

# THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

Vol. XXX.—DECEMBER, 1895.—No. 6.

## REVIEW SECTION.

### I.—THE PREACHER AND THE PREACHING FOR THE PRESENT CRISIS.

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### VII. PREACHING FOR IMMEDIATELY EVANGELIZING THE WORLD.

THE preaching that is to have this in view must manifestly be *preaching for awakening and revival*—not for emotional or hysterical revival, nor even for sporadic and local revival of the genuine sort, but for a great awakening, such as the church has never hitherto known, that shall reach and rouse and set to work the church of Christendom for the accomplishment of this one object.

From this point of view, the supreme thing to be emphasized in the preaching of the day, if it is to meet the present needs, fulfil the preacher's commission, and be effective, is that it must be essentially and directly evangelistic, and with constant reference to the present status of that commission. The Gospel must be preached as a regenerating and saving power, of present efficacy for the individual sinner, and for all mankind. Now, if ever, preaching should intelligently and constantly aim at the immediate conversion of sinners and of the world. It should be heartily and intensely Gospel-preaching, in this awakening and saving sense.

Such preaching will doubtless rouse opposition, as it always has in the past; but that opposition will be God's testimony and Satan's testimony to the necessity for it. It will not excuse the preacher from faithfully delivering the message Christ has committed to him.

*Preaching the Gospel as a saving and regenerating power, by the stated ministry, for the immediate saving of men, is, as we take it,*

\*The subject treated in this series of sketchy articles will be published later in book form, greatly extended so as to cover the vital current topics connected with it, in more systematic shape. The series copyrighted.

## II.—SIR THOMAS BROWNE—HIS PLACE IN A MINISTER'S LIBRARY.

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THERE is a class of writers usually described as "quaint authors," who hardly receive the attention they merit. They are deemed so far aside from what is practical and useful, that, not having the charm of the novelist, they are let alone. Perhaps the ministry, as a body, are little inclined to be utilitarian in their ethics, but they are in danger of being too utilitarian in their habits as readers. Their duties require so much reading along the lines of religious inquiry, that they come to have too little relish and to take too little time for the lighter sorts. In former papers I have sought to point out the positive gains to the ministry from acquaintances with the poets, historians, novelists, and writers on subjects outside the lines of professional study. In this paper I desire to call attention to "quaint" authors. For perhaps different, but equally cogent, reasons, it would be well for clergymen to know something of what they are. I refer to such books as Montaigne's "Essays," Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy," Thomas Fuller's "Thoughts," Sir Thomas Browne's writings, and those of Charles Lamb. At present, I can only discuss Sir Thomas Browne.

For many years I have had on my library shelves a small sixteenmo volume of some four hundred pages, published by Ticknor & Fields, consisting of selections from the writings of Sir Thomas Browne. His complete works are found in four octavo volumes. The volume of selections referred to contains the best things of the author. It has been a source of delight to me these many years, and, I think, also of profit. I have never taken it up for a half-hour's perusal without getting something out of it by way of mental refreshment, and often of stimulus or suggestion.

Sir Thomas Browne unites in himself three distinct types of men. He was a humorist, with a keen eye for the oddities and idiosyncrasies of the world about him. He was a mystic, delighting in the incomprehensible things of the universe. "I love," he says in the "Religio Medici," "to lose myself in a mystery, to pursue my reason to an *O altitudo!* 'Tis my solitary recreation to pose my apprehension with those involved enigmas and riddles of the Trinity, with Incarnation and Resurrection. I can answer all the objections of Satan and my rebellious reason, with that odd resolution I learned of Tertullian, *Certum est quia impossibile est.*"

He was also a practical man, a physician of wide repute, devoted to the care of his patients. On the mural monument in the church at Norwich where he lies buried, we find the inscription, *in urbe hic Nordovicensi medicinum arte egregia, et felici successu professus.* Among

the resolves recorded in one of his commonplace books, is written the following: "To pray daily and particularly for sick patients, and in general for others, wheresoever, howsoever, and under whose care soever; and at the entrance into the house of the sick, to say, 'The peace and mercy of God be in this place.'" The medical profession has contributed distinguished names to English literature—Dr. Mark Akenside, Dr. Samuel Smith, Dr. John Arbuthnot, Dr. Thomas Browne, and in our own time Dr. John Brown and Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes. But no one of them has a better claim on us for consideration than the subject of the present paper.

