

## DR. B. M. PALMER; AN APPRECIATION

Dr. Palmer was a great man, a great preacher, a great orator. Indeed, there was nothing small about him but his bodily presence, which suggests Henry Ward Beecher's saying that a fine figure is a hindrance to a speaker.

I remember somewhat vividly my first sight of him as he entered the public hall of the University of Virginia to deliver one of a series of lectures by eminent men. I recall distinctly the feeling of disappointment created by his altogether unimpressive appearance as contrasted with those who had preceded him in the course, and indeed with his own great reputation as an orator that had heralded his coming. Of all the distinguished men grouped on the rostrum that day, he bore least the outward insignia of the greatness which was to leave its indelible impress upon every hearer. When he rose, one wondered at the insignificant figure of the great man; when he sat down at the close of a peroration that had lifted the great audience upon the splendid tide of his eloquence, there was no hearer that thought aught about his figure.\*

Dr. Palmer was an *orator*.

There is an element in oratory that is unique; culture can not impart, though it may greatly improve it; no attainment of scholarship, no grade of ability, no degree of culture can produce its effects. It seems a native endowment, and usually gives early indications of its presence; the schoolboy in his callow youth will reveal glimpses of it in his crudest efforts. By this is not meant that it is superior, but simply different, in a class altogether to itself; others may delight as much, may edify even more, but the orator alone *thrills*. This gift was Dr. Palmer's in an eminent degree. It is as characteristic of his earlier efforts, as of his

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\*"The Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer." By Thomas Cary Johnson, author of "Life and Letters of Robt. S. Dabney, D. D.," "John Calvin and Genevan Reformation," etc. Presbyterian Committee of Publication, Richmond, Va. 8vo. Cloth. Pp. X. 638. Price, \$2.50.

later, the chief difference lying in that sure chastening of style which comes usually and only at the suit of years.

An illustration may be found in his address\* delivered at Davidson College in August, 1852; for matter and style that address is memorable, and its closing paragraphs, while showing somewhat the high color of youth, are not greatly inferior to any product of his ripest years.

Dr. Palmer was a great *preacher*.

He was markedly a man for great occasions, rising uniformly to the height of his opportunity. He was at home with large themes, a builder of great sermons. There was a certain spaciousness about his conceptions, an amplitude of scope that was characteristic of him. His greatness lay largely in the range of his thought; there was always a loftiness which led to extended views, and the hearer felt the inspiration of great elevation and the expansion of wide horizons. The sermon was a gradual but constant ascent; the preacher began quietly on the average level and with no evidence of effort led the hearer so gradually and so easily as to call for no labor on his part, but so steadily, though without consciousness of climb, that sooner or later the listener would feel the altitude like wine.

He had a well-nigh unerring instinct for climax; everyone who has heard him will recall and recognize this as a distinguishing feature of his speaking; the address waxed steadily towards its fitting close, and its peroration was its crown, the natural unfolding of a flower consummate, glorious.

Dr. Palmer was a great *man*.

It was a rare circle of which he was not chief, a very unusual assemblage in which he was not pre-eminent; yet his greatness seemed unstudied and his superiority unsought. There was ever a gracious dignity about him; it was dignity, but it was gracious; there was no element of stiffness, not a suggestion of self-consciousness, not a symptom of self-assertion. There was never in manner or bearing any of that obviousness of the honored guest

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\*Southern Presbyterian Review. October, 1852. Vol. VI., Pp. 226.

so common and withal so natural in distinguished men, appearing in pose or manner: a feeling of the responsibility of the occasion that manifests itself in a sort of inoffensive appreciation of the fact that by unanimous consent one occupies the recognized centre of the picture and is the conscious "star" of the scene. This utter lack of pose in anything was the distinctive hall-mark of his greatness, that he bore himself so simply, so naturally, so modestly and never "plumed himself" one whit!

