

Two Lay Sermons

No feature of *The Sioux City Journal* was more characteristic of the editorship of George D. Perkins than the sermon which appeared as the leading editorial every Sunday morning. In these sermons his whimsical humor, his masterful use of idioms, and his religious convictions were given free expression. The familiar stories of the Bible were explained in the light of modern conditions and Biblical characters were invested with lifelike reality. Thousands of people read the sermons regularly, and some never went nearer to church than that. As William S. Kenyon wrote after the death of Mr. Perkins, the "vision of 'Uncle George' in his little office, working away at his own typewriter with an open bible on the table, is one familiar to many of his friends, and no minister from the pulpit could reach the heart as 'Uncle George' did in those Sunday sermons." Their influence can scarcely be overestimated.

It was in the year 1899, when Mr. Perkins retired from Congress, that he made the sermons a regular feature of the *Sunday Journal*, although previous to that time he had often written editorials of similar character. Only once during the next fifteen years was the editor's extensive congregation deprived of the weekly sermon. On Easter Sunday in 1912

there appeared this quaint announcement in place of the usual religious editorial:

EASTER GREETINGS

The Preacher who has occupied this Pulpit is setting forth on a long Vacation. He has not failed to appear of a Sunday morning for many years — through heat of summer and cold of winter; rain or shine. The Record is chiefly meritorious for its Continuity and the Long Suffering of a Patient People. The usual annual Vacation of the Cloth is to be taken in Bulk. The Flock is dismissed with a Blessing, and with —

Easter Greetings.

The flock, however, raised such a general and insistent objection to the proposed vacation that on the following Sunday Mr. Perkins stated in the *Journal* that, “The Preacher had no more than started upon his Vacation when he was Intercepted. He was Questioned and had no Answers that were deemed Adequate. A Silver Cord was put upon him, and he was Conducted Home. He was led to the old Den, seated in the Old Chair and asked to Pray for Forgiveness for the Sin that was in his Heart. A Bible, quickly recognized as His Own, was placed in his hands, and a Presiding Angel opened the Book and Pointed to the Words: ‘For consider him that endured such contradiction of Sinners against Himself, lest ye be Wearied and Faint in your Minds.’ Whereupon the Book was

opened to the second chapter of Revelations, and the finger of the Angel rested on the tenth verse. There was a Voice, declaring itself to be the Voice of the Congregation, speaking with the accent of Love, yet in the tone of Command, saying, Write! And the Preacher was left Alone to reflect upon the Evil of his Ways."

From that time until three weeks before he died the sermons were continued without interruption. The preparation of the sermon entitled "The Strength of Joseph", which was published on January 11, 1914, was the last work that Mr. Perkins did. Although he was ill, he held himself to this weekly task. But he felt that it was not up to his usual standard and sent word for the office boy to tear it up and write another. Members of his "flock", however, regarded this last sermon as one of the best — rich with the wisdom of years and suggestive of the creed of the author. The sermon on "Bearing the Yoke", published on August 6, 1905, is typical of the character and style of the whole series.

THE STRENGTH OF JOSEPH

"And he asked them of their welfare, and said, Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?"

Joseph had been without news from home for a long time, and the visit of his brethren gave him opportunity to ask questions very near his heart.

He knew of the famine, and had answered the needs of his brethren. They supposed they had bought corn of a stranger, but when they came to the inn and opened their sacks every man's money was in the mouth of his sack; and so they returned to say they did not know how the money came to be in the mouth of their sacks, and to offer it again. And the steward said, "Peace be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money."

It was stranger still to the brethren when they were taken into Joseph's house, and were entertained there; for were they not Hebrews, and were they not with the Egyptians? "Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?" It was hard for Joseph to ask the question, for he feared ill news. "And they answered, Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive. And they bowed down their heads and made obeisance." They spoke of "our father," and they did not know they also spoke of Joseph's father. And Joseph lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son."

Joseph was overcome by his emotions, and he slipped away to his chamber, and wept there; "and he washed his face, and went out, and refrained himself, and said, Set on bread."

The story of Joseph's meeting with his brethren,

under such vastly different circumstances than those in which he parted from them, is a human interest story well worth the knowing. It is worth while to preserve such stories, for they speak of God in man, and of the holiness of brotherly love.

By inquiring after their father Joseph had report from his own. The peace of his father's God came into his heart, and he fain would have taken his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, in his arms. It was a time of compensation for Joseph.