The lot of Sir Thomas Browne was cast in a troubled period of English history. He was born in London, 1605. He died at Norwich, 1682. He had thus lived through the reigns of Charles I., the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, the Restoration of Charles II., and almost up to the Revolution of 1688. It has been made a matter of reproach to him, that during this period of terrible intestine struggle he should have been engaged in writing treatises on "Urn Burial" and "The Garden of Cyrus," and burrowing in the dusty recesses of antiquarian lore, instead of using his pen as a propagandist of civil opinions. But it is forgotten that he was a busy, faithful physician, looking well after his patients, and using his studies as a diversion; that he was not made for a controversialist, and that, as a Royalist, he was true to his convictions. *Non omnia possumus omnes*. Let us be thankful that we have from him the "Religio Medici" and "The Christian Morals," instead of numerous pamphlets on the questions of the day, hot with epithets, and long since flung into oblivion. Sir Thomas Browne did not neglect the gift that was in him, and the world is better for it to-day.

There are some special characteristics of the man we shall consider before giving any account of his writings. First, his intense craving for knowledge. He was a specimen of insatiable literary curiosity. The Rev. John Whitefoot, his most cherished friend, said of him, in the memorial prepared after his death: "He could tell the number of the visible stars in his horizon, and call them all by their names that had any; and of the earth, he had such a minute and exact geographical knowledge, as if he had been by divine Providence ordained surveyor-general of the whole terrestrial orb, and its products, minerals, plants, and animals." Readers of the "Inquiries into Vulgar and Common Errors," the "Religio Medici," and of the "Urn Burial," find plentifully besprinkled on their pages references to obscure authors who have written on all sorts of subjects, as well as to classical writers. His capacious and retentive memory seems a vast storehouse for this occult learning, from which he draws at command to illustrate his subject. Much of it practical men would impatiently fling aside as the merest rubbish. It had value in his eyes because it was what men had once toiled for, or thought, or felt. He sometimes deftly

turns his use of all this ancient lore to practical ends. How finely he closes Chapter V. of the "Vulgar Errors"! "For the wisdom of God hath divided the genius of men according to the different affairs of the world, and varied their actions according to the variety of actions to be performed therein; which they who consider not, rudely writing upon professions and ways of life unequal to their natures, dishonor not only themselves and their functions, but pervert the harmony of the whole world. For if the world went on as God ordained it, and were every one employed in points concordant to their natures, professions, arts, and commonwealths would rise up of themselves, nor needed be a lanthorn to find a man in Athens."

A second characteristic of the man is his unfailing, all-pervasive geniality of spirit. All his writing breathes it. A kindlier nature never expressed itself in literature. Among his resolves, we find this: "Upon sight of beautiful persons, to bless God in His creations, to pray for the beauty of their souls, and to enrich them with inward graces to be answerable unto the outward. Upon sight of deformed persons, to send them inward graces and enrich their souls, and give them the beauty of the resurrection." His tolerance of spirit in an intolerant age springs largely from this sweetness of temper. Thus he says in the "Religio Medici:" "It is as uncharitable a point in us to face upon those popular scurrilities and opprobrious scoffs of the Bishop of Rome, to whom, as a temporal prince, we owe the duty of good language. I confess there is cause of passion between us; by his sentence, I stand excommunicated; heretic is the best language, he affords me; yet can no ear witness I ever returned him the name, Antichrist, Man of Sin, or Whore of Babylon." Again, "I could never divide myself from any man upon the difference of an opinion, or be angry with his judgment for not agreeing with me in that, from which within a few days I shall dissent myself." As one reads his writings, touch on what he may, there seems to exhale from the pages this sweetness of temper, this spontaneous geniality of soul, and we always rise from the reading in gentler, kindlier mood ourselves.

The religious spirit of the man is no less striking. One has but to read another of his "Resolves" to feel this: "To pray in all places where privacy inviteth; in any house, highway, or street; and to know no street or passage in this city which may not witness that I have not forgot God and my Savior in it: and that no parish or town where I have been may not say the like." "To take occasion of praying upon the sight of any church, which I see or pass by as I ride about."

Mr. Leslie Stearns in his essay \* seems to imply that he was very latitudinarian or semi-skeptical. I confess I can not find this in the following quotation, but rather the essentially religious spirit of the man, overleaping the boundaries of creed: "At the sight of a cross or crucifix, I can dispense with my hat, but scarce with the thought or memory of my Savior. . . . I could never hear the Ave Mary bell without an elevation, or think it a sufficient warrant because they erred in one circumstance for me to err in all, that is, in silence and dumb contempt; whilst, therefore, they directed their devotions to her, I

\* "Hours in a Library," second series, pp. 88-89.

offered mine to God and rectified the errors of their prayers, by rightly ordering mine own." Occasionally we come upon passages in the "Religio Medici," where he touches on religious subjects in a tone which seems to some to imply want of seriousness, when he appears rather the humorist than the Christian believer. As when he says, "It is hard to place those souls in hell whose worthy lives do touch on virtue upon earth; methinks, among those many subdivisions of hell, there might have been one limbo left for these." But this is straining a point against the author, whose "Religio Medici" from first to last breathes a spirit of genial piety. He accepts devoutly Holy Scripture as a revelation from God. Only the interpretations of Scripture he will hold open to question, as when he says, "I can not dream that there should be at the last day any such judicial proceedings or calling to the bar, as indeed the Scripture seems to imply, and the literal commentators do conceive; for unspeakable mysteries in the Scriptures are often delivered in a vulgar and illustrative way."

