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REVIEW SECTION.

I.—HOW CAN THE PULPIT BEST COUNTERACT THE INFLUENCE OF MODERN SKEPTICISM?

NO. V.

BY JESSE B. THOMAS, D.D., BROOKLYN, N. Y.

THE limitations of the question are too conspicuous to be wisely ignored. It confines itself to a particular phase of skepticism—the modern—and to the possibilities of a particular agency in its counteraction—the Pulpit. It suggests a problem of expediency solely. It asks not whether the Pulpit ought to attempt the work indicated, for that is assumed—but only how it may best accomplish it.

To this as the best antidote to skepticism it is obvious to suggest “holy living.” “His words were thunder, his life lightning,” said Basil’s epitaph. We believe in the efficacy of lightning and instinctively turn to it as the normal extinguisher of evil. But the answer is scarcely legitimate; for holy living, however powerful in itself and however certainly the duty of the preacher, is not the function of the Pulpit at all.

Nor is it much more helpful to suggest the “preaching of the Gospel” simply as the desired expedient; for that is the only function of the Pulpit; relinquishing which it would no longer be a Pulpit. There used to be a regular Saturday advertisement concerning a certain church in one of our cities stating that “the pastor” would “preach in the morning,” and that there would be “a *Gospel* service in the evening”—the seeming antithesis contributing much to the merriment of the profane. It is, of course, true that the “preaching of the Gospel” is the divinely appointed antidote not only for modern but for all skepticism, and for all other forms of evil as well. But the phrase is too comprehensive and flexible to meet an inquiry so specific as that here propounded. We still ask *how* to “preach the Gospel” so as best to reach the end indicated. “The Gospel according to Matthew” differs materially from the

SERMONIC SECTION.

PETER'S SIFTING.

BY J. R. MILLER, D.D. [PRESBYTERIAN], PHILADELPHIA.

The Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.—Luke xxii : 31, 32.

THESE words of Christ are revelations. They give us two deep glimpses into the unseen spiritual world that lies about us. First, we have a glimpse into the realm of evil. The door opens a moment, and we see what is going on in the kingdom of darkness. The disciples had not been conscious of any special danger that day. They had seen no enemy in the air. They had overheard no plottings for their destruction. Yet the Master says to them in the evening, "Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you." This glimpse of the unseen should convince us of the reality of a most malign and hostile realm, not far from any one of us. We have spiritual enemies, keen and strong, who are intently and actively engaged in efforts to destroy us. In our sunniest hours, when the sweetest peace plays about us, they may be plotting for our ruin.

Were this the only glimpse given us of the spiritual world, we might lie down in despair. But here is another. Our Lord tells the disciples of Satan's activity and their peril, but tells them also of his own active interest in their behalf, and of what he has done to save them. While the veil is lifted to show us the plottings of Satan against Christ's disciples, we are shown also the hastening of divine love to the rescue. The disciples knew not of their danger, but there was an Eye that saw it coming,

[Many of the full sermons and condensations published in this REVIEW are printed from the authors' manuscript; others are specially reported for this publication. Great care is taken to make these reports correct. The condensations are carefully made under our editorial supervision.—Ed.]

and a Hand that was reached out to provide shelter. "Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat; but I have made supplication for thee."

There are several important truths taught in these words, which I would like to open a little way to you.

I. The first is, the *discrimination* which our Lord makes in praying for His disciples. This becomes apparent only when we look closely at the words. The "you" in the first clause is plural. "Satan asked to have *you*, to sift *you*,"—that is, all of the disciples. "But I have made supplication for *thee*, Simon." All the company were in danger, but the prayer was only for one.

Why was this? Why did our Lord make this discrimination? And why was it Simon that was chosen for special intercession? Was it because he was dearer to Christ than any of the others? There were three that belonged to the *inner* circle of the disciple family, and one of the three was Peter. But we know that John was the nearest, the beloved disciple, the one who leaned on Christ's breast at supper. If deepest love had been the reason for special supplication that night, John and not Simon would have been chosen.

