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BEWARE THE EVANGELIST!*

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It is agreed on all hands that Evangelism is a good thing. Everybody joins in the prayer "Revive thy work, O Lord!" But there is a right way and a wrong way of doing things. The world moves; and the Evangelism which was effective and acceptable in former times will not meet the demands of these days.

A Man has been going about for a long time, doing the work of an evangelist against whom it behooves us to be on our guard. He has preached in most of the important cities of the world and is now in America. There are many people who have been urging him to begin a campaign in Greater New York and elsewhere who would probably withhold their welcome if they knew the real state of the case. The writer has had occasion to study his methods and desires to state, particularly for the benefit of thoughtful Christians, who sincerely desire to keep abreast of the age, some of the reasons why he should not be further solicited and why, in case of his coming, we should be slow to co-operate with him.

It must be understood, at the outset, that no criticism is passed upon the personal character of this Man. So far as known his manner of life has been beyond reproach. The fact that he is of humble origin and unlearned in the schools is nothing against him. Nor are we disposed to find fault with his singular claims as to the efficacy of his prayers for the healing of sickness, or with his exercise of the power of absolution. Allowances may be made for extravagances of this sort when associated with such extraordinary zeal in the pursuit of a single aim.

But, in the first place, decided objection is made to his constant appeal to the emotions. Experience proves that men and women won by the urgency of the hackneyed call "Come to Jesus" are not likely to persist in the better life. Yet the Evangelist referred to relies much on this form of exhortation, crying "Come! Come" wherever he goes. Perhaps, if he were familiar with the developments of psychological science he might do otherwise; but there lies the very crux of the difficulty. So far as would appear from his preaching he knows practically nothing of science, or philosophy. His sermons are built along the old-fashioned lines of mere logic; and, therefore, while specious and convincing

*The writer of this Paper is so well and widely known as a staunch exponent and defender of the views of the Scriptures held by the League, that we feel certain that the broad satire underlying his production will not be misunderstood.—Editor.

enough in their way, are not calculated to win but rather to repel cultured minds. The fact that he has drawn great audiences is neither here nor there; the educated classes have generally held aloof; it is the common-people who have thronged to hear him. Naturally he has wrought upon their excitable natures; but, for this very reason, it devolves upon those who are better informed to protect them from his inflammable approach. The commotions among the peasantry of Russia, at this moment, illustrate the frightful danger of exposing the impressible people to the impassioned eloquence of vehement and uneducated leaders.

Nor is this all: the methods of the Evangelist referred to are in clear contravention of social philosophy, as we understand it. We know that what is needed for the so-called regeneration of society is not the changing of an individual character here and there, but an all-round improvement in the condition of the masses. If we can bring about a better social environment, an improvement in the housing and clothing and feeding of the community, better sanitary conditions, a higher degree of culture, instruction in the fundamental laws of industry as well as in arts and literature, the individual will take care of himself. His elevation is inevitable in the necessity of the case. But this man, in seeming disregard of such propositions, addresses himself to the betterment of the individual. The larger part of his work is not social but personal. If this is the correct method then many of the approved results of modern sociological research and experimentation must obviously go for naught.

Still further, the preaching of this Itinerant is distinctly dogmatic; whereas there is a practical agreement among the thoughtful Christians of our time that creeds and symbols have little or nothing to do with genuine religion. We do not mean to affirm that he denies the importance of right conduct; on the other hand his sermons ring with the importance of keeping the law. He dwells with, perhaps, unnecessary emphasis on the Ten Commandments; ignoring the fact that they are no longer regarded as inspired in any singular way. But his ethical teachings are invariably founded on doctrine. And often-times his presentation of doctrine is crude in the extreme.

For example, he takes the moral, not the physiological view of sin. It is generally conceded nowadays that sin is a disease and that its remedy is to be sought for in the province of scientific therapeutics. He teaches, on the contrary; that sin is a violation of divine law and, as such, is followed by sure retribution, not only in this world but forever. We can not be mistaken at this point. His words are unequivocal. He says the sinner is "lost," and by this he means lost not only to self-respect and the regard of his fellow men but to the favor of God. How can this be reconciled with the dictum that "God is love"? He says, moreover, that the sinner is "dead;" that is, his spiritual functions have ceased, just as a corpse having eyes sees not and having ears hears not.

And he proceeds to say that the sinner is doomed to "hell." This word, now practically obsolete and vulgar to ears polite, is frequently on his lips. And it is perfectly clear what he means by "hell." He likens it to fire and a gnawing worm and darkness. And the fire is "unquenchable;" the worm "dieth not;" the darkness is "outer darkness," that is, beyond the provisions of the mercy of God. These notions are antiquated; the world has outlived them. Why should this old straw be threshed over and over again when by common consent there is nothing in it?

