



The Preacher's Adaptation to his Intellectual Environment.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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DELIVERED BY

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Any one who closely observes certain forms of vegetable and animal life will be struck with the great disparity between the number of seeds or young and the number which reach maturity. Single plants of many species will bear each year almost innumerable seeds yet so few mature that the number of that particular species in a given area remains about the same from year to year. The female of a very common fish, the shad, will, it is said, lay each year more than a million of eggs, and yet it is considered fortunate if at the next season two of that number survive. There are foes without number that threaten the life of the fish at every stage of its existence. The eggs are fed upon by other fish which gain a subsistence in this way or in a sudden freshet they are covered with mud or swept from their secure resting-place. After the remaining eggs are hatched and the young fish start on their journey to the sea, multitudes of larger fish stand ready to pounce upon them, and, at the end of their journey, their number is sadly diminished. When they have grown, man, knowing their disposition, in spite of distance or other obstacles, to return to their birth-place, prepares for their capture and net, spear and hook at each bend of the river await the luckless tribe. So by the time the year has rolled around and the fish has descended to the sea and returned, there remain on an average two and even less of all that countless host.

What happens in this case is repeated everywhere in nature. The strong devouring the weak, the small combining and achieving the mastery by superior numbers, the animal feeding upon the plant, and the plant waiting patiently its time when it in turn shall feed upon the animal;—thus in ten thousand ways and incessantly there wages what may be properly called the “Irrepressible Conflict.”

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One is inevitably led to ask, Is there no limit to this conflict? Does nature war to the death with herself? Is not the species in danger of becoming extinct? What surety have we that even the two shad will return to their birth-place? Will not this fierce struggle for life at each other's expense result in the gradual but final supremacy of the strongest and the extinction of the weaker, and will not these strongest ones, too, give way before the mightier powers of inanimate nature, until at last all life shall be extinguished and the world be but the vast grave-yard of the plants and animals which once peopled it?

Scientific observers have seen that there is another process going on in nature which limits and modifies the first, viz., that of protection from danger, of resistance to hostility. They have seen that unconsciously but beautifully the plant or animal has taken on a slightly different form or a new power to adjust itself to altered circumstances. In this way it is enabled under new conditions to find or make a suitable home for the perpetuation of its species, to stand the rigors of climate and soil, to defend its life or to hide from enemies, to obtain suitable nourishment and, in general, to secure itself in every way from extinction. This slight change of form or acquisition of power to suit changed circumstances is called, for brevity's sake, Adaptation to Environment. The seed of the peach taking on a hard, flinty covering to prevent being eaten by the smaller animals; the bright hues, or fragrance of the flower to attract the bees and through them distribute the pollen; the wings on the seed-pod of the sugar-maple that it may be wafted by the winds to some suitable spot for germination outside of the thick shade of the parent tree; the animals of arctic regions assuming a white coat to hide the better in the perpetual snow :—these and numberless others are familiar instances of this adaptation.

This power of change is possessed in different degrees by species and individuals, and the whole history of life on our globe shows conclusively that those who could take new shapes and

powers to suit the varying conditions of life survived and transmitted their new powers to their descendants, while those who could not thus adapt themselves went down in the struggle.

This fact or law is an interesting and important one and, while it is entirely inadequate to bear the great burden that our friends, the Evolutionists, impose upon it, does naturally and beautifully account for many of the phenomena of vegetable and animal life. And it holds good in other spheres than that of biology where the phrase "Adaptation to Environment" originated and whence our illustrations have been drawn. In every sphere of existence there is a struggle for supremacy between ideas, tastes, methods, beliefs, in every sphere there are hostile and varying natural surroundings which require strong vitality and great power of adaptation. In the intellectual and moral world, how few of all the hopes and beliefs, system and plans which have sprung from the brains and hearts of devoted men have remained unto this day! Many of them, it is true, did a work and when they sank to earth became the fruitful soil for other and better views, and so have not been lost, but very few have had continuous existence.

In the business world the methods which were considered safe and wise and even enterprising fifty years ago, would break any merchant on Main street to-day. New factors have entered and new conditions of success have arisen, and the merchant who, having been trained under the old *regime* has too little vital power or is too unbending in his nature, will fall before a force he can neither resist nor understand.

The same principle holds as to the preacher himself, his office and the message. The fact that his office has been divinely appointed and his message is not his own but God's does not lift him or it above that which conditions life elsewhere. So I have thought it might be useful to speak at some length of the Preacher's adaptation to his Environment.

Here we must reluctantly restrict ourselves to one phase of this adaptation. It would be useful to look at its importance in other

respects, e. g. in matters of taste. The sphere of taste is wide, extending all the way from literature to dress. Its authority is commanding, determining to a great extent social position and influence and regulating in many cases far more than morals, personal friendship and companionship. There can, then, be no more important question in pastoral work than how far and under what circumstances the preacher should conform to or resist or use the personal preferences of his people in things morally indifferent.

