E. B. Balcombe

SACRED RHETORIC.

SACRED RHETORIC;

OR,

COMPOSITION AND DELIVERY

OF

SERMONS.

BY

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TO WHICH ARE ADDED

HINTS ON EXTEMPORANEOUS PREACHING,

BY HENRY WARE, JR., D. D.

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PREFACE.

A REMEMBRANCE of my early wants, and a regard to the natural action of the mind in composing sermons, led to the preparation of the following work.

Without detracting from the substantial merits of existing works on preaching, I may just mention two particulars in which they have appeared to me deficient. They do not contemplate the actual position of a man who undertakes to compose a sermon; and, consequently, they do not unfold the process through which his mind ought to pass. In other words, they contemplate a sermon, as composed; not the man, as preparing to compose, and as actually composing, a sermon. This remark presents the idea on which a chief part of the following work is built, and which is also employed by Gresley in his Treatise on Preaching.

For this idea I am as much indebted to Cicero and Quinctilian, as to my own experience: probably, more; for nature has not sufficient play in many of our studies; and however ready she may be to indicate the proper starting-point, some of us need more than a hint, from other quarters, in order to accept her guidance.

The other particular alluded to, is, that in some valuable works on this subject a student is left without a proper view, and without proper specimens, of sermons commonly denominated *textual.* Now, however superior are sermons which are marked by unity of subject — and the following pages will bear testimony to a high valuation of them on my part — the experience of the pulpit, and the mental constitution and habits of large masses of hearers, and of many preachers, clearly show that textual sermons are not to be dispensed with. Much space is not required for instructions on such sermons; still, a practical view of them is evidently desirable.

Though I have intimated that existing works do not meet the wants which I have felt as a teacher, yet I have not the presumption to suppose that every want of teachers, or of young ministers, will be met by the present volume. Indeed, on the subject of preaching, the range for

precepts and advice is so ample, and the demand for common sense and philosophy, for experience and observation, is so constant; the peculiarities of taste and custom in different denominations of Christians, as well as the diversities of time and place, all exerting an influence on preaching, are so many, that it would be marvellous if any one book on the subject should receive universal favor.

This volume takes for granted, that the student has already become acquainted with the works of Campbell and Whately on rhetoric; more particularly, with the latter author's Elements of Rhetoric. No book exhibits, better than the last-mentioned, the principles on which a man must act, who would reason justly and cogently, write or speak lucidly and earnestly, and thus be able to "carry his point."

The present work presupposes, also, the possession and the habitual cultivation, by candidates for the ministry, of personal religion. It does not, therefore, discuss the necessity of piety to a preacher. The general spirit of a work on preaching, and particular suggestions naturally occurring at appropriate places, should be such as to indicate, without the danger of mistake, the indispensableness of piety to the proper discharge of the preacher's office. I

use the word *piety*, here, in distinction from mere upright moral deportment, and as involving a radical spiritual renovation. Piety, thus understood, is indispensable to a preacher. I do not assert, that a man cannot be an eloquent preacher without it: for, eloquence requires mainly a dignified and interesting subject, a good acquaintance with it, an inventive genius, and a sensibility sufficiently keen to make a man feel his subject and forget himself; and, evidently, many religious subjects may be amply known, and may awaken genius and sensibility, in the absence of genuine piety. Yet, beyond question, religion presents many subjects which cannot be properly apprehended, and, of course, cannot be adequately treated but by a man who has had inward experience in regard to them. Many relations, also, or bearings of subjects, less exclusively experimental, will escape the observation, or cannot stir the sympathies, of any but a pious man. Besides, even subjects more strictly intellectual would be more eloquently treated by a man who should have, in addition to the requisites which another may possess, the advantage of a heart pervaded by love to God. It is strictly correct, therefore, even on rhetorical grounds, to insist on piety as a prime requisite to a preacher; and to enjoin on him the assiduous cultivation

of that faith in Christ by which his heart may be disentangled from earthly and sensual influences, and, free from selfish purposes, may make the glory of the Redeemer the main spring of his activity.

It is, also, here taken for granted, that the student is sufficiently acquainted with Christian theology, or is obtaining a sufficient acquaintance with it, to become a preacher. Hence, instruction in religious doctrines does not occupy any of these pages; nor have I thought it within my province to express opinions as to the proper view, or the relative position, of various doctrines, which yet will form the substance of many sermons. This belongs to the theologian, rather than to the rhetorician.

I have preferred to make a small book. My aim has been, to cultivate the inventive powers of students, and help them to rely on their own resources.

Dr. Ware's Hints on Extemporaneous Preaching will prove, I trust, an acceptable appendage to the work. This mode of preaching deserves more attention from educated ministers than it receives; and Dr. Ware's essay discusses it fully and judiciously. I should not do justice to my feelings, in speaking of this essay, without endeavoring to prepossess my readers in its favor, by paying an honest, though

a merely passing, tribute to the ability and excellent spirit of its author, with whom I had the happiness, for many years, of a general acquaintance. My thanks are due to the Rev. Chandler Robbins, the editor of Dr. Ware's Works, for permission to avail myself of this Essay.

Though I have endeavored to give this book a completeness adequate to the wants of students generally, yet the use of the following works in connection with it would be attended with advantage: Fenelon's Dialogues on Eloquence, Campbell's Lectures on Pulpit Eloquence, Porter's Lectures on Homiletics and Preaching, Gresley's Treatise on Preaching. To these may be added Sir Joshua Reynolds' Discourses before the Royal Academy; a work, prepared for students in painting and statuary, but unfolding with rare felicity — since the fine arts have so much in common with oratory — the higher principles of rhetoric. The young minister would possess in this collection an ample rhetorical apparatus.

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ON EXTEMPORANEOUS PREACHING.

SACRED RHETORIC.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY VIEW OF RHETORIC. — DIVISIONS OF THE PRESENT WORK, AND CLASSES OF SERMONS.

RHETORIC, in the modern acceptation of the term, is the science of good writing. It includes within its province precepts pertaining to all sorts of writing, poetry as well as prose, orations, philosophical treatises, essays, and epistles. It regulates the use of the pen, and is particularly careful to produce a good style of composition. In common language, it often signifies the cultivation of polite literature in general; and between the terms Rhetoric and Belles Lettres little, if any, distinction is usually made. The term oratory is sometimes annexed to that of rhetoric; as when we speak of a professorship of Rhetoric and Oratory. In such a connection, oratory pertains to the public speaker's employment before an audience; rhetoric, to his preparatory employment in the study. Rhetoric has reference to a literary production in itself considered, whether it is to be delivered before an audience, or to be printed for private reading; when the individual presents himself before an audience, having performed the labor of preparation, whether that labor consisted

Modern use of the term.

solely in meditation and arrangement of topics and thoughts, or included the additional work of committing the discourse to paper, he then appears as a *speaker*, or orator, rather than as a *writer*.

Ancient use of the term.

Among the ancients, rhetoric related specifically to public speaking, and was subservient to the forming of an orator. It properly concerned itself with precepts on the construction and delivery of public speeches. This was its appropriate field.

The etymology of the word — it being derived from ῥέω, I speak — accounts for its having been applied by the ancients to a system of instructions on oratory. Their treatises on rhetoric, consequently, discuss the subject of orations, and aim to form a perfect orator. Whatever did not very intimately concern the composition and delivery of speeches, and the forming of a finished orator, was beyond their province, when strictly and properly viewed. Still, as rules pertaining to the diction, or style, of orations, would also be applicable to other species of writing, compositions which were not intended for public delivery, received attention from the ancient rhetoricians.* But the orator's occupation was that to which rhetoric was mainly subservient. Hence, a treatise on this subject did not instruct on poetry; this latter subject employed a distinct treatise. Thus we have Aristotle's work on the Art of Poetry, as well as his work on the Art of Rhetoric; thus, too, we have Horace's treatise on the Art of Poetry.

Whether it is wise to extend the application of the term so as to make it nearly equivalent to the cultivation of polite literature, or whether it would be desirable to restore the more specific use of the word, it is needless now to discuss. The ex-

* See Whately's Rhetoric, Introduction, § 1.

tension of its meaning was a very natural one, and usage has sanctioned it; though recent works seem tending to limit its application to prose compositions. For the purposes of theological students, in particular, it will be most profitable, as well as most convenient, to conform to the ancient signification, and to consider Sacred Rhetoric as appropriated to instruction on the preparation and delivery of sermons.

Extent of Sacred Rhetoric.

Such being its object, the utility of this branch of study will at once be conceded, provided the system of instruction is good. An objection against it may, indeed, exist in the view of some persons, on the alleged ground that systematic instruction overlooks individual genius, moulding all alike, notwithstanding the diversities of talent and circumstances, and that it thus tends to form a mechanical preacher. This, however, is a mistake. For though a system of instructions marks out a definite course, yet it need not enter so much into detail as to interfere with any man's peculiarities. If it merely exhibit the principles which the design of sermons and the nature of the human mind require, within the limits thus fixed ample range will be found for excursive minds, as well as for those which cannot, or dare not, take a bold flight. Besides, instruction is intended to meet the wants of the forming age, and to set the mind on the proper track for self-cultivation and independent action. Precepts which cramp the mental powers instead of directing their free action, are not to be tolerated. Who does not condemn a mode of agriculture which should produce only a stinted growth, instead of enabling the inherent powers of a plant to exert themselves, by the cultivator's loosening and enriching the soil, and giving free access to all

Utility of Sacred Rhetoric.

the kindly external influences which are ready to lend their aid, if they are not positively hindered from so doing? But as in the arts of common life, the future workman is directed to follow certain rules, and by this very process his native skill is nurtured and experience is acquired, so that ultimately he makes rules for himself, and becomes, it may be, a better artizan than his early master; and as in the fine arts, rules and systematic instruction are highly conducive to the culture and development of natural gifts; so, in oratory, sacred as well as secular, early instruction is not to be dispensed with. Yet it should be such as to give free action to the mind, and to produce an intelligent operator, who can rely on his own invention and judgment. This thought is applicable to instruction in any of the employments of life; and the more intellectual is the destined employment, or the more liable to be affected by circumstances which cannot be foreseen, and, therefore, cannot be calculated on, or the nearer to actual entrance on their employment the persons are to whom instruction is given, the more necessary it is to observe this thought. The idea should be made familiar to the student, that his last resource, as to intellectual performance, must be his own genius and judgment in the use of appropriate knowledge.

Relation of Rhetoric to other studies.

Instruction in sacred rhetoric, particularly, presupposes in those to whom it is offered, extensive attainments in theology and in general knowledge, and continued industry in the culture of the mind. This branch of study, in order to confer the benefit which it is capable of bestowing, must be allowed to occupy its proper place in relation to other studies. It cannot supply the lack of that knowledge and that mental discipline which are essential to the preacher; it takes for granted that these

are possessed, or that a person is chiefly occupied in acquiring them. It teaches how to employ materials, which must, however, be elsewhere procured. Should a person, therefore, study sacred rhetoric with the expectation of its furnishing him with materials for discourses, or of its being able alone, or mainly, to make him a good preacher, he will necessarily be disappointed; for he is expecting from it not only what it does not promise to give, but also what, from its very nature, it is incapable of giving. Assign it, however, its proper place, as a subsidiary, and it will greatly aid him in making his acquisitions available to the purpose for which they were sought.*

As distinct notice has been taken of the sense in which the ancients employed the word rhetoric, it may be well to add, that their systems of rhetorical instruction discussed

* Compare Cicero's declaration in his treatise, entitled ORATOR, § 3. Fateor me oratorem, si modo sim, aut etiam quicunque sim, non ex rhetorum officinis, sed ex Academiae spatiis, exstitisse. . . . . Hujus [Platonis] et aliorum philosophorum disputationibus et exagitatus maxime orator est, et adjutus. . . . Positum sit igitur in primis, sine philosophia non posse effici eloquentem. See also § 33.

The reader will remember the latitude which was given among the ancients to the term *philosophy*. Theology was one of the branches of philosophy; at least, so far as discussions on the being, the nature, and the attributes of God are concerned. The remarks of Cicero should be understood rather with reference to the general principle involved in them, than to any particular class of studies.

