

## BOOK SERVICE FROM THE PULPIT

By William L. Stidger

THE preacher who knows and lives in books is capable of a service to his people that will pay a hundred-fold," said a preacher-pastor one day in my presence. He said it with a good deal of emphasis and feeling.

"Books? So you are a book-preacher?" said another preacher in a slightly critical tone.

"Yes," said my friend: "a preacher of books and *the Book*."

A week before this conversation I had heard Helen Keller speak at a meeting of the Advertising Clubs in Cleveland, Ohio. I was scheduled to speak immediately following her appearance. It was the most difficult speaking task I ever attempted. The wonder of what Miss Sullivan had done for that blind, deaf and dumb girl swept me off my feet. I could not refrain from calling the attention of that great crowd of business men to Lincoln's words at Gettysburg as he stood looking down upon the graves of thousands of American soldiers.

I said, "As I stand up to speak to you, following as I do the miracle of Helen Keller, I am aware of the fact that what I say cannot speak as loudly as what Miss Sullivan has done."

It was a tense meeting because of that wonderful girl's presence. But perhaps the most beautiful moment of all was when Miss Sullivan permitted that crowd of business men to ask questions of Miss Keller.

One man said, "Tell Miss Keller that I know her brother in the south." Miss Sullivan put Helen's two fingers

to her own lips and Helen's thumb to her vibrant throat and conveyed the message.

Even before those words were spoken Helen's feet began to dance and her body to vibrate with ecstasy as she said, "And are you an engineer also?"

Then somebody asked Helen what her favorite sport was.

She said with that peculiar and careful pronunciation, "Horseback riding!"

Then Miss Sullivan asked Helen if she knew that the room was full of men.

She danced with excitement and said, "Yes I know."

"How do you know Helen?"

"I can smell zem."

"How do you tell your men friends apart, Helen?"

"I smell zem."

The crowd roared with laughter and excitement. Tears were in every eye. It was a tense ten minutes for every man. Even the laughter was to hide the tears.

"What do you mean when you say you smell them?"

"I smell zeir different tobaccos," said Helen clapping her hands.

Then the crowd applauded. Helen seemed overjoyed at the applause.

Somebody asked her how she could tell that they were applauding, since she could not hear.

She said, "I feel zem."

"How do you feel the applause?"

"Wiz my feet!" Then she danced with delight.

"Do you like golf?" a man asked.

"No!" said Helen.

"Why?" again questioned the man, a golf enthusiast of Cleveland.

"Eet-iz-a-lazy-man's-game!" replied Helen, to the crowd's huge delight.

"Do you read?" asked one of the business men.

"All-ze-time."

"What is your favorite book?"

"Zee Bi—bule!" she said, and in the spelling I have tried to reproduce her pronunciation of that word. It was as tenderly spoken as the words of a mother in speaking of her baby. "Zee Bi—bule" as that girl spoke the word rings like sweet music in my ears. And so, at the beginning of this article about the preacher as a man of books serving his community, I make haste to say that he must be a man of "books and *the Book*".

Books are sacred to most people whether they know it or not.

No Chinese boy or girl or man or woman ever notices a bit of torn paper lying on the street without picking it up and stuffing it away somewhere. This is why travelers in China see little batches of torn newspapers in every corner and hole, as if birds were gathering up debris with which to build nests.

"Why do they do that?" I asked an editor friend in Shanghai.

"The printed word is sacred to them."

"Even torn newspapers?" I said smiling.

"Yes; even old torn paper sacks if they have any printing on them."

And a little later he actually showed me a Chinese boy in the act of picking up an old torn paper bag which had printing on it. This boy carefully

smoothed that sack out and found a hole in a brick wall wherein to place it.

Not to that same degree, perhaps, but to a great degree, we in America unconsciously revere the printed page. It is for this reason that preachers can contribute a tremendous service to a community by bringing to it a ministry of books.

Books! Books! Books!  
And we thank Thee, God  
For the gift of them  
For the glorious reach  
And the lift of them;  
For the gleam in them  
And the dream in them;  
For the things they teach  
And the souls they reach!  
For the maze of them  
And the blaze of them;  
For the ways they open to us  
And the rays that they shoot through us!