It surely is important, too, that the preacher should adapt himself to his surroundings in the treatment of questions of practical morality. There are many new problems in morals which our times have given us and which are not directly met by Scripture injunctions and besides these, there are old problems into which new elements have entered. Both of these require for their solution a thorough comprehension not only of the letter and spirit of God's word but also of the nature and setting of the sins themselves. For instance, as to that question of growing importance, the observance of the Sabbath, the preacher is not prepared to discuss the nature and extent of its obligations or to decide the numerous practical applications which arise until he has put himself not only at Sinai amid the simple life of the desert, but also, what is equally important, in these closing years of the nineteenth century, and understood the complicated and involved interests which are affected thereby. If he does the former and leaves the latter undone, he will fail to apply to its fullest extent Christ's own interpretation of the law of the Sabbath and will waste his strength in needless and fruitless hostility to his surroundings.

Or, as disastrous as gambling in futures undoubtedly is to the commercial and moral interests of our country, we shall not attack it successfully until we have seen the whole of which it is part. We must understand how the rapid development of a new country tends to unsettle values and to make it possible even in legitimate business to acquire or lose a fortune in a few weeks or months. We must know that the tendency of all business in such a commu-

nity is to assume an element of gaming, and how insensible are the gradations which lead from the fairest business transaction to the outrageous gambling as now practiced in the bucket shops of our cities. All these things a man must know or else he will not estimate the evil aright and will not understand in his preaching that this is a question to be settled not by hair-splitting casuistry, but by the broad Christian principles of honesty and love to man.

But, as interesting and important as this might be, we must pass on to the narrower subject, the preacher's adaptation to his *intellectual* environment. By intellectual environment I mean the tendencies of thought, the intellectual habits, the predominant ideas of his time—in a word all the intellectual influences which distinguish his time and country from other times and countries.

Before I proceed to consider the importance of the preacher's adapting his thought and preaching to these surroundings, let us clearly note and acknowledge the *limit to this adaptation*. He is not the mere exponent of his times, a voice expressing only the thought or perhaps the whims of his own little community or of the larger civilization of which he is part. No, as the messenger of God must not slavishly imitate or affect the tastes of his community, and, as in morals he must not be a chameleon, so in intellectual matters he must not be a mouth-piece for his time. In the first case, that is, in the realm of taste his self-respect will furnish the limit, in morals his own convictions, in the realm of thought his limit is the Bible. If he is to have any steadfast ground on which to build or fight, as occasion may require, if he is to have any sure criterion with which to test doctrines, new or old, if his word is to have any authority for his hearers more than the creature has over the creator, then he must recognize, as his final appeal in matters of doctrine and the certain and fixed limit to his adaptation, the natural and evident meaning of the Holy Scriptures. He may be useful in a number of ways, as lecturer, teacher or scientist, without recognizing this limit, but in so far as he transgresses this boundary, to that extent he forfeits his character as a Christian minister.

Not that he may not with propriety examine the foundations on which this authority rests. He may unite humble faith and the keenest criticism in his inquiry, the faith to give warmth and earnestness to process, and the criticism to eliminate that which is extraneous or superstitious. The inquiry may be as long and as searching as each one may require but let it be understood that it is all personal and provisional, and that when he comes before the people he dare not speak contrary to what the Bible, taken in all its fullness and exactness, speaks.

Nor does it matter what may be the grounds of his confidence in Scripture, provided it be satisfactory to his own mind. It may rest on the solid links of the *a priori* argument forged from man's need of a revelation and God's nature or it may be the inductive argument drawn from an examination of the book itself as displaying progress, originality, divine wisdom, unity amid diversity, and consistency amid apparent contradiction. Or he may argue from his own experience with the Book, since God therein has searched out his heart and revealed it unto himself and satisfied its wants. In any or all of these ways he may justify himself in setting the written Word as the limit beyond which he dare not go in adapting his thought and preaching to the demands of the time.

But let us insist on the other truth equally important, that within this limit there is possible a wide and varied adaptation. There is hardly a fundamental Christian truth which is not capable of variation, either as to the phase presented or as to the manner of presenting it. In the respect of universality of adaptation to real human wants the Bible must ever remain without a rival, and in this respect all statements of doctrine must remain imperfect.

Now I fully believe in the usefulness of creeds, and have no sympathy with those who wish to divorce religious sentiment from its necessary basis of fact, and no patience with that other class who, as one is tempted to believe, wish to make their belief vague and indeterminate in order to escape its consequences. But when

compared with the life and riches of Scripture, creeds are necessarily imperfect. At best they are approximations to truth, and no more exhaust the idea of Scripture than the anatomist's catalogue of the parts of the body exhausts the idea of a living being. Useful they certainly are, as furnishing an exact statement of our present comprehension of the Word, with special reference to prevailing errors, but this very fact which gives them their value at one era diminishes it at another.

Even the circumstances under which the Saviour and the Apostles spoke and wrote helped to free their words from the exactness and rigidity which is the necessary character of human creeds. I count it a fortunate and providential fact that Christ should have come to a creed-cursed community where the spirit and life of God's revelation to the Jews were over-grown by the artificialities of the Rabbis and that his most burning and eloquent words should have been directed against their pedantic refinements. For the growth of a creed, like all other growth, is from the simple to the complex: written creeds never simplify themselves. Inference and consequence must come in quick succession and the chain of argument when too long-drawn, however closely jointed, will lead to conclusions foreign to the principles from which it started. So the tendency will always be to a greater complexity which will hide if not stifle the original truth. Christ in his time with his living words cleared the air of these mists as by a lightning flash. In a truer and wider sense than the phrase is sometimes used by scientist and artists of these days he "returned to nature." And there are his words to-day reaching as they did then to the heart of things and leading true and daring souls everywhere under similar circumstances either to cast the creed away or else acknowledge its limitations.