Aristotle, also, "lays it down as a fundamental principle, that the student of eloquence must prepare himself by an adequate acquaintance with three primary branches of knowledge which rhetoric cannot teach him; the science of dialectics [the principles of reasoning], the philosophy of human character and morals, and the philosophy of the passions."—Encyc. Brit. 7th ed. Vol. XIX. Art. Rhetoric.

the subject under the five divisions of Invention, Disposition, Elocution (that is, according to ancient usage, Diction, or Style), Memory, and Pronunciation, or Action. They contemplated the orator, when in prospect of addressing an assembly, first, as searching for his materials, that is, the arguments and considerations which the purpose of his speech required; next, as arranging these materials; then, as writing the speech, or preparing, whether in mind only or externally also, the language in which he should express his thoughts. He then committed his speech to memory, if the occasion permitted; and, at last, delivered it to the audience.

Divisions here used.

For the purposes of the present work, two general divisions will be sufficient; namely, the Composition, and the Delivery, of sermons.

A division of sermons into classes is desirable only so far as they differ in their general structure, and consequently require different precepts. Hence, the twofold division is here adopted, as also in Gresley's treatise on Preaching, of Subject-sermons, and Text-sermons.

By Subject-sermons are meant those which are occupied with a definite subject, that can be accurately stated and embraced in a brief title. In this class of sermons, a subject is derived from the text, and the sermon is a treatment, or an enforcement, of that subject, as the case may be. Discourses of this kind are also called *topical* sermons.

But in the ordinary course of pastoral preaching, there are also discourses of a very different structure. The text, instead of being employed as furnishing a well-defined subject, is itself regarded as the direct source of the sermon, and the various words, or clauses, of the text, furnish the

divisions, or items, of the discourse; so that such sermons have not, properly speaking, unity of subject. Discourses thus constructed are here denominated Text-sermons.

Augustin's Tract on Preaching.

As particular mention has been made of ancient classical authors, the observation may be a suitable one here, that, among the early Christian Fathers, Augustin is the only one who has left any thing in the form of a treatise on preaching. In his work, *De Doctrina Christiana*, he has devoted the fourth book to the consideration of this subject. He shows an intimate acquaintance with the ancient mode of treating rhetoric. He discusses chiefly the subject of diction, and insists earnestly and diffusely on perspicuity, on a becoming amount of ornament, and on aiming at persuasion as the chief end of the preacher.

CHAPTER II.

TEXTS OF SERMONS.

At this point, a peculiarity in Sacred Rhetoric requires our attention. For while sermons and public speeches possess many resemblances, the former are distinguished from the latter by having a passage of sacred writ prefixed to them, called the text. Such a passage of sacred writ is regarded, at least in theory, as the germ of the discourse.

This subject is here introduced, not as though the choice of a text is always the first thing to claim attention from one who is to compose a sermon; — for this is far from being true; — but because in a treatise like this, no more suitable place can be found for it, and because, in general, a text will, and should, be possessed at the outset of preparing a sermon.

Historical notice of Texts.

This practice is connected with the sentiment, that our Scriptures are the word of God. It originated at a very remote period. Even before the Christian era, the reading of the Holy Scriptures in the Jewish synagogue-worship was followed by an address founded on the passage which had been read. This was also the case in the time of our Lord and of the apostles.* Subsequently, when the followers of Christ had

* Compare Luke, 4: 16 — 22. Acts, 13: 15.

been formed into a separate community and maintained Christian worship, they were in the habit, at least so early as the time of Justin Martyr — and, beyond question, at an earlier date — of having portions of the Old Testament and of the Gospels read in their assemblies on the sabbath, accompanied with an address from the presiding minister of the church.*

From the earliest period of regular Christian worship, such, no doubt, was the fact. Thus came into existence the homilies of the ancient Fathers, which are to so great an extent explanations of the Scriptures, with practical addresses, or exhortations, founded on them. This custom would, naturally, in the progress of improvement, lead, for the ground of an address, to the selection of a comparatively brief passage from the portion of Scripture which was to be read in public. The result would also be a natural one in process of time, that any passage of the sacred volume, whether included in the portion to be read or not, would be employed as a text, according as particular occasions, or a preacher's circumstances or inclination, might suggest.

A text, if we seek for a correct general idea of this term, may be described as a portion of holy writ presented for explanation, discussion, or application in the religious teaching of a Christian assembly; in other words, a portion of holy writ employed as a source of public religious instruction. Such appears to have been the view anciently; and the nearer we keep to this view of a text, the more shall we consult the real purpose of preach- General idea of a Text.

* See Justin Martyr's First Apology (ch. 67), which is assigned to the year 140.

ing. Preaching, as one of the exercises of public worship, was designed for unfolding and applying the principles of the Christian religion, according to the diversified circumstances of an assembly. The preacher comes forward, not on his own authority, but as an ambassador of Christ; not to inculcate religious opinions, as drawn from the teachings of nature, or of philosophy, but to exhibit and enforce the religion of the Bible. In harmony with this purpose, he announces at the commencement of his instructions in the pulpit, the language of inspiration, as originating his discourse, and as determining the views which he is to present. Sermons, then, are very properly preceded by a text from the Bible, because they professedly expound and apply those principles of religion which are contained in that authoritative volume of inspiration.

Whether the exposition, doctrinal and practical, of large portions of Scripture, on the ordinary occasions of public worship, is preferable to the use, generally, of a brief passage, as a text of a regular discourse, is a question of expediency, in which considerations of the hearers' characters and circumstances, and, perhaps especially, of the preacher's qualifications, have place. Prevailing practice, and that of long standing, has apparently decided in favor of the latter method. And yet the former, so common among the ancient preachers, may combine so many advantages, and is so entirely consistent with real oratorical excellence, as was proved in the case of Chrysostom, that the almost universal abandonment of it is to be lamented.

What I wish clearly to express in regard to texts is, that an intimate relation, in point of sense, should be maintained between the text and the sermon; that the subject of the sermon should be contained in the text, and proceed natu-

rally from it, somewhat as the stalk grows out of the seed.* When an intimate connection is seen to exist, the sermon will generally be more adapted to the purposes of preaching than when this idea is not regarded, even though the sermon may be rich in religious sentiment, and be otherwise impressive. Of course, the degrees of relationship between the sermon and the text may be various. It would be extravagant to insist, that a remote relationship should be always insufficient to justify the use of a Scripture-passage for the purpose of introducing a discourse. But while good sense and piety must be allowed a becoming latitude in this matter, the real purposes of texts, and the advantages which they are adapted to secure, are best consulted by the use of texts sustaining, in their proper meaning, a natural and intimate relation to the sermon.

Purposes and Advantages of Texts.

Of these purposes and advantages, four will be here specified.

Generally, an intimation is thereby given of the subject of the discourse, sufficient to gratify the curiosity which is naturally felt on this point. This partial gratification of curiosity kindles desire in the hearers for the preacher to proceed in developing and treating his subject.

The purpose just mentioned is answered commonly, but not always; because the proper idea of a text permits an obscure passage of Scripture to be thus employed, in order that it may be explained and applied; and though such a text may not intimate a subject, yet attention is directed to the passage itself, as the ground of the discourse, and de-

* Herder says, A sermon should *grow out* of the text.

sire is awakened for its explanation, or for ascertaining what use the preacher designs to make of it.

Again; the practice in question imparts to the sermon a sacredness which should characterize all the services of a worshipping assembly. When a fellow-man occupies the position of a religious teacher, and professes to unfold the principles which regulate our moral relations and our future destiny, though his personal character and attainments, if such as the position requires, tend very much to enforce his instructions, yet the ground of obligation to comply with them is felt to be, that they are of divine authority. It is important, then, that the preacher appear in the character of one who presents and explains to men the *word of God.* The mere stating of a text will not by itself, of course, secure this advantage; for, while a text may be acknowledged as sacred, and as of divine authority, the sermon may but little correspond to it, in consequence of the preacher's personal qualities, or of his failing to treat it as the leaven which should diffuse itself through the whole mass of the sermon. But I speak of a sermon which is imbued with a truly Christian spirit; and of the natural tendency of introducing such a sermon with that portion of holy writ which may properly be regarded as its source.

Still further; the use of texts, as the foundation of discourses, gives opportunity for brief expositions of important Scriptural passages; and by associating such expositions with the subjects of sermons, they are made more directly and permanently serviceable to the hearers.

Once more; the use of texts gives variety to pulpit instructions. The preacher is restricted to religious themes; at least, only with the religious bearings of other themes should he feel at liberty to concern himself in the pulpit.

Many religious subjects must be presented, again and again, to the same congregation; but weariness is prevented by the ever-changing forms, and connections, and shades of thought, which they assume in passages selected for texts. Let any one examine a half dozen texts in which the subject of prayer, or of repentance towards God, holds the prominent place, and he will discover quite as many different aspects under which this subject may be viewed. In one passage, the duty may be presented in general terms; in another, some particular motive, or encouragement, to the duty may be advanced; in another, some particular element in the duty, or necessary accompaniment of it: and thus each text, though relating to the same general subject, yet exhibits it in a different light, and gives opportunity for investing it with new interest.

Two extremes to be avoided.

Before proceeding to give directions on the choice of texts, it seems requisite to guard against two extremes to which preachers are liable. The first is, that of a seeming indifference to the kind of texts to be employed. From this it sometimes happens, that between the text and the subject no connection exists, or a connection merely verbal, resulting, too, from a strained, unnatural application of the passage. Such a practice is obviously a departure from the proper idea of a text, and hazards the purposes and advantages to which the employment of texts may be subservient. A good choice of texts and an evident connection between them and the sermons which they introduce, contribute materially to the purposes of preaching. For a preacher to disregard the expectation that,

when he announces a portion of God's word as his text, the sermon is to be in keeping with it, and is to have the reflected sacredness of divine truth, is, to say the least, exceedingly unwise. A positive evil may also be occasioned; for the impression may be made, that texts are employed only out of deference to long-established custom, and that no solid principle is connected with this custom. The tendency of this impression would be, not only to divest preaching of its sacredness, but to take from the Bible itself that reverence which attaches to it, when the ministers of religion, in their capacity of spiritual teachers, practically acknowledge it as our only authoritative religious standard.

The other extreme is, that of an unreasonable subjection to rules. This subject is not capable of very minute and specific regulation. A preacher must be left, in his selection of texts, to his own judgment and sense of propriety. No infallible authority exists to prescribe concerning the matter; never has there been a preacher whose practice has been so uniformly approved that it would be hazardous to depart from the precedents which he has furnished. In the selection of texts, we have no Homer, nor Demosthenes, for our pattern. Nor were the Holy Scriptures composed for the express purpose of furnishing texts as the ground-work of sermons. A remarkable adaptation to this purpose in Scripture-phraseology must, indeed, be acknowledged. This, however, is only an incidental circumstance.

No authority, then, divine or human, touches this matter; and a preacher must consult his good sense and cultivated taste, carefully avoiding improprieties, and aiming to keep as near as possible to the proper idea of a text. A few directions may be of service; yet even these should, in some circumstances, be held liable to modification.

Cautions and Directions in regard to Texts.

I proceed, then, in the first place, to express a few cautions in regard to a choice of texts; and, in the second place, to mention the chief desirable qualities of texts.

1. The first caution is against choosing texts which would have the appearance of quaintness. Any approach to the ludicrous in the selection of a text, is unbecoming; and on every principle both of rhetoric and of religion, seriousness, rather than levity, should be cherished at the commencement of a sermon. Happily, this caution is, at present, but little needed; for, both among preachers and in the community, the sense of propriety on this point is strong. A distinction, however, is to be made between a smile occasioned by the special appropriateness of a text in given circumstances, and the lightness of mind which is produced by the perception of oddity. Religious sobriety should never be sacrificed to love of quaintness.*

2. As a general practice, texts that are very obscure should not be selected. They may convey to the hearers an idea not intended, or none at all; and may thus suggest

* Does not the practice above mentioned naturally produce irreverence for the Scriptures among hearers, and foster the disposition to travesty detached passages? The remarks of the Rev. Richard Cecil on that preaching which abounds in allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures, are somewhat applicable to the topic now before us. He says, "When a careless young man, I remember to have felt alarms in my conscience from some preachers; while others, from this method of treating their subjects, let me off easily. I heard the man as a weak allegorizer: I despised him as a foolish preacher: till I met with some plain, simple, solid man, who seized and urged the obvious meaning."

to them either no subject, or one widely different from that which is to claim their attention. And if the preacher professes to derive a subject from such a text, he may not satisfy his hearers that it contains that subject. Such texts may divert the hearers' minds from the proper direction, and excite a vain curiosity respecting the preacher's aim, or an unprofitable desire to observe his ingenuity.

