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Familiar talks on sermon  
building





FAMILIAR TALKS  
*on*  
SERMON BUILDING



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ON  
SERMON BUILDING

BY  
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TO THE  
**Rev. William McKibbin, D.D., LL.D.**  
PRESIDENT OF THE LANE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
ON WHOSE INVITATION THESE FAMILIAR TALKS  
WERE ORIGINALLY GIVEN TO THE THEOLOGUES OF LANE  
AND AT WHOSE REQUEST THEY HAVE BEEN  
“COMMITTED TO THE CUSTODY OF THE TYPES”  
THIS BOOKLET IS RESPECTFULLY  
DEDICATED



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## FOREWORD

**T**HESE Familiar Talks on Sermon Building make no pretension to a complete treatise in Homiletics. Their original delivery served to supplement the instruction of over-worked teachers of sermon making; and their preparation for the press was the work of a quiet winter at four score in beautiful Pasadena, California.

For the bones and some of the flesh of four of these Familiar Talks on Sermon Building I am indebted to my manuscript notes of Dr. William M. Paxton's Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric in the Western Theological Seminary. They were given to the students of a past generation more than fifty years ago. But they are wonderfully up to date, and have been of immense value to me throughout my entire ministry. And they are more highly prized that the lectures themselves have never been published. For certain reasons I have had occasion to examine a number of volumes on homiletics, but have never found anything of so much practical value, especially in the business of making sermons, as these notes of the Seminary.

Class-room in the early sixties. Relief for myself and help for my readers will explain and justify this drawing on forgotten stores.

O. A. H.

WOOSTER, OHIO.

# I

## *INTRODUCTORY*

### SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD SERMON

**T**HE sermon is a distinctive feature of our Presbyterian order of worship. Some other Churches, notably the Episcopal, make much of the Service; and their Prayer-Book is almost as dear to them as the Bible. Among many of our own Churches there is a growing taste for a so-called "enrichment" of our public worship; and so we have come to have responsive readings, the Lord's prayer in unison by the people, the anthem and responses by the choir, the seven-fold amen, and the organ prelude and postlude, and divers and sundry other features more or less elaborate.

I confess to some sympathy with this desire and purpose to make the worshiper more than a mere hearer, but am afraid this tendency may be carried too far. Nothing can ever take the place of the sermon. It can never wisely be shunted off to a corner. It is the sermon that opens our pulpits to our ministers, and leads to their settle-

ment as pastors; and if they are failures in the pulpit, they might as well step down and out. Sooner or later they will have to go. We rejoice in this prominence of the sermon. It is the distinguishing mark of an evangelizing Church. She thus fulfills her great commission—preaching the Gospel and teaching all nations.

To learn how to make a sermon, therefore, is a great business. There is hardly anything more important in the entire curriculum of the Seminary. It will be a fitting introduction to what I shall have to say on this subject to consider at this time,

#### SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD SERMON

'As preliminary to its consideration, let me emphasize just here these two statements, viz.: 1. The building of a sermon is hard work. If you have any idea that when you get through the Seminary you will have nothing to do but stand in the pulpit and open your mouth, and the Lord will fill it, you are going to get left. There were certain circumstances in which the Lord promised special help in unpremeditated utterance; but preaching a sermon was not one of them.

2. The building of a sermon is a purely mechanical process. 'As the architect and builder conceives the plan of a house, and straightway proceeds to the construction of it in every detail according to the plan, so the preacher invents a



scheme of thought, and, if it amounts to anything, will immediately proceed to carry it out in every particular with vast labor and diligence.

What then constitutes a good sermon? Of course, I am taking it for granted that the sermon is true and orthodox. If it does not possess these features it is a poor sermon, no matter what other good features may characterize it. With this understanding, will you be surprised if I say,

#### I. A GOOD SERMON MUST BE INTERESTING

You are the messengers of the King. You are entrusted with a message from the Throne. What does your legation amount to, if that message does not win the attention of those to whom you are sent? You are bound to get a hearing. Your message must be couched in such terms as will arrest the attention, and hold the interest of your people.

Let me just here warn you against some meretricious ways of making a sermon interesting. They are such as these, viz.: 1. The selection of catchy themes. 2. The use of high-flown oratory. 3. The excessive use of illustrations.

Set over against these there are legitimate ways of securing an interested attention. Such are these, viz.: The use of 1. Timely topics. 2. Clarity of thought. 3. Brevity of expression. 4. Simplicity of diction.

## II. A GOOD SERMON MUST BE INSTRUCTIVE

On this topic let me emphasize the following points, viz.: 1. The teaching function of the pulpit is of immense moment—as much so as ever in the history of the Church. 2. The minister who wears, and year after year abides in his place, with ever growing influence and power, is the man who gives his people something to think about. 3. Preaching in times of revival especially must be instructive. Mere hortatory preaching at such times will not answer. The ephemeral character and influence of many seasons of gracious visitation are due largely to this kind of preaching. When the Spirit of God is stirring men to thoughtfulness, then is pre-eminently the time to give them something to think about. The most fruitful sermons at such times will have to do with the fundamentals—the holiness of God—the Divinity of Christ—the law of God—the nature and demerit of sin—the nature and need of the atonement—justification—Sanctification—faith—and repentance. These are stalwart themes; but when presented to men, when their hearts are softened and quickened by the Holy Spirit, they will make stalwart believers.

## III. A GOOD SERMON MUST BE CUMULATIVE IN ITS UNFOLDING OF THE TRUTH

In other words, a good sermon must grow. The author of a good and important magazine article,

to be read, and possibly re-read, will wisely group his strongest points at the forefront, and later will gather subsidiary considerations, and pile them around the bulwarks which he has already built up.

The builder of a sermon will, for the most part, do exactly the opposite. The most effective sermon will begin with less important points, to be followed by increasingly strong and impressive considerations. And, in the nature of the case, the hearer, whose attention has been arrested at the start, will follow the speaker with growing interest, as he rises from point to point to an ever higher point, and comes at last to a climax of overwhelming demonstration!

For the failure to observe this principle, many a sermon, evincing the profoundest ability, and possessing elements of colossal power over an audience, dwindles away to an utter insignificance.

#### IV. A GOOD SERMON WILL BE MARKED BY A DIVINE UNCTION

“How did you like that sermon?” I said to a friend, as we left the Church. “Well, it was a good sermon.” “But your tone implies that you were not quite pleased with it.” “Well, it was a very good sermon—well constructed, orthodox in sentiment, and logical in arrangement, and it grew to a fitting climax. Yes, I must say it was quite above the average pulpit discourse.” “But still, my

friend, you were evidently not satisfied with it. What was wrong? Now, be honest, and tell me frankly what in your judgment was wanting." "Well, I will, though, as you know, I do not allow myself to indulge in criticism of my brethren. There was one serious defect in our brother's sermon. I never heard him preach a sermon that did not show the same defect. There was a total lack of that Divine quality which I call *Uction*. That man's preaching never touches me. I hear him with interest. I admire the skill with which he frames his discourses. With great intellectual delight I follow him as he marches on from point to point; but all the time my heart is unmoved. His preaching is as clear and cold as an icicle; and I go away from Church crying out of the depths of my heart, 'Oh! if he only had an unction from the Holy One.' I guess that man has never had any affliction."

I think my friend was right, my brethren. This crowning quality of a good sermon is one you cannot learn in the Seminary. In the chamber of sickness, or by the bedside where your loved one is slipping away from you, you may get that tenderness of heart and that mellowness of tone that will carry your message to the hearts of those you desire to reach. Under the sweet pervasiveness of this heavenly unction solemnity and yearning will mark your countenance, and something of Divine Love will possess your whole nature.

Dr. John M. Worrall, of blessed memory, for more than twenty years the pastor of the First Church of Covington, was the best pastor-evangelist I ever knew. Many blessed seasons of co-working in special services we had in the long-gone years. He had this quality of which I am speaking in a marked degree; and it became specially manifest in seasons of revival. At such times his face would lighten with a heavenly radiance, and his voice would sound as if his heartstrings were being touched by the fingers of the pleading angel. I learned much from him, and I needed to. My thin visage seemed to proclaim an austere spirit, and my most earnest tones often rose to a terrible roar.

A good lady of his congregation helped me greatly, and the story of her words, at my expense, may be helpful to you. I went over one evening to begin a series of meetings in the First Church. I reached the lecture-room a little early, and took a seat in the rear of the room, awaiting the pastor's coming. Two ladies sat in front of me. I had no difficulty in hearing what they were saying; but I paid no attention to their conversation, till suddenly my ear caught the question, "Do you know the preacher of this evening?" Of course, I was alert to hear the answer, "No, I don't know anything about him; but I have been told—and here she turned a little closer to her friend—that he just enjoys a funeral."

You better believe I did not put on a long face in that service! I met the lady at the close of the meeting, but never let on—nor did she! I think she changed her mind about the preacher before that series of services came to an end; and the preacher learned that solemnity was not austerity, nor was it wise for a minister to show in his countenance all the woes by which sometimes his heart is weighed down.

This Divine Unction, brethren, you will find you need more than any other one thing—and especially if you mean to preach the Gospel. Oh you can preach ethics and reforms, and such like topics, without it, but not the blessed Evangel. How will you get it? Let me close these remarks with a few briefly worded suggestions:

1. Make your preaching distinctly evangelistic. Woe worth the day when the pastors of our Churches relegate the preaching of the Gospel to the peripatetic tabernacle evangelists.
2. Seek an ever deepening sense of your personal unworthiness as a messenger of grace.
3. Keep ever before you a vivid conception of the lost estate of the unbelieving and impenitent.
4. Enter ever more and more thoroughly into the boundless compassion of the Lord Jesus.

5. Cultivate the pleading, persuasive tones of the human voice.
6. Whenever and wherever you preach a sermon, as the dying mother, in Mac-laren's "Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush," besought her beloved son, "Speak a gude word for Jesus Christ, Laddie."

## II

### CHOOSING A TEXT AND THEME

**B**EFORE taking up this topic several preliminary questions need to be answered.

1. Why choose a text at all? No other form of public discourse has such a prefix; why should the sermon have it? Voltaire, as quoted by Vinet, says "It were to be wished that Bourdaloue, in banishing from the pulpit the bad taste which debased it, had banished from it also this custom of preaching from a text. Indeed to speak long upon a quotation of a line or two—to labor to bring his whole discourse to bear upon this line—such a labor appears trifling, little worthy the dignity of the ministry."

Of course, the inspiration of the text was nothing to Voltaire, nor the fact that that "line or two" might have a message of infinite moment. But this fact of its infinitely weighty character is abundant justification of the custom of preaching from texts. The text is God's message; and the preacher is God's messenger.

2. Should the text, or the theme, be chosen first? Ordinarily, I should say the text. Sometimes, in-



deed, the subject may be chosen first, and the text selected afterward—as, for example, when public opinion is centered upon some great subject, or some prevailing evil has gripped the community, or some kind of reform is sweeping over the state. For the most part, however, you are to preach God's message, and that message is ordinarily in the text.

This choice of the text is one of the minister's difficult—perhaps most difficult, duties. There are several reasons why this is so, viz.: (1) Because of the minister's ignorance of his people's spiritual state. The text is God's truth; but just now it does not fit. (2) Because of the minister's want of a thorough knowledge of the Bible. That Bible is full of messages marvelously adapted to every congregation; but because the minister cannot find them, he cannot say, "I have a message from God to thee." (3) Because of that mental vacillation which keeps one tossing from one text to another, from the beginning of the week to the very end of it.

