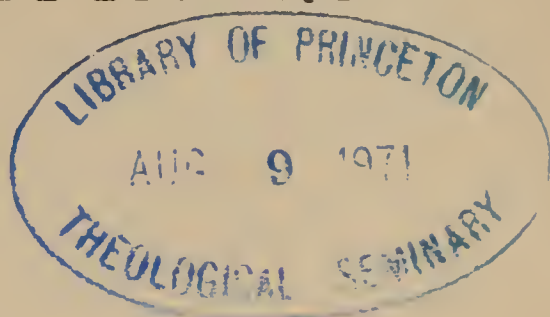


EMINENT AUTHORS



ON

EFFECTIVE REVIVAL PREACHING.

COMPILED BY

✓
REV. WALTER P. DOE.

HATFIELD, SHEPARD, PARK, FINNEY, BARNES, McILVAINE, McCOSH,
BEECHER, STOWE, MURRAY, CUYLER, TAYLOR, HALL,
TALMADGE, SPURGEON, MOODY, AND OTHERS.

PROVIDENCE, R. I.

A. CRAWFORD GREENE, BOOK AND JOB PRINTER, RAILROAD HALL.

1876.

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE REVIVAL PREACHING OF LYMAN BEECHER, D. D.

(AUTHORIZED AUTOBIOGRAPHY.)

MRS. HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.

As to his preaching, it consisted commonly of three parts: first, careful explanatory statement concerning the real meaning of the text and subject; second, a logical and plain argument in the body of the discourse, addressed to the understanding, and third a passionate and direct appeal, designed to urge his audience to some immediate, practical result.

The first part was often very clear, and as dry and condensed as a series of mathematical axioms. If preaching upon a doctrine, he commenced by the most clear and carefully worded statement of what it was not and what it was, before attempting to prove or disprove. It very often happened that these simple statements disarmed prejudice and removed antipathy, and to a people somewhat disposed to return to the faith of their fathers, if they could see their way clear, (as were many of the Unitarians,) rendered the succeeding argument almost needless.

I remember the introductory statement of a sermon

on the doctrine of total depravity, in which, after telling much that it did not include, he reduced it simply to this proposition: *That men, by nature, do not love God supremely, and their neighbor as themselves.*

“All that is cultivated in intellect and refined in taste, much that is honorable in feeling and amiable in social relations,” he said, “we concede. The temple is beautiful, but it is a temple in ruins; the divinity has departed, and the fire on the altar is extinct.”

After this followed the scriptural argument, on which he always and unhesitatingly relied, without a shadow of a doubt that we do have, in our English translation, the authoritative, inspired declarations of God. Then came the answering of objections. Here he was conversational, sprightly, acute, and often drew the laugh by the involuntary suddenness and aptness of his replies and illustrations. Easy and colloquial in his dialect, he carried his audience with him through this part. They were stirred up and enlivened, and, as a plain countryman once said, “He says it so that you feel you could have said it all yourself.”

Last of all came what he considered the heart of his discourse—the pungent application. His previous explanation and argument he regarded as a mere preparation, or a bridge to pass over, to reach the effective appeal. A sermon that did not induce anybody to do anything, he considered a sermon thrown away.

The object of preaching, in his view, was not merely to enlighten the understanding, or even to induce pleasing and devout contemplation, but to make people set about a thorough change of heart and life. These closing portions of his sermons were the peculiarity of his

preaching. He warned, he entreated, he pleaded, urging now this motive and now that, talking as if his audience were one individual, whom he must, before he left the pulpit, persuade to take a certain step. "If these things are so," he would say, "you, my friend, have neglected this matter too long. Are you not convinced that you ought to do something now, to-night, this moment? Do you say, 'What shall I do?' One thing I will tell you, that if you do not do something more than you have, you will be lost. That you acknowledge, do you not?"

Then, changing the tone of his voice to the lowest key of personal conversation, he would say, "Now, there is one thing you can do: You can resolve before God from this moment, that the salvation of your soul shall be your first object, and that, whatever it may mean to be a Christian, you will not rest till you are one. You can do that. Are you not conscious that you can? I put it to you,—will you do it? You cannot refuse without periling your salvation. When you leave this place to-night, you can avoid distracting conversation. You can preserve this resolve as carefully as you would shade a lamp which the winds of heaven are seeking to extinguish. Will you do it? Will you go to some solitary place to-night, and there kneel down and pray? You are conscious that you can do it. Will you do it? Will you open your Bible and read a chapter? And lest you should not know where to look, I will tell you. Read the first chapter of Proverbs, and then kneel down, confess your sins, and try to give yourself to God for the rest of your life. Then seek the instruction of your minister, or Christian friends; break off all outward

and known sins ; put yourself in the way of all religious influences, and I will venture to say, you cannot pursue this course a fortnight, a week, without finding a new and blessed life dawning within you."

I recollect one sermon that he preached in Boston, addressed to business men, those who *were* so engrossed and burdened with cares that they were tempted to feel that they could not give the time necessary to become Christians. The practical point for which he pleaded was, that they would come to a resolution to give half an hour a day to religious reading and prayer.

He plead with all his eloquence for this one thing. "You cannot give half an hour this week, without giving an hour the next ; your eternal life or death may turn on your granting or refusing this one thing."

The many business men who became members of his church, attest the practical value of this style of appeal. As he preached, he watched the faces of his hearers, and when he saw that one was moved, he followed him.

"A— B— has seemed to feel a good deal," he would say, "these several Sundays. I must go after him. Something seems to block his wheels."

Often he used to say to me, speaking of one and another with whom he had been talking, "I've been feeling round to find where the block is. I put my finger on this and that, and it don't move ; but sometimes the Lord helps me, and I touch the right thing, and all goes right."