

A PREACHER'S STORY OF HIS WORK¹

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VII.

EVERY day of my life I more profoundly believe that the instrument God uses for the development of his kingdom among men is exactly the same to-day as on the day of the Pentecost; the symbol of that ministry is the tongue of fire, the message of man to man by word of mouth; and personally, while I know there are many reasons advanced for believing that the pulpit cannot hold anything like as important a place in social life as it did a generation ago—the magazines compete with it, the daily papers compete with it, the University Extension movement competes with it, a thousand and one methods by which education is presented to the “herd” are all supposed to compete with it and do compete with it in a sense—still, I profoundly believe that when a man has a vision of God on the one hand, and, on the other, the needs of the people in his heart, that man will get a hearing. No writing, no literature, no diffusion of knowledge, no religious or pedagogical press, or anything else, can take the place of that sort of preaching. Again and again I have seen churches doing good work, and when I have come to analyze their strength, I have found it lay in wise organization to meet the needs of the people, and patient maintenance of that organization; but these things, good and necessary though they be, cannot take the place of preaching. I see also fully—I have proved it in my own ministry and in the ministry of my clergy—how important visiting is; anything that brings you in vital touch with people is important and useful; but it does not take the place of preaching. When I say “preaching,” I am using the word in the widest sense. It may be preaching at the dinner-table, in the study, on the street, on the political platform; it *must* be preaching in the pulpit; the giving forth of the message that a man has when he stands up

and will not sit down until he has delivered it, subordinating time, method, manner, everything, to that. That is what impresses people; that is the way still to reach all sorts and conditions of people.

I try to make myself the mouthpiece of my parish. What I mean by that is this: I do not think there ever was a man as fortunate as I am in the band of lay workers that surrounds him. Many of them have been with me now for almost twenty years. We need each other, love each other, and trust each other. They give me of their best. For instance, I am going to speak to the Sunday-school. I go to my superintendent: “What do you think I ought to say? What do they most need just now?” Or, if I am speaking to my Working-Girls’ Society: “What should I talk to the girls about?” If it is the young men of the club, I ask in some sort the same question. The result of my questioning is that my friends who know the inward needs of each of these organizations, and the young people who make them up, give me their own sermon to preach, and I preach it. They can see what I cannot see. They hear and know what I have not had an opportunity to hear and know. The sermons I often preach are more often theirs than mine.

Such experiences make a man’s ministry very rich, and keep his preaching very much to the point. I suppose the time will come when our business men will help us in the same way. Alas! they do not yet do it. When, for instance, a great railroad president, or a great lawyer, or a great politician, will tell the clergyman he trusts something of the inwardness of the hour, will tell him the struggle between light and darkness going on in the business field, between truth and lies, between knavery and righteousness, bribery and honesty—when, I say, he does this, the man who speaks in the pulpit can speak with power. As it is, the clergy fail to make their special messages go home because,

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while they are right in the main, they are almost sure to be wrong in the detailed statement of their case. And men sneer at them and say, "Let the shoemaker keep to his last. Don't bring politics or business into the pulpit; you do not understand them. Give us the old doctrines of Christianity. Preach to us the Gospel." And, of course, all this sort of talking I hold to be little short of hypocrisy, if it falls short of it at all. If the laity would help us to preach, the pulpit would have more power than it has, the ministry would be more vital than it has been. But I am bound to say that I think the fault is often with the preacher more than with the laity, for the preacher doesn't impress on his people how anxious and ready he is to borrow their knowledge and experience, and use it freely in pressing home the great message of truth and righteousness on the conscience of the community.

There is great danger of the laity seeking God away from the Church, unless clergymen set themselves resolutely to restating old truths; and they are not doing that as they should. What we need to-day in the Church is a restatement of the truth in terms that men can accept. The Church fails to recognize that men do not want to give up the great doctrines; but they find it impossible to accept them as they are often given to them. Many of the laity attached to St. George's I got on the basis of restating old truths in a way adapted to the thought of to-day. Of course the free church idea had something to do with it; but, even if you cast your fly over a fish, it does not follow that he will take it; you must give him the right sort of fly. What we need is earnest, persistent effort on the part of the clergy to restate old truths—truths men learned at their mother's knee—in terms that they can accept to-day; the terms in which they were taught thirty years ago will no longer touch them. These truths now live in men's minds as a memory; we must restate them so that they will become a living power; as Paul said, "Let us commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." That is the way to get the laity; and this is not impossible. I have had no difficulty in getting the laity in the last twenty years' experience.