I may therefore just here fittingly call your attention to some directions for

#### CHOOSING A TEXT OR THEME

I. *Cultivate the habit of making a note of texts, seed-thoughts, apposite illustrations, and interesting expositions.* Hawthorne's "American Notes"

is a good illustration of the kind of a book a minister ought to carry. The late President Scovel's habit of never going to bed without first outlining a sermon was a good one, but might be improved. Such work were better done in the early morning hours. You could profitably do this while dressing—provided you had no wife to talk to you, and keep your thoughts down to sublunary things.

II. *Get your texts from God.* Ask Him for the message which He would have you bring to your people, in special, humble and confiding prayer.

Our own spiritual state is a factor of vast importance in getting messages from our Divine Lord.

We cannot hope to be His fitting mouth-piece to our people, if we are not living in closest and most sympathetic relations to Him and His work.

III. *Select your texts after a careful survey of your congregation—its present spiritual condition and prospective needs.* Some particular case among your people may lead you to the choice of a text, the discussion of which may not prove helpful to the person for whom you intended it, but which will be used of the Divine Spirit to open other blinded eyes which were not in your thoughts. Let me give you an illustration or two out of my own experience in dealing with souls:

(1) Many years ago in this city, after a long and faithful conversation on personal religion with

a member of my congregation, I went home and wrote a sermon on the text—"Believe on the Lord Jesus; and thou shalt be saved." I prepared the sermon after much earnest study and prayer; and I believed it would, with the Divine blessing, lead my young friend into the light. That Sabbath was a beautiful day; the congregation was large and attentive; and the Lord gave me great liberty of utterance. But the person for whom the sermon had been prepared was not there! Soon after she removed from this region, married in a distant city, and identified herself with a heterodox congregation; and so far as I know never came into the light, and to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Did I then make a mistake? Was my text a wrong selection? I think not. I asked the Lord for it; and I believed, and still believe, He gave it to me. I meant it to voice a message to one person, the Lord intended it for many persons. I have preached that sermon in many places, and to many congregations; and I have many reasons to believe never without proving a fruitful message.

So I say, select your texts with careful reference to your people, and often with some one person in mind—never making him however a recognizable target from the pulpit. And the Lord will direct your message, it may be, to widely different persons from those you had in mind. Let me give you another illustration.

(2) In my early ministry I went to assist a

brother pastor in a series of special services. The congregation was sorely distracted—split up into factions, growing largely out of the state of the country—it was during the Civil War. In ten days I preached fifteen sermons, every one of them addressed to members of the Church, for my thought, with which the pastor agreed, was that it was of little use to try to reach the unconverted, while the saints were in such an unsaintly spiritual condition. On sabbath night, the second sabbath evening of the tenth day, the pastor said, “I believe I will give an opportunity for an expression of interest on the part of outsiders.” I assented; and the invitation was given. In those days, and in that Presbytery, it was the custom to ask inquirers to come forward to the front seats for special personal counsel and prayer. Almost immediately it seemed as if the whole congregation was on its feet, and moving to the front. In the little Church seating only about 200, twenty-five young people came and sat down before the desk; and the place was a veritable Bochim. That broke down the Church. Their petty divisions melted away in the fire of God; and a great work of grace went forward from that day—a work of which some few survivors will tell you after fifty years.

Now the notable thing about this work is that I had not been preaching to these young people at all. And yet I had been preaching to them most effectively in that the truth of God found a lodg-

ment in their hearts, getting in edgewise. My texts and themes, chosen in weakness, were Divinely guided to a gracious and fruitful end.

IV. *When you have chosen a text, as a rule stick to it with your mind ever on the alert to note the fact and meaning of all daily happenings.* You have reason to believe that you have received your text from God. Take it for granted that it contains the message which He would have you speak. Your own peace of mind requires this. Without this fixity of purpose you will vacillate all through the week, and come to the Sabbath with no certain and definite word from the Lord to your people.

This does not mean, of course, that you are to ignore all current events. Many things may happen between the selection of your texts early in the week, and the preaching of your sermons on the coming Lord's Day. But ordinarily it is wiser to adhere to the texts and themes you have already chosen, especially if you are able, as often you will find it possible, to weave your messages and the more recent event together in one mutually strengthening lesson.

Sometimes you cannot do this; and as a mental necessity you will have to take another text and subject. You will not often have my experience on the death of Lincoln. I was pastor of a country church in one of the mountain valleys of central Pennsylvania. We were off the railroad eleven

miles, and there was no telegraph, and the telephone was yet unborn. So it came about that my first knowledge of the great tragedy, which had plunged the nation into mourning, reached me at the church door on Sabbath morning. And I was full of another theme, which I had been studying all the week. But of course I could not preach it; and you may be sure I did a prodigious amount of hustling and thinking, while the choir sang the opening anthem and the longest hymn I could find in the hymn-book!

Another experience of mine will illustrate the truth that, while it is ordinarily wise to stick to the chosen text and theme, sometimes a Divine constraint will compel you to abandon it. I was supplying the Presbyterian Church of Santa Barbara, Cal. One Saturday night I was reviewing a sermon prepared for the next day. My preparations were finally all made, my hymns and Scripture lessons selected; and I was about to retire. Suddenly there came over me the profoundest conviction that I was making a mistake, and that my sermon was not the one the Lord would have me preach. I laid it aside and at 11:30 P. M. turned up the barrel, and selected another. My mind was immediately at rest: and the next morning with most inadequate preparation I preached on the text—"Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He will sustain thee."

Two women in black sat before me, one of whom

I recognized as the wife of one of the elders; and the other I supposed was the married daughter, whose home was in Oakland. As I spoke the tears rolled down the face of the younger woman, while she appeared to be wholly unconscious of any display of emotion. Of course, at the close of the service I sought them out, and learned this sad story—the daughter had been married a number of years, and had two little children. The eldest, a boy of six, had been born deaf and dumb. When the little girl came they feared a similar affliction, but hoped they might be spared another so great a trial. But only recently it had become evident that the Lord was doubling their sorrow, and that their home would never be gladdened by the cheerful voices of happy children.

In the young mother's grief, she came for comfort to the old home, and to her own mother's sympathizing heart. With great difficulty that mother had persuaded her to come to the house of God that morning where she should hear, as the Lord had graciously planned, a message which should wondrously help and comfort her. The mighty Lord, so opulent in resources, thought it not too much to send His sorrowing child five hundred miles down the coast, to hear the message He had for her; and that message He had sent more than two thousand miles across the continent to sustain her fainting soul, and send her back

to her silent home with lowly songs of submission and peace.

V. *Seek variety in your texts and themes.* He was a wise minister, whose practice it was—not indeed with unbroken regularity—to vary his sermons somewhat after this fashion—to-day he would give his people a sermon on some Bible doctrine. Next Lord's Day his sermon would be on some practical Christian duty. On the third Sabbath he would come before his congregation with a carefully prepared Scripture exposition. And on the fourth Sunday he would seek to interest his people with a fruitful analysis and delineation of some Biblical character. So he would run a course of varying Bible themes for a month, and often for two months.

In this way he succeeded in escaping one of the most insidious perils that beset the path of the pastor, especially one settled in a retired community—the temptation to monotony in the choice of subjects, leading often to equal monotony in the treatment of his themes.

VI. *Avoid, or use with extremest care, all peculiar texts and themes.* This is a common, and for the most part, wise direction. And the reason is not far to seek. The danger is that your sermon may seem dull and flat to people whose attention has been arrested by the announcement of a peculiar and striking text. But there are many such texts in the Bible; and I suppose they were



put there to be preached from. I think, therefore, that it is permissible sometimes to use them. To do so to edification, it is important for the preacher to tone down the expectation of his hearers by immediately calling attention to the plain and serious truth which the Divine Spirit has chosen to present in such a striking way.

Let me illustrate the difficulty, and the way to obviate it, from my own experience. A few summers ago, while still in the pastorate, I wished to present to the Summer School of the College of Wooster the truth in four striking passages of Holy Scripture on four successive Sabbath mornings. I announced a series of "Plain Truths from Strange Texts"—emphasizing the plainness and solemnity of the truth, and not the novelty of the Scripture statement.

My first sermon was "A Call to Men," and the text was Pharaoh's words to Israel's leaders, "Go now ye that are men, and serve Jehovah." The second was on "Edging toward the World," with Lot's example as set forth in the text, he "Pitched his tent toward Sodom"—a text the Revision has well-nigh spoiled. The third was a statement of the "Characteristics of an Insufficient Religion," and the text was in Isaiah's words, "For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that a man can wrap himself in it." The fourth sermon of the series, addressed to women especially, was on

“Making it easy for our friends to remain away from Christ,” and the text was that striking one of Ezekiel, “Woe to the women that sew pillows upon all elbows.”

To sum up then what has been said on Choosing a Text and Theme:

1. *Cultivate the habit of noting Texts and sermon material.*
2. *Get your texts from God in humble and believing prayer.*
3. *Make your selection after a careful survey of your congregation.*
4. *When you have chosen a text in all ordinary circumstances adhere to it.*
5. *Seek variety in your texts and themes.*
6. *Avoid, or use with extremest care, all peculiar texts.*

### III

## GETTING SOMETHING TO SAY

**W**E have found our text or theme: what shall we do with it? A superficial answer would be, Let us first of all set down some divisions of our proposed sermon; or perhaps the suggestion would be, Let us in the first place get a good introduction to the subject.

Well, some texts naturally divide themselves; we don't need to waste time on these bones of the sermon. And for some themes, under certain circumstances, no introduction is needed; and the wise preacher will at once, and without any preliminaries, launch out into the discussion of his subject.

Usually, however, the first thing is to get something to divide, if division is called for—something to introduce, if introduction is necessary. In other words, we want first of all something to say. We introduce and divide not the text nor subject, but the material we have gathered for the discussion of text and theme. And we must, as the first step, provide the material. One word describes the process, *i. e.*, Invention—finding the subject-matter of the sermon.

There are three steps in this important work:

1. *The origination of thought.*
2. *The gathering from other fields.*
3. *The combination and assimilation of the originated and gathered stores.*

Let us examine these three steps in their order.

I. *The origination of thought.* This is altogether the most difficult part of sermon building. Some ministers shrink from it. And after getting the text, the first thing they do is to resort to commentaries, and the sermons of other preachers. As a consequence of this habit they become simply compilers; and, as a rule, their sermons have really almost nothing that they can honestly call their own.

Some suggestions, therefore, for this work of originating thought, will not be out of place.

1. *Resort to prayer.* You received your text from the Lord in answer to prayer. Continue in that receptive attitude, and believe that He who gave you the message will open your understanding to the fullness of its meaning. Only by prayer will you get that tranquillity of mind that will fit you to receive the truth of the text into your own heart, and until you get it into your own heart, you will not be able to carry it into the hearts of your hearers.

2. *Seek to get a clear idea of the text, and its plain meaning, just as it would come to an untutored reader of the word.* The common people

will hear you gladly when they find you emphasizing the truths which they have themselves discovered in the message.