Clearly, however, as has already been intimated, texts of this character ought not to be wholly proscribed; for the true conception of a text includes the thought, that it is a passage of Scripture presented for elucidation, as well as for doctrinal, or practical, application; and, certainly, a preacher's increasing acquaintance with the word of God ought to promote his hearers' understanding of it. A *frequent* employment of such texts should be avoided; for it might suggest the unfavorable thought, that the preacher is fond of displaying research and erudition.

It deserves to be considered, too, that the proper design of the pulpit is, to establish and strengthen righteous character in men. Expositions in the pulpit are valuable mostly for the immediate purpose of furnishing a theme for religious instruction and impression, or of furnishing Scripture proofs of a topic under consideration. But when philosophical, historical, or geographical inquiries are, through their nature or their length, in danger of excluding a due attention to the ultimate aim of preaching, they are better confined to the study room, or communicated otherwise than in sermons. It will generally be found, also, that passages which are so obscure as to require copious exposition, are not the best for the preacher's public work. Exceptions, doubtless, will occur; and when a passage, confessedly obscure, can be satisfactorily shown to contain a vitally im-

portant truth, no preacher should hesitate to set it in its proper light and avail himself of it as a text. As an illustration, reference may be made to 1 Cor. 4: 4 — "For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified." By a brief explanation, this passage, which probably conveys to readers in general no meaning, acquires surpassing importance, as it exhibits an essential article of the Christian religion in a peculiarly interesting light.*

3. I would advise a preacher, also, not to employ texts of a very indefinite character. Clauses, and perhaps verses, may be found, which not only do not contain a subject, but, taken out of their connection, or forced into what may be called a spiritual sense, are capable of applications as various and contorted as imagination can suggest. Almost anything can be said under them. A discourse founded on such a text, or rather succeeding, by juxta-position merely, the mention of such a text, will probably be a crude, ill-assorted harangue, not unfolding important principles of character and conduct, but occupied with truisms, which are well intended, indeed, but are not well adapted for permanently improving the hearers. Instances of such passages as are here meant, are the words of Ehud to Eglon, which occur in Judges 3: 20 — "I have a message from God unto thee;" and the question of David to his brother Eliab, in 1 Sam. 17: 29 — "Is there not a cause?"

4. Prudence, to use no stronger term, would dissuade preachers from employing texts which are marked by grandeur of expression. They seem to promise a great effort. Though they make known the subject which is to be treated,

* The apostle here affirms that he is not conscious of having done any wrong, as a minister; yet, that his justification in the sight of God does not rest on that ground.

they may attract attention more to the preacher than to the subject. However justifiable might be such a selection, in supposable cases, and however impressive a sermon which, without parade, should explain the language of such a text, and modestly present the subject divested of its magnificent drapery, it would, in common, be extremely injudicious to announce as a text such a passage as Rev. 6: 15–17; "And the kings of the earth, and the great men and the rich men, and the chief captains and the mighty men, and every bondman and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

Such passages may be very effective, if felicitously wrought into the descriptive and elevated parts of a discourse. But generally, that is the most valuable sermon whose text, plain and direct, is a small nucleus, gathering around it, by the skilful effort of the preacher, a well-arranged, homogeneous mass of quickening instruction. While such a text is a small lamp-flame, yielding ample and enduring light, an oratorical text, on the contrary, would, except in rare cases, rather suggest the thought of a meteor which for a moment surprises the observer and then passes off.

Desirable qualities of Texts.

The principles involved in the use of texts having been so minutely exhibited, and some cautions advanced which the abuse of this practice seemed to demand, little need be said, or rather the nature of the case admits of only a little being said, in the form of positive precepts on the desirable qualities of texts.

1. The text should fairly contain the subject of which the preacher proposes to treat. A text is preferable which furnishes the subject directly, rather than by inference, or implication. But as the Bible was not made for the special purpose of providing a text for every occasion of preaching, or for every subject which may with propriety be introduced into the pulpit, a text which furnishes a subject by a natural and easy inference, or by an intimate connection of thought, and which therefore has not been wrested in order to make it answer the purpose, may properly be employed. A text may also be considered as fairly containing the subject of discourse, if the sentiment or the moral lesson couched in it, or the trait of character which it illustrates, be made that subject. Many passages, both in the Old Testament and the New, may thus be employed as texts, without justly subjecting the preacher to the imputation of fancifulness.

It is here taken for granted, that the preacher, though he selects his texts from our common version of the Scriptures, yet believes, to the best of his knowledge, that those texts convey the true meaning of the sacred writer in the original. If he has good reason to believe either that a passage which he proposes to employ was not correctly apprehended by the translators, and therefore is not correctly expressed in our version, or that the passage, through the changes which have occurred in the meaning of certain English words since the version was made, is generally taken in a different sense from that which the translators affixed to it, he should, if he prefers, notwithstanding, to use it as a text, avail himself of his knowledge of the original, and present the true meaning of the passage as that on which he proposes to found his sermon. Only let him do this with mod-

esty, and in such terms as will not bring discredit on a version which, though far from being perfect, is deservedly held in high repute and is adequate to the purposes of a divine revelation.

It could not be of much utility to present an array of examples at variance with the rule just given. And yet, as a passing illustration, it may be proper to remark that the word *conversation*, as used in our English Bible, nowhere bears the signification which ordinary modern use attaches to it. The word *soul*, likewise, in our version, is far from meaning, so generally as it does in our modern use, *the immortal part* of man; and hence a sermon on the preciousness, or costliness, of redemption by Christ, would by no means be so appropriately founded on Ps. 49: 8 — For the redemption of their soul is precious, — as on 1 Pet. 1: 18, 19 — Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, &c. An examination also, in the original, of Col. 2: 8 — Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit — would show that this passage does not directly caution Christians against the *corrupting* influence of false philosophy, since the word *spoil* is here equivalent to the expression *make a spoil of*, or *lead captive*.

2. The text should present that view of the subject which the sermon is designed to exhibit. Such a congruity between a text and the sermon makes the favorable impression that the preacher is indeed unfolding the word of God. His sermons would thus, also, present the various aspects and shades of divine truth which actually exist in the volume of inspiration. If he wishes, for instance, to give a general view of the subject of repentance, he might employ the text in Mark 6: 12 — "And they

went out and preached that men should repent." If he would persuade his hearers to repentance by the fatal consequences of impenitence, he might employ the Saviour's words in Luke 13: 3 — "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." If he would induce them by the blessing of pardon consequent on repentance, how suitable the language of the apostle Peter, in Acts 3: 19 — Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." If, again, he would urge this duty by motives drawn from the day of judgment, to this particular view of the subject the text in Acts 17: 30, 31, would be appropriate; — "God . . . now commandeth all men everywhere to repent, because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness."

Such pertinency of the text to the particular view which is to be presented of a subject, is eminently desirable in sermons which design to vindicate some Christian doctrine. This remark is the more worthy of attention from the fact, that certain passages of Scripture, in point of phraseology, and when taken out of their connection, and thus viewed apart from the sacred writer's purpose, conflict with one another in regard to some doctrines of religion. If, then, a preacher announces a text which, in point of language, is quite at variance with the doctrine he proceeds to maintain, he encounters the unfavorable circumstance of seeming to contradict an inspired writer. It would be wiser, and certainly more in harmony with the design of texts, to select a passage which would suggest the sentiment of the discourse. Then, after fairly disclosing its import and thus gaining the advantage of inspired authority, it might be well to propose, before entering at large on the vindication of the doctrine contained in the passage, to consider an

objection against it found apparently in another passage of the Bible. Dr. Campbell well shows the incongruity of the opposite course, by saying that the text seems to point one way and the sermon another.* Thus, if the discourse is to vindicate the doctrine of justification by faith, how much more suitable it would be to adopt for the text the language of the apostle Paul in Romans 3 : 28 — "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" — than to prefix to such a sermon the language of the apostle James, 2 : 24 — "Ye see, then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." How preposterous, again, does it seem for a preacher, when designing to maintain the doctrine of the real Christian's perseverance, to announce as his text the words of the apostle Paul to the Galatians, 5 : 4 — "Ye are fallen from grace." In such cases, should his purpose require him to consider the passage which is ostensibly at variance with the doctrine he intends to maintain, let him introduce it at the appropriate place as an apparent objection to be examined. Or, should he wish to give more prominence and larger space to such a passage than this course might allow, he might take it as a text and propose to explain it in union with a consideration of passages to which it appears to be opposed. Thus, without occupying the unfavorable position of one who seems to contradict his very text, he may show the congruity between it and the doctrine which he maintains.

On the other hand it may with truth be said, that the announcement of such a text would excite attention and curiosity on the part of hearers. So far, the effect would be favorable; and it may well be conceded, that the prac-

* Lectures on Pulpit Eloquence. Lect. VII.

tice is one of those which may occasionally be resorted to with advantage.

Latitude allowed on this subject.

As has already been intimated, very considerable latitude must be allowed, in the choice of texts, to the preacher's genius and sense of propriety. Particularity and preciseness of direction would here be extremely apt to produce a set of arbitrary prescriptions, which would be "more honored in the breach than in the observance." Dr. Campbell, after giving four rules on this subject, which partake of his usual sobriety and good sense,* concludes with equal good sense, by remarking, that texts conformable to his rules cannot always be found; and in such a case the rules, he says, "should be deviated from, though as little as possible, rather than that a profitable subject should not be discussed." Special cases will also arise, which no rules can meet, and which must be provided for by the preacher's genius, experience, and sense of responsibility to God. Sometimes, no single passage will suggest the thought on which he desires to preach; but a combination of verses, or clauses, disconnected as to the place of their occurrence, will exactly meet the case. Thus, the thought that *the government of God is a ground both of joy and of dread* obviously flows from the two passages combined — "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice (Ps. 97: 1); "The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble" (Ps. 99: 1). Then, again, for brevity's sake, instead of employing as a text a whole

* The substance of his rules is, that texts should be perspicuous, pertinent, full, simple. Lect. VII.

parable, or paragraph of a narrative, some principal verse, or clause, of it may be selected. Thus, though the entire parable of the talents be really the ground-work of a sermon, it might be preferable, instead of reciting the whole of it as a text, to select the words, Occupy till I come.

Directions on the choice of texts must not overlook the nature of the case, the structure of the Bible, the diverse ways in which the human mind operates, the endless variety of aspects in religious truth, and the equal variety of character and circumstances in an assembly. Hence, a good general rule must be taken *as such*, and not be invested with the authority of an unalterable statute. It is a good general rule, that a text should contain a complete sentence; but if a preacher must be bound by this rule, what would be the result? He must never select for a text the clause — A just God and a Saviour; nor such as the following, which are perpetually occurring in the Bible — Mighty in the Scriptures: — Having no hope: — Patient in tribulation: — The glorious gospel of the blessed God. Now, though these clauses are not grammatical sentences, yet they so far contain a complete sense, a definite idea, as to suggest a full subject. And who will say that this is not sufficient in a text? No one will pretend that such a clause should not be thus employed; or that it must be so connected with the context as not to be an imperfect scrap of the word of God.

Again; we are sometimes told that a text should never be a mere motto. This is a good direction, almost universally applicable; for the use of a passage of Scripture as a mere motto prefixed to a sermon, is a departure from the true design of texts. Occasions may however arise, on which a text may be employed rather out of regard to cus-

tom, and as a mere starting point of a sermon, than as having any real, substantial connection with the subject of the sermon, while yet a habitual, or frequent, disregard of this direction would be improper and even harmful.

Let a preacher be impressed with the great end of his vocation, and the unutterably sad consequences of impropriety and injudiciousness in the mode of performing its duties, and he may be safely left, with only a few general principles, to the promptings of his genius. And lest too much latitude should seem to be here given on this subject, these remarks shall be closed with a few sentences from Dr. Campbell, whose authority I am happy to adduce in support of a thought already expressed on the importance of a judicious selection of texts. "Nor let any one think this point [namely, a deviation from the rules he had given] a matter of little or no moment. As a good choice may contribute previously to rouse attention, and even to put the hearers in a proper frame for the subject to be discoursed on, as well as to keep their minds, in the time of preaching, from wandering from the subject; so, on the contrary, an improper choice will often serve to dissipate the thoughts and put the mind in a frame nowise suitable. I can say for myself, that I have been witness to instances of both effects. I have observed sometimes, that the bare reading of the text hath served to compose the minds of the audience into an earnest and attentive expectation of what was to be said. I have seen an ill-adapted text, on the contrary, especially when there was anything fantastic in the choice, excite a very different emotion in the audience, and dispose their minds not to be edified, but amused." *

* Lecture VII.

CHAPTER III.