His was always the simplicity of genuine greatness; this simplicity was comprehensive and it was pervasive; it appeared in what he was and in all that he did. It was evident in his style as in his character, a certain stateliness in both, but no "fuss or feathers" in either.

Buffon says, The style is the man. His speaking was like nature, supremely excellent, but, like nature, unobtrusive in its excellence; nothing of the machinery of art, none of the clap-trap of elocution, no tawdriness of rhetoric. If you chose afterward to reflect upon the matter, you would remember that he had a splendid voice, and had used it splendidly; a beautiful enunciation, clear, distinct, cultured; a remarkable appreciation of the subtleties of emphasis; a fine taste, bold, but severe in its loftiest flights; for, while the garment was sometimes regal in texture, it clothed a royal thought, and even the most fastidious eye could see no extravagance in the dress.

There was never any sign of strain; his loftiest flights seemed the effortless ease of a bird on the wing, and this effortless ease left the impression of indefinite reserves of power.

#### Dr. Palmer was a great citizen.

At the time of his earliest identification with it, New Orleans was a city of far greater relative importance than in later years, though it has always been the metropolis of the South and Southwest, so that he was a citizen of no mean city. It was no idle compliment when Colonel William Preston Johnston, introducing him to a vast audience representative of what was best in city and State, said: "It is now my privilege to introduce to you a man who by his talents, his eloquence, and his virtues, well deserves the title of the first citizen of New Orleans."

That a man of his extreme conservatism and utter lack of self-assertion should become the most influential man in such a city is a wonderful tribute to his personal force; that for many years his was the dominant personality in New Orleans goes without saying to any one acquainted with the city. His leadership in all great moral movements was pre-eminent and undisputed. He occupied a niche peculiar to himself as the one man whom all the people delighted to honor, a man revered by all classes and all creeds, and his death clothed the whole city in mourning.

After the foregoing, it might be sufficient to say of Dr. Johnson's work that it is an adequate biography. The volume bears the marks that those familiar with the author's work have learned to expect in anything that comes from his hand: exhaustive study, painstaking research, breadth of scope and uncompromising fidelity. It is a masterly, a monumental work.

The life of such a man must possess elements of wide interest and of lasting value. Dr. Palmer's prominence makes his life a mirror of his times; his biography, therefore, becomes a history of the stirring period compassed by his life, while his speeches and writings furnish a record of the great questions and controversies that agitated Church and State, and they thus serve the incidental but important and valuable office of filing with posterity an appeal for just judgment upon the isolate position of our Southland; an appeal voiced by one of her most typical representatives, one of her ablest and most eloquent advocates. The book will do much towards vindicating our country and our Church before the bar of an enlightened public opinion, and this gives the volume distinct and decided apologetic worth. There are few books that have appeared within my recollection that for a Southern man, and more particularly a Southern Presbyterian, surpass it in personal interest or exceed it in permanent value.

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# THE PHILISTINE AND PHILISTINISM

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The Philistines were an ancient people who originally occupied the territory between Egypt and Syria. They were among the first troublers of Israel. They were among Israel's most insistent and enduring enemies, surviving the splendid military activities of Joshua, and outliving the aggressive campaigns of David and Solomon. During the first century, however, the gospel was preached in Philistia, and Ashdod became the home of a Christian minister. But all along the Philistines were the troublers and foes of Israel.

The Philistines still oppose and criticize, they still trouble and disparage Israel. Philistinism is another name for opposition, for criticism, for depreciation, for contention. Philistinism especially characterizes those within the Church who speak and act and live as a Philistine outside of the Church. The Philistine outside assumes a given attitude towards the doctrine and polity of the Church, and the Philistine on the inside joins hands with him by adopting his language and teaching and by dallying with the popular prejudice. The subject may be better studied by illustration.

