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Reflections on the Status of Our Preaching

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Reflections on the Status of Our Preaching.

3.

The Alleged Causes of the Present Situation.

In Our Preparatory Schools and Seminaries.

While not a few of those who answered our questionnaire stated that our preparatory schools and seminaries cannot, at least not as a rule, be held responsible for poor preaching heard in our circles, the general opinion seems to be that the alarming symptoms evident in our pulpit work do "reflect in a measure upon the training received at our preparatory schools and seminaries." The following are the criticisms voiced most frequently by our correspondents: Our preparatory schools, with some noteworthy exceptions, do not give enough attention to the spiritual life and Christian training of their students, to systematic, practical Bible-study, to composition, and to public speaking. In our seminaries there is, in addition to some of the shortcomings found in the preparatory schools, not enough sermon analysis and sermon-writing, not enough preaching, especially before congregations, and not enough emphasis on the delivery of the sermon. At St. Louis the work is hampered by excessively large classes. Not a few of the brethren complain that there is a rather general lack of scholarly attitude among the students.

Cultural and Intellectual Shortcomings.

On this delicate subject the pastor of one of our wide-awake city churches writes the following:—

"Personally I believe that the shortcomings as displayed from Lutheran pulpits are primarily cultural. Much of the preaching in our cities is not on a par with the intellectual standards of our present-day city congregations. Our audiences have changed during the last fifteen or twenty years. Many of our members are college graduates. Almost all of the younger generation are at least high-school graduates. The thing that is hindering the progress of our Church, as far as the pulpit is concerned, is not any doctrinal uncertainty or faulty dogmatic presentation, but certain crudities, which are not always due to carelessness, but to positive ignorance. The form in which the pulpit thoughts are couched is very offensive to the sensitive ear. And then the subject-matter is sometimes presented so uninterestingly, with an absolute disregard of all external embellishment, that intelligent people would almost be justified in considering attendance at church as a most effective sedative."

Similar opinions are expressed by others. The following paragraphs present a few characteristic excerpts from their letters:—

"I do fear that most of our men do not spend sufficient time on their intellectual advancement. If there is any complaint about preaching on the part of our people, it is probably due to the fact that much preaching is cold, a would-be intellectual presentation of doctrine, without the necessary application to the conditions in which we are living."

"The great fault is that most of our men do not do nearly enough reading. I mean general reading, which will keep them abreast of the times and the pressing needs of our changing age. There is a lack of cosmopolitanism, which proves to be a great handicap. . . . Many of our men have never learned the art of applied concentration, and in many of them the love of books has never been inculcated."

"I hold this to be the chief cause of whatever decline there may be. I fear that a large percentage of our clergy has not developed (or has lost) fixed habits of study."

"I fear that the intellectual life of many, many of our pastors is not as active and broad as it should be."

"Yes, I believe this is one cause which deserves some consideration, and I believe lack of studiousness is not found so much with the so-called busy pastor, but with such as have not enough to do. I have also noticed that the pastor's library seems to be deteriorating. . . . In part this is due to the small salary they receive. After they have provided for the most necessary physical needs of the family, there isn't sufficient money left to buy books. But in part this is also due to lack of interest, lack of intellectual and spiritual appetite."

And one of our District Presidents says:—

"I have heard complaints from laymen about the preaching of their pastors. In every instance these complaints were made about men who have been in office over fifteen years and more, and the complaint was to the effect that their pastors were stale, their preaching stereotype, lacking freshness. I believe that most of the poor preaching which exists in our circles is due to mental stagnation, and that is a result of indolence."

Lack of Thorough and Systematic Bible-Study.

This matter was touched upon in the paragraphs treating of expository preaching; but it should be stated here that many of the brethren regard the fact that the average minister does not engage in regular exegetical Bible-study and that he therefore does not actually live in the Scriptures as one of the principal causes of the weaknesses which are becoming evident in our preaching. One of our District Presidents says:—

"The chief cause of a decline in the quality of the sermon contents is insufficient study of the Word of God. There is not enough private study, not enough reading. This duty should be stressed and impressed upon the students at the Seminary. If they continue in studying and reading the proper books, they will increase in knowledge and wisdom, and this will reflect in their sermons. I think that here we must start if we want to elevate the quality of the sermons. That our young pastors do not pursue as much *Privatstudium* as formerly is very evident to me. This also is revealed at the conferences. The tendency is to shorten the conferences more and more."

