

# **THE SUPERNATURAL**

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The Supernatural by Lyman Abbott

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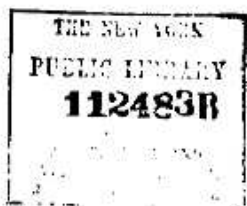
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## THE SUPERNATURAL

**W**E are to discriminate clearly between theology and religion, between life and the philosophy of life. My object this morning is not to expound a complete system of philosophy, but to consider the effect of the change which is taking place in philosophy upon the religious life.

The object of the minister is not to expound philosophy, but to promote life. He is not a teacher of theology, but a preacher of religion. He must be a theologian; he must have a philosophy of the life which he is imparting; nevertheless, his object is not to impart the philosophy, but to use the philosophy that he may impart the life. "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly," says Christ. And then he breathes upon his disciples and says, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit. As my Father hath sent

me, even so send I you." We who are ministers of his grace are to be administrators of his life. We are to impart life. We are to do this through truth; nevertheless, for his ministers truth is not an end, but a means to an end. Truth is instrumental.

The teacher in the medical school teaches physiology and anatomy and hygiene; but when we get sick and send for a doctor, we do not send in order that we may receive a lecture on physiology or anatomy or hygiene. We send for the doctor that he may use his knowledge of physiology or anatomy or hygiene to make us well. You break a bone: you do not want the doctor to tell you about bones, you want him to set the bone. So the object of ministers is not to lecture us on the philosophy of religion; neither is it to ignore the philosophy of religion; it is to use the philosophy of religion to help men and women to live better, nobler, diviner lives. "The truth," says Christ, "shall make you free." "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." Truth is, then, an instrument. The object of truth is to set men free; it is to sanctify men, to make them holy.





The minister who simply expounds the truth does not understand his mission. His mission is so to use truth that men shall be made free; that men shall be made holy. His ministry is, therefore, to be determined by fruits in the life. That is the best sermon, not which is a great pulpit effort, but which is helpful. If, young men, you have preached a sermon and some one comes up to you and says that was a great pulpit effort, hide your head in shame and go home and never write another like it. But if some one comes to you, with a little quaver in the voice and a little moisture in the eye, and says, "Thank you; you have helped me this morning," thank God and go home and try to write another like it. That is the end of preaching—to use theology to help life. The test of the sermon is its fruitfulness in life; and that is the test of theology.

We are not, however, to judge of a truth beforehand by the fruit which we think it will produce. It is the truth which makes free, not any kind of error. It is the truth which sanctifies men, not any kind of falsehood. All truth is safe. All error is danger-

ous. It is only the truth that the minister is to use. He is never to say, "This is the philosophy that my people are used to and this is the philosophy that I think will do better service, and so, though I do not believe it, I will preach it." Never. It is only the *truth* he is to use, but he is always to *use* the truth. Truth is always an instrument.

He is to distinguish, too, between the things he knows and the things he thinks, between certainties and hypotheses. He must have both, both certainties and hypotheses, but he must distinguish in his own mind between the two. It is absolutely certain that there is sunlight, and it is absolutely certain that that sunlight produces certain vital effects on humanity and vegetation; and it is now the universally accepted hypothesis that the whole universe is filled with an invisible, impalpable ether, and that sunlight is produced by undulations of that ether. The ether is a hypothesis. The sunlight is a certainty. In science we all recognize this distinction between the hypotheses and the certainties. Unfortunately, we have not yet learned in theology to distinguish between the hypotheses and the cer-

tainties. We generally quarrel about the hypotheses.

It is, for instance, a certainty, I hope in the experience of all of us—certainly it must be a certainty in the experience of every minister, or he has no right in the pulpit—that God is. God is not a hypothesis which the minister has invented to account for the phenomena of creation. He knows that there is a “power not ourselves that makes for righteousness,” because when he has been weak that power has strengthened him, when he has been a coward that power has made him strong, when he has been in sorrow that power has comforted him, when he has been in perplexity that power has counseled him, and he has walked a different path and lived a different life and been a different man because there is that power—impalpable, invisible, unknown, and yet best and most truly known. But when he comes to ask himself for a definition of this power, for an account of its attributes, and its relation to the phenomena about him, he enters at once into the realm of hypothesis. We know God in his personal relation to ourselves. What he is in himself