SUBJECT-SERMONS. SUBJECT OF A SERMON, OR PROPOSITION.

At entering on the consideration of subject-sermons, it may be well to repeat the thought, that the preceding chapter was devoted to texts rather for convenience' sake than from any necessary priority of a text, so far as the *composition* of sermons, belonging to this class, is concerned. For though a text is, at least in theory, the seed out of which the sermon grows, yet, as in nature it is only the vital principle in the seed that is essential to the production of the plant, and the external coverings fall away in the process of germination, so, in a text, it is the particular subject embraced in it, the *thought, sentiment, principle,* or however denominated, that is to be evolved and expanded into a sermon. The choice of a subject, or, what will often be found more advantageous, the choice of a proposition, is that which, at the starting point of preparing a sermon of this class, chiefly claims attention.

Precedence of the Subject.

This claims precedence in the order of thought; for until this is decided, a central point is not obtained around which the mind can gather materials. It claims precedence, also, in regard to importance; because it is the subject that gives substance to the sermon; and according as this is wisely or unwisely selected, according as

this is definitely or confusedly apprehended by the author, the sermon will be capable of benefitting the hearers, or may leave them without any valuable influence on their understandings or their hearts.

Whether a text or a subject is to be first chosen.

Now, for all the purposes of preaching, or for the goodness of the sermon in itself, it is wholly immaterial whether a text suggested the subject, or the subject was otherwise suggested, and an appropriate text was afterwards selected. The important point is, to have a proper subject; the manner, or the circumstances, in which it first came before the mind, this is of no consequence. For in either case, the text may be a very suitable one; and the connection between the text and the subject may be so intimate, that no hearer could decide from the prefatory sentences of the sermon, or from the nature of the proposition, which of the two arose first to the preacher's mind. In either case, too, an exposition of the text may be necessary in order to bring out the precise subject of the sermon, or it may be wholly discretionary.

Agreeably, however, to the sentiments of the preceding chapter, a decided preference is here expressed for subjects which are so obviously deduced from the texts employed, as to appear to have been really suggested by them; for such subjects are more conformed to the idea that sermons are the exhibition and enforcement of the word of God. When a subject is stated which has no more connection with the text than with a hundred other texts, the sermon, however suitable its subject may be for the pulpit, yet fails of an advantage which it would possess if the subject were drawn from the text. Care must be taken, however, when a text has suggested the subject, to pass without protracted remarks over those words, or clauses, which need not be

explained in order to bring to view the subject; since a minute attention to irrelevant matter might pre-occupy the hearer's mind, or distract his thoughts. The very easy distinction between a text and a subject is a sufficient guide in respect to this point; since, in the class of sermons which we are now considering, a text is chosen, not that its words, or clauses, may separately furnish ground for remarks, but as presenting an important subject. The subject, then, is here the main thing; other matter in the text is, for the present purpose, subordinate.

Dr. Campbell insists that in this class of sermons the subject should be chosen first, and a suitable text be afterwards found. In laying down this rule, he was influenced by the desire to correct the erroneous mode of constructing sermons which in his day prevailed in Scotland. The distinction between a subject and a text not being sufficiently acknowledged in practice, the custom existed of minutely dwelling on what may be called the subordinate parts of a text, before touching the main subject; so that sermons often consisted of heterogeneous, or ill-connected parts.*

In point of fact, as to this particular, the experience of preachers will, of course, be various. It would, indeed, be strange if, to a preacher who makes the Bible his study, or employs it copiously for devotional purposes, passages of Scripture should not frequently occur with much interest and force, sometimes clearly and fully opening before him a subject in the precise form in which it may be best treated before his congregation; at other times, suggesting a somewhat chaotic mass of thoughts which he soon reduces to order, and from which he selects a particular subject. It

* Campbell's Lectures on Pulpit Eloquence. Lect. VIII.

would be equally strange, if such a man's independent reflections should not fasten on some view of a subject, or some unusual combination of thought, which may be enlarged into a sermon; or, if his intercourse as a pastor, a friend, a citizen, or if any book he reads, should not frequently originate a train of thought which, even before a suitable text presents itself, will issue in a subject for a sermon. All this is, indeed, so natural to an intelligent and pious man, that the following remark of Dr. Porter, when applied to men actually in the ministry, is not more admonitory than true — "That preacher who is perplexed through want of subjects for sermons, should suspect that something is wrong in himself; at least, that he is very imperfectly qualified for his office. . . . In selecting among subjects for sermons one that should be most appropriate in given circumstances, I allow he may hesitate. But with the profusion of interesting matter displayed in every page of the Bible, if he is perplexed to find any topic of discourse, he has mistaken his business. Let him go to the farm, or to the shop. The fact that he wants a *subject*, is demonstration that he wants either the *understanding*, or the *heart*, of a minister." *

Compass of a Subject.

In regard to what may be called the *compass*, or *extent*, of a subject for a sermon, a little reflection will show that it ought to be quite limited. The time allotted to a sermon in our religious assemblies is too brief for the treatment of a very extensive or general subject; such as would require

* Porter's Lectures on Homiletics and Preaching. Lect. V.

several main divisions in order to be adequately discussed and enforced. Hence, a sermon is not an extended treatise on such a subject, but a discourse on some division of it, or even sub-division.

Again, the human mind is so constituted that the several parts of a general subject cannot be set before it advantageously in rapid succession and in a very brief space of time. A well-defined and enduring impression cannot thus be made. But should one of those parts be presented separately and with greater copiousness, a deeper interest would be secured, and the corresponding practical results might be more rationally expected. A sermon should, therefore, as to its subject, be restricted to a narrow compass.

Lest a subject of narrow compass should be mistaken for one not admitting of copious treatment, it may be useful to illustrate the difference which is here intended between a general and a particular subject. Take, then, *Repentance toward God.* For our present purpose, this may be called a general subject. Suppose now, a preacher divides his sermon on *repentance* into several branches: thus, I. Its nature; II. Its necessity; III. The obligations, — and IV. The motives — to repentance. Such a sermon, if it give to each part an expansion at all adequate to the design of preaching, must exceed all reasonable limits both of time and of the hearers' ability of attention. It must be rather a treatise, than a sermon; or else, with all its pretensions to copiousness and completeness, it must be an exceedingly meagre performance, scarcely more than a mass of common-place remarks, uninstructive and unimpressive.

But suppose the preacher restricts himself to a narrower range, and selects one of the above named branches as the

subject of an entire sermon; for instance, *the nature of repentance.* After a suitable introduction, he gives, we will suppose, a brief general view of repentance; he then enters more into detail, and carefully discriminates between true repentance and its counterfeits, as to principles and their fruits. He then, in order to employ the beneficial influence of example, describes a penitent man; he sets before his hearers the repenting prodigal, the repenting David, or Peter, and for the sake of contrast, and of rendering still clearer the difference between true repentance and false, the man who, unable to bear his load of guilt, went away and hanged himself. Having thus far unfolded his subject, and held it up to the steady and interested view of the assembly, he next makes it bear distinctly on the different classes of hearers — on professors of religion; on those who are beginning to be attentive, and those who are indifferent, to their spiritual welfare; on the openly vicious; — on as many and such of these classes as his purpose requires.

Obviously, on the ordinary principles of our nature, a sermon thus constructed would be far superior, for the design of preaching, to one which should not be thus restricted in its aim. It would be far better adapted to fix attention, to convey a just apprehension of the subject, and to lodge in a hearer's soul a seed of truth which would produce fruits meet for repentance.

In like manner — still further to illustrate definiteness of subject — instead of employing, as the basis of a sermon, the whole of one main division of a subject, as it may be called, such as *motives to repentance,* and presenting several distinct motives, a class of motives may be selected; for instance, *the results of repentance;* or, still more definitely,

one of these results, namely, *forgiveness of sins;* and the sermon may be founded on the single thought, that *repentance secures forgiveness.* An inventive and well-regulated mind, properly stored with religious knowledge, could gather around this proposition abundant materials for a sermon. And a sermon, the whole tendency of which would be to make that one sentiment clearly understood, to enforce it on the conscience, and to apply its persuasive power to the heart, would well exemplify the leading traits of effective preaching. Dr. Porter justly observes — "That is not useful preaching, which is a mere *collection of good remarks,* without the scope, connection and impression which belong to a regular discourse. Nor is that a profitable sermon, which now and then startles the hearers with a vivid flash of thought, or makes them remember a few eccentric phrases; — but that which fixes their eye on a *single subject;* which holds their attention steadily to *that subject;* which gives them, as they go on, a clearer perception and a deeper feeling of *that subject;* and finally compels them to remember *that subject,* though they cannot repeat one expression uttered by the preacher." *

Another illustration presents itself, which may show the importance of definiteness, and bring into suspicion the propriety of a prevalent mode of constructing sermons. A discourse on the general subject of Regeneration may contain three particular, or definite subjects, under the heads of the Nature, the Necessity, and the Author, of regeneration; and such a sermon is capable of being reduced to the three propositions — Regeneration is a radical change of the heart towards God, Regeneration is indispensable to

* Porter's Lectures on Homiletics and Preaching. Lect. VIII.

salvation, God is the author of Regeneration. Any one of these propositions is sufficiently ample for an entire sermon; and neither of them can, in a sermon with these parts, be treated with that copiousness which its legitimate influence would require. Such a sermon will, perhaps, close with three diverse remarks, suggested each by one of the three parts. A sermon thus constructed, though all its parts are arranged under one general subject, is in reality a combination of three separate discussions; and the three remarks at the close, instead of being placed, each where it naturally belongs, in immediate connection with the discussion which originated it, and where, on the principle of association, it would probably be most useful, are ceremoniously put together at the end, thus giving to the whole collection the appearance of one sermon, instead of its being three short sermons joined together: for if each concluding remark had been set in its proper place, the real nature of the performance would have at once disclosed itself.*

Objections against a restricted compass. Advantages of it.

An objection may arise, perhaps, to an unpractised writer, that this view restricts the preacher within too narrow limits, and would deprive him of materials for sermons. Such an objection is entirely a mistake; for while this view does, indeed, restrict the preacher within narrow limits, it also by that very circumstance tasks his inventive powers, and thus increases his ability both to multiply and rightly to employ materials. When the mind is occupied with a general subject, it can-

* "It might be of use, if, in the composition of sermons, we were to oblige ourselves to give titles to them. Many of what are called sermons would be found to require three or four titles to answer to their contents; which at once proves that, properly speaking, they are not sermons." — Andrew Fuller.

not be so active, nor penetrating, as when it contemplates a small portion of the subject, surveying that portion on all sides, and detecting its various relations.* A discourse on a general subject, which does not enter into a very minute consideration of any one part, will be occupied with such superficial thoughts as, however just, cannot, from their being common-place, arouse either the preacher's or the hearer's powers, nor interest his affections. Men are not stimulated by pointless sayings.

Still further; the supply of general subjects may be soon exhausted, while the supply of particular subjects is absolutely inexhaustible.

Besides, the habit of meditating only on general subjects, without dissecting them and examining the various parts in detail, greatly tends to impoverish genius; a consideration, which of itself should prompt a pastor, to whom an inventive and well-regulated genius is indispensable, to select commonly very definite subjects.

A general subject sometimes expedient.

It must be granted, that such limitation of subject as has been instanced is not always attainable, nor, indeed, always desirable; and that the form of a general subject will often be expedient, under which the nature of the subject, the grounds of it, its importance, the motives appropriate to it, or several considerations respecting it, will, some or all of these, have place. For the preacher may sometimes think it judicious to present a brief and comprehensive view of an entire subject, rather in the form of a summary than of a careful and exact treatment of it. In other cases, when this method is resorted to, it will probably be advisable so fully to treat

* See Whately's Rhetoric. Of Propositions, p. 26.

several of the divisions that at least two sermons may be requisite; or, to select one branch as the principal part of the sermon, and to treat the others with as much brevity as will be consistent with the preacher's main purpose. Though each head in such a sermon may be in reality a separate proposition, yet the consecutive treatment of the several parts may, on a given occasion, be more advisable than the treatment of each one by itself, as the basis of an entire sermon; for the case may not well admit of two or more separate sermons, the preacher's aim being to produce a strong impression concerning the subject at once, and then to dismiss it. For instance; the subject may be Family Worship, and it might be well to dispose of it in one sermon, under the two heads of *the duty*, and *the manner of performing it*. If the duty alone were discussed on a given occasion, the preacher's aim, so far as practical results are concerned, might fail; if the manner alone, some hearers might yet need to be convinced of the duty. The interest excited by the proof of the duty might be the best preparation for instruction on the manner of performing it. Should the subject, then, occupy two sermons, the design might be defeated in consequence of the hearers' coming to the second discourse after a cooling of the interest excited by the first, or by the absence from the second of some who had listened to the first, or by the want of preparation on the part of those who had not the opportunity of hearing the first.