3. *Read the text in its connection, making note of any incident to which it refers, and marking any peculiar circumstances in which the text lies imbedded.*

This preliminary work now being done, as the next step prepare your mental machinery for serious thinking. As part of this preparation this advice (which is not mine) is not to be despised, viz., Take the most favorable attitude for thinking. Some think best walking the floor—others sitting at the desk with pen in hand—still others in a swinging chair, with feet on the desk and higher than the head, to let the blood run down to the brain—and still others—Alas! that I am obliged to say it—with a corncob pipe, if not a meerschaum, in the mouth!

In this process of thinking we find two important steps. The first is that of *general survey*. At this stage of your thought you are looking about the text. You stand before a beautiful edifice. You note its location. You mark its surroundings. You study its relations to the landscape which it adorns. All this in a leisurely and easy way you survey; but you do not at present enter the building.

The second step, for want of a better term I may style that of *delving in the mine*. At this

stage of your thinking your mind, with all its forces girded for earnest work, lays hold of the text, turning it this way and that, searching its depths, and bringing to light its hidden, possibly manifold meanings.

As you thus bind your mind down to the Divine Message, that mind begins to work. A thought springs forth; if you are wise you will tarry a moment, and nail it down. While doing this a second idea follows almost immediately. You nail it down; and this suggests a third. In like manner you nail it down. And so the process of mental incubation goes on; and almost before you are aware of it, you have all needful and appropriate thought corraled, and noted on the pages of your note-book.

II. *Gathering from other fields.* And 1. *First of all, you will need to examine your text in the original Hebrew or Greek.* If you cannot read Greek or Hebrew, the good Lord have mercy on your souls; you are going to miss a heap. However the Englishman's Hebrew and Greek Concordances are two volumes which will greatly help you, and make up in large measure for your ignorance of the words in which the Holy Spirit has enshrined the message of salvation. To some of you this may seem a barren field, even with the aid of such scholarly helps. I beg to assure you that it is not so; on the contrary it is oftentimes an exceedingly fruitful field. The root idea

and original meaning of the words of Holy Scripture often open upon a world of fruitful and edifying thought. Let me give you two illustrations, one from the Hebrew, the other from the Greek, e. g., Psalm 17:8—"Keep me as the apple of the eye." Literally it is "Keep me as the little one of the eye." What suggestive meaning is here? You confront the face of your loved one, and the image you see in those gentle orbs is a miniature of yourself. So the Psalmist is near to Jehovah, and in those Divine eyes, bent in love upon him, he beholds a miniature of himself; and as one guards his eye and the picture there portrayed, so he prays for the Divine keeping.

Again look at Mark's story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand. The Lord commands his disciples to seat the multitudes in companies or literally "parterres" of about fifty each. And knowing the Oriental love of bright colors, we can imagine the variegated costumes, and what a spectacle is here pictured for us in the 100 parterres or flowerbeds spread out in orderly array on the green slopes of Bethsaida. No quicker way can be imagined for securing the attention and awakening the interest of a congregation in the discussion of the great miracle than to begin with this picturesque setting of the Gospel story.

2. *Collect and collate all parallel passages.* With discrimination you will afterward find it needful to reject those which on a closer examina-

tion you come to see are inappropriate. Then you will find it helpful to write out all those that are really *Ad rem*. And as you thus work, you will find a store of thought, germane to your text and helpful in its elucidation, coming to your hand.

3. *Having done your own thinking, you can now safely and profitably look over the thinking of other students of the Word.* Now is the time to examine the best and sanest and soundest of the commentaries. You may not find even the best of them specially helpful. It has been wisely and wittily said, Commentaries are notoriously good on the easy places, but of comparatively little value on the passages that really need an enlightening exposition.

4. *As another step in gathering from other fields, now is the time for you to read anything and everything that you have reason to believe will "bring grist to your mill," and increase the store of subject-matter for your sermon.* To be well posted in the lessons of history will be vastly helpful to you; and this is particularly true of perfect familiarity with the historical portions of the holy word. With all the modern Bible study, we have to admit that there is a woeful amount of ignorance of the historical Scriptures. Of the many thousands who sing Perronet's grand old hymn, "All hail the power of Jesus' name," how few there are who understand the meaning of his phrase—"the stem of Jesse's rod," or know where



the poet found this singular name for the Messiah. This is but one illustration of many Scriptural expressions and incidents, the use of which will greatly enrich your discourses, and you may be sure will come to many of your people with all the freshness of novelty, and as something they have never heard of before.

III. *The combination and assimilation of your originated and gathered stores.* This is an exceedingly difficult and important part of your work in building a sermon.

You have gathered, let us suppose, abundant material from the store-house of your own brain, and from the fields where other minds have garnered. You cannot put this miscellaneous store before your people in any edifying way, without further thought, and, shall I say manipulation. This body of material must now be put through the alembic of your own mind, and fused into one homogeneous mass. Only thus can you regard it as fitting Subject-matter for your sermon. To do this effectively several things are necessary. You must go back to your text, and ask yourself, What does this text need? Is it explanation—or proof—or illustration—or practical enforcement. And your answers to these questions will determine what, and how much, of the material you can use, and how.

But I need not further dwell upon this topic. You will secure a great variety, and come to your

pulpit with an ever unfading freshness in a wise and discriminating use of the stores of thought you have garnered and gathered.

Perhaps in talking of materials for sermons, I should say something just here on the subject of "Quotations." A series of Don'ts will probably best express my mind about them.

1. *Don't use quotations very often.* Some ministers' sermons are like a patch-work quilt.

2. *Don't make a point simply to bring in an interesting quotation.* That device is quite transparent and soon loses its effect.

3. *Don't use quotations that are not germane to your subject, and easily recognized as such.*

4. *Don't use quotations simply to show the extent of your reading, and impress your people with your learning.*

5. *Don't use doggerel in quoting, but draw upon the great poets, or the hymn-writers of all the ages.*

Sometimes one of the grand old hymns, apropos to your subject, will most effectively close a good sermon. For example, if you were preaching on Rev. 19:12, "And on His heads were many crowns," you might close with this incident: One of God's saints dying in a foreign city, was heard to murmur "Bring," and they summoned her husband. But she shook her head, and again breathed forth the one word, "Bring." And they brought her little daughter; and again she shook her head;

and again they caught the word, "Bring." Once more the nurse brought the strengthening cordial; but again she shook her head. At last, summoning all her powers so rapidly failing, she cried out:

"Bring forth the royal diadem,  
And crown Him Lord of all."

and sank away immediately into unconsciousness, to awaken, as they fondly believed, in the presence of her crowned Christ.

After such a sermon, and such an affecting incident, a few stanzas of the hymn, I have already quoted, would seem to be a necessity:

"All hail the power of Jesus' name,"

and any Christian congregation would surely join in the glorious refrain:

"And crown Him Lord of all."

## IV

### ARRANGING OUR MATERIAL

**W**E have found our text and theme. We have gathered from various sources such material as we wish to use in the discussion of our subject. How shall we present this material to our people?

In answering this question two others emerge just here, viz.: (1) In this arranging of our material shall we make use of divisions? And, if we answer this affirmatively, (2) Shall we announce our divisions beforehand?

Before going further we must find, if we can, satisfactory answers to these inquiries.

1. *Shall we make use of divisions in arranging our materials?* I should say, Certainly not, if what we have to say amounts only to a sermonette! It is not worth while to divide a loaf if the separate parts amount only to a few little crumbs.

The modern tendency, I think, is to discard the use of divisions. Some say they trammel and hamper the mind of the preacher as he prepares his sermon. I do not myself see how this can be, if he gathers his material before he divides.

If a man divides his text, as the next step after getting one, it is easy to see how his divisions may prove barrier lines, within which all his subsequent mental processes must go forward. Others say divisions are destructive of unity. This depends on the kind of division you make. This will appear more clearly when we come to consider the characteristics of a good division.

Dr. Paxton used to tell his students, Divisions are depreciated by several classes of people as (1) By those who strive simply to please; this is best accomplished without divisions (as to which my verdict would be best expressed in the Scotch vernacular, "I hae me doots about that"). (2) By those who do not know, or at least do not practice on the knowledge of, the difference between the essay and the sermon; and in this, in my judgment, there is a vast amount of truth. In conforming to the demand for short sermons (which at the outside must not go beyond 30 minutes, and the most popular preacher hesitates to exceed 20) our modern sermon builders unconsciously slide into an essay style; and so we no longer hear the stoutly-framed strongly-built discussion of truth that grips the attention, conscience, heart and will of the congregation, and becomes an element of tremendous power in molding the life of the people.

2. *If we make use of divisions, shall we announce them beforehand?* I should say, No. And

in this, I believe, I have the approving judgment of many of the great preachers of the Church—as Fenelon of the French pulpit, and Robert Hall of the English. Yet it is a notable fact that Robert Hall, distinguished as his sermons are for good divisions, almost invariably announces them beforehand. In the six large volumes of his works I found not more than a dozen, in which the whole scheme of his sermon is not spread out in the beginning, immediately after his introduction. So you can take Hall's precept, or his practice. I prefer his precept. It seems to me the interest of the people will be more easily and certainly kept up, if you do not announce your divisions beforehand. And if it be desirable, as oftentimes it will be, to give your people a general and comprehensive view of what you have been saying, you can better do it in a closing recapitulation.

Taking it for granted, then, that as a general rule sermons are better for divisions, let us now attend to these three things about them. And, as you see, I follow Robert Hall's practice, and announce them beforehand:

1. *Some of the characteristics of good divisions.*
2. *Some of the different kinds of divisions.*
3. *Some of the wisest methods of treating divisions.*

## I. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD DIVISIONS

1. *They should be brief.* Divisions are like the sash in the window—important and needful to support the glass; but the less sash you use the more light you will have.

2. *They should be few and yet comprehensive.* Few—so that your people can carry them away in memory, and by recalling them may be able to recollect the essential parts of your sermon. Comprehensive—that so no part of your text will appear to have been omitted.

3. *They may be concealed.* That is to say, it is not always necessary to announce your divisions as firstly, secondly, etc., while yet they are separated so distinctly that even an inattentive hearer can note your passing from one point to another.

4. *They should be marked by one of two features; (1) They should grow one out of another.* Your first, for example, should presuppose the coming of your second, yet never imply your hearers' knowledge of the second. And your second should look for its completion to the third, and so on, if you have so many. This is so important let me illustrate it by an example. You are preaching on Mark 3:29, "Whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin." You say by way of introduction, One of the most subtle

objections to the doctrine of eternal retribution finds its force in the vision of a soul in the lost world bemoaning its folly and crying out for a penitent return to God, but shut out of heaven by an arbitrary and irreversible ordination. There will never be such a case. The teaching of Scripture is that the lost not only have no power but also no desire to return to God. They are guilty of an eternal sin. This then will be your plan in defending the text: (1) The terrible and destructive persistence of sin. Without help *ab extra* it goes on to irremediable ruin. (2) God's gracious provision for arresting this persistence of sin, in the blessed work of the Holy Spirit. (3) The nature of that sin which defeats the provisions of the Divine Mercy, and compasses the eternal loss of the soul. (4) An earnest plea for a tender treatment of the loving Spirit.

It is not difficult to see how in this plan of a sermon one division grows out of the preceding; and the order of the topics cannot be changed without destroying the unity of the discourse, and blocking the tender appeal with which you would close the discussion of this solemn subject.