Neither had I any difficulty in Toronto.

I came to Toronto on the crest of an extraordinary spiritual wave. Moody had not been there; no revival had been there; the movement that burst out in New York in the sixties and seventies came years later in Canada; I happened to be the match that lit the fire—that is all. If I were to go to Toronto to-day and preach the sermons I preached twenty-five years ago, I could not get the people at all in the same way. I firmly believe that if you keep constantly before men the truth that the essence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the Love of God, and therefore the brotherhood of men, they will respond to it; there will be a great and growing response.

Just as there is a difference between the preaching needed to-day and that needed when I began to preach, so there is a difference between the sort of call upon people a minister should make to-day and that made a generation or so ago. My visiting of course began in the East of London and in Norwich, the eastern part of England; and in those days the people expected the visits to be of a distinctly clerical, professional type. I remember I made it a rule in those early days that, if possible, I would never visit without praying or reading the Bible, and that was the common expectation of the people on whom I called. I sometimes found it very irksome, but I went through with it from a sense of duty. I made it a rule in those early days never to go into a railway carriage without trying to read my Bible, or talk to people about their souls. It was a terrible standard I set for myself, and caused me much trouble. I fear it was not very acceptable to my neighbors; but I stuck at it until I saw a better way. That sort of thing did not have the appearance of unreality nor seem as unreasonable thirty years ago as it would to-day; it would not be possible now here in the States, and I doubt whether there is as much of that sort of thing in England.

And yet, in a modified way, I still try to pursue that policy. I think the smoking-room of a Pullman car affords a great many opportunities for earnest conversation. One naturally begins with politics, then the next step is sociology, which is the first cousin to religion. I recall an extraordinarily interesting conversation that I had in a Pullman car two or three years ago. I

had been preaching at Yale, and got into the New Haven train. There were three or four men in the smoking-room; we talked politics, and then slipped gradually into an earnest sociological discussion and so into a religious one. I was led on from step to step until I dwelt on what I have already said has been an immense power in my life—the relation of man to God because he is man; of the Fatherhood of God; that men were children of God, not because they had been converted or baptized, but because they were born the children of God; and as I went on, I suppose I put a certain sense of energy and earnestness into what I said. At any rate, after I had been talking about three-quarters of an hour, one of the men arose (they were all perfect strangers to me), wrung my hand, and said: "I've got to get out here, sir; but I want to thank you, and to say to you that I am a Senior Warden of an Episcopal church, and I have never heard that before, and that is God's truth." I would not think of getting into a train and pulling out my pocket Bible, or talk to people about their soul and ask them if they were saved, as I did years ago in England; such practices are impossible; but I do think there are great opportunities, if we are only ready to take them in our daily intercourse with our fellow-men, of bringing in such subjects, and generally you find them as ready for discussion as you are yourself. Then, such discussions are robbed of all professionalism—a great advantage.

I remember an illustration of the same thing in a very different environment, years ago when I was in the Far West. I was in a very wild part of the country; for five or six weeks I had been away from every kind of civilization, and of course I dressed as everybody else did there. One day I was riding with a friend (who was a lawyer, by the way) to the next United States Army post. I wore no coat; my shirt was heavily spattered with blood from butchering our own meat and carrying it into camp on my shoulders; just before we reached the post we met three or four rough Western fellows; they looked at me and at my friend, gave us the time of day, as they always do there, and passed on to where our outfit was behind; they hailed the drivers of our pack horses and said,

"Who are those two fellows in front?" "One is a lawyer and the other's a parson." "Suppose the big fellow is the lawyer?" "No, he's the parson." "Well, he looks big enough to work for his living," they answered, as they rode on. I had a chance to speak to those same men at the post the next Sunday; and coming in contact with them in this absolutely natural way was a splendid introduction.