Obviously, however, judgment must be exercised in selecting the several parts thus proposed for treatment, — lest more be selected than can be treated with sufficient copiousness — and in giving a well-proportioned treatment to each part.

Similar or contrasted views of a subject.

Several similar, or contrasted views of a subject may also form the substance of a sermon, which views are not, each one, capable of being expressed in one and the same simple proposition; but which properly stand under one general head, and are best exhibited on one and the same occasion. For instance, the discourse may be on Death, viewed in the two aspects of *a conqueror* and *a conquered foe;* Death *achieving a triumph*, Death *triumphed over;* or, on the Christian Ministry, with reference to its *Discouragements* and its *Supports*. The consideration of the last thought, in each of these instances, may be more effective by coming in contrast with, and immediately after, the first, than by occupying a separate sermon. Unity is sufficiently consulted; and the power of contrast in impressing a moral lesson is too great to lie unemployed.

In truth, our views of unity should not be such as to cramp any mind; but rather to give its powers the most favorable direction. Nor should we conceive of a sermon as a geometrical demonstration; nor, as invariably a logical discussion of a subject; it should often rather be an exhibition of a religious truth in a diversity of aspects, or in several consecutive views, and with much variety of form and method, and made available, in an indefinite variety of ways, to the spiritual benefit of the assembly.

Unity in Sermons.

The distinction which has already been noticed between a general and a particular subject, is a sufficient guide in respect to the unity which should commonly characterize a sermon. And when a suitable subject

has been selected, the very thing which is proposed for consideration, and not subordinate topics involved in the statement of the subject, should be treated. Matter which is taken for granted in the terms of a statement need not be copiously unfolded, as though it was not understood; nor should the fear be indulged, that a sermon strictly related to a proposition, or confined to the precise point in a statement, will exclude any thing that is essential to a complete understanding of the theme proposed. For, whatever is requisite to this end may be disposed of in the introduction of a sermon, or may form a paragraph preliminary to the proposition, or may follow the proposition as explanatory of it, and occupy just so much space as the case requires. If the subject proposed requires very copious explanation before entering on its treatment, or if some subordinate thought in the proposition demands minute examination or copious expansion, let this antecedent matter occupy an antecedent sermon. It may generally, however, be taken for granted as already understood; or, a few hints will be sufficient to set before the hearers this preliminary matter. But when a definite point is proposed for consideration, let not one half, or more, of the time which that point demands, be devoted to preliminary and subordinate matter, and thus the main thought be denied its just space. This would seem to be a device rather for filling up a given amount of time, than a method of amply unfolding a proposition, and carrying home its particular lesson to the hearers' understandings, hearts and consciences. In truth, a definite statement of any moral or religious principle gives ample scope for a sermon, in treating the precise point which is stated, and in dilating on the various applications of which it is susceptible. Without any unnecessary de-

tention, let the preacher go directly to the point in hand. he will find enough to occupy his powers and the time of his hearers; and his discourses can then hardly fail of variety and fulness of instruction, or of interest and impressiveness.

Illustrations are easily found of the mistaken course just alluded to. From Ps. 9: 10 — "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee" — suppose a preacher undertakes to show that *a knowledge of the character of God tends to produce confidence in him;* and makes the three following divisions — I. What is a just knowledge of the character of God; II. Whence this knowledge is obtained; III. How this knowledge tends to produce confidence in God. Now, the first two divisions are here entirely subordinate, and are unnecessary to the unfolding of the proposition. A formal consideration of these heads would, also, not leave time for a suitable discussion of the third, which yet contains the very thing, in truth the only thing, to be discussed. Besides, the hearers' ability of earnest attention to a full discussion of it would, by this course, be somewhat impaired. In all probability, again, the first and the second heads would be more copiously treated than the third; and thus the occasion would necessarily fail of accomplishing what the hearers of the proposition would have a right to expect. Evidently, moreover, such a mode of constructing sermons incurs the hazard of their being common-place, and, consequently, pointless and barren of interest. Rather, let subordinate matter, instead of occupying formal divisions, be briefly touched in a paragraph or two, or be wholly passed over as already known to the hearers; and let the preacher proceed with as little delay as possible, and with as much time before him as possible,

to unfold and apply the proposition itself. Let him have a certain point selected for treatment, let him clear his way to it, if necessary, as quickly as possible, keep to it as closely as possible, and apply it as copiously, as pungently, as persuasively as his powers permit, and the wants of his hearers demand. A sermon thus constructed has true unity; unity of proposition, or of point; unity of the whole discourse, as the amplifying or copious treatment of that proposition; unity of the whole discourse, as proceeding from, or directed to, one common centre.*

* A sermon by John Howe, entitled The Influence of Hope, well illustrates this faulty mode of structure. The text is Romans 5: 5, —"Hope maketh not ashamed;" and in the opening sentence the expectation is raised that the discourse will relate to "this property of the Christian's hope; namely, that it maketh not ashamed." After showing "the scope and series of the apostle's discourse" and the connection of the text, the author proceeds "to inquire, I. Of what this is spoken: and then to consider, II. This particular property of it." On arriving at the second general division, two things, he says, are to be done; "1. To open the import of it; and, 2. To demonstrate the truth of the assertion." After largely explaining the import, the author 'proceeds to demonstrate this to be the true property of the Christian's hope;' and as he 'has remaining but little time,' he considers briefly three things pertaining to it. "The Use of what has been said" then follows under three heads, and the discourse concludes with "a word or two, 1. of counsel; 2. of caution."

Thus the main idea of the text, and that which at the opening of the discourse seemed destined to receive the principal attention, is in fact almost wholly displaced by the prominence and expansion given to subordinate considerations.

Though we may not say that any work of John Howe's would be common-place and pointless, yet it must be obvious, on reading a few of his discourses, that even he could not avoid, in this manner of making sermons, unnecessary and tedious repetitions; and that had he not trammelled himself by these artificial divisions, but spent

Forms of Propositions.

But it is time to consider the various forms which propositions may assume. They are by some divided into two kinds, the rhetorical and the logical, according as they simply mention a subject, or make an affirmation, or a negation, concerning it. *The faithfulness of God* is a rhetorical proposition; *God is faithful* is a logical one. As to a choice between these two forms, even when, as is not always the case, the form is optional, no universal rule can be given: the nature of each case must be taken into consideration. And indeed, so far as the hearers are concerned, this may be considered wholly immaterial.

The logical form, however, has advantages in reference to writers themselves. To some, this form of statement will prove more suggestive than the other by its particularity, and by its actually committing a writer to a certain view. It will originate a variety of questions. Thus, the affirmation, *prayer is efficacious*, puts the mind into an in-

freely his whole force in elucidating and urging the main thought stated in his propositions, he would have been far more interesting and effective.

A similar remark might be made concerning President Edwards, though by no means so extensively as concerning some other preachers. For while he made formal divisions of the subordinate matter of his propositions, he treated those divisions less fully and more rapidly than is frequently done, and gave chief prominence to the main thought. In some instances, this subordinate matter is not more fully treated than it would have been had he disposed of it, without formal divisions, in a short paragraph or two.

Dr. Emmons' sermons are generally constructed in a similar manner. But his first division, consisting of subordinate matter, is commonly despatched as speedily as possible to make way for the main thought.

quiring attitude. The question arises, What does this affirmation mean? This leads to explanation and to the detection of mistakes concerning the truth affirmed. A question again arises, What is the evidence of this assertion? Proofs are then sought for, and objections examined. Still again, a question occurs, What if prayer is efficacious? Then consequences which result from this truth, or some other impressive views, present themselves.

This advantage, however, may depend very much on habit; for the rhetorical statement, *the efficacy of prayer*, would suggest to some minds similar inquiries, and to other minds several items of thought which would form main divisions of a sermon.

The logical form of statement, limiting a writer, tends also to secure true unity and point in a sermon. For if you affirm, or deny, something, and the whole body of the sermon is, so to speak, the verifying of that assertion, or accounting for the thing asserted, or the exhibiting of its various aspects and relations, so that a hearer becomes, by virtue of the considerations laid before him, occupied with that assertion, and with its legitimate results and applications, that sermon must have unity, and unity, for the most part, of the strictest sort.

On the other hand, the rhetorical form of statement is advantageous, as being less formal, and as favoring the consideration of successive topics, not logically connected, but intimately related to each other, and more impressively exhibited in connection than apart.

The hint may not be entirely useless, that a writer may secure to himself the advantages of a logical proposition, while yet in his sermon he may actually adopt the less formal rhetorical mode of statement.

Besides the rhetorical and the logical forms of proposition, the interrogative mode of presenting a subject will sometimes be found advantageous; particularly, when the case requires negative, as well as affirmative considerations, and when the preacher's object would be best gained by his assuming the attitude of an inquirer attempting to discover what opinion ought to be formed on the subject proposed. Should his subject be, for instance, Evidences of personal piety, it would be more congruous, instead of exposing under this statement, in several items, insufficient or false evidences, and then mentioning, in the same series, the satisfactory evidences, to raise the inquiry, What are genuine evidences of piety? In answering this inquiry, he might either in a didactic manner deny the sufficiency of certain supposed evidences, or propose various questions, such as, Is such a quality, or course of conduct, a genuine evidence? Is such another? or another? and show their fallaciousness. He might then exhibit the true evidences.

It is advantageous, also, when a subject is to be treated which is viewed by some hearers with an unfavorable prejudice, to propose an inquiry into that subject. The inquiry may then be so prosecuted, that erroneous opinions shall be exposed and the truth vindicated, with a fair prospect of effecting conviction.

The interrogative mode of presenting a subject is favored by its vivacity. It puts the hearers' minds into an inquiring attitude, and appeals to their good sense.

Ought the Proposition to be always stated?

It is worthy of consideration, whether the proposition, or subject of a sermon should always be stated. This inquiry

will receive different answers according as it relates to the writer, or to his hearers. A writer ought invariably to set before his mind, even if he does not express it on paper, the very sentiment which he wishes to establish, and that in the most suitable form of statement. Otherwise, he will incur the danger of not being very definite, and consequently will not be prepared to guide others to a just conclusion. The simple fact, too, of having precisely expressed in writing that which he aims to establish, or to exhibit, will often prove advantageous in securing, throughout the discourse, precision of thought and language. It is certainly safest thus to be provided with a point of gravitation. But for the hearers, though it may generally be best distinctly to state the subject, yet not always. When the truth to be urged is one against which the hearers are strongly prejudiced, an advantage may be gained by not formally stating, at the outset, the conclusion to which it is the purpose of the discourse to bring them; that is, by not formally stating a proposition. But after having announced the text, the preacher may present consecutively several considerations suggested by the text; and thus proceed, till the particular truth will at length appear as the inevitable result of those considerations.

Sometimes the text itself is as simple a statement as need be devised. It is certainly unnecessary, after announcing the text — "God is faithful" — formally to state the topic before the preacher shall proceed to show the grounds, or the practical influences of this declaration.

Sometimes the course of thought in the introduction may make the subject sufficiently obvious, without its being distinctly mentioned. Sometimes a statement of the subject may be informally introduced in connection with explana-

tory or amplifying remarks, and the hearers yet apprehend at once the precise point of the discourse. Thus, in a sermon on the words — "For he is the minister of God to thee for good" — the preacher observes, when about entering on his subject, "The duty of civil submission is made by St. Paul to rest on a religious dogma. 'He is the minister of God to thee.' 'Wherefore, ye must needs be subject not only for wrath, but for conscience' sake.' Civil obedience is a religious tribute to Heaven, because God ministers in the person of the magistrate. As this declaration involves a general principle, it has lost none of its value or validity by time. Whatever truth it had as a general principle, it will constantly retain till human magistracy shall cease. I ask your attention while I make this truth the subject of my discourse."

Then, again, the introduction may be so framed as to close with a precise statement of the subject, and thus formality be avoided. In such a case, however, the clause which states the subject ought, in the delivery of the sermon, either by its phraseology, or, still better, by repetition, to be known as performing that office. For however neatly and gracefully the clause which announces the subject may be introduced, yet if the hearers are not aware that mention is then made of the subject, a mere trifle comparatively is gained at the expense of a most substantial consideration; for of what worth are all graces of composition, compared with clearness of apprehension on the part of hearers?