2. *If not bound to each other after this fashion your divisions should all be bound with common ligaments to the central theme.* The divisions of your sermon are like the stalks of a bunch of celery. Every separate succulent stalk stands upright alongside of its fellow; but if you will look



low enough, you will see every stalk curving round to take hold of the common root. Let me illustrate this by an example. You are preaching on Gal. 6:7, and your theme is "The Laws of the Harvest." The heads of your discourse are these, viz.: (1) We shall reap if we sow. (2) We shall reap what we sow. (3) We shall reap as we sow. (4) We shall reap more than we sow. (5) We shall often reap what other people sow.

Here are five divisions; and the order in which you discuss them is not very material. All have an equal relation to the general theme of the text, and all take hold of the memory; *If* we sow—*What* we sow—*As* we sow—*More* than we sow—*What* others sow.

Such divisions, growing one out of another, or growing out of one central theme, so thought out and bound together, will never shackle the mind of the preacher, nor destroy the unity of his discourse.

## II. SOME OF THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF DIVISIONS

Divisions are multiform; and it will help us to learn and use all of them. Our sermons then will not seem to be cast in the same mold. Because of our inattention to this, some of our people may come to think our divisions are mechanical and stiff. The whole sermon will seem to them a ribbon of dried-up material which we reel off, chopping

off a portion here—and another there, “without rime or reason,” and the entire performance will have such an air of unreality as to disgust the intelligent and thoughtful hearer.

Dr. Paxton’s lectures mentioned seven different kinds of divisions. I select five of his classifications as specially worthy of note; and in this examination for the most part use the examples he furnishes by way of illustration. One of the five deserves more than this passing glance, as we shall see:

1. *Topical Divisions.* This class is especially a division of the subject, not of the text. As an example take John 3:7—“Ye must be born anew.” Strictly speaking, the subject of this text is the Necessity of the New Birth. But if you wished to treat it topically your subject would be “The New Birth,” and your divisions would be the topical ones—(1) The Nature—(2) The Author—(3) The Necessity—(4) The Evidences of the New Birth.

The great value of this kind of divisions is this: It disciplines the mind of the preacher to wide and comprehensive views of truth. At the same time it gives the thoughtful hearer the opportunity for large and influential aspects of Scripture doctrines and principles.

There is the danger in the use of such divisions that the sermon may be dry. This may be due partly to the nature of the themes to which this

kind of divisions is specially applicable; but for the most part it will be the fault of the preacher if the sermon thus divided is not interesting.

2. *Propositional Divisions.* Here we draw our divisions from a proposition as before from a topic. Taking the same text as before, John 3:7, we draw the proposition, "The New Birth is necessary to Salvation." Then our divisions would be the separate and varied proofs of this proposition.

A good illustration of propositional divisions is given in a sermon by Theremin (the noted German Huguenot pastor of the French Reformed Church in Berlin, in the early part of the last century). His sermon is on Acts 17:30, 31—"The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now He commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent; in as much as He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised him from the dead." From this text he draws this proposition: "We consider the resurrection as an incentive to repentance." And these are his propositional divisions: (1) The resurrection proves the existence of an invisible world. (2) We pass into that world after death. (3) Our destiny in that world depends on our relation to Christ here in this world.

This is an example of divisions drawn from a single proposition. Sometimes the divisions may

be a series of propositions. Old John Flavel has a sermon illustrative of this on the text in Luke 23:43: "To-day thou shalt be with me in paradise." His divisions are the following propositions, viz., (1) There is a future state into which souls pass after death. (2) All believers are immediately after death received into glory. (3) God may, though He seldom does, prepare men for this glory immediately before death.

3. *Textual Divisions.* This kind of division I pass by for the present. We shall have opportunity to consider it when we come to the study of the Expository Sermon.

4. *Observational Divisions.* In this kind of division the sermon consists of a series of observations springing naturally from the text. A good illustration is furnished in Dr. Bedome's sermon on Acts 9:4, "Why persecutest thou me?" His divisions are the following observations, viz., (1) Unconverted men are often of a persecuting spirit. (2) Christ has his eye upon persecutors. (3) He considers an injury done to his people as done to Himself. (4) His call to persecutors is to produce conviction of sin. (5) His call is earnest and particular. (6) He condescends to reason with the persecutor.

Some cautions are needed in the use of divisions of this kind. (1) Be sure you make observations or reflections, and not propositions. In a general way the difference between the two is this—

Propositions are statements of truth susceptible of debate; Observations are statements of truth instantly and everywhere accepted. (2) Observations should be devotional—experimental or practical, not philosophical or critical. (3) They should not be scholastic on the one hand, nor dry and commonplace on the other.

5. *Interrogative Divisions.* This is a useful and favorite form of divisions. It brings out the meaning of the text by well-directed questions. For example, Jay on Matt. 6:33, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," has these interrogative divisions: (1) What? (2) How? (3) Why are we to seek? Again Dr. Alexander on Mark 1:1, "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," has these divisions, viz., (1) What is the Gospel? (2) Whose is it? (3) Where did it begin of old? (4) Where does it begin now?

This is a brief survey of some different forms of division into which you can cast the material of your discourses. By a careful and judicious selection, adapting the kind of division to the subject in hand, you will escape the danger of monotony in the structure of your sermons; and the people will never have the opportunity to say of you, "He is a good preacher, but his sermons are stiff and mechanical in their make-up."

## III. SOME OF THE WISEST METHODS OF TREATING DIVISIONS

You have the text and the subject. The material for your sermon is all gathered—from your own brain, and from other people's brains, and from miscellaneous sources. You have made such arrangement of your material as seems to you most fitting. And now your first head is before you. The question then is urgent—What will you do with it?

There are four things usually to be done with a division.

1. *It is to be explained.* This, of course, depends on whether any explanation is needed. And whether or not it is necessary will appear in answer to these two questions: (1) Will explanation throw any light on my theme? and (2) Will explanation interest the congregation? If these questions cannot be answered affirmatively, you may take it for granted that explanation is not needed, and were better omitted. In any case, the explanation of a division should be brief, lucid, and interesting.

2. *A division is to be proved.* Here also, of course, the question must be answered first of all, Is any proof needed? If not, then don't try it, but proceed at once to illustrate and enforce it. Usually, however, the themes of the pulpit are

great themes, and proof is often needed to win our hearers' acceptance of Scripture truth.

3. *A division is to be illustrated.* Of course, as with explanation and proof, a division that does not need to be illustrated, ought not to be subjected to this kind of treatment. Dr. Paxton gave us seven different kinds of illustrations. I must content myself with simply mentioning them. They are illustration 1. By Metaphor—2. By Simile—3. By Antithesis—4. By Parable—5. By Allegory—6. By Illustrative Example—and 7. By Historical Allusion.

4. *A division is to be enforced or applied.* This form of treatment is not often applicable to a division; more commonly it belongs to the whole sermon, as we shall see in a subsequent "Talk." And the common sense direction is, If the division does not need this separate application, don't try to make it, but wait for the end of the discourse.

## V

### THE BEGINNING AND THE ENDING

OUR text has been chosen. Our subject has been determined upon. The necessary and proper material has been gathered. That material has been fittingly arranged. With all this done, we may have an excellent torso. But our body needs a head and feet before we can say it is finished. In other words we want an introduction and a conclusion—an exordium and a peroration. They are by no means unimportant.

Among the many homiletic aids of our day, Dr. Herrick Johnson's "The Ideal Ministry" ranks among the latest and best. In one of his later letters, given by his biographer, he mentions one of the serious defects of his book. On the "Ideal Sermon," he says, "Strangely enough I have omitted all discussion of its ideal introduction and conclusion. How I came to leave these minor, yet often vital parts of the sermon (either of which may be determinative of pulpit effectiveness), to go without some elaboration and emphasis I do not quite know." We know the probable reason was in his absorption in ministering to his



beloved wife in her last illness. The fact that he thought it necessary to prepare an addendum to his book for a possible second edition, on the ideal introduction and conclusion, shows his estimate of the importance of the topics of this "Talk."

### I. THE INTRODUCTION

Some people say the introduction of a sermon should be written last, like the preface of a book. This opinion does not seem to me to be well-supported. When the sermon is finished, the mind of the writer is all aglow with the treatment of the theme, and is not in a condition of calm serenity best fitted to write the few quiet statements which may most appropriately introduce the sermon.

The purpose of the introduction will also indicate the time when it ought to be written. The old masters of rhetoric taught that the object of the introduction was three-fold—to render the audience Docile, Benevolent, and Attentive. The first two are likely to be secured by the character and personality of the speaker, before, he says anything. If not, they will not probably be attained by any words of the introduction.

The main thing is to secure attention. For this purpose, the thought of the exordium, natural in character, should be presented in a natural order, and in a natural manner, with short and sprightly

sentences, and with nothing dry or prosy about them.

Introductions are not always necessary; and the wise preacher will best serve his cause by at once jumping into the heart of his subject.

Some characteristics of a good introduction may here be mentioned: 1. It should be brief. 2. It should be pertinent and appropriate. 3. It should be clear and perspicuous. 4. It should be cool, calm, and grave. 5. It should be delicate. This last characteristic is violated (1) By apologies, (2) by a self-important air, (3) by pedantry—an ostentatious display of learning.

From what has been said you will easily understand that it is no small matter to get a good introduction. There are several reasons for this: 1. The subject matter of the introduction should be different from that of the sermon. I recently heard a minister preach a sermon on *Gideon*, and it was a good sermon too. But the preacher read as the opening lesson of the service the sixth chapter of the book of Judges, which is not a short one, and full of the incidents of Gideon's early career; and he gave a running comment on those incidents. The sermon following was an expository one on the life services of the great Judge of Israel. Both the reading and the sermon were excellent, but the first took the juice out of the second. In like manner, if you say in the introduc-

tion what you propose to say in your sermon, the freshness of your sermon will be spoiled.

2. While different from the sermon, the thought of the introduction should be closely related to the sermon. 3. It should be a legitimate correlative of the sermon.

Dr. Paxton gave us ten different kinds of forms of introduction. Quoting again from my manuscript notes of his lectures, let us just glance at them.

1. *Introductions drawn from the context.* This is one of the simplest forms of introduction. They describe themselves. They are apt to be too long. There is danger of stiffness in reciting the items of the context. Or the preacher may fall into an inflated or bombastic style in giving the nexus of the text. And either stiffness or bombast is fatal to the usefulness of this form of exordium.

2. *Explanatory introductions.* In this kind of introduction the preacher explains (1) a word or phrase of the text, or (2) the literal, prophetic, or spiritual meaning of the text, or (3) the meaning of a metaphor in the text, or (4) a historical allusion in the text, or (5) the meaning of a type used in the text.

3. *Introductions drawn from the analogy of Scripture.* In this form of exordium the preacher takes a parallel passage, and reflects its full light on the text. E. g., Dr. Payson on Heb. 3:7, "Today if ye will hear His voice, etc," introduces his

sermon by a reference to Revelation 2:7, "He that hath an ear to hear let him hear what the Spirit saith." Again, Saurin, the great French preacher on the song of Simeon, the Nunc Dimittis of the Prayer Book—"Now Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, etc.," begins his sermon by a reference to Jacob's words on meeting Joseph—"Now let me die since I have seen thy face, that thou art yet alive."

4. *Anecdotal introductions.* In this form of exordium an anecdote or incident is used to give interest, force, or practical impressiveness to a text. E. g., A sermon on Rom. 2:17, "The just shall live by faith," might be fittingly introduced by the story of Luther's experience, while climbing the Scala Santa in Rome, where this text was flashed into his mind by the Divine Spirit to the illumination of his soul.