Was it because Peter in his character was the most amiable and beautiful of all the disciples? Was it because he was the gentlest, the most self-controlled, the meekest, the truest, the firmest, the most like his Lord? We know that he was not. He was rash, impulsive, impetuous, headstrong, wanting calmness and self-control. He was not yet Peter the Rock. His character was still sorely blemished. John far surpassed him in loveliness of spirit and disposition. Why was not this peculiar

interest shown in the beloved disciple?

Or was Peter chosen for this distinction because he was the stabdest and strongest of all the disciples? Was he the one who would receive with the sublimest calmness the shock of the fierce waves of temptation and trial, hurling them back with the most unshaken firmness? Was he the one who would honor the Master the most in His great sorrows, standing the nearest to Him in loyalty and fidelity, rendering Him the best comfort, and witnessing for Him the most nobly and heroically? We know that Simon proved that night the weakest of all the apostle band, even denying that he had ever known his Lord.

Why, then, did Christ single Simon out from among His disciples for this peculiar distinction? What was there in him that kindled such special tenderness of love? Why such marked favor shown to the disciple who was the most rash and inconsistent, the most hot-headed and ill-controlled—the one who was so weak and capable of such cowardice, such craven disloyalty and denial?

It is just here that we have a disclosure of our Lord's character, and of one special feature of His love, that to some of us ought to give great encouragement and help. This peculiar interest in Simon was shown because he was the weakest, the most in danger, the most liable to fall. Satan had asked and obtained permission to have all the disciples in his hand, to try *all* of them. Our Lord looked down upon the little company with tender, compassionate heart, and saw that it would go hardest of all that night with Simon. Because of his peculiar temperament he would be in greater peril than any of the others. His rashness and impulsiveness would expose him to the fiercest assaults and render him least able to resist. And for this very reason Christ made a distinction in his favor, offering special prayer for him. He did not pray for John; John's calm-

ness would be an effectual shield for him. He did not pray for Thomas and the others; their caution would keep them away from the danger. He prayed for Simon because he was, of all, the most liable to fall.

Let us not lose this disclosure, for some day it may save us from despair. Christ's help does not go out in greatest tenderness toward the strong, but toward the weak; not toward the secure and sheltered, but toward the unsheltered and imperilled. We find the same discrimination in all true human love. The *invalid* in the home, and not the one who is strong and robust, draws out the deepest sympathy, the gentlest thoughtfulness, the most unselfish helpfulness from all the household. Parental anxiety is greatest not for the child that is safest, but for the one most endangered. Even nature seems to teach the same beautiful lesson. When one branch of a tree is broken the whole tree at once pours its life toward the wounded part, to restore it. When a shrub is wrenched, or a violet bruised, the sun, the wind, the dew, the air, all become physicians to it, and begin to perform for it their beautiful ministries of healing.

All through the Gospel we find in Christ this same discrimination. We find Him going most among the out-cast classes, not because He loved best to associate with rudeness and wickedness, but because these classes needed Him the most. He said He was a physician, and the physician's mission is not to the whole, but to the sick. He came to save the lost, and His heart was drawn most to the lost.

This thought, this disclosure of our Lord's heart, ought to bring great comfort to us. We are not all alike temptible. There are some with sweet temper and equable disposition, whom nothing disturbs. God seems to have sheltered them by their very nature from the power of evil. They appear to have a genius for being good. They are in this world like those lilies that float in the black

bogs, themselves ever pure and unsullied, though the vile waters lie all about them. Nothing stains the exquisite whiteness of these favored souls. Amid human vileness and Satantic plotting they remain untarnished, unspotted by the world.

Then there are others whose natures seem to be open on all sides, exposed to every danger. To live truly costs them fierce struggles every day. Their biases are toward evil. Their appetites tend to debasement. They have received as heritage a temperament that renders them temptible; or their early training has been at fault, and they have never been disciplined into self-control, the kingly element in a noble character; or their early habits have destroyed the safeguards of virtue in them, broken down the walls and weakened the power of conscience, leaving them a prey to enemies.