He himself said of His words, "They are spirit and life;" and there are so many points of analogy between his preaching and life that one is tempted to say our Lord uses here no figure of speech but the literal truth. See how fresh and vivid it is after

eighteen centuries and how with all our description and explanation there remains a subtle vitality which we can see and feel but which defies analysis. See how it has given power and currency to creeds for a time and afterwards burst them off as the crab throws off the shell which is too narrow for its enlarging life. See too, the power of adaptation it has already displayed. In the plant the chief condition of adaptation to its new surroundings was strong vitality. If its life was vigorous enough it might more rapidly develop new powers or more easily hold on to existence as it slowly changed. The power of adaptation is a distinguishing feature of life. The stone cannot yield in its contact with obstacles great or small; it must crush them and retain its own rigid shape or be crushed and lose its identity. The plant can wind itself around an obstruction or find the point of least resistance and pierce it or gradually send down its rootlets till the solid obstacle is disintegrated and whatever is valuable in its constituent materials absorbed in its own growth and life. Let not the most independent and original mind fear losing independence when it accepts as its limit and corrective the living words of Christ and his Apostles, for within that limit there is the fullest freedom for everything that is normal and legitimate in human thought.

Having cleared the way by showing the possibility of a wide and varied adaptation to one's surroundings within the limit of the Bible, I propose to discuss briefly as possible the following points: The nature and necessity of such adaptation, the obstacles in the way, and some respects in which we may profitably adjust ourselves to our environment.

I. THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF THE PREACHER'S ADAPTATION TO HIS INTELLECTUAL ENVIRONMENT.

What does this adaptation mean? Clearly, much more than mere conformity. The plant that adjusted itself to a different climate yielded perhaps at one point, drew in its forces, as it were, only to make a stronger fight at another. It would be a far sim-

pler and less important thing and I should not waste your time in discussing it if the preacher's whole duty with reference to the thought of to-day consisted in yielding gracefully to the inevitable. Let us notice more particularly what is included in this adaptation on the part of the preacher.

1. It means *close intellectual sympathy* with his hearers. He cannot take the first step until he knows what thoughts they are thinking, what struggles they are having, what sentiments are expressed on the streets, in the newspaper and in the social circle. If in his effort to understand what is going on in the minds of his people and to see things as they see them he have to struggle for his own faith, the struggle will not be worthless either as regards his own character or as regards his helpfulness to others. I do not think it is necessary for the physician of souls to have all the moral and intellectual diseases of his congregation in order to treat them aright; I only insist that he must study patiently and lovingly each case as he finds it. For the preacher's power as a man, apart from the authority of his message and the Spirit's presence, is the power of sympathy. He is not a priest and exercises no exclusive priestly function. In the eyes of Protestants, and I may say, especially of Baptists, who make and unmake their preachers with no hindrance or help from without, his office does not give his words authority, and does not, in any sense, make him a mediator between God and man. His words will have the influence that their own weight carries, and that of the man who stands behind them. The completer man he is, the more he has the passions and powers of manhood, the wider experience he has had and the greater triumphs he has made, the the more complete will be his sympathy with all men and the more powerfully he will move them. How often have I heard the minister putting all the strength of his sermon on theological niceties which were considered important a generation ago, and not only neglecting the marrow of the Gospel, which is bad enough, but finding scarcely a point of sympathetic contact with

his audience. If the adaptation of the preacher to his surroundings meant no more than this closer sympathy, it would be amply worthy of our most strenuous efforts; but it means besides,

2. *A just appreciation of the good in modern thought.*

If, as is frequently said, evil is generally the exaggeration of that which is true, and if the vitality of error is found in the truth which it contains, then we should never be content with a wholesale denunciation of any form of error. Our whole duty consists not merely in hunting out its salient blunders and those which lend themselves easily to refutation or ridicule, but also in finding out the truth of which it is a distortion. But your work does not stop in finding the grain of truth in the chaff, for it would be a puerile outcome of all your efforts and a weak and lazy solution of life's problems, however satisfactory to some minds, to conclude that all beliefs have some good in them. You may safely make that assumption to begin with, and save yourself the trouble of study. But now turn to your Bibles and read them again with reference to this new truth. Do not read it into God's word, but see if it is not there. May be it is there in embryo, perhaps implicitly but clearly contained in a principle which was first meant to do a different work. See it there in its connection with other truth, as it is modified and limited by co-ordinate truths, in its true proportions, and when you go to the pulpit again incorporate that truth into your preaching.

And this is not dishonoring to God or to His word, to let modern thought be a key to some of its treasures. It is a beautiful illustration of the fulness of Scripture and of God's reign over the infidel thought of the times that we should be led by it into a completer knowledge of his revelation to us. It is a common and yet one of the pleasantest facts connected with the devout reading of the Bible that some passage which was dark or insignificant has taken on meaning and beauty under the light of some recent experience. And if the history of the individual becomes under God the interpreter of his word, so, for the same reason on

a much larger scale, should the whole march and trend of human thought. The Bible when it is dissociated from the interpreting power of Providence and individual experience becomes more and more unreal, artificial and unhuman and the same holds in the larger case. Modern thought needs to be guided by Scripture and, if we will believe it, Scripture needs to be vivified by modern thought. Neither will reach its highest usefulness without the other.

