citing this verse as an instance of such. During his eighteen months' mission in Corinth Paul's teachings must have embraced innumerable subjects which could not have been included, categorically or literally, in the term "Jesus Christ and him crucified." What he meant was, that everything in the system of religion which he taught rested upon Christ and his work as its foundation, and led upwards to Christ and his service as its consummation. Every doctrine, precept, duty; every

rite, ordinance, and sacrament, holds its place, and is invested with its function, by this great fact of "Christ and him crucified," as every particle of matter in the material world has its position determined and its movements regulated, by the great law of gravitation. The mighty force which lies in the life and death of Christ was, in one sense, Paul's only theme. Yet, in another sense, that theme included in it a vast amount of underlying and environing knowledge. The speaker then called attention to the manifest departure from the line prescribed by the Apostle for himself in much of the religious teachings of the present day. As evidence of such departure, he cited the desire in certain quarters for the simplifying, weakening, or banishing of creeds and confessions of faith; the inauguration of a distinct school of evangelism which repudiates all systematic theology as at variance with the true knowledge of Christ; and the widespread antipathy in the Christian world to what is called doctrinal preaching. From the press and the pulpit we hear, not infrequently, the startling war-cries, "Back to Christ!" and "Down with dogma!" as though professed expounders of religion had fallen under a Satanic influence like that which entered into Judas, and in their zeal for dogma had sacrificed their fidelity to Christ. By attaching a sinister meaning to this term "dogma," and classing all doctrine with it under this meaning, these "liberalists" have sought to convict teachers of religious doctrine of hiding the pure knowledge of Christ under their own speculations, and of being false to Christ while endeavoring to maintain a theory or to uphold a sect. With these innovators, the speaker said, Paul could never have consorted. His determination to know nothing among the Corinthians save Jesus Christ and him crucified, meant, "I have determined to make known to you *all* in your own character and condition which made it necessary that Jesus Christ should come, and *all* the divine purposes which were concerned in and accomplished by his coming, and *all* the terms upon which the benefits of his coming were to be secured, and *all* the results which were to be effected in the believer's experience and in the history of the world by his coming; and *all* these, in their combination, constitute the body of systematic theology which the church, at least ever since the Reformation, has sought to teach. The Christ of Paul was no vague and misty object like a floating cloud, ever changing its form and tint, but a most fixed and definite orb like the sun, maintaining its outline and immensity of disc, charged with manifold relations, the unfolding of which requires that we pass under review a

vast field of concurrent and affiliated truth, and the exposition of which teems with doctrine. The "liberalist" sees Christ as a surface without bulk. He concedes to Christ but one moral attribute, and that is love. Not, however, that love with body, substance and validity, whose breadth and length and height Paul prays that we may comprehend, and which, he says, passeth knowledge. To preach love alone is not to preach Christ. To do that requires that we preach all the doctrines that centre in Christ, the whole round and range of authenticated knowledge with reference to Christ.

The speaker here deploras that there should be in this age so many signs of a departure from the Apostolic model on the part of the ministry, and of disaffection towards doctrinal preaching on the part of Christian people. In our country and in the Presbyterian Church these faults are prevalent only on a limited scale. In the Southern branch of our church they are practically unknown. In our Southern church at least there is no controversy between Christ and dogma, and the conviction still prevails that it is through evangelical doctrine that men are to be led to Christ. It was needless that the speaker should here remind his hearers of what they well knew, that for fifty years his pastorate had been conducted upon the model of Paul's. He found comfort in the recollection that when he came to them he came with Paul's determination to know nothing among them save Jesus Christ and him crucified, and in the consciousness that he had consistently carried out that determination until that very hour. His conception of the pastoral office was the simple and specific one of *teacher*, not that of a priest, or an exorcist, or a medium and dispenser of supernatural grace. His commission ran: Go ye and *teach* men to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.

After dwelling on the difficulties which invest the preaching of the word, growing out of the variety and magnitude and awfulness of the themes in the word which call for exposition, the speaker adverted to his first sermon in Natchez, delivered while he was but a licentiate, May 27, 1843, which was an index of his determination, at his very introduction to the people, to know nothing among them save Jesus Christ and him crucified, an advertisement that he believed his legitimate vocation was to be a teacher of Scriptural doctrine. That first keynote he made the keynote of all his subsequent teaching. This of course necessitated that he should teach, as connected with and growing out of his central theme, all the practical duties of man, the elements of common Christian morality.