It needs no demonstration to prove that temptation does not mean the same to both these classes. They are not alike temptible. One man stands in a certain place and feels no strain; there is nothing in the temptation to appeal to his appetites and passions. Another, in precisely similar circumstances, feels every evil passion of his nature start into fierce madness. Take, for illustration, Peter and John that night of the Saviour's arrest. John was in the courtyard when Peter fell, but he did not feel the power of the temptation under which the other was defeated. Peter, only a step or two away from his friend, was swept down by the tempter's power. There are the same differences in the members of every Christian congregation. Some of you move amid evils every day in your ordinary pursuits, and walk amid dangers, but feel no desire to turn aside; then there may be some of you to whom each day, with the very same experiences, brings sore temptation and fierce struggle.

The teaching here is that easily tempted ones are they to whom Christ's sympathy and helpfulness go

out in most tender interest. The weakest he draws closest to his heart when the storm beats. He singles out the one from every circle that is most liable to fall, and makes special intercession for that one. Even the Johns, with their gentle loveliness, receive less of help from the Master than do the fiery Peters. Take the lesson of cheer for yourselves, ye who need it.

II. In the second place, consider the nature of the help which Christ gave to Peter in his peril. "I have made supplication for thee." Tennyson says:

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of."

We know not how many blessings the prayers of our human friends bring down upon us; how often we are shielded from temptation, or led out of paths of peril, because some one has been praying for us. What better treasure has earth than a friend who prays for us? Yet here is something better—*Jesus* prays for us. We have not lost the privilege and blessing of His intercession by His going away, for in heaven He ever lives to make intercession for His people. From His holy mountain in glory He watches His friends in this world, and whenever He foresees danger for any one of them He instantly offers intercession. What blessed guardianship they have who have committed their lives to the love and care of Christ!

There are several things to notice in this intercession of Christ. One is its individuality. "I have prayed for thee." Each one of us is the object of Christ's particular watchfulness and care. He does not save people in masses. He knows each name. He watches each life. He prays for thee, my friend; for thee, and for thee.

Another thing to mark is, that He made His supplication before the danger came. "I have prayed for thee." He did not wait until the disciple was in the snare before he sought help for him. Peter was unaware of danger,

but Jesus was watching and saw it coming. There is One who has our lives in His keeping and is ever caring for us. The Lord is thy Keeper; and he that keepeth thee never sleeps.

Another thing to mark here is, the petition itself. What did Jesus ask for His imperiled disciple? Not that he might escape the trial, for he needed just this experience; not even that he might not fall, but *that his faith might not fail*. "Yet," you reply, "his faith *did* fail. He denied Christ. He fell into the hands of the tempter." Yes, but it was not an utter and final failure. The word our Lord uses here means to be totally eclipsed, put out altogether. He prayed that Peter's faith might not suffer an utter and endless eclipse, as had that of Judas. Peter's faith failed for the time, but it came again from the dark shadow, in new brilliancy, as the sun comes from an eclipse, with its brightness undiminished. Judas went out into the darkness—into a black night, in whose skies the star of hope never shone again. Peter's hold on Christ was torn loose, but not for ever; Christ's prayer saved him, and he lived to be a glorious apostle and do a great work for his Lord. He, too, went out into the darkness to weep bitterly, but the Angel of Mercy went with him, and through the gateway of penitence led him back again to his forgiving Lord and Saviour and to restored discipleship and apostleship.

III. In the third place, notice the result of Peter's sifting. Satan's design was to destroy him, to winnow him all away. Thus he had done with Judas, because his attachment to Christ was not real and spiritual. But Christ's prayer defeated Satan's design. Simon was left in Satan's hand, and put through Satan's sieve; but the chaff only in him was sifted out and the pure wheat left. He was a smaller man after the sifting, just as the bulk of the wheat pile is reduced when the chaff is blown out; but he was a great deal better man.