3. This adaptation means also a *knowledge of the best points of attack*. By best points of attack I mean those points where the very heart of the evil can be aimed at and where there is most chance of success, not necessarily those points which, as I said, lend themselves most easily to ridicule or off-hand refutation. For instance, it is quite a favorite method with some to attack the evolution theory through that which is but an incident in the whole hypothesis, the development of man from the monkey. All manner of funny things can be said on this point on a very slender basis of information, and the absurdity of a theory that contains a belief so unreasonable can be made very palpable, yet I doubt whether a Christian minister can make his best attack here.

The true and most successful method has already been more than hinted at. When you have eliminated the truth from the error and given it its true position in a completer system, you have struck a blow at a vital point; you have removed what is the reason and condition of its existence; and not till this is done will the error be successfully destroyed. We say and are right in saying that no mere attack however strong and just will ever destroy Christianity, that our opponents must substitute something that will do the work it is now doing before the victory will be complete. We must not forget that the converse holds true, that no amount of argument or ridicule can destroy an error as long as there is bound up with it a truth which has no place elsewhere, or as long as that error is an exaggeration of permanent wants of humanity not otherwise recognized. Recognize that truth, meet those wants and the error will fall of itself.

The Christian preacher has better opportunities for detecting and correcting the vagaries of modern thought than any other man of letters, if only he has a thorough knowledge of that with which he has to deal. For he has the central truths of the universe revealed to him, as he believes, by God as the fixed quantity in his calculations. You know the astronomer must have some fixed distance as his measuring-line before he can deal so confidently in numbers so large as to be bewildering to ordinary people. But give him the distance between two heavenly bodies and with this fixed line he walks forth into the universe, and the magnificent and complicated motions of all its parts are reduced to the simplicity and precision of mathematical formulae. So the preacher, knowing the two central facts in the moral universe, God and man, and their relations to each other, can with this fixed line correct the conclusions and guesses and half truths of himself and others. But something more is necessary for right measurement than mechanical skill. Often times the preacher must fuse both the revelation and the other truth in the fires of his own heart and brain before they can be measured one against the other.

From what has already been said you can see the necessity of the preacher's adapting himself to his intellectual environment. Without this no matter how strong a fight he makes he will sooner or later succumb, no matter what useful phases of the truth he represents they will not be perpetuated. He must not only have the truth but he must adjust it. The truth admits of this and he must see that he doesn't stand in the way or substitute a dead form for it. I suppose that in all history there can be found no instance of one who has made a deep or lasting impression on his race who did not add to his personal talents and character or to his supernatural power, a thorough insight into his times and use it in his work.

If any one says in reply that the times are all wrong, that they have nothing to teach us and that the only proper relation a minister can occupy towards them is one of hostility, I say to him

“You are guilty of one of the worst forms of unbelief. If one may make comparison between two things radically wrong, it is as bad for you to say that God is not speaking in the course of events, in the drift of a nation’s thought, as to say he does not speak to us in the Bible.” God pity the hopeless infidelity of the man who sees no Providence guiding the course of the centuries. He may in spite of logic retain his faith in revelation but it will be half-hearted and imperfect and his hold on it precarious.

There can be no stronger illustration of the interdependence of the teachings of revelation and providence than that seen in the manifestation of the Second Person of the Trinity in the flesh. In the counsels of Deity the plan had long stood complete, the purposes of grace were fully settled and yet heaven delayed and earth anxiously waited till the fulness of time came and providence and revelation conspired to carry out plan and purpose. The resources of heaven were there, supernatural power, transparent truth, the God-Man to bear the message, but, strong as these were, they needed for their fullest success the right understanding and use of the then religious and political condition of the world.

All these considerations are so evident and trite as to seem scarcely worth repeating on such an occasion as this. My only justification is that they are needed. Now I do not believe for a moment the charge made in certain quarters that the ministry is the most unprogressive of the professions. In the nature of the case the minister’s progress must be within the limits of revelation and the only fair comparison is between the preacher and the lawyer who is similarly limited by the common law of the country. But, if reference is made to acquaintance with the thought of our times, to say the least of it, the standard of general culture exhibited by the students of this Seminary would compare very favorably with that of the medical or law students drawn from the same section of country, while very many theological institutions of our own and other denominations make a collegiate course a prerequisite to admission. The explanation of the charge as far

as it is not the result of prejudice is that there is no other profession which touches men's thoughts at so many points and where so close a sympathy is demanded and a lack of it so clearly seen. But laying aside odious comparisons and speaking among ourselves we may confess we have much improvement to make in this direction. Look among the preachers of your acquaintance and you shall find men whose sermons are after the style of fifty years ago, who complain of the degenerate times and who do nothing but complain. They shun the "Isms" of to-day as they would sin and are content to remain in such ignorance of them that they are perforce constrained to resort to abusive adjectives. Their whole life and thought is in an artificial, theological world far different from the every-day world of untheological men. Why should this be so? The answer is found in our second point.