In regard to visiting by a rector in New York, often it is quite impossible to introduce the subject of religion at all; that is not the chief function—the thing is to come in touch with the people—to break the ice and know the life we are trying to appeal to; only when we know and understand it are we in a position to appeal to it wisely and well. Most clerical appeal is insufficient because the clergyman does not know, and most clerical intercourse with the people is so horribly professional that the clergyman never learns. I always say to my younger clergy, "Let us try to be natural." That is the only way to succeed with them. We have got to know these people before we can help them, and we cannot know them unless we come in contact with them; a great city like this does not offer any opportunities of knowing people except by visiting. In many cases, when you get to know them well, you can go right into the home and magnify your office, and preach, and speak, and pray. I can cite an interesting illustration. One of my assistants had been visiting for some time a man, a noble sort of fellow, who had been through the war and had fallen into ill health through the results of a heroic effort to save three men fallen down a well into a poisonous vapor—the strain on his heart and lungs had been so terrible; and, as I said, one of my assistants had been visiting him for years. He would talk to him of the weather, the events of the day, and all sorts of things—never of religion; but instinctively the sick man knew the young man came to him as a friend and a brother. My assistants do not wear clericals, as a rule; they can if they wish, but they usually follow my example. After fully two years' constant visiting, this brave old man—for he suffered bravely—said to my assistant: "I want the Holy Communion; I never was baptized in the Episcopal Church, but though I have not

been baptized in the Episcopal Church, don't you think I could take the Holy Communion?" And he added later: "You are the only minister I ever asked for the Communion." A beautiful result of wise and patient visiting for years. I know, too, that the bravery and fortitude with which the old man bore his sufferings was of immense help to the young clergyman. Often the visitor gets as much benefit as those who are visited. I have made it a rule with myself, whenever I feel particularly depressed and down-hearted—as we all feel at times—to go visiting. I don't like it; I have to spur myself to do it; but I do not know of any better stimulant for the soul than to visit sad, sick, and suffering people; it is an immense help. I urge visiting for that reason; not merely because it helps the poor people, but because it is of great benefit to the visitor.

In St. George's Church we do not urge the Holy Communion on any one, but it is a great help; and to those brought up in the Lutheran Church, or in our Church, it is an immense help as a confession of faith. Of course in a great many churches private communion is urged; we do not do that; but we hold ourselves ready at any

time to administer it to those who seek it; we never urge it, as some churches do.

Practically, I have found my best material for my sermons in visiting. In talking with people I have found out the subjects about which they wished to be instructed; I have found out the mistakes they have made, and in the objections offered I have found my text. I have also found it very helpful to bring up in conversation, while visiting, the subject on my mind; and some of the very best suggestions and the best points I have made afterwards I have gained by contact with people in visiting. We do not fully appreciate the value of knowing people—how they live and what they think. Just as the sonship of man to God is only about dawning on men's minds to-day, so it follows that the brotherhood of men to one another, which follows after the first, has not yet been accepted at all; and it seems to me that the constant intercourse I have spoken of affords all sorts of opportunities to illustrate this revolutionary gospel and press it home. The brotherhood of man is a gospel that is not preached yet; it is not understood, but it is bound to come because of the sonship of man to God.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

Types of the Unemployed

By Percy Alden

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BALZAC in "Père Goriot" refers to "dramas that go on and on." Such are the tragedies of the unemployed, recurring with monotonous iteration during every period of industrial depression.

Almost my first experience of East London was a visit to the Dock Gates in the Custom-House district some thirteen years ago. It was a raw, cold winter morning, and at 6 A.M. a northeaster was sweeping with such force over the waters of the Albert Dock that I began to regret my rashness in coming out at that early hour without a sufficiently thick overcoat. A small steam ferry took me to the south side and landed me near a ship that had been berthed soon after midnight, and was now discharging her

cargo, which consisted chiefly of products of the Far East.

About ninety extra men were to be taken on, and I naturally expected to see some inconsiderable surplus of labor; but as I reached the end of the dock-shed I saw, to my surprise, a struggling and seething mass of humanity—nearly a thousand men—facing the foreman who was vainly endeavoring to make a selection from the ranks of the workingmen. A very few minutes sufficed, for proper selection was impossible.

It was a sickening spectacle. If an envoy from a savage tribe in central Africa had been told that these men, with faces bleeding and clothes torn in the mad rush to obtain a ticket, had been fighting for the privilege of a few hours'