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ART. I.—THE ELEMENT OF PERSONAL TESTIMONY
IN THE PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD.

A PAPER READ AT A MEETING OF THE IRISH CHURCH CLERICAL
SOCIETY, AT DUBLIN, APRIL 5, 1894, BY THE REV.
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APPROACHING this important and sacred theme, I ask to distribute the offered remarks upon it somewhat thus: First, we will recall a few cautions on the threshold; then we will affirm to ourselves in a positive way the just and sacred place in our preaching due to the element of testimony; and we will close with a few words about the right method and manner of such testimony.

1. In two main directions we find occasion for some preliminary caution and reserve when the word "testimony" is uttered. The one relates to the nature of the Gospel, the other to the personal attitude of the witness. It belongs to the unique glory of the Gospel that it is a revelation indissolubly rooted into facts; into a Person who is supremely matter-of-fact; into the sufferings and doings of this Person, all matters of fact. "I delivered unto you first of all, that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again, according to the Scriptures." "He preached unto them Jesus, and the Resurrection." "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." "Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead."

This adamantine objectivity of the Gospel is to be recollected always. The grasp of the Christian's hand, the grapple of his foot, is to be always upon this Rock. We go to our preaching not to pursue a reverie, not to exhibit a speculation, but to present a fact, eternal from one side, historical from another; to re-affirm its certainty, altogether independent of our im-

pressions; to restate its significance, not as we have conjectured it or divined it, but as its original and historically ascertained expounders, authorized by their Master, have set it forth.

This anchorage upon supreme and immovable facts—facts of a Person—secures at once the absolute fixity and the boundless adaptability of the Gospel. It bids us rest at a sure centre, remembering on every occasion that “what we do not know can never destroy what we do know.” And it allows us to watch with unanxious wonder and hope the vast motion of the circumference, as the message of Christ is brought to bear on every human need, through all times and places; for that motion is secured and governed from a centre which is not the wisdom of man, but the power and the action of God.

So the messenger of the Gospel must never forget, in his longing to witness to its reality to *himself*, its reality in *itself*. If he would speak aright, he must continually remind his brethren that the facts of salvation stand *per se* outside him, and outside them; that the oracle of peace and life is not an echo of the pilgrim’s voice from the hills of the wilderness, but a voice, articulate and personal, from heaven; that he preaches not himself, even in his own best and noblest experience, but Christ Jesus the Lord. Let every witness be a liar; GOD is true!

Then we recall an obvious caution related to the personal attitude of the preacher. For his own soul’s sake, and for his brethren’s too, as they may be affected by him, he is to take care *how* he witnesses, not only because the Gospel is objective, but because he is a sinner. A subtle risk undoubtedly attends the work of spiritual testimony. Those of us who have experience of some noble characteristic Christian efforts of our time, evangelistic and for edification, know that what is called a testimony-meeting is sometimes a very anxious hour, and needs, for its wholesome working, stringent precautions. Not seldom voices then speak which would be the better for a little discipline of silence, while voices are silent which, if (but for three minutes) reserve could be forgotten for Christ’s sake, would probably say just what would glorify Him and not advertise the witness. And the risk of such occasions has its possible place in the pulpit also. For some men, though perhaps not at all for most men, yet for some, there lies an almost impalpable but serious temptation in the thought of saying in public what the Lord is to themselves; a temptation to set themselves to the front, to accentuate the depth of their own insight, the acuteness of their own repentance, the simplicity of their own faith, the persistency of their own prayers, the completeness of their own victories. “Take heed unto thyself.” “Search me, O God.” Better a reverent silence

than such utterance. "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

2. I have thus indicated some obvious matters for caution in the use and handling of personal testimony in the preaching of the Word. May I now, with the more emphasis and confidence, affirm the just and sacred place which personal testimony assuredly should hold in our preaching, if that preaching is to concur in character with its subject-matter, and to be true to Apostolic models?