Books! Books! Books!  
And we thank Thee, God  
For the light in them  
For the might in them;  
For the urge in them  
And the surge in them;  
For the souls they wake  
And the paths they break;  
For the gong in them  
And the song in them;  
For the throngs of folks they bring to us  
And the songs of hope they sing to us!

Books! Books! Books!  
And we thank Thee, God  
For the deep in them  
For the rhythmic swing  
And sweep of them;  
For the croon in them  
And the boon in them;  
For the prayers they pray  
And the doubt they slay;  
For the do in them  
And the true in them;  
For the blue skies they bring to us  
And the new stars that they strew us.

Such is the glory and the glow of books on human lives. They sweep back the horizons for folks. They add new friendships, new faces, new races, new lands, new worlds to our rich experiences.

More and more are people becoming interested in books. This interest is

due to the number of good books being written; to the influence of the preachers who talk on books; and also to the fact that newspapers are paying more attention to book reviews. There are few American city papers these days that do not have real Book Pages in the Saturday or Sunday issue. Some of these pages are read all over the country.

The preacher who is constantly introducing to his audience great and good books, is contributing something to human lives that is of vital importance. In turn, he will win several things from his hearers for this service. He will win their respect. Perhaps it is a survival of that ancient respect for the printed page. But unconsciously people find themselves respecting the man of books. The man who shows that he is an alert and a reading preacher will have also the constant and the fascinated interest of his listeners. Men and women want to know about books; they want to live with and within books. He will win their trust; for they know that the man who is reading books that are worthwhile is a safe man to follow. "He knows what is going on in the world," they say.

The "dramatic book sermon" is a new form of homiletics. It gives a preacher an opportunity to introduce something "new under the sun" in his sermons. Personally I have never been able to make so telling the story of sin, conviction of sin, repentance, and forgiveness, as I have through Tolstoy's "The Resurrection". I have never been able to picture the beastliness of sin, and the regeneration of a human being as I have through Masefield's "The Everlasting Mercy" or George Eliot's "Romola". I have never been able to present the ramifications of sin as I have through

Bojer's recent book "The Power of a Lie". I have never been able to make so clear the marvelous possibilities of the growth of a human soul as I have through Hugo's "Les Miserables". I have never been able to render sin so burningly vivid as I have through Masefield's "Hell Hounds". I have never been able to make a great congregation see the real Judas so clearly as I have through Dr. Barton's "Four Hitherto Unpublished Gospels". Nor have I ever been able to make the scenes in Christ's life so human as I have through "By An Unknown Disciple". William Allen White's "In the Heart of a Fool" has given me a great, dramatic sermon on the text "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God". The Moffatt translation of the New Testament has become a real feature of my big, popular evening service. "I like to hear you read the Bible now as much as I like to hear you preach," says many a man. There is not a single great spiritual truth in the Bible that cannot be preached through the dialogue, through the characters, the scenes, and teachings of some great novel.

After trying out the "dramatic book sermon" for five years and in one church for four months straight every Sunday night, I have come to the conclusion that the announcement of a "dramatic book sermon" is the surest way to bring people to hear me. It crowds my church; and it also gives me the best medium of getting the truth over to my crowds. People will crowd a church to hear a real book sermon for several reasons: first because every human being has in his soul something that leaps to meet the dramatic in any form. Folks like to hear dialogue and action in a sermon; they like to see real characters walk up and down the pulpit. The second

reason is, that they desire to appear intelligent about books. They are too busy to read books, so they go to hear a preacher who *has* read in an effort to become acquainted with the particular books about which he talks. Third, people like something new in homiletics. They have heard the old "firstly, secondly, thirdly", etc. so long, that when a man brings to them a new type of preaching the news soon spreads through a city.

At first I used the "dramatic book sermon" now and then. It was so successful, however, that after a while I began to use it twice a month. Now for four months in my evening sermon I have used this type of preaching exclusively.

"Do you not run out of books?" I am asked.

"Never! Too many good books are being published," I reply.

"Does it not get monotonous?"

"No! There is infinite variety in books, scenes, and characters."

"Is it not harder to write and preach a dramatic book sermon than an ordinary sermon?"

"Much harder; but worth it!" I answer.

"Do you use anything besides fiction for your dramatic book sermons?"