Failure to Prepare the Individual Sermon Carefully.

This matter was discussed in the section presenting the answers to the question: "Do our ministers in general still regard preaching as their most important work?" Nevertheless it must be mentioned here as one of the chief sources of poor preaching. A District President in the Northwest puts the matter as follows:—

"In theory every one will admit that there is no more important function of the preacher [than preaching]. I fear, however, that in practise the theory does not always work out. . . . Our men do not 'get time' for sermon work, and the preparation of the Sunday sermon is often a matter that is attended to in the late hours of Saturday night and the early hours of Sunday morning. Sermons are usually prepared 'under pressure,' and our preaching cannot be at its best. If there is a decline in our preaching, I feel that it must be accounted for by the fact that so many of our men fail in the proper preparation of their sermons."

The Injudicious Use of Reformed Literature.

If the writer understands the brethren correctly, they do not of course object to the reading of theological productions originating in other denominations. On the contrary, the wide-awake pastor, who is to guide his people and to warn them against present-day tendencies in the sphere of religion, must certainly be acquainted with the positions and publications of other church-bodies. It stands to reason, however, that this reading must be done critically and that every statement must be tested by the teachings of the Word of God. The Lutheran minister who declines to do this will soon become muddled in his theological thinking and will find himself incompetent to distinguish between truth and error. This danger has already been pointed out in the paragraphs treating of the unfavorable symptoms appearing, at least in certain quarters, in our doctrinal preaching.

The Abuse of Sermonic Literature and Homiletical Helps.

The question was asked, "Do homiletical helps, such as detailed sermon outlines, tend to improve or to aggravate the situation?" The answers to this question reveal two different opinions.

Many are of the opinion that homiletical helps do more harm than good. One of our younger professors writes:—

"Homiletical helps as a general thing tend to aggravate the situation since they persuade the preacher to drop his own individuality and to appear in the garment of others."

In a letter from the president of one of our preparatory schools we find the following:—

"Homiletical helps? God bless the men who have offered them to brethren so often in need. I used to appreciate them deeply. And yet they did not make me a better preacher. On the contrary, I hold these helps largely responsible for the deterioration of our pulpit. They have so often given the Old Adam an opportunity to follow the lines of least resistance. If with one swoop we could take them all out of the world, there would be an amazing improvement in preaching. . . . But should we abolish razors because some people cut their throats with them? . . . And again: If we reduce our own homiletical material, won't we open the floodgates to Reformed literature and trash?"

To this may be added the following statements by two of our city pastors:—

"To my mind the greatest trouble with our present preachers is the lack of originality. I have heard sermons by rather prominent preachers that were almost a verbatim reproduction of something they found in the *Homiletic Magazine* or some sermon book. I feel that the trend is but too general in our circles that men use outlines and sermons instead of digesting their sermon material so well that they cannot help but use their own outline. . . . I believe that the literature we are offering our clergy aids and abets this detestable plagiarism with its withering effect on the pulpit."

"I do not think that our published helps have improved the situation except doctrinally; for the fact is that there has been no noticeable improvement in the past."

The majority, however, seem to agree with a director of missions, who writes:—

"I think that homiletical helps are just like paragraph three of the lodge resolutions—there is a need for them provided conscientious persons use them. The possibility of an abuse should not drive us to prohibit the legitimate use by competent people."

This attitude is further reflected in the following quotations:—

"It depends upon the character of the preacher. What one uses for his good, another uses for his harm. The homiletical helps hitherto furnished by our Synod have in my opinion had the following two-fold effect: 1) good, in producing and maintaining soundness and uniformity in doctrine; 2) bad, in producing a certain degree of sloth in too many men who could and should make their own sermons."

"I do not believe that detailed sermon outlines are at fault if the pulpit has declined. There are without doubt some who have substituted the outline for their originality, to the lessening of their efficiency in the pulpit. But I believe there are more who have enriched their own efforts by reading the efforts of others. And if a person uses the advice given by Dr. Mezger, 'Get your flour wherever you can, but bake your own loaf,' then sermon outlines help and do not harm."

"There is a need for sermon outlines, but they must be sound and good. If any are offered that are not, they should be edited and revised."

"The more and better homiletical helps are available to the busy pastor and the inexperienced beginner, the better their preaching will be. To my notion outlines and studies (*Studien*) are better than sermons for this purpose. That would also have a tendency to crowd the Reformed literature out of our pastors' studies."