Four things must characterize an anecdote fittingly used as an introduction—it must be (1) Brief—(2) Apposite—(3) Pointed—and (4) Well-told.

5. *Illustrative introductions.* These consist in throwing on the text the light of an illustration drawn from some outside source, usually an imaginary case. E. g., Adolph Monod, one of the great French preachers, introduces a sermon on the text (1 John 4:8) "God is love," by supposing part of the text, "God is," to have been found in some manuscript in the ruins of Herculaneum,

and imagines what diligent and extensive inquiries would be instituted everywhere to find the remainder of the text!

This form of introduction is very striking, and for this very reason exceedingly dangerous. It would never do to have a dull sermon follow so striking an exordium.

6. *Argumentative introductions.* Any close thinking in the beginning of a sermon is to be avoided. The people have not yet settled themselves in all seriousness to hear what you have to say. But a kind of loose arguing is permissible; and such should characterize this form of exordium. E. g., Charles Simeon has a sermon on Tim. 3:16—"Great is the mystery of godliness," which he introduces in this way, viz.: "Infidels have said, Where mystery begins, religion ends." And he goes on to show that this is not true; and his argument brings him right up to the text.

7. *Observational introductions.* In this form of exordium one or more pertinent observations are made, which lead directly to the text. These observations must not be loose and indefinite, but sprightly, forcible, and pointed, and connected with the text by an easy nexus of thought.

There are three species of this kind of exordium:

(1) An observation of which the text is an example. E. g., Taylor on Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas singing in prison, begins in this way, "The

Christian looks beyond this world for happiness, but he has sources of happiness even now, of which the world knows nothing. We have an illustration of this truth in the text."

(2) An observation showing some great want, and how it is met in the text. E. g., Barrow's sermon on Prov. 10:9—"He that walketh uprightly walketh surely"—begins, "Men are everywhere seeking security and safe walking. Here in the text is a sound maxim to guide in a safe sure way."

(3) An observation showing the special importance of the text. E. g., Blair on Prov. 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Begins with the observation, "Men commonly think it enough to keep the outward life right; the text shows that this is not true."

8. *Antithetical introductions.* In this form of exordium the thought is in direct contrast with that of the text. E. g., Simeon on the "Equivocation of Abraham"—Gen. 20:9, in his introduction shows the contrast of the patriarch's past life of uprightness with his present defection from the path of rectitude.

9. *Affinitive introductions.* This form of exordium is just the opposite of the one last mentioned. E. g., A sermon on Sanctification might well have in the introduction some brief statement of the difference between it and Justification.

10. *Interrogative introductions.* In this form of introduction the preacher starts a question the answer to which is given in the text, e. g., Payson on Isaiah 53:11, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied," raises the question, What adequate motive explains the Saviour's sacrificial death—and finds the answer in the text.

These are the ten different kinds or forms of introductions. It has been well said, "They are not theoretical, but eminently practical," and in the constant and conscientious use of them great variety and interest will mark the beginnings of your discourses. The attention of your people will be secured from the opening sentence; and all will be on the *qui vive* to note how you are going to open up the Word of God as set forth in your chosen text. These opening sentences must be brief; and you must rivet the attention of your people from the very beginning.

## II. THE CONCLUSION

The old rhetoricians divided the Peroration, as they called the conclusion of a public discourse, into two parts—the Recapitulation, and the Application. This is not a bad disposition of the essential parts of the conclusion of a sermon.

1. *The Recapitulation.* Not always necessary, this is often of considerable importance in cases where divisions have been used, and no announce-

ment has been made of them beforehand. The recapitulation should be brief and well-studied—its value and power lying in its clearness, and terseness, and completeness. In this way your people will be able to carry away at least the bones of your discourse. And in this way, too, the pulpit can best fulfill its function as a teaching agency in the propagation of the Gospel.

2. *The Application.* The great object of the sermon is to bring the mighty truths of the Gospel into the region of religious experience and daily life. To do this the clincher of the sermon is the application. And this is the most important and difficult part of the discourse.

This application is fourfold:

1. To *the Intellect.*
2. To *the Conscience.*
3. To *the Affections.*
4. To *the Will.*

Not always is the application to be made to all these departments of the soul, but always to one or more of them. And this application should be brief, pointed, forceful, and solemn.



## VI

### THE EXPOSITORY SERMON

**E**XPOSITORY preaching, of a certain kind, is the refuge of the lazy minister. It is so easy to select a passage of some length—the longer the better—and occupy the prescribed time with a few pious remarks on the separate verses.

But to have acquired the ability for, and some facility in, genuine exposition of Holy Scripture is to have reached the *summum bonum* of pulpit discourse. There is no more fruitful kind of sermonizing than genuine exposition.

Expository discourses are of three kinds, viz.:

#### I. SIMPLE EXPOSITION

Such was the preaching of Ezra in Nehemiah's day (Neh. 8:8), when "he stood on a pulpit of wood," "And they read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly; and they gave the sense, so that they understood the reading." This kind of exposition is specially liable to abuse as already indicated.

A minister of my acquaintance gave five services to an exposition of the five chapters of the epistle of James. Now we know that James is just full of nuggets of gold. Hardly any five chapters of the New Testament furnish so many fruitful texts as these five. But they are full of nuggets separate and special and precious. It is impossible to discover any one dominant thought running through the different and separate chapters. So our brother had to content himself with a few reflections on special and salient verses of each chapter; and at the end of the series his people had not received any clear and comprehensive view of the epistle. It was not the minister's fault, except in choosing James for so short a series of expositions.

The fact is, the little book is not adapted to this kind of exposition.

## II. THE LECTURE

This differs from the simple Exposition in calling for a shorter passage, and a more regular and systematic treatment. There are two principal forms of the lecture:

1. That in which the natural order of the words or thought guides the exposition. E. g., *The Thanksgiving of Ephesians 1:3*—Where we have 1. Thanksgiving to God; 2. The special character in which He elicits our Thanksgiving; 3. The cause of the Thanksgiving; 4. The blessing bestowed;

5. The measure in which it is imparted; 6. The place of its enjoyment; and 7. The medium of its communication.

Not every passage of Scripture lends itself to this form of the lecture.

2. That in which the passage is opened up in a running comment and then its fitting lessons are drawn out and enforced. E. g., Dr. Mason on the "Repentance and Suicide of Judas," Matt. (27: 1-5) First expounds the passage and then emphasizes these four lessons, viz., (1) The sins of men lead often to results that they do not anticipate. (2) It is an accursed maxim that the end justifies the means. (3) The hardening power of sin. (4) The power of a guilty conscience.

This form of the lecture is, as you may remember, like the observational divisions of a regular sermon.

### III. THE TEXT SERMON

This is a form of expository preaching in which the whole passage is treated just as a sermon treats a single text. This, I believe, is the highest and best form of sermonizing. It is equally applicable to short and long passages of the Word of God. In the use of it the preacher and people both become familiar with large portions God's truth. And this is greatly needed in our day. With all our boasted Bible study I fear our people's

knowledge of the Scriptures is both limited in extent and superficial in character. The Holy Spirit, too, will put honor on the minister who puts honor on His Word.

Perhaps I can give you an idea of this form of the expository sermon by dwelling on some examples drawn from my own sermon-barrel. To select short passages first, let us take

*The Christian's Hope. I Peter 1:3-5*

1. The object of it: (1) An Inheritance. (2) Not corruptible. (3) Not defilable. (4) Not fading. (5) Reserved in heaven.

2. The ground of it: (1) The resurrection of Christ. (2) The new birth of the soul.

*Timely Christian Activity. Matthew 14:34-36*

1. Ground of it—Their knowledge of Christ.

2. The Opportunity for it—The Saviour's Visit.

3. The Spirit of it—Kind interest in others.

4. The Result of it—The Healing of the diseased.

Then the closing address to the unsaved: You must "touch," if you would be made whole.

This passage and theme are specially suitable for seasons of revival and religious services.

Sometimes we may wish to treat longer passages. So let us take

*The Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5, 6 and 7*

Dr. J. Oswald Dykes published three little books on the sermon with the titles—"Beatitudes of the Kingdom," "The Laws of the Kingdom," and "The Relations of the Kingdom." I think his analysis might be improved on after this manner, viz.—We have here *The Inaugural of the King*.

I. *The Citizens of the Kingdom.*

1. Their blessed character and experience,  
(5: 3-12).  
(1) In entering the kingdom, (3-6).  
(2) Their life in the kingdom, (7-12).
2. Their salutary influence on the world,  
(5: 13-16).  
(1) As the salt of the earth, (13).  
(2) As the light of the world, (14-16).

II. *The Laws of the Kingdom.*

1. *Not destruction, but fulfillment.*  
With five illustrations, (5: 21-48).  
(1) Murder—(2) Adultery—(3) Oaths—(4) Retaliation—(5) Love to enemies.
2. *Motive Determines Character.*  
With three illustrations, (6: 1-18).  
(1) Almsgiving—(2) Prayer—(3) Fasting.
3. *The Right Use of the World.*  
With two illustrations, (6: 19-34).

(1) Inordinate love of the world—(2)  
Undue anxiety about the world.

4. *Mistaken and Unrighteous Judgments.*

With three illustrations, (7: 1-6).

(1) Fault-finding—(2) Correction of evils—(3) Well-doing.

III. *The Way Into the Kingdom.*

1. Positive directions, (7: 1-14).

Seeking (1) In the spirit of earnestness—(2) In the spirit of love—  
(3) In the spirit of Self-denial.

The contrasted ways—The Broad and the Narrow.

2. Warnings, (7:15-23).

(1) Against false teachers and deceivers—(2) Against bad practice, and self-deception.

*The Conclusion*—The Contrasted Pictures: (1) The House on the Rock; (2) The House on the Sand.

Again, let us take

*The Awakening at Ephesus. Acts 19:1-20*

1. The Divine Source of It, Acts 19:2.
2. The Doctrinal Foundation of It, Acts 20:21.
3. The Small Beginning of It, Acts 19:7.
4. The Opposition to It, Acts 19:13.
5. The Counterfeiting of It, Acts 19:13.

6. The Genuine Character of It, Acts  
19:20.

Yet once more, let us take

*The Awakening of a Soul. John 4: 1-26*

1. The Awakening of Attention.
2. The Awakening of Reflection.
3. The Awakening of Conscience.
4. The Awakening of Faith.

These five outlines of expository sermons I have given as specimens of the highest type of pulpit discourse. If you want to wear you will preach a great deal in this way. It will not be an easy way. It will take a vast amount of Bible study to find and expound passages suited to this kind of preaching.

A few words by way of caution may fittingly close this talk on the expository Sermon.

1. *The passage of Scripture you select must be suited to this form of sermon.*

2. *Your analysis of the text must be clear as a sunbeam.*

3. *You must be sure to get hold of the leading idea of the passage.*

4. *You must group in some natural or logical order all the subordinate thoughts of the text.*

5. *You must make constant faithful and earnest application of the truth, as you go on.*

## VII

### BIOGRAPHICAL PREACHING

**I**N reviewing a ministry of fifty years, more than forty of which were spent in the pulpit, I confess to a feeling of unpleasant surprise as I came to realize that I had made comparatively so little use of Scripture Biography in my preaching. The Bible is a wonderful book of wonderful biographies. By this "Familiar Talk on Biographical Preaching" I would save you, my brethren, from the pain of such a retrospect.

