

Discussion of Politics in Pulpits

Readable Comment on Rabbi Abbey's Arraignment of Doctor Stephen S. Wise

By Dr. C. H. Chapman, Formerly President of the University of Oregon. I AM a faithful and, for the most part, edited, reader of The Oregonian's reports of sermons; upon one of which in a recent issue, after much prayer, I have ventured to set down some comments. It is the sermon in which, according to the headline, Rabbi Abbey "severely arraigned" Dr. Wise. What I have to say is based upon the report alone; I did not hear the sermon, but it is fair to assume that the report is correct, since no errors have been pointed out by Rabbi Abbey. The reporter, as well as the headline writer, calls attention to the intent of the minister, for he says that "Rabbi Abbey meant Dr. Wise" in his highly-polished and admirably grammatical strictures; and, indeed, he could have meant no other, for I take it, no Portland clergyman has of late more conspicuously transgressed by preaching politics than Dr. Wise, whose "Reign of Lawlessness" and "Political Corruption" I have read.

Far be it from me to say anything in behalf of such an offender, whose own armory is not unburied; it is with Rabbi Abbey's reported remarks upon the province of the pulpit that I wish to dwell. I have read them with unpeppering profit, but also with questioning; and, to take my spiritual difficulties in the order they came up, let me cite first the one occasioned by Rabbi Abbey's quotation from the Jewish prayer-book that "Man shall fear God as well in private as in public," which he seems to find available to support his case that the clergy should not preach politics. Just how it can be so applied is rather puzzling. Does Rabbi Abbey understand his quotation to mean that man shall fear God in private, but not in public? Or does it mean that he shall fear him equally in both spheres, for the same reasons and under the identical sanctions? I assume that Rabbi Abbey holds to the latter interpretation of this passage; and in that case will he say that, as far as private affairs go, man needs the guidance of the pulpit about the nature of this fear and the conduct which should result from it, while in respect to public affairs he has no such need? Is public duty so much plainer, simpler and more easily done than private duty? This certainly seems to be the teaching of Rabbi Abbey's sermon; and, quite as certainly, it is teaching which strikes the lay mind both as a novelty and as a paradox.

Shines Alone. Among the lights of the pulpits, whether in the past or the present age, Rabbi Abbey shines alone with this oblique ray. Isaiah preached politics; Jeremiah did the same. Luther and Calvin, John Knox and Cranmer, Jonathan Edwards and Wesley—all preached politics; Washington Gladden and Lyman Abbott preached politics; and, if one might cite illustrious instances less remote in time and space, Dr. J. W. Brougher and Dr. Edgar P. Hill preach politics. Might it not even be said that Rabbi Abbey himself preached politics, and not the most savory sort, by urging, with theological warmth, counsels of silence upon his brethren who would damn corruption with something more effective than faint praise? Kings and Queens have had spiritual directors; legislative bodies have their chaplains. What admission underlies this practice? Is it the sole theoretic function of the holy man to hymn the virtues of his employer? The chaplain of the United States Senate keeps a chaplain and I never heard that it had any virtues to hymn. Unique among rulers, is the politician entering reality of analogy "garb" may be an epithet expressing moral grandeur, and "sewage" may signify the manifold oracles of the immanent God; in the presence of such mysteries the mere lawyer, priest or even and even worshipful silence.

Why Ignore Great Things? Either men are immoral in politics or they are not. If they are not, then here is a very wide field of life and conduct where we have reached perfection—a belief which only the most touching innocence could entertain; and if men are immoral in politics, then either this immorality ought to be corrected or it ought not. If it ought not to be corrected, what is the reason? Is immorality in public life harmless to the body politic and to the soul of the guilty official himself, to say nothing of the souls of the multitudes of young men who look on enraptured with his alluring example, and there something so terrible about it that the pulpit orator is frightened from opposition to adoration, and enjoins upon his colleagues this new kind of devil worship as upon the whole the safest policy, like the native of New Guinea before his fetish? If, on the other hand, political immorality ought to be corrected, who is worthy and fit for the task as our professed and professional ethical guides and leaders? Why is it that their moral judgment, so trustworthy, I suppose Rabbi Abbey would admit or even contend, in all other fields of life and conduct, abruptly falls at the boundary of this one, the most important of all? Are we to follow the ethical guidance of the clergy in little things, but not in the really great and important ones? Is that what Rabbi Abbey wishes to teach? Is it or is it not, taking a specific instance, a sin for an official to break his oath of office? If it is a sin, why should not the clergy denounce it along with dancing, card-playing, theater-going, and other admittedly wicked deeds? If it is not a sin, then why is it a sin to break any oath whatever? Does Rabbi Abbey's God (I suppose he calls it a God) laugh at office-holders' calls like Zeus at lovers' vows?