He lost his rashness, his self-confidence, his pride, his vanity, and came again a humble man, but strong, majestic, a power to bless the world. We look at him before; we see him as he was that night. All his faults appear. How much chaff there is in him! We turn over a page or two, and we see this same man on the day of Pentecost, when he has returned to his Lord and been forgiven and restored, and when the Holy Ghost has fallen upon him. We follow him through the Acts. We read his noble Epistles. The old faults are gone. The vain, boastful, self-confident Simon has become the humble, trustful, spiritual Peter, the man of Rock. Instead of being destroyed in Satan's terrible hands, only the blemishes and defects in his character were removed. The chaff was winnowed out in the fierce gust that blew that night, but not a grain of the golden wheat was lost.

There are defects in many characters that apparently can be removed only by some terrible experiences like those of Peter. This seems to have been true of David. Mingled with all his noble qualities, qualities which made him when purified the man after God's own heart, there were many evil elements of which his nature had to be cleansed. And he also was allowed to fall into Satan's hand to be sifted. But from that sifting he came a new man, cleansed and enriched. Many of David's sweetest songs received their inspiration from the experience of his fall and eclipse, and from the painful chastening he endured. In every matured life, however many are the noble qualities, there are also many faults and defects bound up with the good. For example, one has firmness, and firmness is a good quality; but it is yet a very chaffy firmness. Some of it is stubbornness; part is selfish pride; part is most unamiable obstinacy. There is a good element there, but there is also much chaff which must be blown away before it can be noble, Christ-

like firmness. By and by, when mid-life has come, and when the defects have been sifted out, you will see a firmness stable as a rock, yet gentle as the heart of a little child. It has been cleansed of its chaff in the gusts of trial, and is now pure, golden wheat.

Or there is pride in the character. It makes a man arrogant, self-willed, haughty. But pride is not altogether an evil quality. It has in it an element of nobleness. It is the consciousness of dignity, of divine birth-right, of power. As it appears, however, in early years, there is much in it that is offensive and bad. The man must be winnowed until the unlovely qualities are removed, till the arrogance and the self-will are gone. At length you see the old man, after many experiences of trial and pain, lordly and regal still, but gentle, humble, benevolent, with a sweet spirit, using his noble gifts for lowly service, with his fine hands washing the feet of humble disciples. Pride has not been destroyed; it has been sifted, cleansed, and sanctified. Or, take gentleness; even this quality, beautiful as it is, may be very chaffy. It may be weakness; it may be the absence of firmness, mixed up with timidity and want of strong moral principle. The gentleness is golden, but the defects must be gotten out. Take once more what we call temper. A man is easily provoked, swept away by sudden gusts of anger. Now, temper itself is not a bad quality. It is not to be destroyed, as we sometimes say. Without temper a bar of steel becomes like lead. A man without temper is weak and worthless. We are to learn self-control. A strong person is one who has a strong temper under perfect mastery.

These are simple illustrations of the sifting which Peter experienced. Every one has, in greater or less degree, to pass through the same processes in some way. Sometimes the separation and cleansing go on quietly and gradually, under the kindly cul-

ture of the Spirit. Sometimes afflictions are God's messengers—sickness, or sorrow, or pain. Sometimes temptation is necessary, the buffeting of Satan. All of us have in us by nature, even after regeneration, much that is unlovely, much that can never enter heaven and must in some way be gotten out of us. In Guido's painting of Michael and the Dragon, the archangel stands upon the fallen foe, holding a drawn sword, victorious and supreme; but the monster beneath him yet lives. It cowers and writhes. It dares not lift up its head, but it is not yet slain. This is a symbol of the conquest of grace over the old nature, in the best of us. It is not dead, though under our feet; and this old evil must be gotten out. The process may be long and painful, but Christ is looking on, and every experience of sifting should leave us a little purer.