Qualities of a Proposition.

By what qualities, it is proper now to inquire, should a proposition be characterized? As to substance, it should

be *simple* in conception, stating the very thought to be discussed in so unincumbered a manner that the hearers may, without distraction, contemplate that thought. As to language, it should be *clear*, conveying to the hearers the very idea which is to claim their attention, and *brief*, using just those words which will best convey the thought, and no more. A statement having these qualities will generally be terse, and therefore impressive.

Still, while labor should be expended in devising a brief and neat form of stating the subject, it will be advantageous to have two or three diverse modes of expressing the same idea, if not with equal exactness, yet sufficiently exact to be used conjointly in the statement of the subject, and during the progress of the sermon, as equivalent clauses. Then, when the subject is to be announced, instead of confining himself to the one preferable form, the preacher may use more than one, and at last introduce the very statement which he wishes to fasten on the hearers' minds. Thus an orator — and preachers may learn much from secular orators — announced his subject to be the inquiry, "What, in our age, are the true objects of national ambition? — what is true national glory, national honor? — *what is the true grandeur of nations?*"

A young preacher will derive advantage from examining printed sermons with reference to this particular. He will find almost every conceivable diversity of manner, and perceive the need of constantly tasking his judgment and genius. If he is conscious of having, in every sermon, something in particular to do, something which has assumed definite shape in his own mind, he will not be long in devising the manner of presenting it to his hearers. And this *something to be done*, it should be remembered, is in reality what is technically called the proposition.

Subjects from Metaphorical Texts.

A caution has been reserved for the close of this chapter against retaining, in the statement of a subject, metaphorical language which may be in the text. The thought conveyed by such language should be stated in literal terms; else both the preacher and the hearers may become more occupied with the metaphor than with the thought itself. The sermon, however, though founded on this literal statement, may, as in all cases, employ metaphors, and the particular metaphor in the text, as freely as genius shall dictate. Thus, instead of using our Lord's words — "Take my yoke upon you" — as a string on which to fasten a number of independent paragraphs concerning the yoke of repentance, the yoke of faith, the yoke of profession, the yoke of righteousness, &c., &c., let the real meaning of this language be ascertained. Our Lord was encouraging his hearers *to subject themselves to his guidance.* Let the passage, then, be the text of a sermon on *subjection to Christ.*

In short, the thought conveyed by a text should be the subject of a sermon: the statement of the subject should be simple in conception, brief and clear in language.

Should the views presented in this chapter appear to impose restraints on genius, and to confine it within too narrow limits, it must be considered that they are designed to aid in forming correct mental habits in students preparing for public life, rather than to control well-trained and well-informed genius in the actual scenes of life. When the mind has become habituated to regular and exact trains of

thought, it may safely be left to its own impulses. To the present subject the remarks of Sir Joshua Reynolds, in the first of his Discourses before the Royal Academy are equally applicable as to painting: — "It may be laid down as a maxim, that he who begins by presuming on his own sense, has ended his studies as soon as he has commenced them. Every opportunity, therefore, should be taken to discountenance that false and vulgar opinion, that rules are the fetters of genius: they are fetters only to men of no genius; as that armor, which upon the strong is an ornament and a defence, upon the weak and misshapen becomes a load, and cripples the body which it was made to protect.

"How much liberty may be taken to break through those rules, and, as the poet expresses it,

To snatch a grace beyond the reach of art,

may be a subsequent consideration, when the pupils become masters themselves. It is then, when their genius has received its utmost improvement, that rules may possibly be dispensed with. But let us not destroy the scaffold, until we have raised the building." *

* The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Beechey's ed. Vol. I. p. 309.

CHAPTER IV.

SUBJECT-SERMONS. COLLECTING OF MATERIALS FOR A SERMON.

It is now presumed that a subject for a sermon has been selected. In deciding on the form in which it shall be stated, the writer will have already accumulated many thoughts which the subject will demand. The whole stock of requisite materials, however, cannot be supposed to be yet obtained. It would be a mistake, though perhaps it is a common mistake among preachers, to form at once, as soon as a subject has presented itself, a definite plan for a sermon. The result of this, as a usual practice, would necessarily be narrowness of view, meagreness and weakness of thought, and lack of glowing interest. Instead, then, of hastening to form a plan, the preacher should, at this stage of preparation, look intently at his subject, raise various questions concerning its nature, its relations and applications, and the connections in which the Scripture presents it, and even extend his inquiries in regard to it beyond the limits within which the sermon must be confined. With the ampleness of general views and of particular thoughts that will thus be attained, a plan may be formed which will promise copiousness and yet selectness.*

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* Dr. Griffin's mode of study in preparing sermons illustrates the point to which this chapter is devoted: "1. *Write down* the text on

Much of this labor, perhaps the whole of it, may in some cases have been performed before deciding on the mode of stating the subject. It will generally, however, be found best, after having fixed this point, to go through the process which has just been intimated. The form of the proposition, or subject, determined on, may itself suggest several courses of thought, and will serve to keep the mind in a right posture for accumulating the thoughts which the subject requires.

Purpose of a Sermon to be kept in view.

As preliminary to the proper exercise of the mind in collecting materials, it is indispensable to observe accurately the precise purpose which the discourse seeks to gain. If this be not kept steadily and distinctly in view, there may insensibly occur a mingling of some other purpose with this; and thus the discourse may fail of that simplicity in aim which was originally contemplated.

It would be idle to attempt here an enumeration of the various purposes which sermons should seek; since these are so numerous, and will be so greatly modified by the genius of each preacher. The design of the present chapter only requires that a few of these be mentioned as speci-

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a loose piece of paper, and *look at it.* 2. Inquire, what does this text teach? What is my object? Obtain clear and definite views of the *point.* 3. Then commence *thinking.* Put down thoughts as they occur, without regard to order or language -- get as much material as possible. 4. Then *reduce these thoughts to order.* This thought belongs under this head; that idea should come in there, &c. 5. Throw out all extraneous and foreign ideas." — Christian Review, Vol. IV. p. 359.

mens, and that the direction be indicated which each will give the mind in its search for materials.

Explanation. The purpose of a sermon may be, for instance, *to explain* some duty or doctrine, and to show the grounds on which it rests. Some members of the congregation, it may be presumed, have erroneous views of the subject; others, again, have obscure, and still others not sufficiently extended views of it, and need additional light. Now, for the sake of all these, careful explanation may be the special purpose of a sermon. The most intelligent and the best instructed hearers, likewise, highly appreciate sermons which clearly and largely explain a religious subject; not only for the sake of those who may specially need such explanation, but for their own sake also; because such discourses confirm and enlarge their views, and exercise their power of examination and reflection.

The preacher's purpose, then, we will suppose, is copiously to explain some Christian duty, or doctrine. Possessing himself well-defined and enlarged views of the subject, he wishes to convey them to others. He will find it advantageous here to consider the various classes of hearers whom he seeks to benefit by this effort. He will thus be led to inquire how he can set this subject in a clear light, remove error in regard to it, and, by showing its connections and relations, and its proper grounds, enlarge his hearers' views of it. He will endeavor, also, to distinguish it from other subjects with which it may have been confounded. Illustrations will be needed from the Scriptures and other familiar sources, or from actual life; or such as the preacher may devise by his own ingenuity. The legitimate effects of the subject on character, or practice, are also to be shown. For the question — What then? — should al-

ways be regarded as too important to be overlooked by a preacher.

The aim of another sermon may be, *to account for* some moral or religious principle. Here the preacher may set before his mind persons who will not question the principle, who yet would be much benefitted and gratified by a discussion of it. They might thus gain an intelligent perception of a truth which they had previously believed without much reflection, or perhaps had regarded as not capable of being fully accounted for. They might thus come more deeply to feel its importance, and to employ it more earnestly in their endeavors for personal religious improvement, or for usefulness. As an example, let the principle selected be, that *habitual private prayer promotes a person's piety.* The preacher's purpose would be to show the connection between such prayer and such a result. The truth of the position may either be assumed, or be very briefly shown from the testimony of Scripture and from facts. Then the inquiry arises, How can it be accounted for that such a cause produces such an effect? A variety of considerations will occur, furnishing answers to this inquiry, and giving the preacher materials for his sermon. Examples illustrating these answers may also occur, from the Scriptures, from religious biography, from his own observation. Examples of a contrasted nature would also confirm and impress the truth he wishes to exhibit. When he has thus reflected on his subject, and considered the diversified influences of private prayer on piety, he can hardly fail to see how fruitful in practical consequences this truth is, and how capable of being applied to various classes of his hearers. Materials will accumulate; and the chief difficulty he will feel may consist in making a judicious selection.

Accounting for some principle.

Defence of a tenet.

On another occasion, the preacher's aim may be to *defend* some religious tenet, which either is controverted, or in regard to which it is desirable that all may be confirmed, and may rightly apprehend its doctrinal and practical bearings. He will, accordingly, institute a strictly reasoning process, searching for appropriate arguments, and calling up before his mind objections and replies. Almost every tenet may afford a fair field for argument, whether it is at any given time called in question or not; a reasoning process by no means requires a controversial manner. Whether to assume the attitude of controversy, or to reason with the hearers as learners and not disputers, is an important question, as it may influence the process of collecting materials. It will be important, also, to consider what kind of arguments the case in hand and the character of the hearers require, whether from authority or from acknowledged premises, whether separately conclusive or cumulative. It will, besides, be essential here to distinguish accurately between different sorts of arguments.* The preacher should, also, inquire into the conclusions, both doctrinal and practical, which result from the position he seeks to establish.

The purpose of another sermon may be, not explanation,

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* I cannot, probably, at this point, do my readers a better service, than by recommending to their diligent and repeated study the chapter on Arguments in Whately's Elements of Rhetoric. The habit of mind which a proper study of that chapter would produce, is invaluable to a preacher; it would save himself from confusion and perplexity, and enable him to detect sources of obscurity and error in others, and of course increase his ability to enlighten his hearers. Indeed, the book here mentioned is in almost every part an inestimable store-house of principles for a preacher.

nor accounting for a principle, nor proving a point — for sermons ought, by no means, invariably to take the form of argumentation, or always propose to *prove* something — but the *exhibition*, so to speak, of a subject in its various aspects, or in its relations and modes of application to man's duties, or interests. The omnipotence of God, for instance, or his omniscience, or his providence, without being minutely argued on, may be presented in this manner, for the sake of the moral impression which reflection on these subjects can hardly fail to produce. Some event in Scripture history may be employed in like manner. Some of our Lord's traits of character, or those of distinguished Scripture worthies, furnish themes for such sermons. The practical lessons of religion may also be thus set before an assembly, as illustrated by instances either of conformity to them, or of violation of them. By what more attractive or more impressive method could the claims of conscience — as another instance — be urged, than by occasionally exhibiting various ways in which they are violated in the intercourse both of public and of private life? Pictures, so to speak, of virtue and piety, of the peace and joys of a religious life, of the consolations and triumphs of a Christian's death; these, judiciously interspersed among discourses in which religious principles are explained, or accounted for, or vindicated, may sustain a vitally important connection with the preacher's ultimate object.

Impressive exhibition of a subject.

Here his imagination will be tasked. He must recall past events and his observations on men and manners. The poet's fancy would here be of utility to the preacher, as helping him impressively to combine events and circumstances, and to create illustrations, when history, or per-

sonal experience, or observation, supplies none. Even with a comparatively small degree of this talent, he may profitably treat some subjects in this manner.

Persuasion.

Once more; the design of a sermon may be, *to persuade* to a certain duty, or class of duties. The mind's action here is, obviously, to discover appropriate motives. The preacher will, of course, consider the nature of the duty, its relations to the individual, to society, to God, to time, to eternity. The age and character of hearers are to be taken into account; their amount of information, and the frequency with which they have been plied with motives. Perhaps it will here be particularly desirable for the preacher, as a means of suggesting suitable considerations, to select from among his hearers individuals with whom he may imagine himself in conversation on the given subject, employing such motives as he would judge specially suited to their circumstances and habits of thinking. By such a selection of individuals, he would be able to divide the assembly into small groups, and adapt his motives to their respective characters and conditions. Besides the particular benefit here contemplated, of thus, in imagination, dividing the assembly, namely, the stimulating of his invention in devising topics of persuasion, his preaching would in consequence become marked by a winning respectfulness and friendliness, and become possessed of the eminently desirable quality of seeming to grow out of the very congregation he addresses.

Judiciousness as to the purpose of a sermon.