"Our conference brethren desire that sermon studies be published rather than sermon outlines, . . . studies similar to those published formerly in the *Magazin*. Good helps do not aggravate, but improve the situation."

Bilingual Preaching.

Answering the question, "Does bilingual work affect the quality of our preaching?" an old pastor writes:—

"Die Zweisprachigkeit hat nichts zu tun mit den mageren Predigten. Ein Pastor, der Freude hat an der Ausarbeitung seiner Pre-

digten und durchdrungen ist von der Bedeutung der Stunde, in der er auf der Kanzel steht, wird an Tüchtigkeit durch die doppelte Sprache nichts einbuessen. Im Gegenteile, er wird dadurch gewinnen. Er hat ja ein viel grösseres Feld als der Einsprachige, wird Luther und unsere Vaeter immer mehr schätzen lernen. Ausserdem behaelt Goethe recht, wenn er schreibt: Ein Mensch, der nur EINE Sprache kann, kann keine."

Nevertheless, most of those who reacted to this question registered the opinion that preaching in two languages, especially when performed within the space of two or three hours on a Sunday morning, is a real handicap to the conscientious preacher. Witness the following expressions:—

"Bilingual work definitely lowers the quality of our preaching. Preaching is to some extent an art in which language plays an important rôle,— and no man can be master in two languages. It should be pointed out again and again that the greatest preachers were those who presented the Gospel on a golden platter. To the magnificence of the message must be added the power of rythm and good prose."

"Bilingual work does most decidedly and disastrously affect the quality of our preaching. Again I have reference primarily to form. The man who is compelled to preach in two languages every Sunday is either going to be deficient in both, or he is going to emphasize the one to the sad neglect of the other. The pastor who makes two different sermons, one in German and one in English, thereby naturally is burdened with an extra task, which makes it impossible for him to work with the necessary thoroughness. If he has an evening service besides, he has three sermons a week, and no preacher on God's earth can deliver three good sermons a week. Most of our men, I believe, make their sermon either in the German or in the English language and then translate it in the second service. This again naturally brings about defective pulpit work."

"When a pastor preaches a 'double-header' every Sunday, he may become slipshod in language and expression. In theory he should improve by thinking the matter through in two different languages; in practise a slipshod treatment of the language that he knows best may result."

"I think that bilingual work affects the language of the preacher, the elegance of his expression, etc., but that the contents do not suffer much. Since the effectiveness of the sermon does depend upon the delivery, language, and other things besides merely the content, bilingual preaching is surely not helping the crusade for better sermons."

Worldliness among the Clergy.

It is very gratifying and encouraging to note that, with a very few exceptions, our correspondents are convinced that our clergy has not yet been seriously affected by the inroads of worldliness. One of the brethren, who has been very frank in his criticisms of the rank and file of our men, says:—

"I believe it is safe to say that there is no wide-spread evidence of increasing worldliness among the clergy. I have found in my contacts a high degree of consecration and a careful personal supervision of life and conduct. I do believe that there is noticeable

a greater naturalness and a departure from the solemn clerical posing which may have been a fault of the previous generation. But this increasing naturalness is in my estimation only to be commended. It does not by any means signify a spirit of worldliness. Naturally there always will be exceptions to the rule. There always have been such exceptions. But I believe the spirit of our clergy is very high."

Notwithstanding, most of the letters contain earnest words of warning with respect to this particular danger. A few of them are herewith submitted for the readers' consideration:—

"Worldliness is undoubtedly creeping in, is probably present more than was the case in former years, which would account for a decline in preaching force and vigor. Men often seem more interested in their vacations, in outward advancements, in making a good showing, than in the deepening of the spiritual life and knowledge of their congregations."

"The dangers threatening our Church, worldliness, lodgism, indifference, are getting greater and greater. Dr. Walther's prayer and wish: *'Gott gebe uns ein frommes Ministerium!'* ought to be our constant importunate request before the Throne of Grace. Ultimately that little word *fromm*, rightly understood, would help us out of all our troubles and difficulties in our colleges, seminaries, and congregations."

"I have some very definite views on the increasing worldliness of our clergy, if by that you mean the standards they have and the demands they imagine they can make. When I visit the homes of boys whose congregations are not meeting their obligations and never have money for anything worth while, I am surprised at the luxury which is taken for granted."