Need I at any length remind my brethren of the impressive degree to which personal testimony, quite definite and explicit, enters into Apostolic teaching, above all into that of St. Paul? If it be true, as a great preacher has said, that one inmost characteristic of a true sermon is that it is a deliverance of truth through personality, we may abundantly illustrate the dictum from those great written discourses, the Epistles, and from some of the originally unwritten discourses reported in the Acts, such as St. Paul's address at Miletus, that at the temple-stairs, and that spoken before Agrippa. "I count not my life dear to myself, so that I may accomplish the ministry I received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." "I was zealous before God, as ye all are this day; and I persecuted this way unto the death: there shone from heaven a light around me, and I heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul;" "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision; having obtained help from God, I continue unto this day, testifying that Christ must suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead;" "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ;" "By the grace of God I am what I am;" "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who comforteth us, that we may be able to comfort; our comfort aboundeth through Christ;" "God hath shined in our hearts;" "We bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body;" "We believe, and therefore speak;" "He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong;" "He revealed His Son in me, that I might preach Him;" "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me;" "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain;" "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ;" "That I may know Him;" "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into His ministry, who was before injurious;" "Of sinners I am chief; howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Christ Jesus might show forth His all-longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should

hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting;" "I know Him whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him, against that day."

As St. Paul, so St. Peter and St. John, less persistently and abundantly, but as naturally, "put themselves in evidence" for their Lord: "I am a witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed;" "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

May we with reverence cite, not the servants only, but their Master also, in proof of the essential fitness of personal testimony in the preacher's work? Is not the indication of His own most sacred personal experience no small element in the Lord's own teaching of eternal truth to man? "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." "He that hath sent Me is with Me; the Father hath not left Me alone." But I dare not press this beyond the most guarded limit; for He, unlike the very greatest of His servants, was essentially and necessarily His own message, His own Gospel. Let it be amply enough for us to remember, as we have done, how abundantly His servants, preaching and teaching His Word, pour into their affirmations and expositions this vivid element of personality, and, for His sake, say to us what to themselves the Gospel was.

And this is not an accidental tendency or characteristic; surely it is of the essence of the thing—of the essence of the message and its delivery. We remembered deliberately at the outset the immovable objectivity of the Gospel, and the consequent grave mistake of beclouding in our preaching its character as external historic fact; but we remember also that the fact was, and is, for the sake of the inmost life of the human spirit. Its absolute independence in itself of our meditations, of our imaginations, of our emotions, of those "frames and feelings" with which religious language is familiar—what is the significance of this to us? Surely this—that only by that which is in no sense of ourselves can ourselves be saved, transfigured, glorified. And this effect upon us it can have only by entrance into us, as we welcome to the heart, to the soul, to our whole being of thought and will, the Lord Christ Jesus in His Work, His Word, Himself. Nothing less than such a welcome and such an entrance satisfies the Scriptural account of the Gospel and its operation. With all else that is to be said about the scope and function of the Gospel (and that is vastly much indeed), *this* can be omitted only with a fatal loss to the whole—this personal contact, in man's inmost region, with the

eternal facts and forces of the revealed salvation. Nothing else, however great and true, in Christianity can be the substitute for this. The purest and most far-sighted programme of organization cannot take the place of this sacred individualism, deep as the relationship is, in a true view of things, between the individual spiritual life and that of the community. The most venerable and most splendid externals of religion are without this only a rich casket robbed of its inestimable jewel, or, if I may borrow an illustration from Irish literary antiquities, only a beautiful "shrine" from which the precious manuscript has been lost. The true Creed itself, so far from being a palladium, is but a formidable warning, a penetrating rebuke, if it is not the counterpart in its confessor to a true life, lived by faith in the Son of God.

Such is the message of Christ, that its own nature contradicts the idea of a messenger or expounder of it who is not also a witness. There are subjects innumerable of human thought on which it is quite legitimate to think and to discourse altogether, practically, from outside. But he who, being a commissioned servant of the Gospel, thinks of it and discourses of it merely *ab extra*, or even allows himself to seem to do so, cannot possibly do so and be in harmony with his theme; he cannot so do even mental justice to his theme. His action is a reproof to his position. And how, on such a subject, can he hope to reach the inmost life of other men?

3. Briefly, in closing, we are to think awhile about the right way and manner of personal testimony in preaching the Word of God. Here, if anywhere, let me speak with humility and diffidence; who can dare, in a matter of this moral and spiritual delicacy, to lay down crude rules, even had he an experience and an insight the greatest that has ever been?

Yet one rule must be recited which has no crudity in it, and no doubtfulness. It is the law of spiritual reality. He who in the pulpit would set to his seal that God is true must indeed, out of the pulpit as well as in it, "*know* the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent." A testimony which has not a walk with God behind it is an awful fallacy. An expression of personal peace and gladness in believing to which the chamber, the home, the heart give no real counterpart is the clatter of the sounding brass and the tinkle of the cymbal. A fatal facility for a testifying language which is only secondhand, or only caught by a superficial contagion, is a malady to be prayed against with all the heart. The witness *must* be the man who has seen, the man who personally knows.