It was hardly to be expected that Joseph would hear that his father was in good health — that he was yet alive. Jacob was old: his life had been beset by trouble. At the time he was in desperate straits by reason of the famine prevailing in his country; he had sent his sons to Egypt to buy food. The weight of years was upon him, and his house leaned upon him. He was in responsibility, and he was brave; and he was brave because his trust was in God. "And they answered, Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive."

There is no measurement of life according to the trouble of it, or the burden. Otherwise the report from Jacob might have been that long years before he had been gathered to his fathers. But he was still in the body, doing a man's part.

Possibly not so many die of a broken heart as some people feel it to be their duty to believe. Jacob never had much time for idleness. He never saw the time when it was in order for him to retire.

The sorrows of his life might have overwhelmed him but for the saving power of work.

There is nothing better for people in trouble than work. Work is essential to mind cure, and wholesomeness of mind is of invigorating influence upon the body. It is easy to nurse the ills of the flesh, and the ills of the flesh are quick to respond with increase of power for evil; and that being true of the flesh, it is more abundantly true of the mind.

The disposition of people runs to the use of remedies that are agreeable; and the fact accounts for much of the use of alcohol as medicine. People are easily tempted to keep company with appetite and with their own selfishness. They need the exercise that will take them away from themselves. It may be a shame, and commonly is a shame, that people are such poor company to themselves. They want encouragement in doing the things they ought not to do. They like to apply that sort of a test to friendship; and so they are like children, afraid of the dark. If they cannot have their own way they weep about it; and they say the world is very cruel, and they doubt if it pays to live. They want to serve themselves, and they are so unworthy of service that they fail in their chief desire. They do not know how to serve themselves, and not being qualified to serve themselves they have little adaptability for the service of others. They drag themselves along their narrow way as if broken by the infirmities of age.

Selfishness is really a very hard taskmaster. It drags men down, and it never lifts them up to give them vision of the glories of the coming of the sun. Inspirational life, such as touched David and which laid firm hold upon Paul, is the life that quickens the heart, which opens the eyes, which keeps open the ears, and which consolidates with the human life the eternal life of God.

Men who only look in upon themselves spoil their sight; they become as men looking into a dark cave; they make out nothing for sure, and certainly nothing of beauty. They grope their way; they hear strange noises, and they are frightened by every shadow. The splendor of living is in the open. Every life is challenged to a great campaign; and every great campaign is fought in numbers with the good of one the good of all. The one in battle who sneaks and runs away bears on his forehead the stamp of coward. He may have saved his life, but the life saved was not worth saving.

When Joseph's brethren, representing their father, came to him he was brought face to face with one of the large opportunities of his strange life. His experience in Egypt had not spoiled him. He had come into great power; but his heart was gentle toward his father. He met that opportunity in a way that has immortalized his name.

It is safe to say that Joseph never did anything in his life that gave him as much real pleasure as to fill the sacks of his brethren and place every man's

money in the mouth of his sack; for with that, of itself good, he had the news from his father that he was in good health and alive. The text suggests that one may be in good health and not very much alive. "Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive." Old man Jacob was still holding down the job whereunto he was appointed of his Father.

No one knows just what it is to enjoy life in its fullness until in some way he is brought into touch with eternal life. There was the touch of eternal life in what Joseph did for the relief of his father and his brethren. The greatness of what he did was in the spirit of his doing; and all greatness is of the spirit. His tears were not of weakness; they were the proof of his sincerity. But Joseph was a man of such strength that he very much preferred not to be caught crying in the presence of his brethren and his attendants; and so he slipped away to his own chamber and had it out there, and then he reappeared and excited no suspicion of weakness.

If Joseph had only thought of himself he would have found it easy to weep for himself; but he was a man of large affairs, and he was pressed for time. He did not have time to think of himself; he must serve Pharaoh, and he must serve his father's house.

To be sure, Joseph always has had credit for thinking so intelligently of himself that he thought a good deal as to how he might establish himself in the confidence of those engaging his service. That

was good business for Joseph; and it is agreed by common consent that Joseph made a great record as a business man. It is well to take note of that.

The truth of scripture is that men who would exalt themselves must exalt service. They must be saviors of men. There are none so humble as to be shut out of opportunity to do good in the world. There are none who may not, with lifting up of hands, find touch with the love of God.

“And he asked them of their welfare, and said, Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?”

