

**AD CLERUM:
ADVICES TO A
YOUNG PREACHER**

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Ad Clerum: Advices to a Young Preacher by Joseph Parker

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JOSEPH PARKER

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BY

JOSEPH PARKER, D. D.,

Author of "Ecce Deus."

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1871.

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Ad Clerum:

ADVICES TO A YOUNG PREACHER.

PART I.

CRITICAL LETTERS.

I.

DISCIPLINE.

MR. WASHINGTON has, in my opinion, done well to draw your attention to the ministry, though I feel that both he and you have thrown no little responsibility upon me in asking an answer to the many serious inquiries contained in your interesting letter. In accepting that responsibility (which is done with extreme reluctance), you must understand that throughout my correspondence I shall assume that you feel yourself called of God to the work of preaching the gospel, and that you are daily striving to live in the spirit of Jesus Christ. I wish to be very clear upon this point; for though I may take occasion to express myself somewhat playfully on many questions which will arise, yet I deeply feel that without a spirit of reverent and contrite humiliation before God, and a constancy of loving and trustful desire towards the Saviour, no man is fit to have part or lot in the Christian ministry; when, therefore, I avail myself of satire or raillery, it will relate to the weakness or eccentricity of human usages, and never to the vital and solemn realities of the Divine vocation. Our place, as aspi-

rants to the highest ministry, is at the Cross, where alone the oppression of our own unworthiness is relieved by the completeness of Jesus Christ's grace and truth. All this must be assumed; if we are wrong here, we shall be wrong everywhere;—the gift of prophecy and tongues, and the understanding of all mysteries, will be only temptations and snares, and our ministry will be as a plague in the church.

You have been very frank in the statement of your difficulties, and I regard your frankness as an invitation to your confidence; I shall therefore speak with the familiarity of friendship, being assured that you will not make me "an offender for a word." Shall I condole with you upon your trials before the committee of the college? You complain that though you went before the committee with the simple desire to become a preacher of the gospel, one of the gentlemen horrified you by requesting that you would decline "*Hircus*, a he-goat," on the spot, and that having declined it in the only way which you knew, viz. with much bashfulness and civility, another gentleman asked you to show that if two triangles have their homologous sides proportional they are equiangular and similar. You ask me, in a somewhat impatient tone, what such pagan inquiries have to do with preaching the gospel? You also complain that you were not asked to preach *to* the committee, but to preach *before* the committee; on this point I merely say in passing that you really could not have preached *to* the gentlemen, because if you had addressed them as saints some of them might have been startled, and if you had spoken to them as sinners some of them might have been offended. The gentlemen, you must know, were not exactly hearing for themselves, but were rather congregationalizing by proxy, and giving the preacher a foretaste of the polite treatment which is in reserve for him. As to the Latin noun and the geometrical theorem, I can sympathize with your present dissatisfaction, yet I cannot but

hope that growing experience will convince you that they may have some good influence upon your preparation for the ministry. You will probably forget that in an isosceles triangle the angles opposite to the equal sides are equal to one another, yet the discipline of demonstrating it will enable you to humiliate any rash heretic who may hereafter seek to poison your church members with the deadly doctrine of necessitarianism. You thus observe, my dear sir, that what we have in view is discipline; the strength of arm which you get by turning a grindstone may be turned to excellent account in felling a tree; and the discipline which is imposed by proving that some x 's are some y 's, and that other x 's are all y 's, will enable you to pulverize any hot-headed deacon who may hereafter attempt to prove that you had better be looking out for another pastorate. So you see we seek to whet you on hard subjects that you may the better cut easy ones, just as we whet a knife upon stone that it may the more readily cut the smoking joint. Pray, therefore, look upon your technical studies in the light of *discipline*,—say, if you please, in the light of dumb bells,—which may force you to breathe though they never breathe themselves. Besides this, you must remember that it would be very awkward if you could not meet your people on their own ground, and chastise some of them with their own whips. Only think how embarrassing it would be if a deacon's son knew more than you did about the Law of excluded Middle; how could that young man listen with any confidence to your exhortations from the pulpit? Would not the *principium exclusi medii, vel tertii*, on which he had broken you to pieces, deafen him to your most urgent appeals? Think again, if your lot should be cast among a seafaring population, how utterly quenched you would feel in dining with a captain if he discovered that you could not calculate the varying values of the semidiameters of the sun and moon; and though he might excuse