In addition to the foregoing there are some disputed, not to say discredited, doctrines which are habitually kept in the fore-ground by this Man.

One of them is the Incarnation. We all agree, as a matter of course, to the doctrine of the incarnation; but there is a difference of opinion as to what it means. Here is a great mystery. Just how the divine element was incarnated in Christ is a question that has puzzled the wisest philosophers. But this Man professes to know all about it. He allows no latitude whatever for psychological discriminations but insists always and absolutely that the Messiah is one with the Father, or as the Schoolmen would say "Very God of very God."

Another of his rigid dogmas is the Atonement. And by this he means not simply that Christ died but that he died vicariously. He insists that the saving virtue of the gospel is not in the *imitatio Christi* but in the expiatory value of his death. His preaching is red with blood. He insists that "the life is in the blood," and that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. There is a sense, no doubt, in which this must be regarded as true; but all such expressions are clearly figurative. In their interpretation we must be guided by the sound principle that "the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life." The death of Jesus was indeed a great object lesson in which was set forth as never before or since the importance of heroic self-denial *pro bono publico* and also the immeasurable love of God; but the saving factor in the gospel is simply the magnetic power of Christ's example in "drawing all men unto him."

And another of the draconian dogmas in the teaching of this evangelist is Regeneration. We are ready to allow that a moral metamorphosis is necessary before a sinner can enter on his divine inheritance, as it is written, "Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God." But what does this mean? Can it mean anything more than a moral reformation? Does not that cover the case? Yet this Man insists on a literal making over of the whole man; new heart, conscience, mind and will. How can these things be? It is clearly impossible. When one ceases to do evil and learns to do well that is regeneration; and more can not be expected of him. "For what doth God require of a man but to keep the commandments?" This is in the Book of Deuteronomy, but it is true nevertheless.

And the doctrine of Sanctification follows as a corollary. Now sanctification, as we understand it, is the synonym of character-building. When a man has resolved on living a better life he naturally, by persistent effort, grows better day by day. But to the mind of this perambulating Preacher sanctification means nothing of the sort. It is not automatic evolution but a mysterious process of improvement by virtue of an unceasing personal contact with the Spirit of God. And by the Spirit of God he means not a benignant life-nurturing influence but a self-conscious Personality, who must needs touch the eyes or they can not see and quicken all the spiritual faculties else the man remains dead in trespasses and sins.

But the doctrine which is advanced with most constant obtrusiveness is the infallible Truth and Authority of the Scriptures. It would naturally be supposed that in a time when there is so grave a difference of opinion as to this matter an evangelist would, for mere prudence' sake, speak with some measure of hesitancy. But not this Man. It is enough to say that he has never once so far deferred to the judgment of Biblical Experts as to intimate by word or syllable the slightest misgivings as to the inerrancy of the discredited Book; he has gone further and repeatedly stated with a totally unnecessary emphasis his unquestioning belief in its truth and trustworthiness from beginning to end."* He has gone out of his way to quote disputed passages from disputed books, has committed himself without reserve to the story of the Creation, the Deluge, the historicity of the patriarchal records, the destruction of Sodom, the Exodus, the Pentateuch as a whole and particularly the Mosaic authorship of it, the Book of Deuteronomy, the exact fulfillment of Prophecy and the fabulous story of Jonah in the Whale's belly. The safe and conservative statement that the Bible **contains** truth does not satisfy him. He allows no place for error, nor any latitude whatever for a difference of opinion. His formulary runs, The Bible **is** truth; the Bible **is** the Word of God. So far as his preaching goes one would suppose that he had absolutely never heard that there was a single error in the Book; yet there are many thousands of them. Is it because he knows no better, or because he is not an honest man? In either case, this is a question that should be determined before we open our churches to him.