## PHILISTINISM AND THEOLOGY.

The Philistine is radically opposed to Israel's theology. He claims Dagon and Beelzebub. He would cancel all theological distinctions and obliterate all theological definitions. He is intensely revolutionary. He is a zealous promoter of doubt, uncertainty and loose doctrine. He would cast down all barriers and give a hearing to all kinds of "isms." He believes in license of thought. Beautiful altruistic impulses thrive better when separated from theology. Theology has ever been the foe of progress, knowledge and ethics. It has barred the entrance to Eden, by diverting the attention of men from this world to another. Sociology should be substituted for theology.

This summarizes the Philistine's position. It defines his theological status. It is sad to know that there are those in the Church, occupying prominent positions, who echo these derogatory sentiments, who trample upon Israel's theology, who favor loose and vague doctrines, who proclaim easy-going ethics. This is Philistinism. What does it betoken? What shall be said of it?

It is natural. The hatred for theology arises from two sources: the natural aversion of the heart to God's revealed truth and the natural indolence of the human mind. When the word of God is studied carefully and definitely, the points pierce. The human mind naturally recalcitrates against effort. It costs effort to study truth, and man's unwillingness to recognize sin and repent of it demonstrates unwillingness to know the truth. The man problem is a fiction; the young people's problem is a fiction; it is simply a question of conviction of sin, of repentance toward God, of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of righteous, clean living.

Philistinism is ridiculous. It would appear monstrously ridiculous in a lawyer to ridicule law; or in a physician to ridicule medicine; or in a chemist to ridicule chemistry; and it is no less ridiculous in a minister, or Christian teacher, or a Church-member to ridicule theology. A creedless human being, rational, capable and responsible does not exist.

Philistinism is license. It savors of liberality, but it is really license. License of thought is not liberality; it is pandemonium. "When men get loose in theology the screws are started up in everything."

Philistinism is criminal. It demands that Christianity commit suicide. Take the vertebral column out of an animal, and it will die. The vertebral column of Christianity is composed of the infallibility of the Scriptures, their organic unity, the divinity of Christ, his vicarious atonement and regeneration by the Spirit of God. Take away these cardinal truths, and Christianity ceases to be Christianity. It is said that Sydney Smith once told an old lady who asked him how he managed to keep cool during the very hot weather that he took off his flesh and sat in his bones. The Philistine reverses this method. He takes out his bones and sits in his flesh. And Christianity becomes as flabby as pulp.

## PHILISTINISM AND HYPOCRISY.

The Philistine charges that the Church is the rendezvous of hypocrites. How does he reach this conclusion? He selects the excrescences of human life as they have grown up within the Church, and, judging the Church as it is represented by excrescences, he hurls his philippics against it. And on the inside of the Church are to be found those who, parrot-like, take up the Philistine's reproach against the Church, and denounce and berate and revile it. This is Philistinism with a vengeance. If the Church was as hypocritical in its composition as it is said to be, if it depended for support and sustenance upon those who berate and revile it, it would have dissolved long ago.

The existence of the counterfeit proves the existence of the genuine. No man refuses good money because there are counterfeits. The presence of so many spurious diamonds is evidence that genuine stones can be obtained and that they are valuable, else men would not make so many imitations. The existence of hypocrites is strong proof that there are true Christians, and that they may be discovered and recognized, and that they are valuable, else men would desist from imitation.

The true Christian does not approve the inconsistencies nor endorse the hypocrite. The existence of such is a source of grief to him. He longs for pure and true associates in Church fellowship and labors. But he does not approve the Philistine's burning philippic and wholesale denunciation and iconoclastic tendencies. The Christian's philippic is far more effective. It is the philippic of faith and charity, of loyalty and labor, of sincere devotion and piety.

## PHILISTINISM AND WORKS.

The Philistine says that the Church is doing nothing. Probably he judges Israel by himself. But there are those in the Church who repeat this charge. They say, "The Church has lost its grip on the world." "The Church is dead." How do they know that the Church is dead? How do they know that they themselves are dead? A little boy was praying, "Now I lay me down to sleep." When he came to, "If I should die before

I wake," he earnestly inquired, "How will I know I'm dead?" How do these men know they are dead?