Immoral Teaching. Another item of Rabbi Abbey's teaching I should pronounce, if I were a theologian and had command of his expressive vocabulary, damnable immoral. "One of the greatest modern ethical principles," he says, "is to consider the accused innocent until it is proved guilty"; that is, as Rabbi Abbey's subsequent remarks show he means, until the accused is convicted in a court of law. Now there is no such ethical principle, either modern or ancient; there is in criminal procedure a legal presumption of innocence which the prosecution must overthrow or the accused goes free, even if judge and jury know he is guilty. The evidence which would prove his guilt might be inadmissible under the rules or unattainable by legal process, though the content were notorious. Under such circumstances the civil law obliges the jury to acquit the accused; but it does not oblige anybody to think him innocent, or to treat him out of court as innocent; much less does the moral law impose such

an obligation. The world is today full of men "unwhipped of justice," because they are too cunning for the civil law; if the moral law obligated us to consider them innocent so long as we cannot legally prove their guilt, however well we know it, society would be in a bad way. So long as a man's guilt is in doubt, it imposes upon us of judgment and nothing more; when his guilt is no longer doubtful, ethics imposes condemnation without regard to the presumptions of the civil law. It is just as much a duty to condemn the guilty as to defend the innocent, or to suspend judgment in cases of doubt; and when the available evidence of a given instance has convinced a public teacher and moral leader, it is his duty to speak, and speak plainly; nor should he wait for the tardy and dubious action of the courts of law, where ethics is the last thing thought of. Hellogabalus was never convicted in court; neither was Marlborough of taking bribes from France; shall we consider them innocent in fact, the great majority of the cases upon which a moral guide must pass public judgment never come into court at all.

What Does He Mean by "Religion"? I suppose Rabbi Abbey means something by the word "religion" in his remark that "The province of the pulpit is religion," for he goes on to characterize it, rather astonishingly, as a "light" that is never "heard" and that does not "talk." One is glad incidentally to correct a common belief that religion has shown itself in the course of history to be both a valuable and a belligerent light; but the question is, What is the something which he means by "religion"? Whatever it may be, it clearly has no concern with public life and conduct, for Rabbi Abbey insists that "To preach outside the domain of religion" makes the preacher a "traitor" to his God and his pulpit a "phantom," and by such "matters" he means politics. All that, interesting, difficult and immensely important field of human affairs which public life includes—a field whose ethics is most complicated and whose involved moral problems multiply daily—that which is outside the domain of religion, and our moral guides must be silent about it all, or they are traitors to Rabbi Abbey's "God." Verily this is an amazing God.

Rabbi Abbey, then, excludes the influence of what he calls "religion" from public affairs; and, that being so, he must also exclude from private affairs, since religion cannot concern John Doe for stealing from Richard Roe unless it also condemns him for stealing from Richard plus all his neighbors. Morally the two acts are alike, though the one is private and the other public; nor can religion condemn John for debauching Richard's wife unless it also condemns him for debauching Richard's city. Moreover, it is often the wealth and power which John Doe acquires as a public sinner that enable him to excel in private iniquity.

With Rabbi Abbey's condemnation of evil and of the enormous amount of private evil from which it flows? Hardly; this "religion" can say nothing about either.

"Religion," then, in Rabbi Abbey's sense, has no concern with either private or public conduct; nor is it really dubious what he means by the word; he means a system of dogmatic moral ceremonies and fetishistic rites, which he imagines will propitiate what he calls "God"; and since the preacher's noblest function, namely, the ethical inspiration of public life, is treason to this being, or being it follows that Rabbi Abbey's "God" is something very much like what used to be called the devil and that what he is teaching is nothing more or less than devil worship. And, indeed, Milton, who is a great authority upon such matters, enumerates Mammon among the devils.

Like the Vermiform Appendix. Dr. Wise's sermons, which to the lay reader seem something like a remanence in those so-called times of the transcendent moral power and spiritual glory of Hebrew prophecy, may nevertheless, so far as I know, be fitly called, in the dialect of the pulpit, "The Vermiform Appendix." "In his native land," said Balfour of an Irish assailed, "hiser and assasin are terms of endearment." The benediction of reality of analogy "garb" may be an epithet expressing moral grandeur, and "sewage" may signify the manifold oracles of the immanent God; in the presence of such mysteries the mere lawyer, priest or even and even worshipful silence.