This kind of preaching is specially adapted to all ethical subjects, temperance and other reforms, and the civic virtues, and indeed everything pertaining to a man's relations to his fellow-man. People like to see truth incarnated in character. And you can get a hearing on some topics when linked in with a Biblical character, when they would turn a deaf ear to them, if presented in a plain didactic way. For example, You can get the public ear now-a-days on temperance almost anywhere and at any time; but the time was when this topic could be most fruitfully discussed in the pulpit only in connection with some Biblical char-



acter overcome with wine, as Noah, or Nadab and Abihu, or some teetotaler as Jonadab, the son of Rechab. Some lessons from life and character will almost always attract the attention of men.

More than thirty years ago Dr. Robert Mackenzie, our Secretary of the College Board, was pastor of the Howard Church of San Francisco and during the winter in which I supplied the pulpit of the First Church of that city, he preached a series of biographical sermons on Sabbath evenings to audiences of men alone numbering fifteen hundred. He did not confine himself to Scripture Characters, but took also prominent leaders of the Church, like Luther, Melancthon, Calvin and Knox, Savonarola and Francis d'Assisi. Some think he made a mistake in this, and thought that for a Christian pulpit and in a Sabbath service, he would have done better to confine himself to Bible Characters alone. For within the limits of the Divine Revelation the field is well-nigh boundless, and the subjects of most entrancing interest.

What can be done in this line of preaching I can perhaps best indicate by touching upon a few courses of Biographical Sermons, all of which can be made both useful and interesting, and most of which I have tested in my own ministry.

#### I. SOME SCENES IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

Such a series of discourses would naturally come first and would be found amazingly fruitful and

engaging. The greatest difficulty would be in making a selection of scenes in a life so full of impressive and marvelous events.

#### II. THE APOSTLES OF OUR LORD

These, some with more, and some with less, detail, would furnish topics not less influential than entertaining. What a biography, for example, would be the Life of the Apostle Peter.

#### III. THE LIFE AND TIMES OF AHAB

The chapters of the book of Kings devoted to this man set forth the career of a mediocre, but extremely wicked ruler, around whom the historian has grouped a company of great characters, whose greatness makes the reign of Ahab more illustrious than any other of the Northern Kingdom. The separate studies would be, (1) Ahab and Elijah, (2) Ahab and Jezebel, (3) Ahab and Naboth, and (4) Ahab and Micaiah. And the scenes portrayed in each of these studies are full of dramatic interest and fire.

#### IV. CHARACTERS IN COUPLES

One of the most notable features of Scripture Biographies is the fact that they so often appear in pairs. This feature runs through almost the entire volume of the Scriptures. We have, for example, (1) Cain and Abel, (2) Jacob and Esau,

(3) Moses and Aaron, (4) Balak and Balaam, (5) Orpah and Ruth, (6) David and Jonathan, (7) Elijah and Elisha, (8) Martha and Mary, (9) Peter and John, and (10) Paul and Barnabas.

Here are ten pairs of characters, admitting of the most diverse and interesting treatment. Sometimes it might be comparison, sometimes a contrast, of one with another. Sometimes it might be taking the light of the one and with it illuminating the other.

Over thirty years ago I wrote and preached fifteen such biographical studies, which Randolph thought were worth publishing under the title which he suggested of "Companion Characters."

#### V. THE HEBREW GIANTS

1. *Abraham*, the "Friend of God." 2. *Moses*, "Lawgiver and Judge." 3. *David*, "Sweet Singer of Israel." 4. *Isaiah*, "The Evangelical Prophet."

If you will read Dr. John Lord's four illuminating lectures on these four great men, in his "Beacon Lights of History," you will be convinced that this course of Biographical Sermons is well named. These are the great men on the track, long and checkered, of Israel's wondrous story.

#### VI. HEBREW WOMEN

1. *Sarah*, The woman who laughed at the thought of an old woman's becoming a mother.

2. *Rebekah*, The scheming mother, helping and hindering Providence. 3. *Jochebed*, A mother hired by the King's daughter to nurse her own son. 4. *Hannah*, Lending her son to the Lord. 5. *Ruth*, Longing for a home among the people of God. 6. *Eunice*, A faithful woman unknown to herself preparing Paul's most beloved and efficient helper.

#### VII. THE GATE-KEEPERS OF THE AGES

1. *Joshua*, Finishing the Wanderings, and settling Israel in Canaan. 2. *John the Baptist*, Shutting the gates of the Jewish era, and opening the portals of the Gospel age. 3. *Paul*, The great missionary and pioneer of world-wide evangelism.

#### VIII. BIBLICAL ETCHINGS \*

1. *Ornan*, the Jebusite, The Seller who would be the Giver of the Temple site. 2. *Jabez*, more honorable than his brethren, whom his mother bare in sorrow, but whose answered prayer was the assurance of his prosperity. 3. *Nebat*, mentioned many times in Israel's chronicles, but whose only title to fame lies in the fact that he was the father of a wicked son, "Jereboam the son of Nebat, who

\*Dr. Austen Phelps' *Studies in the Old Testament*, in twenty-four chapters, gives suggestive illustrations of the way in which fruitful and impressive lessons may be drawn from the lives and characters of men more or less noted in the Hebrew story. His book is probably now out of print. It deserves republication.

did sin and made Israel to sin.” 4. *Demas*, the Apostate, one time helpful follower of Paul, who afterward foresook him and went his way to the world. 5. *Barzillai*, the aged friend of David, who preferred his own home to all the glamor of royalty in the Court of Jerusalem. 6. *Onesiphorus*, who in Rome sought out the prisoner Paul, and ministered to his necessities, not being ashamed of his chain, and receives the benediction of his aged friend. 7. *Onesimus*, the runaway slave, converted through Paul’s ministry, and who gave himself to ministering to the Roman Prisoner, and then went back to his master with the Apostle’s benediction and commendation. 8. *Philemon*, whose name is attached to one of the most interesting little letters of our beloved Paul.

#### IX. JOHN THE BAPTIST

1. The Preparation. 2. The Forerunner. 3. The Herald. 4. The Martyr.

## VIII

### SPIRITUAL POWER

**T**HIRTY years ago this month I was called upon to address the students of Lane Seminary, the Rev. Dr. Heron, now pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Wooster, being at that time the presiding officer of the student body. I chose to speak on the theme before us today.

A few years later it fell to my lot as chairman of the examining committee to address the students of the Western Theological Seminary; and I chose the same theme, and largely the same line of thought.

If this third time I choose the same topic in closing these "Familiar Talks on Sermon Building," you will accurately gauge my estimate of the immense importance of the theme.

It is the great question, especially to you, young brethren. None greater will ever meet you in your theological or ministerial studies. It is the greatest and most solemn question you have ever considered since you first met the challenge,

“Choose ye this day, whom ye will serve,” *How can I obtain Spiritual power?*

Commissioned from the Throne to bear the tidings of life to my dying fellow-men,

I. *Wherein resides that mysterious, peculiar and Divine power, which shall take my human words, and carry them with super-human might home to human hearts, making feeble ME the instrument of numerous and powerful conversions from the world, and of greatly increased holiness among the saints of God?*

II. *In what sphere of daily life, or ministerial duty, does the possession of this power especially manifest itself?*

III. *And more than all, by what means, and in what way, shall I become invested with this blessed and needful power?*

We shall not long ponder these inquiries, without thinking of that gracious promise of the risen Saviour, uttered in His final and tender interview with His disciples: “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses.” In the methods of its fulfillment to them we may find the assurance of its realization by us. Though spoken to the apostles, and first made good to the whole company of primitive believers, the promise is as true of us, as of the little company, who on the heights of Bethany, saw, with adoring vision, the opening clouds receive the ascending Saviour. Can we do

better than follow its radiant lines, as we seek an answer to the questions we have raised?

All true ambassadors for Christ, and not less all humble and spiritual minds, can attest the fact that the ministry of the Word is at times attended by a power, of which at other times it is plainly and sadly bereft. That power is seen in the clear and gracious conversion of the impenitent, or in the equally manifest edifying of the body of Christ, the true and cheering quickening of God's people in all Christian graces and duties.

The absence of this power, unnoticed by the worldly mind, is hardly less evident to all consecrated souls. A man's ministry is like a drifting vessel. The captain casts out one anchor after another; but there is no taking hold. So, the anchor flukes of the Gospel message seem to double back. There is no grappling with anything in the sea of conscience, nor around the foundations of the spiritual nature. An unseen but powerful current bears the messenger of God continually and helplessly away. Who can be more helpless than the ship-master, the anchor of whose vessel drags? Who is so utterly weak as the minister of Christ, from whom this Heavenly Power is withheld?

But how difficult to define what this spiritual power is! It is not necessarily to be found in the harmonious condition of the Church, and its hearty co-working with him who ministers at the altar. This is, indeed, oftentimes one of the most blessed



results of the presence and influence of this power. But sometimes, alas! that it must be said, ministers and people agree together (not, indeed, by any written contract or spoken words, yet really and truly, though tacitly) to be satisfied with a formal and unspiritual state. The only Churches of the apocalyptic seven, which were not troubled by conflict with heresy in doctrine or immorality in life, were the two whose unsatisfactory spiritual condition is most severely censured by Him who ever walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks. There was harmony there, and co-working, but no spiritual power!

Nor yet is this power found in the clear statement and able exposition of Christian doctrines. Certainly it is true that nothing so clarifies and invigorates our intellectual grasp of the truth as the presence and possession of this power. But we may grasp the truth when the truth does not grasp us! There may be a real delight, on the part of the minister, in the unfolding of the truth; and on the part of the people, there may be a genuine and universal interest in, and full consenting attention to, the development of an argument, or the application of an analogy, or the felicitous use of an illustration; and the whole performance be a purely intellectual exercise, as marked by the triumphant tread of merely mental prowess, as it is conspicuous for the absence of true spiritual power.

Nor again, is this power manifest in the merely earnest delivery of the message. There is an earnestness born of the conscious presence and help of the Holy Spirit. It is a spirit not exhausted by the public utterance of the message. It runs out into all the channels of the life. But that other (shall I call it spurious earnestness? let me rather say) defective earnestness, which we ministers not unfrequently exhibit in the sacred desk, O how easily we drift into it! How subtly the counterfeit cheats us, and leads us to the utterance of the highest and holiest messages, with only the warmth of mere animal spirits, or elocutionary zeal, while there is no taking hold of the hiding of God's omnipotent and pleading power!

But when that power of God is present, there is a different state of things. And the change is recognized and hailed with joy by all devoted souls, even as the watcher of the night marks the glinting of the dawn that, with song of birds and nature's every opening eye, presages the coming of the day. There may be no more harmony apparent between the pulpit and the pew; there may be no more nor greater clearness of statement nor apprehension of Christian doctrine; there may be no outward signs of earnestness unseen before: but there will be present, sometimes, I think, even possibly unknown to the consciousness of either speaker or hearer, a mighty factor making direct and powerful application of the truth to the con-

science. Not long, however, will such unseen and almighty agent remain to men unknown. Soon they will recognize, what now we know, that here resides the power from on High, the presence and working of a Divine Agent, who, making use of all our natural and acquired abilities and talents, and sometimes wholly independent of them, and possibly even in spite of them, carries the truth home in saving and sanctifying power. Without Him we are helpless.