Truth may be given away by taking for granted as a fact what is not such. A shrewd man once said to a company of scientific friends, "Why is it that a pail of water weighs no more with a fish swimming in it than when the fish is removed?" Various answers were given. After obtaining their reasons, he asked if they were certain that the fact was as the question implied. In listening to the Philistine, one must be certain that the fact is as stated respecting the condition of the Church. These men live in gilt-rock recluses, and for various reasons are wanting in practical information respecting the Church.

The facts concerning the condition of the Church are as follows: The numerous benevolent and humanitarian organizations are supported directly and indirectly by the Church. The Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations, the King's Daughters, the Salvation Army, and almost every sort of charitable institution that springs into being calls upon the Church for support and assistance. The great reforms which have been effected and the revival of public ethics have been accomplished directly and indirectly by the Church. The religious press has rendered invaluable assistance. The leaders and representatives are members of the Church, and the pulpits constantly emphasize the principles of reform. The world has been opened up through the evangelistic activities of the Church. Science, literature, geography, etymology, language and history have been wonderfully enriched by her researches. The wealthy of the Church are giving more liberally of their means than at any time. The gospel is being preached all over the world. The Church is indeed the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the savor of life unto life.

#### PHILISTINISM AND STRUGGLE.

The Philistines outside the Church frankly admit that every excellent cause has to struggle for place and power, for recognition and success. The establishment of any and every benevolent institution, whether commercial, artistic or educational, has to struggle against prejudice, misunderstanding and positive op-



position. "Everything must prove its worth." Everything must fight for its place and right to live, but the Philistines deny the application of this law to the Church. They point out that the Church has been characterized by great wrangle and bitter feeling and sharp conflict, but they show extreme narrowness and uncharitableness in holding this against the Church. It is true that the Church has engaged in severer struggles. She would have been unworthy her name had she not. The standard of the Church, which is the truth of God, has been assaulted by heathenism and paganism, by physics and metaphysics, by learning and ignorance, and it would have been cowardly had the Church not asserted herself. But the history of the Church shows that God is in her, bringing good out of evil, and it is far better to be in a struggle with 'God overruling it and bringing principle to the front out of it than to live in a godless calm of indifference, without enough manhood to fight for principle. The great principles and grand doctrines and massive creeds growing out of struggle and conflict indicate the presence of God in the Church saving the Church, now from herself, now from the Philistine within, and now from the Philistine without. Although there are many denominations, these denominations agree respecting the cardinal truths of Christianity. They share the privilege to differ in non-essentials. *In necessariis unitas, in non-necessariis libertas, in omnibus caritas.*

If it is patriotism to aid one's country, it is certainly not sectarianism to support one's Church. If it was considered glorious in a Spartan of old to love the shrines of Sparta, it is certainly not narrowness in one to love the ecclesiastical institutions of his own land. The poet says, "Dear city of Crecopt"; and, shall one not say, "Dear city of God"?

It is probable that the days of struggle for many have scarcely more than begun. But let it be remembered that no good deed ever dies; it goes on to the ocean of God's love; that no great and generous impulse is for naught; it gives birth to other impulses: that no one lifts his voice for righteousness in vain; it is heard somewhere by someone. Let it be remembered that no one is worthy to be a leader who complains of the stupidity of his helpers, or the ingratitude of mankind, or of the inappreciation of the public. Such things are incident to life, and it is evi-

dence of power and love and courage to meet them and not go down with them. He who runs in a race must run to the end to be crowned. The Christian must be faithful unto death to receive the crown of life. "He that endureth unto the end shall be saved." Then

\* \* \* "clasp thine armor on,  
Fight well and thou shalt see after these wars,  
Thy head near sunbeams and thy feet touch stars."