"If mingling with worldly men is meant, some of our pastors indulge more in it than is good for their sermon-making. Friendly and frequent intercourse with leading lodgemen of the town, sectarian ministers, and men of affairs on hunting and fishing trips, on the golf-links and in summer camps will not fill minds with sermon material for a Lutheran congregation, no matter how wonderfully they have been restored physically to new 'pep.' I am not opposed to wholesome recreation in any form, but if it is sought in worldly association, it will take the Lutheran preacher's dynamite out of his sermon."

"No doubt we have notorious cases of worldliness. Let's tackle them and bring the men to repentance!"

Discontinuation of Sermon-Reading and Criticism in Our Conferences.

Apparently the time-honored custom of reading and criticizing sermons in our conferences has been abandoned at many places. This is regarded by a number of keen observers as another reason why the importance of the sermon is being lost sight of by many otherwise conscientious preachers. A pastor of wide experience states the matter thus:—

"Eine andere Ursache, warum das Predigen nicht mehr auf der vorigen Hoche steht, ist, dass die Kritik fast aufgehört hat. Als ich junger Pastor war, wurden alle auf Konferenzen gehaltenen Predigten kritisiert. Hie und da wurde dabei die Liebe verletzt, aber wir haben doch viel dabei gelernt."

Too Much Preaching.

This matter, which is certainly worthy of consideration in view of the crowded schedule maintained in many congregations, is broached by a District President, who writes:—

"Occasionally one hears complaints about the preaching of pastors in our larger Lutheran centers. I am not sure as to what may be the reason. Usually the men in larger congregations are capable; perhaps the quality of preaching suffers just from much preaching, many services, usually two or three on Sundays and then frequent funerals during the week."

Emphasizing the Liturgical Parts of the Service at the Expense of the Sermon.

Several of our correspondents are of the opinion that the present liturgical movement is bound to react to the detriment of our preaching. The sentiments of these brethren are summarized in the following quotations:—

"I have noted no alarming tendencies in our preaching which you do not mention in your questionnaire, but I call your attention again to the effect of the liturgical trend."

"Noticeable symptoms of decline which are not covered in the answers to your other questions are the highly artificial methods with which many congregations must bolster their church attendance, the increasing tendency to relegate the sermon to a secondary position in the church service, and the general liturgical trend."

"Die Neigung, die Predigt immer mehr abzukuerzen und ihr so eine nebensaechliche Stellung im Gottesdienst anzuweisen. Zwölf bis fuenfzehn Minuten lange Predigten sind nicht mehr selten. Kann man das Predigten nennen? Kaum. Und was fuehlt die Zeit, die so schon kurz genug ist, aus? Orgelvorspiele (processionals, recessionals, offertories), Solos, Chorvortraege oder eine uebermaessig lange Liturgie, so dass fuer die arme Predigt nur wenig Zeit uebrigbleibt. waehrend doch die Predigt und der kraeftige Gemeindegang die Hauptsachen sein sollten."

Lack of Adverse Experiences on the Part of Many Preachers.

On this point we have the following from a brother of wide experience:—

"I do not think that we are maintaining the 'traditional high standards of the Lutheran Church in our preaching.' There has been a very marked decline, which I would classify as in part absolute and in part relative. The absolute decline I note in preachers who lack adverse experience. . . . These preachers lack the fervor that might intensify the stir of their own human interest. The original Lutheran preachers as well as many of the fathers of our own Synod had passed through such experience, which ever afterwards fired them in their Gospel-mission. The lack of this adverse experience in no inconsiderable measure influences the choice of subjects, and I have sometimes felt that the neglect of the preaching of the fundamentals as a result had become well-nigh appalling."

4.

Suggestions for the Improvement of Our Preaching.

It is impossible to publish all the helpful suggestions that were made with regard to the improvement of our preaching; but the writer is eager to pass the most important ones on to his readers.

The first group of suggestions pertains to *our preparatory schools*. Among our correspondents there is a well-nigh unanimous opinion that the preparatory schools should give more attention to Christian training and character-building, to intensive practical Bible-study, to the writing of outlines and compositions, and to public speaking. They should moreover be very conscientious in eliminating all students who prove themselves unfit for the ministry.

A pastor writes:—

"I am convinced that the great need for better preaching is more spirituality and more direct Bible-study from the very first year of our preparatory schools. You touch a sore spot in 7a of your questionnaire. Here in my opinion is where the root of the trouble is. How can we expect full power from the pulpit if, as is the case and in years gone by has been the case, in our *Prophetenschulen* a spirit of worldliness often affects a large section of the student-body?"