Thus it is that even our falls, if we are Christ's, make us holier. Peter came a new man from his denial. He lost much of the evil of his old nature on that battle-field of shame. Much of the grandeur and power of his afterlife came out of that costly lesson. It is often so in Christian life. "The oyster mends its shell with a pearl." Where the ugly wound was, there comes the gem, hiding the scar and making it a spot of lustrous beauty. The same is true in Christian lives under the great Healer's gentle care. Sins that we repent of and forsake and overcome, leave pearls where there were flaws. Evil habits conquered become gems of character.

An old man sat dreaming one day about his past, regretting his mistakes and follies, and wishing he had never committed them. He made a list on paper of twenty things in his life of which he was ashamed, and was about to seize an imaginary sponge and rub them all out of his biography, thinking how much more beautiful his character would have been if they had not been committed. But to his amazement he found that if there

were any golden threads running through his life, they had been wrought there by the regrets felt at wrongs; and that, if he should wipe out these wrong acts he would destroy at the same time whatever of nobleness or beauty there was in his character. He found that he had gotten all his best things out of his errors, with the regret and the repenting which followed. There is a deep truth here—that our mistakes and our sins, if we repent of them, will help in the growth and upbuilding of our character. “We can make wrong the seed of right and righteousness. We can transmute error into wisdom. We can make sorrows bloom into a thousand forms like fragrant flowers.” Our very falls, through the grace and tender love of Christ, become new births to our souls. In the hot fires of penitence we leave the dross and come forth as pure gold. But we must remember that it is only Christ that can make our sins yield blessing. It was His look of love that night, after Peter’s denial, that saved the fallen disciple. If we are Christ’s true followers, even our defeats shall become blessings. Longfellow says of Peter’s sitting:

“One look of that pale, suffering face
Will make us feel the deep disgrace
Of weakness;

We shall be sifted till the strength
Of self-conceit be changed at length
To meekness.

Wounds of the soul, though healed,
will ache;
The reddening scars remain, and make
Confession;

Lost innocence returns no more;
We are not what we were before
Transgression.

But noble souls through dust and heat
Rise from disaster and defeat
The stronger;

And conscious still of the divine
Within them, lie on earth supine
No longer.”

IV. The last point in this lesson is, that through his painful experience Simon was prepared to be a more helpful man. “Do thou,” said the Master, “when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren.” He should use his new knowledge, gained by his sad and painful experiences, in blessing others. I can but merely

touch upon this point in closing. We are to use our lessons again in teaching others. When God comes to us in some sorrow and comforts us, he is preparing us to be his messengers of comfort to those who are in sorrow. When we fall in temptation and God comes and delivers us and helps us to rise again and restores our soul, He wants us to use our experience in strengthening and helping and succoring other weak ones in their temptations. Whatever God does for us He wants us to do in turn for others. All the lessons He teaches us He wants us to teach again.

Have you learned to do this? Are you using your experiences to help other souls to live? Let us adopt as our own this prayer of Miss Havergal:

“O lead me, Lord, that I may lead
The wandering and the wavering feet;
O feed me, Lord, that I may feed
Thy hungering ones with manna sweet.

O strengthen me, that while I stand
Firm on the Rock, and strong in Thee,
I may stretch out a loving hand
To wrestlers with the troubled sea.

O teach me, Lord, that I may teach
The precious things thou dost impart;
And with my words, that they may reach
The hidden depths of many a heart.

O fill me with thy fullness, Lord,
Until my very heart and soul o’erflow,
In kindling thought and glowing word,
Thy love to tell, thy praise to show.”

THE SINS THAT CRUCIFIED JESUS.

BY WILLIAM DE WITT HYDE, D.D.
[CONGREGATIONAL], PRESIDENT OF
BOWDOIN COLLEGE.

For envy the chief priests delivered him up. — Mark xv: 10. *Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests and said unto them, “What will ye give me and I will deliver him unto you?” And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.* — Matt. xxvi: 14-16. *And the whole multitude of them arose and led him unto Pilate, and they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this fellow perverting the nation and forbidding to give*