It is scarcely necessary to remark, that a preacher should not only accurately distinguish between the several purposes of sermons; he should also discriminate wisely as to the purpose which any given subject and the circumstances of an assembly require.

If he purposes largely to explain a subject which really needs no explanation, his labor is misdirected. If, again, he purposes to account for some principle which needs only to be explained, or which, though needing explanation as preliminary to accounting for it, he does not explain, he is obviously only beating the air. Should he undertake to prove a point which needs no proof, or the proof of which cannot be well apprehended for lack of suitable explanation; or, should he present an array of arguments to prove a point when only a vivid exhibition of the subject in its various aspects and relations is required; or, again, should he undertake such an exhibition when only simple and clear explanation is requisite, or when cogent proof is demanded, he would be laboring at a great disadvantage both as to himself and as to his hearers.

Combination of purposes.

The intimation has already been given, that the several purposes which have been mentioned as characterizing sermons are not to be understood as a full enumeration of them. The remark is also necessary, that in many sermons more than one of these purposes must to some extent be combined. That is to say, in one and the same sermon, explanation, argument and persuasion may be needed; while yet one of these may require the chief labor on any given occasion, and then, of course, the other should occupy no more space than will be consistent with the proper accomplishment of the main purpose.*

* Says Andrew Fuller, "When I have a subject before me, I sometimes ask myself three questions: What is it? On what evidence does it rest? and, What does it concern me, or any of my people, if it be true?"

Sources of Materials.

The inquiry now arises, Whence the materials here contemplated are to be obtained?

In reply; the Bible must be acknowledged as our ultimate source of authority in regard to religious doctrines; and from that, in the various ways of ascertaining its meaning, we must derive our opinions and our controlling arguments. But a distinction should be made between the direct testimony of the Scriptures and inferences which we may draw from their statements, or from a comparison of views found in various parts of the inspired volume. For, in our inferential reasonings even from inspired premises there is room for mistake and error, since we may not at each step have an entirely correct apprehension of the premises. The Bible is eminently the word of God: who, then, can wonder that man may not comprehend the whole extent, and all the relations, of certain statements found in that book? and that inferences drawn by our reason from inspired declarations, should need to be tested by some other inspired declarations? A candid mind will not, indeed, generally draw unwarrantable inferences from Scriptural statements, especially after an extended comparison of passages. Still, it is important to discriminate, in our arguments on religion, between divine teachings and human inferences.

In collecting materials for sermons from the Bible, we have various helps in the form of concordances, lexicons and commentaries. Each of these aids may be indispensable on any given occasion; but the best preparation for obtaining materials from the Bible is, that intimate and familiar acquaintance, both with individual passages and the

general scope of its books, which results from the habitual and careful study of it, and from having our spirit deeply imbued with its sentiments by making it our chief manual of devotion. Every part of the inspired volume should, by these methods, be rendered familiar, so that authorities, illustrations and phraseology may readily occur to us of the very kind we need. This must be, of course, the growth of time; and from the very earliest period of preparation for the ministry, the Bible should be copiously employed, as a book both for the intellect and the heart, with a view to its subserving the preacher's object. The more we study the Bible with the true spirit of scholarship and devotion, as a book both of sacred literature and of divine authority, the more shall we find it an inexhaustible treasury of thought and of imagery.

A deep personal experience of religious truth is invaluable, also, to a writer of sermons, as increasing his ability, on various subjects, to discern and render available the requisite materials. This gives him, so to speak, the posture of mind and heart which the preparation of sermons requires. It gives him a sort of religious instinct. It teaches him — if such an allusion may be here allowed — the true art of transmuting common metals into gold.

Without descending to particulars, the general remark, in addition, must suffice, that for all productions of the intellect, and therefore for sermons, every department of human science contributes materials. To every orator, and no less to the preacher, the most diversified knowledge, if exact and at the ready command of its possessor, is singularly advantageous. The pulpit calls into requisition the amplest stores of learning which a preacher possesses, or can acquire.

Parts of a Sermon thus far provided for.

The mental activity which this chapter has thus far attempted to illustrate, will issue in the possession of materials for the treatment of a subject, and for the conclusion, when a formal conclusion is requisite. For, whatever is not essential to the treatment, but naturally flows from it in the form of doctrinal, or practical deductions, or of impressive remarks, finds its appropriate place, generally, in the concluding part of a sermon.

Exposition. The exposition of the text, if needed, will also have been sufficiently provided for by the process of deducing from it the subject. On the manner of conducting this process, no rules should be expected in such a work as the present. It is, also, here presumed that the preacher has already made himself acquainted with the principles of interpretation.

Materials for the Introduction.

Probably, also, some thoughts will have occurred during the search for materials, which will furnish the introduction of the sermon. If not, then after provision is made for the treatment of the subject and the conclusion, but not before, materials should be sought for the introduction. Sometimes, an exposition of the text will suffice also for an introduction. Often, a statement of the circumstances, or of the thoughts connected with the text, will very happily answer this purpose. It is better, however, for a preacher to task his inventive powers, than to resort uniformly to this latter method; because, not only sameness, but even dullness, might result from a constant use of it; and, in many in-

stances, the circumstances or thoughts connected with a text can be employed to better effect in some other part of the sermon. When, then, sufficient materials have been collected for the body of the sermon, let the preacher, under the impression which his careful research has produced, and commonly after some interval, revolve his subject anew. Unexpectedly, some thought will arise which would favorably precede the mention of the subject. This thought, expanded, may form the introduction. Or, this thought may suggest another, either by resemblance or contrast; and all the materials for an introduction are then possessed.

An introduction, however, is far from being indispensable to a sermon. A general preparation for listening to a sermon will result from the preceding exercises of the public worship; so that the very first sentence of a sermon, after the text has been announced, may sometimes be the mention of the subject which the hearers are invited to contemplate. Then, again, in the opening sentence, the immediate connection of the text may be noticed, or an allusion be made to the occasion for the sermon, and the subject be at once presented for treatment.*

In fine, a subject having been selected, and the process described in this chapter having been performed, we may now consider the materials for the several parts of a sermon as procured. These several parts, mentioned in the order which is suggested on the preceding

Constituent parts of a sermon.

* The sermons of Dr. Channing contain some interesting specimens of this mode. One of his sermons, after mentioning the text, opens thus — "The example of Jesus is our topic. To incite you to follow it, is the aim of this discourse:" another — "I propose in this discourse, to speak of Love to Christ, and especially of the foundations on which it rests."

pages, are the proposition, with which we may regard the exposition of the text as connected, the treatment — either by discussion or proof, or otherwise, as the case may require, — the conclusion, and the introduction. It will be more convenient, however, in the future chapters of this book, to state them in the order of writing, than in the order of conception; namely, Introduction, Exposition, Proposition, or Subject, Treatment, Conclusion.

CHAPTER V.

SUBJECT-SERMONS. SELECTION AND ARRANGEMENT OF MATERIALS.

As preparatory to considering the arrangement of the materials which have been collected for a sermon, a direction of some importance is here requisite. The mental process, through which a writer has been supposed to pass, will have furnished him with a large quantity of materials, a part of which he can dispense with, as it may be but remotely related to the subject, or not required by his present purpose, or as it would extend the sermon to an unreasonable length. Hence, he must select such matter as the object of the sermon requires, and for the present dismiss the rest. That, however, which a given occasion can advantageously dispense with, may on some other occasion be serviceable. Selection of materials.

The available materials having been selected, the writer next distributes them.

The arrangement of the main parts of a sermon, namely, the introduction, the treatment of the subject, and the conclusion, being fixed by the nature of those parts, needs no directions. The present chapter relates to the distribution of the materials which compose the treatment of the subject, and of those which are to form the conclusion, in case a conclusion, properly so called, is thought desirable.

Modes of Arrangement.

Two modes of arrangement may here be noticed. Sometimes two or more leading divisions are adopted, under each of which the separate items of the discussion are placed. Thus, let the subject be, that *the sovereignty of God is a just ground of joy.* The proofs of this assertion may be arranged under two general heads, or divisions, as follows: The sovereignty of God is a just ground of joy, whether it be viewed, I. In respect to the natural universe; or, II. In respect to the moral universe.

In like manner, when arguments are to be drawn from diverse sources, these several sources may be so many leading divisions; as, I. From reason; II. From history; III. From the Scriptures: and under each of these may be arranged such subdivisions as are necessary.

According to the other mode, the preacher, after stating the subject, enters at once on its treatment, mentioning and developing the particular arguments in their order.

No better advice on a choice between these two modes can be given, than to employ on each occasion that which seems best adapted to unfold the subject and to favor the hearers' clear and ready apprehension of the arguments. In general, sermons do not require a departure from the simplicity of the latter mode.*

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* A writer will sometimes, also, state his subject and then mention his several proofs, or considerations, as so many propositions. Thus, in an address on *the influence of faith in the work of mental discipline and culture*, its author, in exhibiting this influence, chose to embrace his remarks "in three propositions," which he formally stated and proceeded to develope. This mode differs from the second above mentioned only in the phraseology; for evidently the

Rules for Divisions.

In regard to rules for divisions, young writers are sometimes perplexed by the precept that divisions should include the whole subject which is to be discussed, omitting nothing that is essential to it; or, as the rule is briefly stated, divisions should exhaust the subject. The perplexity which is felt, is needless; because this precept is not applicable to the treatment of propositions, and therefore not applicable, generally, to sermons. The reason is, that a proposition may be adequately treated, that is, treated so as to produce entire conviction and corresponding moral impression, while yet much that the subject would fairly admit of may be left unsaid. Besides, topics of proof, or illustration, or enforcement, in regard to a subject, may be indefinitely multiplied according to a preacher's genius, or compass of knowledge. The precept properly applies to definitions of terms, or to a description of a subject; for in these, completeness is requisite, and nothing essential should be omitted. It is applicable to sermons, when the qualities of a subject, or the various parts of which it consists, are to be shown. In explaining, for instance, the nature of genuine repentance, each element of repentance should be stated; else it is not repentance that is presented, but something that falls short of it. So in describing the constituent parts of any duty, prayer, for instance; each part must be named. This is exhausting the subject; and evidently the precept cannot relate to sermons generally.

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writer might have employed precisely the same items of thought in treating his subject, without formally mentioning them as propositions. In sermons, particularly, the less of statcliness the better; for they will thus the more easily win their way to the hearers' hearts.

On the quality of divisions in a sermon, two rules may suffice. 1. The several arguments, or items of the treatment, should be really distinct from each other. The proper unfolding of any one should not involve, or anticipate, the ideas which belong to a succeeding one. The different parts ought not thus to run into each other; but the writer, as he proceeds from part to part, should feel that he is entering on new ground and presenting new, though connected, thoughts.

2. The several arguments, or items of the treatment, should have each a similar relation to the subject proposed. Each one being distinct from every other, should resemble every other in being alike referable to the common point. If there are two or more main branches, these should be alike connected with the trunk; and the subordinate branches, each with its proper main branch. The confounding of genera and species will thus be avoided; and preliminary matter, which should be introduced before entering on a discussion, because it affects the whole discussion, and not a mere part of it, will not constitute one of the particular divisions. Thus, too, homogeneousness will be preserved throughout, and all the parts will be properly connected, as bearing on a common point.

In the case of an argument which consists of several steps, each step preparing the way for the following, and the strength of the whole showing itself in the last, this second rule is, of course, not applicable; that is, when the several steps of the argument are viewed separately, and not in combination, as jointly composing an argument.

Order of the Arrangement.

The order in which the several arguments, or considerations, should be arranged, deserves attention; since the relative position of an argument may be essential to its efficiency, and a proper order may increase the combined force of the whole. The rule that the stronger arguments should be placed at the beginning and the end, while the weaker should occupy an intermediate position, is applicable to secular oratory rather than to preaching. For in the former, arguments which have but a remote relation to the subject may, notwithstanding, conduce to the orator's purpose: they may enlarge the array of arguments for present effect, or may even be used with the covert design of withdrawing the hearer's attention from the real weakness of the speaker's cause, or from the strong arguments of his opponent. But a sermon is, for the most part, so simple in its structure, that considerations which are remote from its subject, and which require artifice in order to be turned to account, can hardly find place. Nor does the sacred character of a sermon allow the use of questionable arguments: whatever a sermon advances in support of a position ought to be, for its own sake, worthy of an intelligent assent; an assent that will bear examination. The end of preaching is the establishment of true moral and religious principles, the quickening of men's consciences, and the promotion of genuine righteousness. Any success in attaching men to certain opinions, or influencing them to certain actions, which is attained otherwise than by an enlightened conviction of the truth, and a sincere regard to the will of God, on their part, is unworthy to be aimed at by a minister of the gospel.