II. THE OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF THIS ADAPTATION.

These obstacles resolve themselves into two: first, the difficulty, secondly, the danger.

1. As to the first it must be said that adaptation in the sense I have explained requires difficult and arduous labor. Laziness is a factor to be taken into account always in dealing with men and the preacher furnishes no exception to this statement. If one lacks energy there is no profession where he can shirk labor more easily than in the ministry, although there is none where there is more incentive to work. But often the preacher has better reason for his failure to keep up with current thought than laziness. It is perfectly safe to say that he has more work now in his profession than ever before. Working at high pressure seems to be as necessary in our churches as in business and in some respects he is a real loser on that account. He is not an evangelist now going from place to place and making one set of sermons do him from year to year. He is a settled pastor with from one to three sermons a week to prepare and those sermons must contain fresh thought and make up in variety and originality of treatment for

the sameness of subject so displeasing to present tastes. He has to satisfy an ever-growing and sometimes unreasonable demand for pastoral work. His position in society and in his denomination imposes many duties. He has numerous helps in the way of commentaries and other pastoral machinery, it is true, but, while they do more or less service, in the end they multiply his duties. What time can be spared from the actual preparation of sermons he naturally feels must be given to the study of the Bible, because this is his distinctive work and because it affects more directly his preaching and the thorough and extensive study which aims at so intangible a result as intellectual sympathy with his times is apt to be neglected. I say thorough and extensive study for while he can gather without effort from the newspaper and conversation what and how men are thinking yet for tracing tendencies to their ultimate roots and for a deliberate and thorough rather than a superficial adaptation, extensive reading and deep thought are absolutely necessary.

And this difficulty common to all is, if I may be allowed to say it, intensified in the case of old or mature men. One of the oft-repeated struggles of history is the struggle between old and young men and as far as one can see it will continue as long as there is progress. As has been well said, speaking generally, old men will be conservative and unprogressive, while young men will be radical and irreverent toward the old, and out of the strife between these two tendencies progress is made without revolution or anarchy. The young are needed to lay hold of new ideas and make them fruitful; the old to oppose the new until its errors and crudities are eliminated and till the world is ready for its reception. What I have been striving for to-night is to hasten the time when the terms old and young can no more be used to represent these tendencies, when old men shall be susceptible to new ideas and young men shall be cautious and reverent, when each shall unite in himself both dispositions as mutually helpful and corrective.

Now as to the close sympathy with and adaptation to the times

it is easy to see that while the danger of such a course lies on the side of the young the difficulty exists specially with the old. Experience will harden into rule and rote, unless broken up with other and new ideas. The natural love of completeness will mould biblical and all other truths into a system and that system soon becomes rigid and will not easily accomodate itself to foreign and sometimes arrogant novelties. It seems so like throwing away the results of experience and it is not strange that men should content themselves with the old and ignore or oppose the new rather than undergo the labor to assimilate the two.

2. A second and greater obstacle to this adaptation is the *danger*. There is the general danger common to all attempts to unite wide and varied culture with narrow professional duties, viz., the danger of losing enthusiasm for one's special work, of dissipating one's energies by dabbling in many things. The preacher must guard himself lest he become as fond of botany or astronomy as of sermonizing, lest he talk with more zest about science and art than about personal religion. The protection against this danger is the same in all cases. He must subordinate his wide culture to his special work. So when I say he should know and sympathize with the movements in physical science, I do not mean that he shall become a scientist or that, except in peculiar cases, he shall undertake to do their work. His study of these subjects may be and in general ought to be study at second hand and study for the special purpose of influencing his thought and preaching. He should study it to find his illustrations, to realize in the extent and variety and design in nature attributes of God which were only words to him before, to interpret his revelation and to correct the evil tendencies of science itself. So he shall find his wide study not making him a jack-at-all-trades but really broadening his own special work and intensifying his interest in it.

Besides this there is very much which is absolutely dangerous and at the same time attractive in modern thought. On one side there is the doctrine of development which undertakes to account

for all the phenomena of the physical and mental world by the simple working out of the inherent powers of matter and which therefore dispenses with the supernatural. On another there is the worldliness which believes and preaches that the physical universe when you enlarge it on both sides by the telescope and microscope is sufficient to satisfy every proper desire of the human soul. On still another side there is a growing antagonism to authority which spurns not only all revelation but even the limits of human thought. On every side the preacher, at each step he takes outside of his own theological grounds, will find much that is hostile to his character and work. And he who studies these phases of thought sympathetically with a genuine desire to profit by whatever good they contain will be in danger of being swept away by them. Yet to a brave Christian man danger is a reason for caution and not for cowardice and inaction. He believes that the Bible is the word of God and he believes that all true science is equally the unfolding of God's wisdom and truth, but still he finds their respective followers engaged in mutually destructive warfare. How strong is the appeal to every noble soul to rush in between the contending parties and cry "Ye be brethren, why do ye strive with one another." Yet let him remember how many have fallen in a similar undertaking and realize his own weakness and be sure of the honesty and unselfishness of his motives.

