

THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

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REVIEW SECTION.

I.—HISTORICAL STUDIES: THEIR HOMILETIC VALUE.

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IN the preface to Jonathan Edwards's treatise on the "Work of Redemption," we are told that he "had planned a body of divinity in a new method, and in the form of a history, in which he was first to show how the most remarkable events in all ages from the fall to the present times, recorded in sacred and profane history, were adapted to promote the work of redemption. . . . His heart was so much set on executing this plan that he was considerably averse to accept the presidentship of Princeton College, lest the duties of that office should put it out of his power." That he did not live to carry out his plan must always be a matter of profound regret, his so-called "History of Redemption" being only the outlines of what he had in mind. The purpose itself shows how closely a knowledge of what is called *profane* history stood related in Edwards's mind to any just understanding of the kingdom of God on earth, and by implication the testimony of this eminent preacher and theologian to the value of this study for ministers. We have on the one hand *bodies of divinity* in abundance, and on the other hand *histories of the church* or *histories of doctrine*. But "a body of divinity in a new method and in the form of a history," is a scheme original with Edwards and as yet unrealized.

In all our theological seminaries church history is taught as essential to the thorough equipment of the clergy for their functions. Far be it from us to question its value. And yet if we were compelled to say which would be most useful to any minister, an accurate knowledge of all the early heresies, or a full knowledge of the Renaissance, leading up as it did to the Reformation, we should unhesitatingly say, the latter. After all, the distinction between sacred and profane history is somewhat shadowy, not to say arbitrary, much of sacred history being somewhat profane, and some at least of profane history being sacred in its

aims and results. Our sole object in this paper is to draw attention to some practical benefits for clergymen in studies of history, modern and ancient. The library of every minister should be made up with a full recognition of the value of historical studies in a selection from the many histories now at hand. History will be found to be a *commentary* on the Scriptures of great scope and insight. It is not too much to say that no man can take in the wholeness and depth of biblical teaching who is ignorant of the history of the *race*. It is this with which the Bible mainly deals—not with Italians, Germans, Englishmen and Americans, so much as with men. Nations and nationalities it recognizes certainly; holds them to account for national sins, and threatens divine judgments on nations and kingdoms that will not serve God. But it is with the human race as a race sprung from one head, under a common doom, to be saved through one redemption, that the Scriptures mainly concern themselves.

It may be asserted, then, with confidence that a study of human history will throw light on the scriptural teachings concerning mankind. No man can be conversant with it and have rose-colored views of human nature. He must see that it is just what the Bible has painted it to be, in its dark and terrible apostasy from God. His general conceptions will become concrete. It was wittily said by a clerical friend that the existence of such a moral monster as Nero or Napoleon is an *à priori* argument for a personal devil. No one can read the history of these men and not feel the force of the remark. If it be said that the ministry do not need to have their views on such a subject as human guilt deepened, it is replied that certain signs of the times certainly point in that direction. Does the modern pulpit lay any *great emphasis* on this doctrine of sin? Are the severer truths of eschatology not toned down in much modern preaching? Is the absolute necessity of regeneration held forth as it was a half century ago? On the other hand, it is said a modern newspaper will give the minister all the confirmation and illustration of Bible truth that is necessary. But this cannot be. It will leave him with only a superficial knowledge of a fact which cannot be circumscribed to any one time or nation. The study of history will give the minister a view of the innate corruption of human nature which is simply overpowering, because it is so continuous, so universal, so various, and of so fearful dimensions. The point made may be illustrated by an example. The defender of Protestantism thinks he is amply equipped for his work because of what he knows of the *present existing* Romanism. But in reality he should have been a student of Spanish and Italian history in the Middle Ages. Such a history as that of Mr. Symonds, in his "Age of the Despots," or any good history of the Spanish Inquisition, is worth quite as much as histories of the Reformation for the right understanding of what the Romish system is in its unchecked development and absolute

power. It is altogether too much the habit of ministers to content themselves with general traditional views of such things. The Inquisition has of late had its apologists, as even Nero and Pontius Pilate have had theirs. The "whitewashing" tendency has had somewhat free swing ever since Froude with his brush and pail strove to make of Henry VIII. simply a royal husband under a sad necessity of beheading his wives. Ministers ought to deal no random blows. They need to refer to history, and should know the history to which they must needs refer.

How many texts there are in Scripture the best possible unfolding of which must be secured by some study of what history shows the actual man to be. Take this word of Christ, "And this is the judgment that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil. For every one that doeth ill hateth the light, and cometh not to the light lest his works should be reprov'd" (John iii. 19, 20, New Version). Christ's view of man is a sweeping generalization. To understand it, to feel its awful significance, to put it forth with anything like its fit exposition, the preacher needs to see how thoroughly it has been brought out in actual human experience through whole periods of history. He cannot show its depth or breadth of meaning by any illustrations his village history can give him. He cannot measure its bearing either by any study of individuals. He must know the dreadful verdict as history on the large scale has uttered it before he can himself feel its truth. So for many other texts. His best commentary on them would be not Meyer or Alford, but possibly Gibbon, or Hume, or Mommsen, or Sismondi.