Yet therefore (may I so far retrace our steps as to say this?)—therefore let us not put away the longing to witness per-

sonally to our Master because we dread the doing it amiss. That is to fold the napkin and to inter the gold. Let us rather, for His sake, so seek to deepen our inward converse with Him, so make reverent use every day for ourselves of our wealth in Him, that we cannot help the outcome of some loving witness, which will be delivered then so far aright that it will be indeed not to ourselves but Him. As pastors we cannot wholly divest even our most secret spiritual hours of a relation to the flock. The man conversing with Christ in his silent study, in his quiet garden, nay, in the solitude of the crowded streets, cannot gather up a deepening intimacy with Him, with "the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, and conformity to His death," in a daily surrender to the Cross, to the Crucified, without accumulating material for the truest personal witness to the eternal verity.

How shall that witness come out? Ah, there is a question which can only be answered by each true man in Christ for himself. And in the vast majority of cases the answer will be the *solvitur ambulando*; it will come as a holy instinct seizes occasion. Now and then, perhaps in most ministries, there will come hours when it will be nobly fit and natural for the man to pause, and to offer deliberately to his audience, simple or cultured, a quiet statement of his Master's past dealings with himself, in conviction, in manifestation, in peace, in power. If, being given aright, such utterance costs the man very dear, so much the better; it will be the less likely that he will deviate into a publication of himself.

But doubtless the occasion for witness will come far oftener in more passing and seemingly casual ways. A sentence here, half a sentence there, can often make all the difference between the mere discourse and the testimony to Christ. No argument will need to be dislocated, or even deferred. No true law of even literary fitness will need to be neglected. No faintest shadow of anything alien to the holy decorum of the Gospel shall fall on the words. Yet it shall be plain that the message comes not only from the Divine Word, but through the speaker's soul. It shall be plain that when he talks of sin, and grace, and righteousness; of new birth and new life; of propitiation, of justification; of holiness through the Spirit's power, making Christ the Inhabitant of the heart; of the peace of God in real life; of conversation with the Eternal Friend, he knows what he is talking about—he has a right to say, "*Come and see.*" To him (his brethren will be sure to find it out, soon or late) Christ is not only a topic, but the Lord; the Gospel is not only a study, but an immense reality.

Personal testimony—may we all have the holy privilege, as

our Master's messengers, of bearing it in our ministrations in this needful world! His last word to His Church assembled in her representatives was, "Ye shall be witnesses of Me." And time only intensifies the need and power of obedience to that royal order. How, in our preaching, under the blessing of the Holy Spirit, shall we best find out the soul, and win it for our beloved Lord, and build it up in Him? On the one hand, by an unwearied affirmation, thoughtful, loving, confident, of the eternal facts; on the other, by such a presentation of them as shall let all men see that they are *facts to us*.

ART. II.—FRA PAOLO SARPI.

THE Rev. Alexander Robertson has received a letter of thanks from the King of Italy, through the governor of the Royal Household, for his "Life of Paolo Sarpi," and he has also been honoured with the degree of Doctor bestowed upon him in Scotland for his literary labours. These acts of grace and courtesy are a strong testimony to the value of the work before us,¹ while the first witnesses also to the liberality of the Italian Court. It was high time that Sarpi's Life should be issued in a trustworthy form, drawn from original sources which have been too much overlooked. Sarpi had the honour of being regarded as a dangerous antagonist by that section of the Roman Church which, while it is specially represented by the Jesuits, is far from confined to the members of that society. Consequently his character has been blackened by a free use of the calumny which is regarded in some quarters as justifiable if a good end is to be obtained by its employment. Few men know that in the great Venetian antagonist of the Papacy is to be found the first mathematician, the first metaphysician, the first anatomist, as well as the first statesman and the most learned Churchman of his generation. In 1623 a statue was ordered by his country to be erected to his memory, but it was not till 1892 that it was erected. So long did the persistent enmity of his opponents prevent his merits from being publicly acknowledged. Two years ago this reproach to Venetian slackness was swept away, and Dr. Robertson's story serves as a good pendant to the memorial.

Dr. Robertson divides Sarpi's Life into sections, which

¹ "Fra Paolo Sarpi, the Greatest of the Venetians," by the Rev. Alexander Robertson, author of "Count Campello and Catholic Reform in Italy" (London: Sampson Low and Co., 1894, pp. 196).