Thus far I have spoken of this power largely in terms descriptive of the effects produced by it upon those to whom we bring the glad tidings of great joy. We must now bring the subject nearer, by contemplating the working of this power upon ourselves. Here we meet our second question, and come to consider,

*In what sphere of daily life, or methods of ministerial duty, the possession of this power specially manifests itself?*

And the answer may fittingly start again from Bethany.

We see that eager little company, not yet recovered from the joyful surprise of the resurrection morning, clustering around their Saviour soon to be taken up out of their sight. They were wondering about the Kingdom. Their minds were occupied with the thought that perhaps *now* was the time. They say, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time

restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Gently but firmly our Lord represses their unspiritual curiosity, an ever abiding and pertinent rebuke of all vain and curious wonderings about the "times and the seasons," and emphasizing the work to be done, He leaves with them this gracious promise of divine endowment of power for the accomplishment of that work, and foretells their important function and duty as witnesses of their Lord. How gloriously did those timid men, within a few days, fulfill their office-work as witnesses for Christ!

The promise and prophecy are ours as well as theirs. The work of the Church, in our day, as truly as in the beginning, is a work of witness-bearing. This is pre-eminently true of the ministry. We are witnesses. We bear testimony to great and solemn facts. We have the true and only apostolical succession. The apostles were witnesses to facts; and they received this promise to help them in their testimony. We inherit their promise that we may continue their work. They attested the fundamental facts of our holy religion, especially the one crowning and blessed fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But it would be the baldest and most barren interpretation of this Scripture to say they received this promise and needed this power only to tell the story of that resurrection. "With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." And the result was that "great grace was upon

them all," sinners were converted and saints were edified. Their work was not simply to relate the story of the resurrection, but to set forth the great fact as the key-stone in the grand arch of Christian doctrine. And their preaching makes it plain that they emphasized the atonement in the blood of Jesus, regeneration by the power of the Holy Spirit, and faith in the risen, living Saviour, as integral parts and essential facts of this supernatural system.

We take up their testimony as to these fundamental truths. The solitary fact of the resurrection we cannot attest as they attested it, because we did not witness it as they witnessed it. But we are competent witnesses as to other fundamental truths. We have no business to be either in the ministry, nor looking forward to the ministry, if we cannot certify as witnesses the reality of Divine pardon and renewal, of adoption and faith. And he who can attest these blessed experiences of the inner life, is, in a true and fruitful sense, a competent witness of the fact that He, who once was dead is now alive again, and lives forevermore. The sun may be for days and even weeks behind the April clouds; but every springing grass-blade and opening flower will testify that he is on his northern course.

We are witnesses of these things! And in the fulfillment of this promise of the Holy Spirit power is given us to testify as to these things in

behalf of Christ. The pertinent and urgent question then for all of us, my brethren, is not merely, Are we preaching the Gospel? but Are we preaching it as witnesses? And the question is of immense moment to you, who have yet to determine what shall be the character of your ministry.

What are the essential requisites of real testimony? *It must, first of all, be truthful.* A clear apprehension of the Gospel and a clear presentation of it to the people, and all in the right spirit, and in the right tone; this by all means must be accomplished; and in these particulars, perhaps, we do not commonly come short of some high standard. But can we say as much, when we remember that a witness must tell the whole truth? I am wondering if we ministers so testify for Christ. Is there no shrinking from fundamental because unpopular doctrines? Is there no conscious trending with the drift of the times, if not in forgetfulness, yet in feebleness of grasp, of the central verities of our faith?

The question suggests another requisite of testimony: *It must be experimental.* Here is pre-eminently the region of our failure. It is so easy to drop down from the lofty plane, where "we speak that we do know, and testify that which we have seen," to the lower level of retailing that which is merely hearsay evidence. The witness gives his testimony with vividness and power because he tells what he has seen with his own eyes,

and heard with his own ears. But the retailer of hearsay testimony has no power. In the pulpit he is perfect weakness. He may have been, at one time, a true witness. But now the form of sound words, which once quivered and glowed and burned with vitality, is as if dead. His views of doctrine and duty are now vague and bereft of power even over his own spirit.

Let such a man become once more a living witness, and how great the change! Baptize with a new experience of heavenly power his long cold heart; and he begins to testify for Christ! The Divine spark flashes into the well-nigh extinguished coal; and where but lately was the blackness of darkness, there now leaps forth the flame of living light. That light comes out because it first went in! Now he not only possesses the truth, but the truth also possesses him! He is no longer telling a story, but bearing witness! He is no longer, with eyes never so keen, and blade never so sharp, dissecting a cold stiff body of divinity; he is himself that body of divinity; and the Holy Spirit has made it His sacred temple, the scene of holy activities, and the throne of royal sovereign power!

The whole system of truth takes on a new aspect to one thus endowed with power from on High. He can now testify that Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour of the world; for, with Paul on yon Damascus road, he has seen Him in the glory of

the opened heavens! Now he can attest the Fatherhood of God, in no merely indefinite yearnings of the aspiring mind, but in the living, joyful spirit of adoption. Conversion is no mystic's dream to him, who, with divine persuading and enabling, has turned about to live a new and holy life. The vicissitudes of Christian experience are no mere theories to him, but solemn realities. He has sounded their profoundest depths, and can gratefully testify, "He brought me up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings; and He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God." He has scaled their loftiest heights; and, striking the chords of assuring song, he can say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee; and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." The joys of heaven he can attest, for has he not been lifted up to behold their supernal glories? The woes of the damned he can proclaim, whose spirit has felt, in the bitterness of sin and the pangs of remorse, something of "the worm that never dies, and the fire that is not quenched."

These truths are living realities to him, as on the witness-stand he testifies for Christ. It was not always so. It may be but yesterday it was not so. The world within lay silent beneath the chill of morn. The cold gray mist of night enveloped, while it paralyzed the sleeping life. But now all nature is awake! The benumbing vapor has once



more vanished away! All is life, movement, song, joy! The whole hemisphere vibrates with throbbing glorious light! The soul now lives! The heart believes! The witness speaks! The power has come!

*Another requisite of testimony is that it should be consistent.* It must stand together as one harmonious whole. I have already spoken of that subtle counterfeit of earnestness in the pulpit. It is found also in the life. And to this we of the ministry are particularly exposed. The holy duties, once fittingly allied to an awakened and consecrated spirit, we still perfunctorily discharge. But who of us does not see with what inadequate conception and purpose we take them up? And the inconsistency of our testimony is apparent and offensive to every spiritual mind. How much more must it be so to God.

Our words must be enforced by our characters, or they are worthless. Testimony depends for its power pre-eminently upon the character. Lord Bacon says, "Testimony is like an arrow from the long-bow. The distance to which it flies depends upon the arm that draws the bow. But argument is like an arrow from the cross-bow. It will fly as far when touched by an infant's finger, as when sprung by a giant's. And the distinction is as important as the illustration is happy. A good argument may come from a bad man, but never good testimony. And we are giving testimony; we are

witnesses! Our ministry of the Word is, and is to be, above all things else, a testifying for Christ! Let us see to it that our evidence is not only truthful, and experimental, but also in all things consistent.

How just and reasonable seems this standard of ministerial duty? How amazingly difficult the realization! Where shall we find the power to fulfill this high and holy service?

*Thus instinctively we voice the final question of the Problem before us of Spiritual Power. And the answer must be sought, and will be found, only where we obtained the other elements of the great subject.*

The heights of Bethany resound with the glorious promise. The Upper-Room in Jerusalem discloses the manner of its fulfillment. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you." Here lies the secret of our strength as faithful and convincing witnesses. Here also is the region surely of the mysterious and inexplicable. What is meant by "the coming of the Holy Spirit."

If this promise is for us as for the primitive believers, are we to expect its fulfillment in the same way? Many say, Yes: and therefore they pray continually for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Others would not exactly say, No; who yet regard this language as improper. They say that all our ideas about the pouring out of the Spirit are Old Testament ideas, that they are found in the prophe-

cies that point especially to Pentecost, that then the Holy Spirit was poured out as never before nor since, the ascension gift of our glorified Redeemer, then given, once for all, to His blood-bought Church. The Holy Spirit is, therefore, now with and in the Church (not with a hierarchy, nor in any such sense as to imply nor logically require infallibility, as in the Papal idea, but nevertheless), in a real and true and precious sense; and there is no need that He should be poured out upon the people of God again.

It is thought that this view is sustained by the words of the Evangelist, "This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." This view seems to be supported also by the language of our Lord Himself, "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever."

On the other hand, it is said that the undeniable facts of many great and precious revivals of religion furnish such striking and even marvelous resemblances to the scenes of Pentecost, as to justify the common descriptions of them as outpourings of the Holy Spirit. It is further said that, while the Spirit was certainly given in attestation of our Lord's assumption of mediatorial sovereignty, it can hardly be said that the Spirit was never poured out upon the Old Testament Church, as, for example, in the great spiritual awakenings

and reformations, in the days of Hezekiah, Josiah and Ezra. And the explanation of Pentecost, on this theory, is that what had been done before, was then made a sign of new and more blessed truths, just as the Rainbow and the Sabbath, previously existing institutions of the ante-deluvian world, were made signs, the one to Noah, and the other to Israel.

What was done at Pentecost, had been often done before in the Church; and we may justly expect that it will be done again and again. Compared with what preceded it, Pentecost was peculiar only in degree, but not in kind, save as to the gift of tongues. Instead of believing, therefore, that it was such a day as had never been seen before and never, in all the coming triumphs of the Church of God down the ages, will be seen again, we ought to regard it as the model day of the Christian dispensation, to be repeated often, and in growing power from age to age.

These two views, in explanation of the coming of the Holy Spirit, thus briefly described, seemingly widely divergent, are practically not so different after all. They, who pray, in Old Testament terms, for the out-pouring of the Spirit, believe that He abides with His people forever. And they, who question the fitness of this form of prayer, believe in and rejoice in the unusual and manifest tokens of the Spirit's power, in seasons of gracious quickening. The fact of the Holy Spirit's presence and grace in our witnessing for

Christ, we know beyond a doubt; and in that fact we glory! How He comes we cannot know. Happy they who know what it is to testify for Christ in the power of the Spirit. They need no words of mine to show them what it is. All others could not understand what it is, with all possible explanation. It is like the new birth itself; it must be personally experienced to be fully known.

The practical question, to which all this discussion has been leading us, yet remains, *How shall we receive this promise of the Holy Spirit, and so obtain this Divine endowment of Power?* And the brief but weighty answer is, As did the primitive believers. They were told to tarry in Jerusalem until the Spirit and the power came. And they "with one accord" went into that upper room to pray. Why did they pray? For what did they pray?

Here we come to the innermost shrine and sanctuary of the minister's power. Let us approach it with reverence. None of us can have failed to notice the extreme reticence of Luke as to the particular occurrences of those ten days. They filled the traitor's place; and this fact the historian records. But this business did not surely occupy more than one session of the assembly. And as to all else the annalist is silent. Was it because the scenes of that waiting time were indescribable?

Let us reverently imagine some of the probable characteristics of the series of daily assemblages.