As was proper in such a discourse, the history of the church received notice. Beginning with the visit to Natchez and to the Territory in 1801 of three North Carolina missionaries, the history of the church was traced down to the present date. A building was erected in 1812, an organization was effected in 1817, and in 1828 a new edifice was erected for their sanctuary, which, after having undergone many changes, is the building now occupied by the congregation. Worthy tributes were paid to his predecessors in the pastoral office, of whom there had been but three, also to the elders and deacons with whom he had been associated and who now serve the church. Speaking of accessions to the church, and commenting upon the largest enrolment he had made in any one year as having been the result, to a great degree, of the labors in the congregation of a well-known and beloved evangelist, he used this marked language: "It has to be sadly confessed that the promise of increased vitality and efficiency in our body which had been given us by this increase of our numbers has not been fully realized; and I am only confirmed at the close of my ministry in the conviction with which I began it, that the most assured method of building up a church is to be found in the faithful, continuous, and prayerful application of the doctrine of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified,' through the pulpit, the Sabbath-school and the home." He expresses his preference for "a quiet work of grace, without unusual stimulants."

Most graphic, indeed, is that part of this historic discourse that refers to the vicissitudes which have in the past half-century befallen the speaker's State and city, a series of changes so remarkable as to outdo the surprises of romance. And eloquent is the description which he draws of the close and sympathetic companionship in which as pastor and people they had walked through all these ebbs and flows of historic tide, these radiances and eclipses which have chequered the social sky. And if the church which he served is to live, if as the body of Christ and the depository of the word of the Lord, it must like that word endure forever, it must live, not in memories and traditions of former activities and former blessings, but in its living members. "It must live through a faith in you which discerns through all its outward structure and order the living Christ who is enthroned within. It is not the person of its ministers, however venerated and beloved; it is not the traditions of its sainted forefathers, nor honorary tablets on its walls, nor swelling numbers in the columns of its register, that make a church, but a present active sense of the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ in the hearts of its constituency, and a living practical knowledge of St. Paul's great doctrine of Jesus and him crucified."

Turning his eyes to the future, and contemplating the disclosures that sleep in the womb of the coming half-century, he says: "It is not improbable that a great battle will have to be joined between the confessors of revealed Christianity and the votaries of competing false religions. The strange spectacle has been presented to us during the present year, and in an American city, of what has been called a 'Parliament of the World's Religions.' Whatever good or evil may come out of this extraordinary convention, one thing seems to me clear, and that is, that the crown of our adorable Lord and Redeemer suffered a grievous dishonor when Mohammed, Confucius, Buddha, Brahma, theosophists, agnostics and rationalists were allowed to stand side by side with him as claimants for the suffrages of men. And another thing that seems to me equally clear in this conference was, that these champions of false faiths evinced a boldness in maintaining their systems which shows that they are prepared never without a death-struggle to surrender them." Christ was made to stand as their peer amongst these errorists in Chicago, whereas he is their foeman and their conqueror.

In drawing his discourse to a close, the speaker alluded with emphasis to three things:

First, his personal testimony, after actual experiment of more than a half-century, of the value of the religion which he had tried not only to teach but to live. He had found it true to all its pledges.

Second, the value of self-denial. It does not belong to the world's philosophy, but it does to Christ's, that the sacrifice of self, when endured in obedience or submission to the will of God, is a source of truer enjoyment than any which the indulgence of our natural inclinations or desires can give us. It is the duty of the Christian minister to be, to a large extent, the servant of all men. He ceases to be his own when he becomes the under-shepherd of Christ's flock. But there is abundant compensation, even in this life, for all the hardships of his servitude, for Christ knew the hearts of men better than the teachers of mental science or political economy. He knew that self-improvement for a good object enriches the soul with a satisfaction sweeter and more real than any which the acquisition of the means of merely selfish gratification can give it.

Third, religion can make affliction a benefit; not that affliction has lost its literal quality of painfulness, but through the painfulness of it other sensations have been introduced into the mind, by which what was in itself bitter has been transmuted into sweetness. Looking

back from his mellowed sunset hours over the adversities which have shattered his hopes, and the bereavements which have torn his heart-strings, the aged believer can trace to their influence the quietude and cheerfulness with which his eventide is suffused.

With the declaration that this was a valedictory message he was uttering, and with a grateful recognition of the unvarying kindness which had been lavished upon him through these fifty years by an affectionate people, the speaker invoked upon them the fulness of the blessings of the Crucified, and concluded his address.