This, by the way, is a point that was stressed by almost every writer.

With respect to the composition work at our preparatory schools one of our large conferences goes on record as follows:—

"We should have far more composition work at our colleges. Composition, rhetoric, and the science of rhetoric, it seems to us, are too much neglected. Too many of our men have no correct idea, for instance, of paragraph structure, and that plays such an important part in sermon-writing. Our preparatory schools are the place where this should be given thoroughly. No young man should be allowed to enter our Seminary without a thorough knowledge of the mechanical make-up of a composition, or essay. Yet we are told, and that by men who have been graduated within recent years, that too many have no proper conception of this phase of the work when they come to St. Louis. . . . We feel that far more essays, better essays, or compositions, should be written at our preparatory schools. If that were done, you would have better material to work with when you get the young men to the Seminary."

One of our older pastors, a man who has excellent judgment in these matters, writes in a similar vein. He says:—

"What I am trying to stress is this: Sermon-writing must begin, not at the Seminary, but at high school and college. I doubt that sufficient emphasis is laid upon this fact by our professors of literature and rhetoric at our preparatory schools. Certainly, if the style of the writer is the tool he has fashioned for his self-expression, then the fact that so few of our men can write with anything approaching a distinct and pronounced literary style speaks ill for their early training in the art of literary self-expression."

On the subject of public speaking we have many expressions like the following:—

"There is not enough preparation for speaking. Why could not our preparatory schools have vigorous debating teams, as most other schools do? Perhaps there are schools in our Synod that have laid stress on debating, but I do not know of them."

Our *seminaries*, we are told, should lay special emphasis on exegesis and dogmatics, demand more outlines and written sermons from their students, give the students more frequent opportunity to preach in the classroom and before congregations, include an extended and thorough course in public speaking in their curriculum, invite successful preachers to address the student-body on topics pertaining to Lutheran pulpit work, and, last but not least, be insistent in warning against plagiarism. In addition, determined efforts should be made to reduce the size of the classes and to weed out all students who demonstrate that they do not belong in the ministry. A few excerpts will suffice to characterize the expressions on which this summary is based.

"Im Seminar muss Gewicht gelegt werden auf den Unterricht in der Homiletik, dass die Studenten die Einzigartigkeit der Predigt erfassen und lernen, sie aufzubauen. Freilich ist das nicht die Hauptsache. Die beste Wasserleitung nützt nichts, wenn kein Wasser vorhanden ist. Darum bleibt die grosse Hauptsache, dass die Studenten fleissig Lehre und Exegese treiben, und so Geschmack gewinnen auch an Luther und der Literatur unserer Synode, gerade auch bei dem Zunehmen der englischen Arbeit."

"At the Seminary much more sermon-writing should be required, at least in the last year. There ought to be a schedule of at least one sermon a month during the last six months at the Seminary. . . . The professors should not be required to do all this work. Perhaps a special position could be created—some pastor who cannot serve a congregation because of some chronic illness or because of advancing years. Why not get such a man to check the written work of the students? The universities have some such arrangement."

"I have for a long time been in favor of the establishing of a course in 'Scripture Exposition and Sacred Oratory' at the Seminary, which would have for its purpose a practical training in spontaneous 'thinking, building, and speaking' sermons. This ought to be a three-year course, in which the individual is led on and personally trained in *conspectu omnium* of his class. In such a way I would hope, with God's blessing, to enable men, of course after due and even exhaustive preparation, to stand upon their feet with a spirit that chafes to be let loose, that is, into the pulpit, to deliver a message."

"The class in homiletics should be broken up into small groups, and there should be sufficient instructors to do the work. Every student in these classes ought to furnish a weekly sermon outline or sermon or part of a sermon. Our St. Louis students need more direction as to how to gather material for sermons and where to find it."

"Theological students are prone to consider the homiletical views of their professors as antiquated, even though they are adapted to

modern needs. It would seem to me quite helpful for a successful preacher of ours to give a talk to the boys, on pulpit work especially. It would be necessary for you to give such a speaker the right focus and at the same time carefully avoid the impression that he is but a mouthpiece. A round-table talk should follow the lecture."