Were they sitting in gaping expectancy of the Spirit's visible advent? This is to exalt the merely phenomenal to a place, which, it seems to me, it was never intended to occupy. It was pre-eminently the Spirit's day and power. On any theory, Pentecost was the inauguration of the Spirit's dispensation. Can we doubt that it was for Him they were praying? Can we, who believe that all true prayer is indited by the Holy Spirit, can we doubt that He was present to inspire their prayers days before those fiery flames and cloven tongues were seen? Is it any adequate view of Pentecost that separates the last day from all the preceding days, that preceding nine, and says the Spirit did not come until that tenth and phenomenal day. Can we for a moment doubt that the Holy Spirit wrought powerfully in all their hearts, as He has always done when He visits Zion with His gracious influences.

There was, then, in that upper room, we may well believe, the profoundest abasement on account of sin. Here were the very scenes of their sins, especially the sins of the apostles. Perhaps in this very room they had striven for the place of honor, while their Master girded as a slave performed his servile work. Here in the city was the hall where Peter had denied that Lord, now glorified. Yonder was the garden, where all of them had slept in the hour of their Redeemer's agony, and where all forsook Him and left Him alone. Well

chosen was this place for bringing sin to their remembrance!

Can we doubt that the Divine Spirit wrought in them the deepest humiliation, searching them and troubling them, until with broken hearts they cried anew for mercy. Was there ever before or since the day of Pentecost, a coming of the Holy Spirit, not marked by such searching and humbling views of sin? And can we believe that He wrought differently upon His inauguration day?

But that spirit was also to testify of Christ. And we may well believe that here the crucified Saviour was brought most vividly before that bowed and supplicating multitude. Here was the room of the last Supper, and of the Holy Supper, with all its tender memories of the Man of Sorrows, going down into the awful shadows for them. Here too, we must believe the eye of faith was lifted up to Calvary, for Calvary was here. And in the dawning light of the Spirit's day the Cross of Christ must have risen before them with a meaning and a power never seen by them before.

So they were searched and humbled; then lifted up and comforted. Then, as they waited with lowly and believing hearts, united and expectant, looking, in the power of the Spirit, not up to the heavens, but to Calvary, there dawned the ever-memorable morning of the tenth and Pentecostal day. And then with the rushing wind the Spirit came. Had He not come before? Most certainly! He had already indued with heavenly power and

grace the souls of His believing and praying people. But now He comes to crown His work, and as a sign of convicting power to unbelieving men! And so we read, "When this was noised abroad, the multitude came together." As is frequently the case with visitations of the Holy Spirit, the work was far advanced among the saints, before the profane and careless world was arrested and attracted by the marvelous sight.

Here, then, we find our answer to the problem of Spiritual Power, not on that last and crowning day of Pentecostal miracles. The servants of the Lord, already indued with power, were only waiting then to be led forth in conquering train against the adversaries of their exalted King. But we find it in those searched and humble hearts, and in the earnest, united and believing prayers of those preceding days of solemn, quiet and expectant waiting upon God. Can we longer wonder that they soon went forth with sharpened sickles to cut in every land the grandest harvest the world ever saw?

To such a work, of surpassing value, and honor, you are called, my brethren. Like them of old, some of you have been sitting for three years at the Master's feet, and in the class-rooms of His servants. And in a little while you will all be separated laborers in the field, alone, and yet no more alone. Is it too much to ask of you to seek now a similar endowment of power? A revival of religion in a Theological Seminary might seem



strange to the unthinking world; but nowhere is spiritual quickening more needed, nowhere would it be more fruitful. Well do I remember one more than half a century ago, the echoes of which are to this day still sounding round the world. Throughout our country, and in India, China and Japan, are to be met the gracious influences of that solemn season; and even "the grave-dotted strands" of the "dark continent" attest the devotion, which that day received its mightiest missionary impulse.

The times are ripe for harvest laborers; and such you are summoned to be. One such I now recall, the father of our lamented and accomplished Mary Allen, who used to lay his hand upon my boyish head, and express the hope that I might serve God in the ministry. Long years of seeding time were his; but the glorious harvest came at last. I would rather have for my portion the toiling ministry of *Charles K. Thomson* among the weaker churches of western and southern Indiana, crowned by the five years of singularly rich ingathering with which that ministry closed than wear the coronets of kings!

But whether the reaping time come soon or late, you need, must have, this spiritual power. Only so will you have a burning love for souls. And no young minister is ever likely to be very useful in this holy calling, who does not possess an unquenchable thirst for the conversion of men. In later years his ministry may find fitting and largely

sufficient scope in the edifying of Christian people; but his earlier work must be characterized by an unappeasable longing and labor for conversions. The philosophy of this has been already probably indicated. The minister must be a witness. He must testify. But the change from death to life, from darkness to light, is as yet the young ambassador's chief experience. The vicissitudes of the Christian life, its decays and revivals, its anomalies and perplexities, are yet to him, much as he may think he knows them, largely an unexplored country. It is Vinet, I believe, who wisely says "Experience must be left to the preaching of older ministers." But even the beginner must speak that which he knows, and testify what he has seen. His first message must be proclaimed under the pressure of the adjuration, "Ye are my witnesses." The conversion of men, therefore, will be naturally, may I not add, necessarily, the chief, though not exclusive, object of your earlier ministry.

And this love for the impenitent and perishing will bring in its train a multitude of personal advantages, and save you from the snares peculiar to a cold heart and an unconsecrated life. One, whose character and ministry give him a right to speak, truthfully and forcibly says, "Devotion to this supreme work of saving men will not contract, but enlarge and complete the pastor. It will develop socialness, intimate and accurate knowledge of men, faithful pastoral work, direct, forceful,

omnipotent preaching, presentation of the whole truth, law and Gospel, love and wrath, mercy and judgment, eternal life and eternal death. In his travail of soul for the lost, he will come into the fullest sympathy of the mind that was in Christ, and of the truths that revolve around the cross and its Infinite Sacrifice. There will be unity, concentration, enthusiasm, and persistence in his ministry."

With such a burning love for souls, and desire for their conversion, you will not be greatly troubled about the choice of a field of labor. Under the burden of such a feeling, and with the Divine leading, you will have no difficulty in following the advice of old Dr. Plumer, of blessed memory, who used to say to us, "There is one safe rule to follow, young gentlemen, when you have a choice of fields, and that is, Go always where there is the most devil." With such love for souls you will never write, as a young minister once wrote to me, giving this as one of the reasons for desiring to leave his church: "It affords me no field where I can develop my powers as I would like to do." Longing for the salvation of men, you will give your energies to the development of your field; and God will attend to the proper development of your powers!

It is my profoundest conviction that, in this day of just demand for a ministry more able in mental endowments, and better furnished with all needful knowledge, the call for a higher standard of min-


isterial consecration is infinitely more imperative! In the greater spiritual power of God's ministering servants, is to be found the best safe-guard the Church can have against the insidiously growing worldliness of the professing people of God, against the aggressions of an ungodly and spurious science, and against the paralysis of an undevotional and irreligious criticism. In this spiritual power of her ministers the Church shall find hope for the unfaltering proclamation of the cardinal truths of our holy faith, the speedy prevalence of genuine and mighty revivals throughout both this country and other countries, and her final and assured triumph over all her foes.

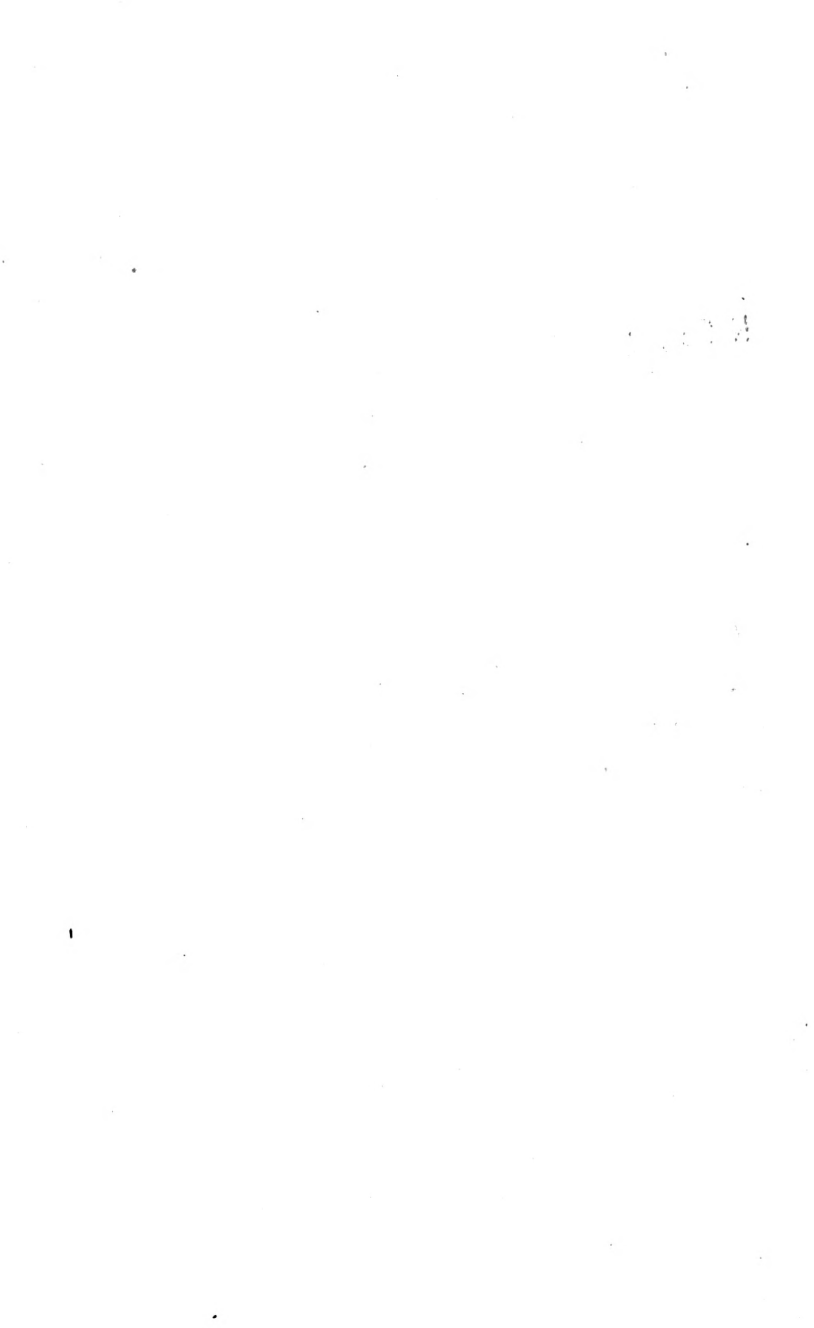
May God give to you, my brethren, and to all His ministering servants, true and commanding Spiritual Power! Amen!

I thank you, brethren, for the kind and patient attention you have given to these "Familiar Talks on Sermon Building." I trust you will find them helpful to you in preparing for the most blessed work ever committed to mortal man, the glorious work of preaching the glorious Gospel of the blessed Son of God. In this day of abundant homiletical aids I can hardly hope to have said anything especially new or original. I can only say the considerations I have been able to present to you have been wrought out in my own ministry, a long and happy, and I trust useful ministry of more than fifty years. I pray God that you may have a like blessed and useful service of our most gracious Master, who sends you forth into the great harvest field, and who will, with sympathetic expectation, await your return, bringing your sheaves with you.



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