"I use poems, such as Edwin Markham's 'How The Great Guest Came', 'The Juggler of Touraine', and 'The Shoes of Happiness'; I use such great poems as Masefield's 'The Everlasting Mercy' and 'Hell Hounds'; such dramatic poems as Thompson's 'The Hound of Heaven', and John Oxenham's 'The Gate'. I have used also such books as 'The Americanization of Edward Bok', the 'Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie', 'The Autobiography of Judas Iscariot', 'By An Un-

known Disciple', and 'Four Hitherto Unpublished Gospels'."

We have a book table at St. Mark's. Every book on that table is worthwhile. One of our circles of women has charge of these book tables. There is a table in each lobby. The idea is not to make money but to see that good books are available for all. The women sell the books in exactly that spirit; they feel that they are helping in a real ministry of books when they sell a book to a member of the church. They feel that their work is an extension of the preaching ministry of the church. We do not allow this sacred idea of the ministry of books to degenerate into a money making scheme, even though it is that to a certain extent.

One of the saddest indictments of the sluggishness of the average mind is that it does not read and does not think. A casual glance through the library of an average parishioner will convince any minister of this sad truth. The second thing that a minister soon learns about the lack of books in the average home, is the fact that the average person actually does not know *how* to get a book when he feels the impulse to possess it. He must either write to a publishing house or he must go downtown to a book store. And many of the book stores know little about books. The book table in a church makes it easy for folks to buy books, and the alert minister will be willing to take time out of his busy life to see that books are made easy of access to his people.

People really want books. They are proud of having a well-chosen library, although few of them know how to select books for such a library. It is not an uncommon thing for the women who run the book table in my church

to have a young man or an older man come to them and say, "I want every one of the books that Mr. Stidger has preached about. Get me one copy of each." The last request of this kind meant an order of twenty-five books. I see to it that several copies of the book on which I am going to preach are on our tables. They are invariably sold following the sermon.

Dr. Gunsaulus of Chicago, Dr. Shannon his eloquent successor, Dr. Lynn Harold Hough of Detroit, and Dr. Edgar DeWitt Jones, are all exponents of the book table for churches. They believe that one of the real ministries that a preacher may give unto his people is that of teaching them to buy good books every week of their lives.

"You got me to buy 'The Scarlet Letter' several years ago. That was the turning point in my life," said a boy to me recently.

"The night you preached about 'Les Miserables' sent me to college!" said another lad.

"A chapter in a book in a mission study class sent me to China for my life work," said a young college graduate to a preacher friend of mine.

I remember attending a presentation of John Drinkwater's "Abraham Lincoln" in New York last summer. After the play the author's books were on sale in the lobby of the theatre. Evidently thousands were being sold in that way.

"That's something new," said a friend.

"I've been doing it for five years in my church," I told him to his astonishment.

I have found that one way to contribute to a ministry of books is to run a book column in a city paper. In San José, California, I ran what was called a "Tuesday Evening Book-Serv-

ice" column. Each Tuesday evening in that column I recommended to parents books for children of all ages. I also reviewed a worthwhile book and answered general book questions. I contributed to the town the service of suggesting books for business men, for housewives, and for commencement and other gifts. After this column had been running for a few months the book stores of the city requested that I let them know in advance the books that I was going to review on Tuesday evening. They said that there was always a demand for these books.

In country towns where there is a small daily or weekly paper this service would always be welcome both to the editor of the paper and to the readers of that paper. The publishers are generally willing to cooperate with a minister who is running such a column of book service to his community. It is one of the real ministries of books that a preacher can offer.

I never conduct a prayer meeting without several books on my desk to add variety to the service and to add spiritual strength to whatever else I may have to say to my people. I take Joyce Kilmer with me; Edwin Markham; John Oxenham; Angela Morgan; Edna St. Vincent Millay; and so on through the list. I take a book of prayers like Bishop William A. Quayle's "The Climb to God" or Bishop Thirkield's little "Book of Prayers"; and if a lull comes in the evening service I snatch that opportunity to read to my people a great spiritual poem or a great prayer from some deeply devotional heart. It adds a touch of spiritual strength that I alone cannot give. I do not make this the chief part of the prayer meeting; but it is a real part. I always make *the* Book

the large part of the service, but side by side with The Book of Books I have several companion books to draw on for added spice and variety. This is a ministry of books that I have found most useful and most interesting to large audiences at my prayer meetings.