"I am now coming to what I consider the primary cause of so much poor preaching in our Church. Too many poor preachers are permitted to enter the ministry. It is my conviction that, when a young man has been in training in our institutions for nine years and is then a failure as a preacher, he will be a failure all around as a minister and should not be given a diploma and thus officially declared to be qualified to perform the functions of the holy ministry, when as a matter of fact he is unfit to perform one of its primary functions, preaching."

Concerning the instructors at our colleges and seminaries the following interesting suggestion was made:—

"The professors at our colleges should be encouraged to continue their studies at an American or foreign university and to spend some time in traveling. Our teachers need this to keep them from growing stagnant and stale. I consider this very important. We have spent enormous sums in our Synod for fine college buildings and elaborate equipment, but we have done little for our faculties, and, after all, the soul of the school is the faculty."

The majority of the letters received contain helpful suggestions regarding *our publications*. A few of these follow:—

"Let the *Witness* and the *Lutheraner* frequently show our people what they should expect of their preacher and what not."

"Instead of a multiplication of sermon outlines and prepared sermons our theological literature should abound with inspirational articles on methods of successful preaching and with material which will fire the zeal of our ministers to do the very best possible to a human being during the thirty minutes of precious time during which they are filling a pulpit."

"I believe that a course of studies on the matter of sermon preparation might be prepared and then published either in the *THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY* or in special tracts or pamphlets, which would be mailed to every minister (if published in the *MONTHLY*, that ought to be mailed to every minister, whether a subscriber or not)."

"We feel that the real need of the hour in the homiletical field is the publication of sermon studies. We have little or nothing to offer our young men similar to the old *Predigtstudien* in the older numbers of the *Homiletic Magazine*. I have urged repeatedly that these old *Predigtstudien* be done in English. I believe that, if we had this and our young men would be shown the real value of these studies, we should get many of them back to preaching on the pericopes and should also have better doctrinal preaching. Besides, we now have several other series of pericopes, to which attention is called in the little 'red book' issued by our Publishing House. How about some good sermon studies on these series?"

"I might suggest more or less hesitatingly that instead of homiletical helps we begin to print a long series of articles on the romance of preaching and that a goodly section of our homiletical courses be devoted to the biographies and methods of the world's great preachers."

"For students and ministers publish a series of volumes of sermons that will be stimulating and helpful in raising the standard. A few volumes of selected sermons of the best non-Missourians . . . would be valuable, also a few volumes of sermons by carefully selected Missourians, instructing them to furnish each one just a few of his best and most stimulating sermons containing some fresh thoughts and illustrations, even though they may not be divided into three or six parts. Select for this work an editor who knows what is needed and will go after it wherever he can find it."

But even our *pastoral conferences* and the *synodical officials*, especially the Visitors, must interest themselves in the improvement of our preaching, we are told, if such an improvement is to be brought about. Hence the following suggestions:—

"Much could also be done if the visitation of our churches on the part of our official Visitors were carried out conscientiously. These Visitors are really the men that ought to know about the status of preaching in the Missouri Synod, and they also could do much toward maintaining our high standards. Even our conferences could do a great deal if more time were devoted to doctrinal discussions, while again and again emphasizing the great principles of sermonizing, perhaps in connection with the presentation of sermons, etc."

"Suggest to District pastoral conferences or local conferences or both to concentrate next year on 'How to Raise the Standard of Our Preaching.' Offer to furnish suggestions, even a speaker if desired."

With these suggestions our symposium has been completed. It remains for the reader to digest these materials and to form his own opinions.

E. J. FRIEDRICH.

Sermon Preached on Communion Sunday.

GEN. 32, 24—30.

Context.—The two armies of Jacob, v. 10; Esau's opposing army; Jacob, the sentinel; the tension; the night.—There appears an unexpected opponent; a combat ensues.—Who will prevail? Who receives the spoils?

A Remarkable Combat.

1. *The two combatants.*

A. Text. 1) Jacob: a strong and mighty man, experienced, brave, yet only a human being, mortal, inexperienced in warfare, afraid. A wrestler is competent only relatively, if one measures his ability by the strength, experience, and condition of the opponent—a weak man will overpower the weaker, and the strong is weak in the grasp of the stronger. Jacob's strength and his chances of victory must be measured by the ability of his opponent. Who was his opponent?—2) Vv. 28—30. None other than God Himself, Hos. 12, 3. 4, the promised Messiah. What an uneven match—man against God and God against man!—3) The combat itself is remarkable in its nature, for