Without dwelling longer on Sir Thomas Browne's characteristics as a man, let us glance at his main writings. His "Religio Medici," published in 1642, tho written twelve years earlier, in two parts, gives us his thoughts on religious doctrine (Part I.), and on the Christian virtues (Part II.). His "Inquiry into Vulgar Errors" appeared in 1646, soon after the battle of Naseby. It was written while all England was convulsed in the terrible struggle which ended in bringing Charles I. to the block of the executioner. More than any other of his writings, it exhibits the oddities and whimsicalities of the man, and, if it stood alone, would seem to justify the saying of Colend, that "he had a brain with a twist in it." He discusses very gravely such errors as "that crystal is nothing else but ice strongly congealed;" "that a diamond is softened or broken by the blood of a goat;" "that an elephant hath no joints, and a horse no gall;" "that the ostrich digesteth iron," etc, etc. He does this with perfect gravity, with affluence of learned quotations. Among all the "curiosities of literature" there is none greater than this treatise. In 1658, his "Garden of Cyrus" and his "Urn Burial" appeared. In the first of these his vein of mysticism is shown. He labors to show that the Garden of Cyrus, arranged in quincunxes, follows a law of the universe. He ransacks heaven and earth to show that the number five is elemental in the structure of the world. In the "Urn Burial," he seizes on the fact of the discovery of some ancient Roman urns, to discourse on the different modes of sepulture which have been practised in the world, ending with rare and beautiful reflections on the whole subject of immortality. In no one of his treatises is his genius seen to better advantage. It is full of the choicest thought, wondrously expressed. Here is an example: "But the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity. Who can but pity the founder of the pyramids? Erostratus lives that burnt the temple of Diana: he is almost lost that

built it. Time hath spared the epitaph of Adrian's horse, confounded that of himself." His "Christian Morals," a posthumous work, is a lengthened series of moral apothegms, often terse, and full of pithy wisdom. They touch on nearly every known form of obligation. They deserve an equal celebrity with the celebrated maxims of Rochefoucauld. They are a mine of sententious wisdom on moral themes.

These are Sir Thomas Browne's main writings. Remembering the daily labors of his busy professional life, it is a wonder where he got time to amass all the learning which they show, or to put into literary form so complete his curious lucubrations. And yet, as we shall see, these quaint treatises have no small value to the preacher. I shall not dwell on them as affording a very true and wholesome mental recreation, tho they may certainly fulfil this high office. Sir Thomas Browne is the most genuine and genial of humorists, and nothing better than his quiet humor can be found to wash out the fatigue from the over-plied brain. But there are other uses to which his wit and wisdom can be put. He has always been to me a suggestive author. He sets the mind to thinking sometimes by the startling quality of his paradoxes, sometimes by the quaint garb in which he has clothed old truths. The best way in which to disclose these merits is by an array of quotations. We shall thus also better understand the secret charm of his style, for it has charm as well as power.

In his way of handling religious questions, there is always quaintness of expression, but never anything like flippancy. He is earnest and sincere, whatever oddity there may be in either the view or the style. Here is his confession of faith: "But because the name of a Christian is become too general to express our faith, there being a geography of religion, as well as lands, and every clime being distinguished, not only by their laws and limits, but circumscribed by their doctrines and rules of faith: to be particular, I am of that reformed, new-cast religion, wherein I dislike nothing but the name; of the same belief our Savior taught, the Apostles disseminated, the fathers authorized, and the martyrs confirmed; but by the sinister ends of princes, the ambition and avarice of prelates, and the fatal corruption of times, so decayed, impaired, and fallen from its native beauty, that it required the careful and charitable hands of these times to restore it to its primitive integrity." Sometimes the note of seriousness is very deep in touching on religious matters. He utters thoughts of great pith and moment with an almost severe gravity. He puts abstract things in a very concrete way. "God hath not made a creature that can comprehend Him; it is a privilege of His own nature. '*I am that I am,*' was His own definition, not Moses'; and it was a short one, to confound mortality that durst question God, or ask Him what He was. Indeed, He only is; all others have been and shall be; but in Eternity there is no distinction of tenses; and therefore that terrible term, *predestination*, which hath troubled so many weak heads to conceive, and the wisest to explain, is in respect to God no precious determination of

our states to come, but a definitive flash of His will already fulfilled, and at the instant He first decreed it; for to His eternity, which is indivisible and all together, the last trump is already sounded, the reprobates in the flames, and the blessed in Abraham's bosom."