History offers to the ministry a no less interesting field than that just considered in its disclosures of the Divine Providence in human events. Interpreting providence is a somewhat perilous business. Most of us have listened to sermons which undertook this serious business when we felt like replying in Cowper's lines,

"God is his own *interpreter*,
And *He* will make it plain."

A great many people find a *special* providence in every turn of life, and quite forget that in the very process they are taking away their favorite conception of its particularity. But those who have studied history deepest and longest are most ready to find a *unity* in history—that is, its shaping by a divine Mind to a great and good end, as in Tennyson's celebrated lines,

"The one far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves.

St. Augustine affirms that the Being who has not left "even the entrails of the smallest and most insignificant animal or the feathers of a bird, or the little flower of a plant, or the leaf of a tree without harmony, and as it were a mutual peace among all its parts—that God can

never be believed to have left the kingdom of men, their dominations and servitudes outside the laws of his providence."*

Bunsen entitles one of his great treatises "God in History." Professor Fisher answers the question as to the meaning of history by saying, "The deliverance of the race from moral evil and error, and the building up of a purified society, enriched with all the good that belongs to the ideal of humanity and exalted by fellowship with God, is not only an end worthy in itself, but it is the end towards which the onward movement of history is seen to be directed."† · What more inspiring study could offer itself to a Christian teacher than this study of Divine Providence in the great movements of history?

Take such a text as that in Acts xvii. 26, 27 : "And he made of one every nation of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed seasons and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek God." How is it possible to unfold its meaning except by such object-lessons as the study of history may furnish? The Bible is largely made up of historical elements. These are more or less familiar. But if from his reading the preacher going outside the pale of revelation can show that God's hand is to be seen in the great historical movements which profane history records, he has an immense advantage in presenting his subject.

I trust many of the ministry have found time to read Mr. Francis Parkman's remarkable series of histories, "The Pioneers of France in the New World," "The Jesuits in North America," "The Discovery of the Great West," etc., etc., which give so graphic and so scholarly an account of the attempts of France to gain and keep her foothold on this continent. Nor shall I soon forget the impression made on my mind of the watchful providence of God over the destiny of this nation as Mr. Parkman raises the question, What would have been the changed position, had France been victorious in the war which threatened to overrun New England with a Roman Catholic power? Had New England become a Roman Catholic province instead of remaining the Puritan colony of England, who can forecast the possible results? One holds his breath sometimes in reading the story of such struggles. We all know the providential element in the battle of Gettysburg, which Mr. Everett so devoutly recognized in his oration. Here and there God leaves his footprints so plain that we can trace them. Whoever else neglects historical study with such disclosures, it should not be the preacher.

Historical studies inspire hopeful views as to the moral progress of mankind. The pessimistic spirit is found sometimes where a pessimistic philosophy is repudiated. More than one good Christian opens his daily newspaper, which chronicles the great crimes of the

* Quoted by Prof. Fisher, Univ. Hist., p. 3.

† The italics are ours.

world in every issue, and lays it down with a sigh, half persuaded that mankind is only going on from bad to worse. The ground is openly taken by excellent clergymen that with all that Christianity is doing the general tendency is retrograde, and that it will continue such till point is reached in which God will interpose and institute a new order. In the pulpit nothing is worse than the continual chanting of Jeremiads. It depresses the people, cuts the sinews of Christian effort, and sometimes breeds a pestilent skepticism as to the power of Christianity to regenerate human society. The best possible remedy for such a disease is a thorough study of history. We can find an example in the case of Romanism. Some good people are in a chronic state of alarm as to its growing power. The appointment of an American cardinal, the establishment of a great Roman Catholic university at Washington, are quoted as signs of the times which show that the power of this system is to be greater than ever. But when one reads history and finds what the terrors of an interdict once were, when we follow the story of Henry IV. of Germany making his submission to the Pope at Canossa, standing day after day in the snow and cold, fasting, bareheaded, while Gregory looked on from a window at the humiliation of this mighty prince, and then think that all such bolts are powerless now, and recall Bismarck's words, *Wir gehen nicht nach Canossa*, we know that Rome has been shorn of her power at every point. And if for nothing else, the historical studies should be pursued to understand the immense difference between the Rome of the tenth or twelfth or fifteenth century from the Rome of the nineteenth. So, comparing the England of the seventeenth with the England of the nineteenth, we see immense gain morally and religiously. What society was in the time of Horace Walpole we can read in his letters. It may have ugly spots on it to-day, but it has been immeasurably purified. The great advantage of such studies is that we can compare period with period, and so mark advance. Take a well-known fact in literary history. It was permissible to read aloud in mixed society at the close of the eighteenth century in England, what now would be attempted only to meet a howl of indignant remonstrance, or be resented as a foul insult. Take humane institutions, and see how they are expanded. The history of treatment for the insane is a case in point. Open the "Encyclopedia Britannica" and read the article on Insanity if you would see how the world grows in humane and Christian ways. These are examples of numberless facts. History has two sides to it—one dark, the other bright. But as one looks on its pages he sees the dark growing less dark, and the bright growing more bright, as he turns the records of a century. It is a great thing for a preacher to be a thoroughly hopeful man. He needs to have this tone always. The "weeping prophet" is in place sometimes. He has his day and hour. But it is not now. The man of brave and cheerful spirit, whose spirit

of happiness is contagious, is the man for to-day. And studies in history will go far toward making of our ministers Great Hearts in our Pilgrims' Progress toward the Jerusalem of a purified society.