In addition to the foregoing, attention is called to his exclusivism. We are living in irenic days. The various bodies of religious people are drawing closer together and the great prayer is that they all may be one. Yet here is a Man whose intolerance has come to be a proverb. He affirms with the most stubborn reiteration that there is only one way into life and that a narrow way: that there is only one door and that he holds the key of it. His hearers are required to believe what he teaches

*The gentle reader is doubtless aware that all scholars, without exception, reject the traditional view of Inspiration. Should that fact be called in question it may be verified in a very simple way, to wit; If any man rejects the view aforesaid he is **ipso facto** a scholar; otherwise not.

or else "the wrath of God abideth" on them. To speak thus of the wrath of a benevolent God is surely to strike a most discordant note. Fear as a motive to personal reformation was discarded long ago. The sinner must be drawn, if at all, with cords of love. The bogie of "the dead line" has given way to the sweetness and light of "the larger hope." It is the extreme of foolishness for a man on a mission of loving conquest to repel those who would gladly co-operate with him, by an unnecessary insistence, on one way, one Religion and one Church. The action of the recent Federation Council in refusing admission to Unitarians is a blunder which can scarcely be repaired by years of conciliation. The idea that a difference of phraseology in the statement of so flexible a doctrine as the Incarnation should close the door against brethren who are at one with us in striving for the common good is simply preposterous. Yet this is precisely the method pursued by the Evangelist in question. His lack of common tact has alienated many. He has been known, on more than one occasion, to denounce, in most scathing terms, ecclesiastics of known character and wide renown. Standing in the vestibule of the leading church in a Metropolitan City he characterized the members of its Official Board as "hypocrites" and expressed a serious doubt as to their escaping "the damnation of hell."

Is it not wise, under such circumstances, to call a halt? Do we want an evangelist of this sort to create disturbance in our congregations and turn things upside down?

It remains only to estimate the results of such a headstrong and divisive propaganda. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Fortunately, statistics are at hand. There is no manner of doubt as to the general character of the converts which this man has gathered about him. Very few of the better class, the mighty and noble, have allied themselves with him. Scholars are generally agreed that his doctrine is foolishness. The leading churchmen in places he has visited regard his teaching as a stumbling block. It is the poor and ignorant who have followed him. In the course of his evangelistic tours he has enlisted some millions of these; hundreds of millions, indeed; and there is good reason for affirming that there is not one among them who is any better than he ought to be. All, alike, while professing conversion, still continue in their sins. Many of them lie and steal. They are a poor, staggering, stumbling lot of people. Many of them deny their profession the moment they are out of his sight. It is known that one of his immediate band of helpers agreed to betray him for the paltry sum of fifteen dollars, and another swore like a trooper that he had never known him.

These things being so, how can we consistently invite him to a campaign in Greater New York. The ministers of this city are a devoted body of faithful men, cultured, broad-minded and tolerant toward all. They are competent to manage their own parishes. Why should they invite discord and dissension? Let well enough alone. It is a broad world we

are living in and there is room for all without jostling—that is, for all except such as this divisive dogmatizer. Let us have peace and toleration.

CREDIBILITY OF THE EARLY BIBLE HISTORY IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT EXPLORATIONS*

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There are three ways in which we might test the truth of ancient historical documents:

The first is by the **literary method**, the method of literary analysis and judging by what we know of human nature, of the action of the human mind in various conditions, and how men would be likely to act under these conditions. This, in general, is the process of what is called the **higher criticism**,—a perfectly legitimate process and one that may lead to very important conclusions; but it is evident that this is not by any means infallible. Subjectivity on the part of the critics and analysts may often lead to erroneous conclusions, which need to be checked by the two other methods.

The second is by **historical comparison**,—reasoning from documents like those of the Old Testament. We may compare these with other documents, such as those of the monuments of Egypt and of Babylon, which have been opened to us through the interpretation of the inscriptions upon them, and which lead us to judge of the conditions of society at the period of which the Bible teaches us. The documents are very imperfect, and this is by no means a certain guide, for we are not sure of the trustworthiness of the documents found. We know that the epitaphs on gravestones are not the most certain guide to the characters of individuals. We can not be certain that this historical method will lead us to absolute correctness of conclusions.

The third method is the one to which I am to call your attention this afternoon, and one which, in the Providence of God, for the last twenty-five years I have been led to pursue. This is a line of investigation which I feel is but partially understood, and which I hope, if my life is spared, to expound more fully to the world,—**the scientific method**, the process of considering carefully the conditions of ancient times and whether they were such as to justify the truth of what has been recorded.

This method is similar to the cross-examination of witnesses. The purpose of cross-examination of a witness is to see if he really knows what he is testifying to, what he is talking about. It is found that, if a person undertakes to invent any elaborate story that involves conditions of time and place or anything more than a simple statement, he will be

*An address delivered in the Manhattan Congregational Church, New York City, Sunday afternoon, January 14, 1906. Dr. Wright had just returned from an extended tour of exploration in Russia, Turkey and Egypt, and this was his first public utterance after his return. The results of his investigations, to be published later, have an important bearing on the question of the historicity and universality of the Flood.—Editor.