We have here sufficiently revealed the secret of Dr. Stratton's long and successful pastorate. Equipped with ample training, grounded in a sound theology, he adopted at the outset of his labors Paul's conception of the ministerial office as his. In singleness of mind, unselfishness of purpose and unwavering fidelity to Christ, Paul was his model. His piety, his modesty, his touching humility, his eminently discreet and practical mind, his sweet and contented spirit, his indomitable habit of hard work, his splendid scholarship, his classic grace and elegance as a writer and speaker, are all conditions contributing to his prolonged usefulness, down to a ripe old age, in a single charge. It is easy to see how the absence of these or his possessing them in an inferior degree, might have rendered his a briefer pastorate.

Yet I am disposed to believe that the cause of short pastorates is more to-day in the churches than in the pastors. Natchez has stood by Dr. Stratton, received his gospel, upheld his hands, discharged her part of the pastoral contract. Had she not, her ungratefulness or irresponsiveness would years ago have driven her beloved shepherd and bishop to some other city. Too often our churches have other cravings than for plain gospel preaching. So many in every congregation chafe at hearing nothing but the monotonous story of the cross. The pulpit must be, for them, sensational rather than instructive. The Bible and our standard devotional works are not read. The world and its themes have possession of their minds. Now it is safe to say that no sensational preacher, who panders to this popular taste instead of striving to elevate and purify it, can hold a long pastorate in any church. Only teaching pastors develop staying qualities. To be such they must be educated men with positive beliefs; must make much of the cross, and sink their own personality in the message they deliver. When I hear of pastors advertising their sermons under flash titles; of song services, floral decorations, choir exhibitions, addresses on current topics, social, literary and political, being made the attraction instead of plain, in-

structive doctrinal preaching from the pulpit, I know that the congregation, taught to relish such substitutes for the gospel, will soon demand another pastor. Resorting to these carnal devices is to sacrifice all intelligent, spiritual interest, which alone can be permanent, to secure a hasty, easy spurt of outward interest that will prove as short-lived as it is shallow. Our churches want to be diverted rather than edified. They degrade the gospel in clamoring that it be popularized. Then the demand is almost universal for the traveling evangelist as the vehicle for securing the Holy Ghost, and the reliance for renewed life is in the galvanism and spasmodic effort of the revival meeting, the thrilling results of which are joyfully heralded to the world through the religious press. The incongruous and unripe elements thus gathered in, often but poorly taught in the doctrines they profess and the duties they espouse, too often demand a constant repetition of the exciting demonstrations under which they were brought in. The cold relapses of such over-stimulated churches tend to drive out the disheartened pastor from his post, to seek elsewhere that responsiveness to his message that he feels he must have or else suffer in his own spiritual life.

In these periods of decline there is often such a falling off in the financial support of the pastor as necessitates his removal. I am inclined to think that in scores of our churches inefficiency in the diaconate is the cause of ministerial changes. The people may not be desirous of a change. They are able and willing to accord a support, but the dilatory and unbusiness-like methods of deacons and collectors allow hopeless arrears to accumulate, till the discouraged pastor, to save his self-respect, is forced to "quit and leave." It is not the call in front of him that leads to the change so much as it is the pressure of neglect and the absence of appreciation pushing from behind. Thus true and godly ministers swap about from church to church of coördinate rank and strength, only to secure that quickening in the activity, attendance and liberality of the congregation that we see frequently following a pastoral change, and lasting, it may be, until the novelty of the new relation is worn away.

On the other hand, pastors must be very discreet men if they would retain the undivided support and affections of a congregation. They must be thoroughly consecrated in their walk, and in the pulpit must know only Jesus Christ and him crucified. If they are not diligent students, they will fall by the way. A few months ago Dr. Stratton, in a letter to me, stated that his Hebrew Bible was an old friend

from which he could not yet afford to part. Cease hard study, and you may look you out another field. Here is where many ministers are at fault, and are responsible, rather than their churches, for the curtailment of their pastorates. They grow weary, and wish to go where they can use their "barrel," where they can dispense stale bread. But no long pastorate can be maintained on a barrel, so another change is made necessary. Is it not true that the multiplication of social diversions, and the great volume of ephemeral literature that is daily dumped into the pastor's study, prevent the perusal and mastery of those older and healthier and more educative works of literature and theology that build up the mind and heart, instead of dissipating all intellectual energy, as the modern twenty-four-paged daily newspaper tends to do? Very many of our ministers now read stories more than they do divinity. Let us learn the conditions of success by observing the character and methods of those who succeed.

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