Such work of mediation is certainly dangerous, but is there not a corresponding personal advantage? An opportunity is here furnished for spiritual discipline. What poise of character is necessary for one to unite in himself two things so unlike if not so contradictory as simple faith and the rigorous inquiring spirit of the scientist! How distinct and vivid must be his religious experience, if he is not to be confounded by the clash of opinions! How strong and living will be the faith which has stood such tests! Already, if I mistake not, we are coming more and more to see the full significance of faith as the foundation of the Christian life, that it is not a matter of arguments, of balancing of

syllogisms or probabilities, but an act which is the outcome of one's whole nature and character. One may justify his faith to others or to himself in his critical moments by reasoning, but faith did not have its rise there and does not derive its daily and habitual life therefrom. And it may be that this elevation of faith as the flowering of one's whole nature and this poise of character required by the conflicts of to-day are steps on the way by which God is leading man up to the fullness of his own image.

Will you bear with me now while I discuss briefly

III. SOME RESPECTS IN WHICH THE PREACHER MAY PROFITABLY MAKE THIS ADAPTATION.

Here I shall be compelled for lack of time to hint at rather than fully express my thoughts.

1. We should give a *wider range to the working of law* in the *religious* and *moral* world. There is no doubt that modern science has taught us much in the way of extending the sway of law. It has revealed the hidden bond which united the most dissimilar phenomena, it has reduced to harmony and order events the most inconsistent and capricious. It has shown that the shaping of a feather and the swinging of a world are the work of the same law. Yet partly because some have pushed the working of laws so far as to deny the miraculous and have thereby frightened off the believer and partly because of the greater difficulty in determining the more subtle spiritual laws, very little work of this kind has been done in religious phenomena. There are men who will admit to the fullest extent that fickle winds and unstable clouds and restless waves are legitimate subjects of investigation but who deny that in a religion in which the supernatural plays so important a part laws can be formulated. But does the presence of the supernatural exclude the natural? Rain is sometimes sent in answer to prayer but that fact does not destroy the science of meteorology or render the Signal Service Bureau superfluous. A man is born again by the power of the Spirit which,

like the wind, bloweth where it listeth and yet that should not hinder us from noting all the phenomena of his conversion and religious life and educing the laws which control them.

Let us be willing and anxious to ascertain all the laws and by them explain all the phenomena of the religious world as far as they admit of it. Let us acknowledge that the laws which control religious growth and development are special applications of those which control mind and character elsewhere. Let us understand that when Christ put repentance and faith as the condition of moral improvement he was only giving wider scope and higher direction to principles that hold everywhere, and that in the nature of things one must be dissatisfied with himself and yet have confidence for the future before he can reform. Let us insist in our preaching that the rewards and punishments set forth in the Bible are not arbitrary and isolated facts but are only expression of the essential nature of good and evil.

Unless I am mistaken, very much needs to be done in this direction. There may come a time, for instance, when the wise preacher must not only pray for a revival but understand the laws which control revivals. He may have to know what are the outward conditions which affect religious awakenings, what relation they bear to beneficence in the church, to the commercial prosperity of the country or to local or general disasters. A series of statistical tables might be prepared which should set forth these and similar facts, and I see no reason why they should not be as useful to the preacher of the gospel as statistics are to the political economist.

Or, as to religious experience, while we acknowledge that there are many types, we have never taken pains to ascertain what peculiarities of temperament, what degree of culture or what cast of mind corresponds to each of these types. Yet how useful such work would be as a clearer recognition of the manifoldness of christian life and in putting a stop to well-meant but fruitless efforts to conform it to one type and in removing doubt and anxiety from

many hearts. Let us look, for instance, at the difference in the religious experiences of to-day and those of fifty years ago or those which prevail now in remote rural districts. The most casual observer can see that there is no longer that intensity of experience which used to mark conversions. Contrition for sin so deep and dark and raptures of faith so ineffable we almost never see. Some complain of this change, call these the days of lax convictions, of milk-and-water religion, and are unwilling to acknowledge the somewhat deliberate and calm experience of to-day as a genuine phase of Christian life. Yet I dare to say that the Christians of these times will satisfy as many biblical tests as those of any age since the apostles. If the church member is not the man to burn at the stake, it is because there are no stakes awaiting him. The opposition has changed its shape and no longer resorts to fire and sword and abuse, but rather to the calm deliberation of the intellectual arena. Living in tents, drilling and planning campaigns are all important in times of open war, but, when the enemy have withdrawn, then we can best protect the interests of our country by passing good laws, encouraging thrift and industry and thus preventing our commerce and national wealth from being absorbed by them. The language and habits of peace are far different from those of war and less intense and enthusiastic, but who shall say that they are any the less the expression of love or patriotism. This explanation of the difference in religious experience is doubtless inadequate but my object is to show that a full explanation can be found and found alone in a knowledge of mental and spiritual laws.