Historical studies throw light on social questions coming up to confront the church of Christ. These and not theological problems are the real problems of the hour. It is interesting to note how clearly this has been recognized in some of the church congresses of England. Some of these discussions have been invaluable on some of the matters demanding church attention. If the ministry of the present day does not interest itself in Social Science it will be a loser every way, in point of influence as well as clerical usefulness. The church ought to lead and not to follow. That the church and the ministry did not lead in the great cause of emancipation for our slaves, but followed as Peter did his Lord—a great way off—is a discreditable fact to the American Christianity.

Now on many of these social questions the study of history is an invaluable help. If it does no more, it can hardly fail to rouse interest in them. We need to know what the social wrongs are which have been tolerated it may be for centuries. The struggle between capital and labor is no new issue. It is older than Wat Tyler's rebellion. Monopolies are no modern invention. The world knew their oppressiveness before great railroad corporations had bought legislatures, or so-called "trusts" had become the mighty spoilers of the time. It were well to know what history has shown them to be. They pleaded the same specious reasons for existing; they ran the same course and entailed the same evils which modern monopolies are like to do. It would be a good thing if the preacher would give a chapter from history as a sermon on such things. Or if he did not preach, his knowledge of what the evils have been will fit him to insist more strenuously on that gospel which insists on loving our neighbor as ourselves. It is perfectly evident that "Socialism" is not to be dismissed from the public mind with a polite bow. It will probably, before we get done with it, have as thorough a discussion as ever was given to a public question. Everything points that way. It is, in fact, best that it should be so, that we may get things settled on a right foundation. And the clergy cannot afford to stand aloof from this discussion. But to do so with any effect the clergy must be up in the questions. History is to be read. The history of modern civilization especially may be in point. But it is astonishing to find how old some of these problems are. And the knowledge of what ancient or modern history records on such questions, is knowledge that will be found surprisingly available on questions of to-day. There are no better proofs nor tests of social theories than historical facts. Historical study inspired by such motives will be fruitful to the ministry, if in no other way, in enlargement and enlightenment of popular sym-

pathies. It has another and very direct homiletical use, as it furnishes the ministry with a fund of apt and telling illustrations. These are to be found in every possible variety—now in an incident, now in the saying of a wise man, now in the career of an individual, in the turn of a battle, in the accident of a life, in the progress of a revolution. The sources are boundless. And how effective they are in sermons when wisely used! If, for example, in the reading of “Green’s Popular History of England” note were taken of all that could be used to illustrate sermons, any one would be surprised at the amount. If the sermons of any noted preacher are studied with this in view, it will be seen that no more effective mode of illustration is ever adopted. The English preachers of the seventeenth century made great use of ancient history for this purpose. They used their knowledge of Greek and Roman history with telling effect. To imitate them in this would savor perhaps of pedantry. But modern history furnishes a very much more extended field than South or Barrow or Jeremy Taylor could know. I would not for a moment be understood as saying that history should be primarily studied by the ministry in order to go on a still hunt for illustrations. But pursuing historical studies for the weightier reasons already given, then let the minister keep ready his note-book, if his memory is not perfect, and jot down in it the illustrative fact or the incident to be used in the day of need.

II.—APOLOGETICS IN THE PULPIT: ARE THEY NOT MORE HURTFUL THAN USEFUL AT THE PRESENT TIME?

NO. I.

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GREAT indeed were the services rendered to the infant church of Christ by those who are known as the Primitive “Apologists,” among whom the name of Justin Martyr is foremost. Those who at a later date wrote more elaborate defences of the faith introduced a great variety of plans and operations in their holy warfare against paganism; and not content with merely protecting the church, they resolutely assailed idolatry and superstition, alike with argument the most logical and sarcasm the most withering. Arnobius, who comes in like a commander of cavalry at a critical moment when his charge upon the enemy decides the battle, breaks upon them with such force and with such confidence that they are already a defeated host, that “apologetics” in his case becomes another name for the utter rout and confusion of unbelief. His is the artillery of Elijah when he mocked the priests of Baal. He does not use Scripture very freely: it would have been casting pearls before swine. Scorn and sarcasm and a towering assumption of Christianity as already triumphant are his resources, and he writes like one who foresees the utter overthrow of the religion of Numa as near