BEARING THE YOKE

“It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.”

Jeremiah began his work as a prophet of Israel more than 600 years before the dawn of the Christian era. In all this long reach of time it would seem human nature had made little advance. Men are about the same and boys are about the same.

The ox that is broken to the yoke can be beckoned to his place with the bow thereof, and the man who is contented under the yoke must have been broken to it in his youth.

There are not many boys who take to the yoke kindly. They kick. They tell their dear mothers what other boys are permitted to do, and there are mothers who take in washing to enable their boys to do as other boys do. They are willing to bear the

yoke themselves to save the necks of the boys; and if the time comes when the necks of the boys are not saved it seems very strange to them. There are mothers who say they cannot understand the Lord's ways. They cry out that through years and years they saved themselves no labor; they toiled far into the night. They prayed with earnestness; many times their tears blinded them. They clasp their hands when the storm surges within them, and they cry out pityingly for the love of God. What more can they do? Are they not always thinking of the boys? The beds are made ready, the clothes are washed and mended, it is seen to that the table is always ready, admonition is not spared. What more can they do? There is one thing more they might do. They might put the yoke on the young scalawags and put the key in the bow so that they cannot slip it. And why not? Sooner or later, it is urged, they will know what trouble is; let them have happiness in their youth. The yoke does not gall the neck of their mates, taking the word of the boys for it; they want the freedom of the town, and they plead so earnestly that the mothers say it may be so for the day and for the night. So it is with the poor, and so it is with the rich, and the yoke waits.

The self sacrifice of mothers is a strange mixture of love and pride. Among the lowly as among those reckoned of better estate there is ceaseless desire to stand as servants at the door of opportunity for the boys. Every mother's boys are as good as any-

body, and the presumption is that they are always right if an issue arise between them and a neighbor's. Love binds up their bruises and shakes an angry finger across the street; and pride is the strength of determination that the boys shall have chance to hold up their heads in the circle of acquaintance. If money is scarce it is saved for the purpose, and if money be plenty generosity is permitted to set the figure. These dear mothers look without, and not within; and the boys grow as the weeds. They are little dears in tidy clothes; they are barefooted and quickly ready for the swimming hole. They lounge into lubberhood, and drift and drift. They shun the yoke.

It is not an easy thing for human love to use a slipper or a stick as a means of introduction to the yoke. The boys do not want to go to bed at night or get up betimes in the morning. They look upon school as an invention of cruelty. They early learn to juggle with the truth when they have in mind the fear that the yoke may land. Boys become adepts in giving color to their words, and they are encouraged by the prejudices of love in their behalf. They are excused from school because of headache and join another fellow whose two fingers have appeared in silent eloquence at a place agreed upon over the back fence. As the boys grow they have increasing confidence in their wits. They say they will live by them when they are men.

Boys who take to the yoke naturally in the great

aggregate of boys are not many. Those who do are the salt of the earth. They constitute the nucleus for doing things; they pull true. They are the rallying point for an army of boys who have in some way been broken to the yoke. The majority of boys who get into the bow do so because they have to; and so it is that the average boy is fortunate if he is so situated that he is made the object of discipline and upon whose back the whip of correction comes down at proper intervals with sufficient force to develop his blood.

Those who bear the yoke to advantage are for the most part broken to it in their youth. There is something very admirable in the trained man who makes the yoke easy, who does not fret under it, and who puts his strength to it as an ox. Younger men look on and say he finds his pleasure in his work; it is second nature to him, and he knows how to do things with the least inconvenience and with the least hardship. And so it seems, and so it is. It is a part of life, and it is that part of life which lightens the burdens, smooths the way, brings results and gives to it sweetness.

There is much desire in our time for what are called the accomplishments. The desire for a creditable place among men is not new, as the desire for power is not new. Yet there is the old longing for results without sacrifice and without the devotion of time and constancy of purpose. But no way has been discovered, and no way will be discovered, to

garner the best fruits of living without steadfastness, without steady pulling, without bearing the yoke. That is the lesson of all experience. That is the lesson to which all men are held by the love of God.

The yoke may not be taken on willingly, but in time it comes to be recognized as a friend. It looks good after the field is plowed and after the harvest has been gathered. The heat of days is converted to the cool of evening, and the strain in the yoke over the rough places becomes a treasured memory.

The pride of men in review lodges with their strength, and their comfort is in what they did under the yoke.

“It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.”