But is there not danger lest in our pursuit of law we ignore or deny that which is above law or miraculous? Most assuredly, but this disposition which I have been advocating, if kept within proper bounds, will intensify by way of contrast the force and significance of the supernatural. If every phenomenon was miraculous in the sense of being opposed to or superior to law, then miracles would lose their significance and there would be no power

in them to attest a revelation. But let a man see how universal law is, how it rules in heart and intellect as well as in matter, and he will the better understand and appreciate what God did when he directly intervened in the moral world and how great the purpose which led him to speak face to face with man. The element of the miraculous may be less than we thought before, but I take it no child of God can fairly interpret the written Word or his own experience so as to rid them of the supernatural, and this which is left will have the more power. Huxley represents life as a game of chess which man plays with an invisible opponent, Nature. She has no special desire to win but she pardons no mistake and knows no relenting. The rules of the game are the laws of nature and the consequences of defeat are visited without feeling and inexorably upon him who makes the wrong play. No matter what may be the excuse for the mistake, no matter how deep and sincere his contrition, Nature knows no anger and no pity. Ever since I first read his words and understood their fearful meaning and saw how truly they represented many of the facts of the physical and moral world, I have realized the preciousness of the Christian's God who "like as a father pitieth his children, pitieth those who fear him" and have had a firmer grasp on His personality and fatherhood, and his wonderful self-manifestation in our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. A further respect in which we may profitably adjust ourselves to our surroundings is in forming a *juster estimate of secular knowledge*. It is not strange that the apostles should have expressed by the strongest metaphors the antagonism between the church and worldly knowledge for the church represented new ideas and those hostile to reigning systems of thought. And there surely has been enough during the intervening centuries to strengthen the conviction on the part of devout men that secular knowledge, i. e. knowledge devoted to strictly secular ends, is dangerous and worthless. It may be well to try to understand the true relations between the gospel and such knowledge. Free-mantle, in his Gospel of the Secular Life, has given a formal

statement to what appears more or less clearly in a great deal of the current religious thought. He makes Christianity a sentiment or a principle which attaches to all the acts of our common life and sweetens and elevates them. There can be, he says substantially, no antagonism between it and any form of science or art, for it is a mere accompaniment of these and never sets up for itself. Christianity is love of truth in science, honesty in business, charity and justice in social relations.

This may be accepted as fairly descriptive of one side of our religion but is entirely inadequate as a definition. The religion of Christ has a peculiar and well defined work. It is to redeem men from sin, to restore God's image, to fit him to dwell with God—in a word, to save man. This is its distinctive work and as it claims to be the absolute religion its ministers do right when they look with suspicion upon all unchristian attempts to do the same work. But there are other and indirect effects of the gospel which are also aimed at by other forms of thought and effort, such as science, culture and art. Christ taught men the love of truth as the condition of knowledge and intellectual freedom; scientific habits impress the same lesson. He taught that all men were brethren and would find their highest good by treating each other thus; political economy as understood by its best representatives seeks to teach the same lesson from a different stand-point. Christ says that man's life consists not in meat and drink nor in the abundance of one's possessions and art says the same thing when it cultivates the love of the beautiful and elevates the mind by constant contact with it everywhere in nature. Education naturally sprang from the bosom of religion and was carried on by the clergy on purely religious grounds; the State is influenced by far different motives and yet both arrive at the same ends.

Now I am sure in most of these cases the religious ground is the higher and better, but shall the minister grow jealous when he sees other influences doing the work which religion once did exclusively? Shall he not gladly welcome any power as an ally which fulfills

however unconsciously the will of the Master? Christianity can afford to do this for she is not thereby yielding contested points. These influences for good, if they have not sprung directly from her bosom, at least have been fostered and nourished under her care. As well might the mother become jealous of the child she bore as Christianity of science and art and literature. In her distinctive work she will always remain without a rival and over these children of hers she can always exercise a parental influence. Science will need to be taught humility and reverence, art must have Christian ideals to keep from becoming sensual and too realistic and all culture must take its proper second place in view of man's eternal destiny.

Perhaps I can better explain what I understand to be the proper relations between the gospel and secular knowledge by an illustration. Drunkenness is both a sin and a disease. Each case of intoxication has its physical antecedents and results just as truly as its moral. The minister of the gospel brings to bear upon the victim of the habit moral motives, tries to break off his chains by influencing the will through the considerations of religion. The physician treats alcoholism as a disease, finds that there is a certain condition of nerves and blood corresponding to this intense craving for drink and that this craving can be inherited. He treats it as any other disease, strives to restore the normal condition of the system, advises the patient to avoid excitement, begins early in the life of the child to fortify him physically against the inherited propensity and searches through the *Materia Medica* for a partial or complete antidote to the poison. Here is the same fact looked at from the gospel stand-point and the secular stand-point. Ought there to be conflict between the two? Is not the physician who from fear of failure to magnify his own calling will not use moral motives in his treatment of drunkenness, recreant to his duty? Is not the preacher equally foolish and blameworthy who will not use along with his message of warning and love physical remedies for fear of dishonoring the gospel? Let the physician take along

his Testament and let the preacher get all the help he can from the physician. If ever there should be found in the animal, vegetable or mineral world an infallible antidote for drunkenness, which I very much doubt, I shall hail it with gladness and have no fear of the gospel's losing its influence because it has no more work to do.

I count it fortunate that there are other stand-points worthy of being occupied besides the theological. Christianity looked at not as a system complete from the hands of God, but as wrought out in human lives needs criticism and opposition. Any truth however fundamental and valuable tends in the hands of men to become one-sided, to run to seed as it were unless limited by other truth. The danger to the gospel lies not in outward opposition but in a self-satisfaction and narrowness which comes from having no rival and no critic.

