

## The Pulpit.

## Some Things Which We Lack.

[A Sermon preached at Portland, Nov. 19, 1882, by Henry Shadle.]

"One thing thou lackest." Mark 10: 21. "Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; \* \* \* \* and to temperance patience." 2 Peter 1: 5.

The rich young ruler who came in great haste to Jesus to learn what he must do to inherit eternal life, went away sorrowing, because he found that his standard of righteousness was rejected by the Great Teacher, not on account of any failure in external relations, but for the reason that true benevolence and piety had been overlooked in the exactness of his adherence to the forms, rather than the spirit of the law.

The Pharisee was punctilious in keeping the law of Moses even to the tenth of the garden herbs, yet unless our "righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees," we can in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Christ's law demands an exact adherence to every prescribed form of his worship, and we must obey that form of doctrine delivered unto us, but I think sometimes, while we are very careful to observe the "form of doctrine," we sadly lack in our conceptions of what the Savior really intended by his law to the human race.

I have been thinking about our lacks; not what some poor brother lacks, who has scarcely enough of this world's goods to keep the wolf from the door, or of some poor sister who lives two miles from church and has not enough, at times to buy a street car ticket, but I speak of what we lack in order to a more perfect "growth in grace and the knowledge of the truth." I do not refer particularly to the churches in Oregon, nor on this coast, but everywhere we are lacking, and should God come down to-day, and write upon the walls of our churches, he would only need write a part of the sentence that Daniel translated to fill us with deepest consternation—"Thou art weighed in the balances—and found wanting!"

The very first lack is found with the preachers, and as it comes naturally under the division of my subject I will notice: First. We lack *virtue*. This word, as found in our lesson, simply means moral courage. Among the Greeks, in the days of Homer, it was considered a virtue—*aretas*—to be possessed of manly courage, war-

like bravery. The apostle removes the idea from physical bravery, when he connects it with faith, and makes it convey the idea of moral heroism. The preacher who fails to make a personal and individual application of practical duties and obligations, but spreads out his remarks in glittering generalities, hunting the most meaningless terms lest some one should feel that

he means them, simply lacks moral courage. We must understand that it is myself who is being taught, and in order that a sermon be practical it must become to us personal. Then, let it be understood that whatever lacks we may find among us, they are individual lacks; that as the church is made up of churches, and churches are composed of individuals, any failure of the church to perform the duties ordained by its Head, must be accounted personal failures to perform the duties and obligations imposed upon us. In the general acceptance of the term we may lack faith—faithless we certainly lack—but in the faith we are assuredly right. With God's book open before us, we may say without egotism that we are right. We have thrown away all creeds and confessions of faith made by men, that the Bible may become to us our only rule of faith and practice. Our public customs comfort with our teaching; we are known now and respected, as believers in Jesus Christ and Him by whom he was sent, but we lack many things, and not because first in importance, but as item first in the lesson, we lack moral courage.

Take first the positive duties of a Christian life. They are no longer controlled by the personal operation of God's spirit, in signs and wonders, and divers miracles, but are regulated in these three—faith, hope and love, the greatest of which is love! "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat," obtains in every department of church duty, as well as the Lord's Supper. But in all these self-examinations we lack moral courage. Let a visitor come next Thursday evening, into our prayer-meeting; a man of the world, a man engaged in business, and who has the operations of his firm constantly on his mind. He notices particularly, that the leader calls attention to the fact that this is, in a certain sense, a business meeting, where we transact work for the eternal ages. He hears him tell the attendants

that the meeting is for all the brethren and sisters; all are interested in this work, because all want to be saved, but moral cowardice whispers: "You cannot speak to edifying, you cannot offer an acceptable prayer; you cannot read the Scriptures like Mr. A. or Miss B., you positively cannot take part in prayer-meeting!" And thus that meeting ends with that person as cold as an iceberg, and no amount of fervid expressions from the leader, or calls from the pastor can warm such an one up to any correct sense of Christian duty, simply because they fail for want of courage to appreciate the true worship in the beauty of holiness. We lack the moral courage to dare to preach an every day Gospel. We all desire to be saved; not a church member living that intends to be lost. A neglected duty to-day, is going to be taken up to-morrow. We may loose a thread in the fabric of life, but we will not miss one thread—we may drop a stitch in the make up of our existences, but we can pick it up at some future time. I have never talked with a member of the church who did not really desire that the church should grow, that the membership should be increased and that the cause should prosper. There are some who desire that *our* preacher shall be the most eloquent, *our* prayers the most elegant, *our* singing the most artistic, *our* church the grandest, and *our* people the most elite, from a purely selfish motive, but these are exceptions; most of us are desirous that the church shall grow, but alas! we seldom know what part we act in making the success or failure of the work.

Many want the work to go on, but by their absence Lord's day after Lord's day, say more plainly than words: "The church may grow indeed, ought to be doing well, but it must not depend upon me!" Because? Ah, yes, because you have not the moral courage to stand by your convictions of right. "But I cannot see the absolute need of attending every Sunday!" No. But the preacher can see your vacant place; the leader in singing misses your voice, and both being human, feel very much like staying away the next time. This moral cowardice is infidelity, pure infidelity to a cause we profess to love. Better to have never been born into his kingdom than to prove a traitor to his cause! We are beginning to lack moral courage to

speak where the Bible speaks, and remain silent where the Bible is silent. The Bible says: "Forsake not the assembly of the saints," but we can stay away with impunity, or go somewhere else to church, with the evident satisfaction that our whole duty has been performed. We are fearful to abide by a principle lest it offend. This usually comes from an undue desire to be counted as *progressive* as other people; it makes no difference, right or wrong, we must do as the other churches do! This is moral cowardice, "only this and nothing more!" It is the over-weening desire to be thoroughly orthodox, when the *orthos*, or right is only the *dox*, or opinion of men. It is perfectly proper to *preach* our practices; we may tell the people that we believe in immersion; that we do not sprinkle babies; that we break the loaf every Sunday. We may tell all about our customs, only we must present these as our *peculiarities*. But to say that we do these things because commanded to do them, and that we do not many things because there is no divine warrant for so doing, would be a grievous offence. Something is wrong here, and we may, with propriety, introduce our

*Secondly*. We lack *knowledge*. Not particularly a knowledge of the plan of salvation, but a knowledge of how we ought to behave ourselves in the house of God. Some one is to blame for our lack of knowledge, and I am inclined to believe it is the elders. The modern mistake is, to make the preacher responsible for all the teaching, or rather for all the ignorance in the church, when very many preachers are young in the ministry, and need themselves the advice and counsel of their elders. I do not wish to be understood by this term, that I mean only those who have been placed in the official relation of elders, to the congregation. Primarily the elders included those who had age and experience, and these were mainly constituted the teachers in the church. There are very many things in which the preacher is constituted pastor, to be young or old, but to expect of him that private instruction, that fire-side teaching which is an absolute necessity in every healthy church, is sheer nonsense! Elders, deacons and deaconesses, have their respective places to fill and those places are not filled, when the elder has waited upon the Lord's table, the