I never let a year pass without conducting a series of study classes in my young peoples' meetings or at the prayer meeting time. The first purpose, of course, is to get the message of the books into the hearts of the people; but a secondary reason is to get the books into the people's homes. This is a fascinating and a simple book ministry. A certain book is selected for study. Each person in the class gets a copy of the book, and the study runs through as many weeks as there are chapters in the book. At the conclusion of that period the members of the group have acquired intimate knowledge of a new book and new love for the old Book. The Fosdick books may be used in this fashion, as may also "By An Unknown Disciple", "Four Hitherto Unpublished Gospels", and others of a like nature. It was in this way that the chapters of Dr. Sheldon's great book "In His Steps" were first presented to an evening church audience; and it is thus that they have been presented thousands of times since their publication. Perhaps these circumstances explain in a large measure the fact that over 22,000,000 copies of this book are said to have been sold.

Another of the real book ministries that a clergyman may enjoy, is that of lending his own marked books. Somehow they mean more to his people when he has read and marked them. I have been doing this for years, and I have lost very few of my books in

this way. Whenever I do lose one I say, "Well if that person wants that book badly enough to keep it I am glad. It is his as my gift and I'll get a new one." Young people especially will take advantage of this service of the preacher's library. Except for the work of turning the faces of young people toward college, there is no greater ministry than that of turning their faces toward good books and the great characters living within their covers. Indeed the two ministries are kindred.

In a recent conference that I heard conducted by a great-hearted preacher for preachers alone, each minister was asked to tell exactly the thing that had had the most influence in his life. We were somewhat surprised to learn from these great preachers that few of them had been turned to the higher life through hearing a sermon; by far the larger part testified that the reading of certain great books had had the most determining influence in their lives. It is for that reason and that alone that "Who's Who In America" contains the names of more preachers' children than the offspring of any other profession.

"Why is that?" asked a great business man of a great preacher.

"It is because they were raised with great books, culture, and ideals," replied the great preacher to the great business man.

"That is a turning point in a lad's life," said the business man thoughtfully.

"What is?" asked the preacher.

"When he is introduced to a great book," replied the business man.

There are many ministries that the eager preacher may offer to his people; but of them all, the ministry of books has a high place for everlasting good in human lives.

# A SPORT WRITER CONFESSES

By Lawrence Perry

*With Sketches by Reginald Marsh*

SO numerous and varied are the connotative aspects of modern amateur sport that even one as closely associated with it as the writer finds himself at a loss to determine intrinsic values. The professional branch, if only because of its frankness, offers no such difficulty. Obviously and unblushingly its interests are commercial. Ethics are enforced through the medium of fines, suspensions, and the like, so far as participants are concerned, while those who look on are under the surveillance of the police and representatives of private protective agencies. You simply pay your money and demean yourself in accordance with such standards as exist in the paddock, the ringside, the grandstand, or the bleachers. Or, if it be one's lot to chronicle for the daily press, report and commentary of these mercenary sporting activities, the issue is clearly defined; for the aim and the end of all these things is the purveyance of thrilling amusement.

On the other hand we have come to uncertainty concerning the essentials of amateur sport because of complexities which have developed in recent years. For one thing we note a pervading commercial aspect which in respect to football at least must—and does—excite envy in the professional promoter. In track and in rowing there exist opportunities for the promulgation of that international relationship whose recently appreciated significance has utterly changed their character as mere sports and made

them important adjuncts to statecraft and diplomacy.

Furthermore, industrial captains have come to recognize the value of competitive games as a prime factor in the establishment of morale and solidarity among forces of employees, while their value as propaganda has not been lost upon those who conduct our educational institutions.

Amateur sport is competition involving the pride of personal opinion and conducted without thought of gain purely for the sake of the game. The writer used to regard this definition lovingly as a brain-child absolutely adequate and completely descriptive. Now he wonders; he wonders if sport per se any longer exists or, rather, he did wonder until last winter when he varied the rugged delights of the winter carnival at Dartmouth by a ski-hike over the green and white New Hampshire hills where in an alluring tavern in a little ice-locked village he came upon a game of checkers between two local champions.

Surrounding the protagonists sat enthusiasts from the country round, with bated breath watching the various moves and counter moves which the gnarled, albeit cunning, hands devised. And upon the instant of some effective stroke, hand-clappings and floor-thumpings attested the triumph. The issue unquestionably was momentous; sporting spirit ran high. It was, in fact, sport, tangy of the American soil.