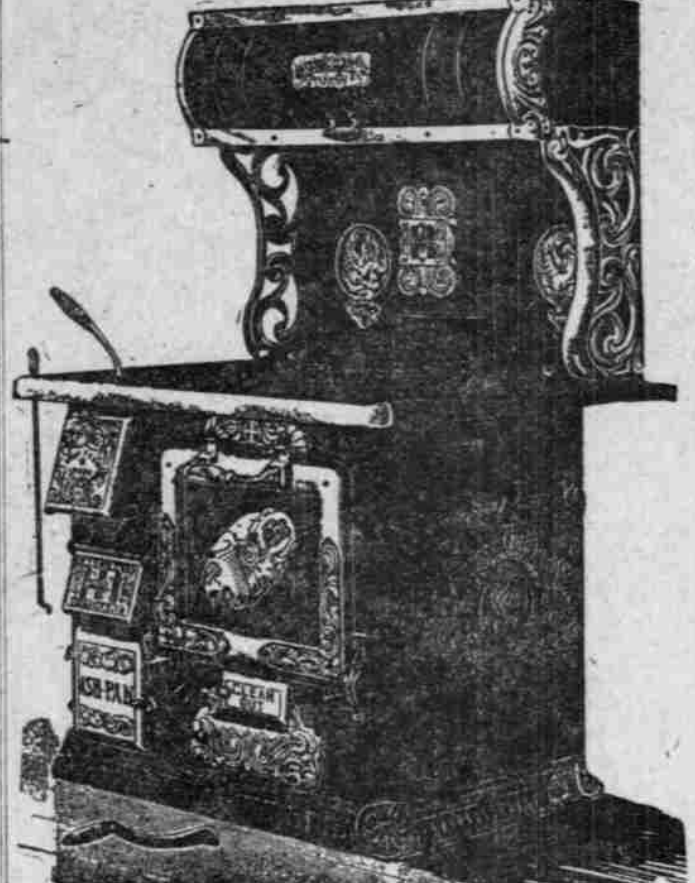
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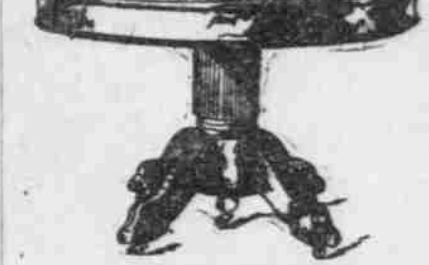
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Writer of "Casey at the Bat"

Ernest L. Thayer is Author, and "Poem" is in Seventeenth Year.

THIS is the time of year when the annual dispute over the authorship of "Casey at the Bat" is due. There is hardly a newspaper in the country that is not asked at least once a year to reprint "Casey," and also settle the question of its authorship. The facts regarding the verses and the author recently came into the possession of the Baltimore News, and they are of such a character as to seem to settle forever the question as to authorship of the poem.

WANTED HIS OWN WHISKEY

JOSEPH SLACK, of Grenada, Miss., who witty sayings and bright stories are the talk of all Mississippi and half of Tennessee, is one of the few really original men who are averse to seeing their names connected with their stories in print, says the Memphis Commercial Appeal. But Mr. Slack's genius has, in a manner, made his stories public property, and they are so good that, with the best intentions of respecting his idiosyncrasy in this particular, all writers, whether familiar with his desires or not, are sure, sooner or later, to disclose him by chronicling something of his origin.

Consolidation of Rural Schools

An Object Lesson of Interest to Every Section of Oregon.

NEWBERG, Or., April 7.—(Special Correspondence of The Sunday Oregonian.)—Consolidation of a rural school with a city school, and the transportation of pupils from the country to the city has been undertaken with great success at this place. Pupils of the rural school who formerly received four or five months' instruction each year in an ungraded school now receive nine months' instruction in a graded school. Instead of walking through the mud and wet to a small country school, the children ride in a hack to the city school.



READING FROM LEFT TO RIGHT—DIRECTORS, J. C. COLCORD, J. W. FORSYTH (CHAIRMAN), C. J. EDWARDS, ROLLIN W. KIRK, PRINCIPAL, W. H. HUBBARD.

And Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur there. Close by the staidy batsman the ball unheeded sped: "That ain't my style," said Casey. "Strike one!" the umpire said.

SCARING THE RATS.

Ingenious Device of Maine Woman in Clearing Them From Path.

Kennebec Journal. An Augusta hotel is more or less infested with rats, and naturally the rats have a love for the department where the food is prepared. The help is largely furnished while none of the rats has any fellow feeling for the rodents, there is one who stands in mortal fear of them. She, with the others, occupies rooms on the floor above the kitchen. The hours of the day is when she gets up in the morning and makes her way to the kitchen. She had rather meet old Nick himself than a rat, and she always feels that she is liable on going downstairs, to meet on every step. Therefore, in order to prevent anything of the kind, she has devised a means of averting it that is simple yet effective.

On her trunk, within reach of the bed, she keeps ten or twelve tin lid pill covers, and when in the morning she has donned her raincoat she carefully opens the door of her room, and taking a cover lets it go down the stairs. The rattle of the tin on the stairs gives her courage, as well as the other covers in her hand she starts down the stairs. When she has descended two or three stairs she lets go another cover, and makes another advance. This goes on until she has reached the foot of the stairs, when, after opening the kitchen door very carefully, she throws the remaining covers across the floor, and then she starts down the stairs. By this time she has convinced herself that not a rat is left in the kitchen, and with a sigh of relief she begins her day's work.