Besides, secular knowledge has given a fullness and diversity to human life which it would not otherwise have had. New tastes, new employments and new ambitions have arisen and made life in the nineteenth century a much broader thing than ever before. A human soul is not worth more now than in the time of Christ but a human life is immensely more valuable. It has greater powers and purposes, greater possibilities of usefulness and pleasures—a more worthy sacrifice when laid upon the altar of God. This broader and more diversified life the gospel of Christ now, as then is called upon to redeem and glorify. A simple but beautiful strain was the music of the Christian life of the apostolic times, all the more beautiful because it was the only melody to be distinguished in the discord of that day. As the centuries have rolled by, other voices have been added one by one, each with a certain beauty of its own but when taken with the others sometimes harmonizing and sometimes breaking into fierce discord. But more and more these voices are learning to sing together and by and by there shall be perfect harmony and as one shall listen to the swelling chorus he shall hear with infinite variations and sur-

passing grandeur the words and air first sung nineteen hundred years ago "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and good will."

3. But our adaptation to our times will not be complete until we have *supplied their need*.

The chief evil of present scientific thought is its low and unworthy view of human life and destiny and its chief need to correct this pessimism is the preaching of truths of the gospel which take a high and hopeful view of humanity. Some daring and presumptuous scientists have not scrupled to lay violent hands on the holiest belief. They find no place in their endless chain of cause and effect for God or, if they cling to old phraseology, God means only matter and force to them. Right and good as applied to actions are terms they would abolish or use them to describe those actions which minister to individual happiness or to the preservation of the species. Conscience is no longer the voice of God revealing eternal distinction but only an inherited bias against or for certain classes of acts. Thus they have destroyed until, as it seems to them and possibly to others, they stand amid the wreck of superstitions.

But with all their real or fancied victories are they happy? No, not even now when the excitement of battle is upon them. Sometimes they grow smiling and enthusiastic as they give the final blows to what they are pleased to call a Semitic tradition but how will it be when they set up for themselves, when they begin to give a better reason for their existence than that of opposition to reigning errors? Can the universe have any real or lasting significance without a centre? Can human life retain its value without individual duty and can human character and virtue have any real existence without immortality?

In marked contrast with this Pessimism stands the Bible and especially the gospel of Christ. Crude and unmetaphysical as the writers may seem to us they were always true to the moral purpose of the universe. There was no blank and bald despair in the

presence of the problems of life. Even that most dreadful doctrine that sin may grow in depravity and punishment throughout eternity is infinitely better than to blot out the distinction between sin and right-doing or else to translate it into materialistic phrase. Without that distinction all effort becomes vain and all virtue temporary and that which seems most lovely to our purest and strongest aspirations becomes when probed to the heart as worthless and frivolous as any.

There never was more need of the good news than now and never, as I believe, greater chance for its success, if preached aright. Men cannot satisfy their minds with atheism or feed their souls on the husks of worldliness or adopt the lazy alternative of agnosticism. Let the preacher proclaim with all the fervor of his soul the fatherhood of God, Providence working in and through natural laws, personal accountability and eternal life through Christ. Let him not arouse prejudice by petty attacks or by a narrowness which neither knows nor regards the doubts and difficulties of these times. Let him not betray weakness or lack of confidence by going out of the way to conciliate others by concessions. Let his sermon bear witness that he is living in the wider atmosphere of this time but let him not be pedantic in his allusions to prevalent forms of unbelief or imagine it necessary for him to preach directly against them. His work must be chiefly positive adapting truth to present wants and eliminating error. The truth, thus spoken in the fear of the Lord and with firm reliance upon him for help and acted out in the life of preacher and layman will be as much "good news" to the agnostic or Infidel of to-day as it was to the effete religions which the apostles had to meet.

A word or two in conclusion. You must have felt while I have been speaking that I was urging you to attempt what was difficult if not impossible. I have urged a wide and thorough adaptation to the thought of our times and yet one within the limits of the Bible. The preacher, I have said, must be in full sympathy with the varying wants and difficulties of his people and yet his

own faith must remain unshaken. He must acknowledge the truth even when combined with error, yet he must not forget the absolute character of God's revelation. He ought to strive to find whenever possible the natural in religion and revelation, yet he must not eliminate or explain away the miraculous foundation on which the Gospel rests. He ought to welcome as allies all phases of secular thought which advance the permanent interests of man, yet he must not yield his authority to correct or denounce them in the name of his God. In every way he must unite in himself different and conflicting tendencies. And it seems to me that this is the necessary position of the true preacher as long as he is the bearer of the unchangeable truth of an infinite God to a changing and progressing world. But let him not despair at the difficulty of his task. Professional pride, his own improvement, the importance of his work and above all a sense of personal obligation to him whose gospel he bears, should nerve him for the effort.

And I trust it will not be considered presumptuous if I say that attendance at this Seminary will help you in your two-fold work. Here in the center of a busy city you may encounter in one shape or another all the influences which distinguish the life and thought of this day and country. And here in the lecture-rooms, by the traditions of the institution, by the power that lies back of it in the million or more white Baptists of the South who have not lost their love for the old-fashioned gospel and by the personal influence of the men whose hearts and minds have given it existence and character, you will be led to a firmer and more intelligent grasp upon the Word of God. I pray Him that you may use both these opportunities to the fullest and that His richest blessing may rest upon us all in our work for the coming session.