There are also to be found passages, which finely convey, by aptness of illustration, some of the deeper realities of Christian experience. They spring so ingenuously from his heart that they are wonderfully touching. The following would have delighted Dr. Arnold of Rugby, who had, as one of his favorite texts, that to which reference is made in the closing sentence: "Some believe the better for seeing Christ's sepulcher, and when they have seen the Red Sea, doubt not of the miracle. Now, contrarily, I bless myself, and am thankful that I live not in the days of miracles; I would not have been one of those Israelites that passed the Red Sea, nor one of Christ's patients on whom He wrought his wonders; then had my faith been thrust upon me, nor should I enjoy that greater blessing pronounced to all that believe and saw not." How ingeniously and wittily he rebukes that insatiable prying spirit which can receive, in matters of faith, nothing short of a mathematical demonstration, in these words: "I can read the history of the pigeon that was sent out from the ark and returned no more, yet not question how she found out her mate that was left behind; that Lazarus was raised from the dead, yet not demand where, in the interim, his soul awaited; or raise a law-case, whether his heir might lawfully detain his inheritance bequeathed unto him by his death, and he, tho restored to life, have no plea or title to his former possessions."

If the Christian world had only acted on the principles conveyed in the following sentences, blending so much good sense with kindliness of heart, how much better off were Christendom to-day! For the history of religious disputes shows as much want of common sense as sweetness of temper: "Every man is not a proper champion for truth, nor fit to take up the gantlet in the cause of verity; many from the ignorance of these maxims, and an inconsiderate zeal for truth, have too rashly charged the troops of error, and remain as trophies unto the enemies of truth. A man may be in as just possession of truth as of a city, and yet be forced to surrender; 'tis therefore far better to enjoy her with peace, than to hazard her on a battle."

All the extracts given above are taken from the "Religio Medici." The "Christian Morals" is just as full of these suggestive, incisive thoughts. It abounds in pithy sayings about the duties of common life which show us how genius can vivify and give edge to commonplace moralizings. Many of them are quotable. They would, in a sermon, catch the attention of the common people. As when he says, "Sin by old ethics and the classical rules of honesty. Put no new names or notions upon authentic virtues and vices. Think not that morality is ambulatory, that vices in one argue not vices in another; or that virtues which are under the everlasting seal of right reason, may be stamped by opinion."

Is not this a lovely statement of the duty of gratitude? "Annihi-

late not the mercies of God by the oblivion of ingratitude; for oblivion is a kind of annihilation, and for things to be as tho they had not been is like unto never being. Make not thy head a grave, but a repository of God's mercies."

Here are wise words upon solitude and society :

"He who must needs have company, must needs have sometimes bad company. Be able to be alone. Lose not the advantage of solitude and the society of thyself, nor be only content, but delight to be alone and single with Omnipresency."

One would hunt long and far among ethical writers for a finer presentation of what Christian charities really are than what these words contain :

"Moses broke the tables without breaking of the law; but when charity is broke, the law itself is shattered, which can not be whole without law, which is the fulfilling of it. Look humbly upon thy virtues; and tho thou art rich in some, yet think thyself poor and naked without that consuming grace which thinketh no evil, which envieth not, which braveth, hopeth, believeth, endureth all things. With these sure graces, while busy tongues are crying out for a drop of cold water, mutes may be in happiness, and sing the *Trisagion* in heaven."

We have space for no further quotations. Enough have been given, however, to give the readers of this monthly a taste of Sir Thomas Browne's quality. His writings have that quickening power which is among the rarer gifts of genius. He can not be taken up for an odd half-hour, without leaving something in the reader's mind that will grow, germinating thoughts that expand as we dwell upon them. He is eminently an author to fill up spaces between severer toils. He is an author that soon becomes a friend, a kindly companion, whose kindly humor makes every sojourn with him delightful and profitable.

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### III.—A STUDY OF "THE RAVEN."

BY WM. ELLIOT GRIFFIS, D. D., ITHACA, N. Y.

THERE are some who might wonder that the Savior of men should bid His disciples "consider" an objectionable bird like the raven. In every land this "grim, ungainly, gaunt and ominous bird of yore" is feared and disliked; and, curiously enough, its name is nearly the same in most languages. Its malignant expression, color of plumage, marrow-curdling croak, fetid odor, and solitary habits do, indeed, cause mankind to study and watch it with superstitious attention; but it is surely not with superstitious eye that our Master bids us consider it. For, above all things, Jesus commands us to keep our minds from superstition. He would say: Mark it closely, look down underneath appearances; think of this lonely, solitary bird, and see how God provides for it; its life, in freedom from care, is the very reverse of that toilsome anxiety so often seen even among rich and aspiring men.

The reference of the Savior is probably to the helplessness of the fledgling in the nest, as well as to the sure maintenance of this common scavenger-bird of Palestine, ever flying restlessly about to satisfy its voracious appetite. Without