Cases, however, may arise in which it will be advisable to make a decided impression at the outset, as well as at the close. In such cases, should the considerations to be employed though all of them entirely true and strictly applicable to the point under discussion, yet differ in their degrees of strength and impressiveness, and should no particular order be suggested by their relation to each other, it would certainly be wise to arrange them according to this precept.

The order in which arguments, or considerations, should be arranged, will sometimes be a matter of indifference. Commonly, however, an order will be suggested by some obvious connection between either the whole or a part of them; or by the dissimilarity of one, or more, to the rest. One will naturally prepare the way for a certain other; some will presuppose the consideration of another. Some may resemble each other in their source, while one or two others may be derived from a different source. It is evidently proper to place in connection with each other those which are alike as to their source. Some, for instance, may be arguments of our own devising from admitted truths; another argument may be drawn from the direct testimony of the Scriptures: it would be a random division to place this argument from testimony between two speculative arguments.

When the nature of the arguments admits, it will be advantageous to arrange them according to their relative importance, so that the final impression shall result both from the greater importance of the last, in itself considered, and considered in reference to the particular assembly which is to be addressed, and from its being aided by the combined effect of all the preceding.

It would seem hence to follow, that the proper place, in a series of proofs, for those which are drawn directly from the Scriptures, is the last. And this may usually be advisable. A universal rule, however, cannot be given in respect to proofs from Scripture, because the cases which require them are not always uniform. It may, on some occasions, be advisable, at the very commencement of the reasoning, to establish a point by the evidence of holy writ, and then proceed to show its conformity to the deductions of reason. On other occasions, conviction may be best secured by so arranging the arguments that a favorable state of mind shall be produced for receiving, at the close, the direct testimony of Scripture. Judgment must, therefore, be consulted; and arguments from the word of God, just as those from other sources, must be set in that position which circumstances require.

Extent of the Treatment.

The number of separate considerations, or arguments, to be used in the treatment of a subject, cannot be fixed by rule. The preacher seeks to produce an enlightened and impressive conviction: whatever is necessary to this must be performed, without regard to the question of more, or fewer. Such, however, is the nature of the subjects treated in sermons, and such the nature of the proofs, or considerations, that a long array of separate items will seldom be necessary. Five are generally regarded as sufficiently numerous. It would be better to say, that the number should be as small as the adequate treatment of the subject will permit. "Divide, break not into fragments," is a good direction. A judicious selection of leading thoughts, as has

already been said, must be made. It will be eminently serviceable, when many items of thought have occurred, to examine them with reference to their mutual connection, and the consequent propriety of grouping together several of them under one common statement. By this process, much available matter may be retained; and ideas which at first seemed to require for each a separate paragraph, and threatened to extend the sermon to an inconvenient length, will prove to be materials for the treatment of some one item.

Examination of Objections.

The inquiry now arises, to what place in a sermon should the notice of objections be assigned?

Preaching should avoid, as far as possible, an air of controversy. Even when errors ought to be exposed and prevented from producing their natural effect, wisdom will often discover a better way of gaining this end than that of formally taking the attitude of debate. Jeremy Taylor sagaciously cautions preachers against "bringing before the people the arguments urged in defence of great and dangerous errors, though with a purpose to confute them; for they will much easier retain the objection than understand the answer." A mere allusion to some errors, in suitable connections, may be sufficient; the firm establishment of certain opinions may answer all the purposes which one would aim at from entering the lists of controversy, and combatting the opposite opinions. The truth on far the larger part of religious subjects may be effectively preached without a formal notice of the opposite errors. A preacher may perform his work, apparently, as he would if every one held the same opinions as himself, while yet a skilful

observer may readily see that he is acquainted with all the prevalent forms of religious error, and knows how to meet them successfully.

On some subjects, however, a distinct and even formal examination of objections is requisite. When an objection lies against the view advanced in a certain part of the sermon, it should, obviously, for the efficiency of that part, be disposed of, though as briefly as possible, before passing to another point. If objections lie against the main sentiment of the sermon, an advantage is gained by removing them before commencing the discussion. Obstacles are thus removed; a clear path is opened; and the hearers may with readiness admit the preacher's views. Brevity must be studied, so as to allow the sentiment of the discourse to be amply treated.

An example of this method occurs in South's sermon on Prov. 3: 17, entitled the Pleasantness of Wisdom's Ways. After a few introductory remarks on the importance of the motive to piety presented in the text, he says — "But it is easily foreseen, that this discourse will in the very beginning of it be encountered by an argument from experience, and therefore not more obvious than strong." He then states the objection which seems to arise from the very nature of religion, as requiring self-denial and repentance. Having shown the futility of this objection, he enters on the subject of the discourse by observing — "Having thus now cleared off all that by way of objection can lie against the truth asserted, . . . I shall show what are those properties that so peculiarly set off and enhance the excellency of this pleasure."

Should the objections be too many, or the replies require too much time, for the early part of a sermon, then imme-

diately after presenting arguments, objections may be examined. Should this latter method be adopted with a subject against which grave objections are known by the hearers to exist, information should be given by the preacher in the early part of the sermon that he intends, after showing the arguments in favor of the position, to examine the chief objections. The favorable impression is thus made, that he has investigated the whole subject, and that he means to treat it with candor.

When there are many objections, several of them may sometimes be traced to one or two common principles, which can be disposed of in the introduction, or in a preliminary section, and the remaining objections be interwoven and answered at suitable places in the course of the positive reasoning.

Suggesting objections against errors.

The hint may here be of some utility, that when a controverted position is to be defended, an advantage may be gained by stating, previously to entering on the proof, one or two of the most weighty objections against the opposite views. Objectors may thus become sensible of difficulties which they had not contemplated, and may be induced to hear with greater candor arguments in favor of the position; those who admit the point under discussion may receive additional confirmation; and those who are indifferent may be led to regard the subject as more important than they had supposed.

Arrangement of Materials for the Conclusion.

Conclusion sometimes not needed.

It now remains to consider the arrangement of materials for the conclusion, in case a formal conclusion is needed: for, sometimes, the development of a

subject will, in its progress, furnish the most suitable opportunities for making such practical suggestions, or presenting such illustrations, as would supersede the necessity of directing attention at the close to its practical bearings. In this case, the purpose of a sermon is better secured without a formal exhibition of consequences which result from the subject. Sometimes, again, the unfolding of a religious truth will be so intimately connected with its practical uses, that its relations will be instantly discerned and felt by every hearer; and a formal conclusion might weaken the impression already made. A hortatory sermon, also, as being throughout a persuasive address, does not admit of a train of remarks in the form of a conclusion. Such a sermon is best concluded by briefly recapitulating the several considerations which have been urged, and combining the whole into one impressive view: or, when the preacher is about to present his last persuasive, he may advantageously restate all the preceding items, and then bring forward his concluding motive, as the close of the discourse.

Materials for a conclusion properly consist of deductions from the subject which has been treated, or of remarks naturally suggested by it; — deductions, or remarks, which appear necessary in order to give completeness to the discourse. They are replies to the inquiry, WHAT THEN? Care should be taken, therefore, that the items of a conclusion flow severally from the subject as unfolded, and not from individual parts of the treatment, or from one another. They should all be traceable to the subject, as their source.

In considering the inquiry just mentioned, the preacher should keep in view the various classes of his hearers, and the various ways in which religious truths are applicable to men. It is not enough clearly to explain, or satisfactorily

to prove, a certain point. That point, well established and rightly apprehended, may be a source of valuable instruction to classes of men widely different from each other; and, generally speaking — for there may be occasional exceptions to the remark — the preacher should not take for granted that the hearers, even those whose minds are the most active, will at once discern all its relations, and make the requisite application. Let him rather, having gained an advantageous position, avail himself of it to direct the intellect, and to excite the consciences and the affections of the several classes among his hearers, whom he may be able profitably to reach.

A single thought may sometimes be sufficient to be expanded into a conclusion; frequently, several thoughts will arise, and these of different kinds, doctrinal and practical, even in the same sermon. When these several thoughts are diverse in their nature, some doctrinal and some practical, those which are of a similar nature should be classed together. It is, also, more congruous with the ultimate design of preaching to occupy the closing passages of a sermon with practical considerations. When the thoughts intended for the conclusion are all of one class, the arrangement may be determined by some connection between them; or, by their progressive importance; or, their applicableness to various classes of hearers may suggest the order.

Plan of the sermon completed.

We may now regard the writer as having selected and distributed the materials of a discourse, and as ready to enter on its composition; in conformity, if we may so apply the language, to the advice of Solomon (Prov. 24: 27) — "Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself . . and afterwards build thy house." In

other words, an entire plan of the sermon is now prepared.

Importance of a good Arrangement.

The importance, both to the author of a sermon and to his hearers, of a good distribution, as preliminary to writing, cannot be too highly estimated. On this depends, materially, facility of execution in writing; and, still more, clearness of apprehension on the part of hearers. He who has a well-defined subject, and by patient thought has acquired and properly arranged all the materials requisite to its treatment, has of course clear views, and can with comparative rapidity clothe his conceptions in suitable language. His pen will readily give all needed expansion to his main thoughts; and subordinate thoughts will be in waiting to fill their appropriate places.*

Such a man's hearers, too, readily come into his track; his words, expressing clear ideas, make well-defined impressions. Hearers generally, when the preacher has a poor plan, *feel* the difficulty, though they may not be able to trace it to its real source; and one of the reasons why a man of a truly philosophical mind is able "to make things plain" even to illiterate hearers, is, that he presents clear thoughts in a proper order. The remark of Dugald Stewart has much weight, that "there is no talent so essential to a public speaker, as to be able to state clearly every different step of those trains of thought by which he was led to the conclusions he wishes to establish;" † or, it may be added,

* Verbaque provisam rem non invita sequentur. Hor. De Arte Poetica, 351.

† Philosophy of the Human Mind. Chapter II.

"to be able to state clearly every different step of those trains of thought" which are adapted to convey to others a right apprehension of a subject, and a conviction of its truth and importance. In other words, an ability to form a good plan of a discourse, is essential to a public speaker. To attempt to make, or to hear, a sermon, without such a plan, is, as Herder remarks, to wrestle without a firm foothold.* And however much labor the forming of a plan may cost, the labor should be cheerfully endured; since it will be so amply repaid in benefit both to the preacher himself and to his hearers.†

* Arena sine calce.

† Among the rhetorical exercises of theological students, the forming of original plans of sermons, under the direction of an instructor, should occupy a very considerable space. It would be highly advantageous, also, to analyze sermons of distinguished writers, and carefully to inspect their plans, with reference both to their excellences and their defects.

CHAPTER VI.

SUBJECT-SERMONS. CONSIDERATION OF THE CONSTITUENT PARTS OF SERMONS, AND OF SOME INCIDENTAL MATTERS.

THE composition of a sermon, though it is substantially provided for by the accumulation and the arrangement of its materials, will yet be facilitated by acquiring correct views of its various parts, and of some other minor points. These points, though minor, are, however sufficiently important to claim attention from one who would consult all those principles of our nature which are concerned in the affectionate reception of religious truth. To this purpose the present chapter is devoted.

The Introduction.

The design of this part is, to lead hearers easily and naturally to the subject of the discourse. Such is the relation of the preacher to his hearers, such the nature of a sermon, and such the occasion on which it is delivered, that seldom, at its commencement, will an effort be required, according to the ordinary rules of rhetoric, to secure the attention, or the favor, of hearers. In regular religious assemblies, a preacher generally, on rising to preach, enjoys the advantage of attention and good will on

Design of an Introduction.

the part of his audience; and his only special care here need be, not to divert attention, nor alienate good will. Still, some prefatory sentences are commonly advisable, in order to avoid the disadvantage of an abrupt entrance on the treatment of a subject. Besides, some thoughts will often be suggested by the subject, or the text, or by something special in the occasion, that will naturally require to be mentioned before entering on the discussion.

Qualities of an Introduction.

The quality chiefly desirable in an introduction is, therefore, appropriateness to the sermon of which it is a part. As being the commencement of a sermon, and as intended gradually to lead the hearers to a certain subject, it should be characterized by simplicity, both in thought and in language; it should avoid abstruseness and elaborate composition.* Gravity, too, is specially

* An example of an introduction which greatly fails in regard to simplicity, occurs in the first paragraph of Dr. Barrow's sermon on the Profitableness of Godliness. "How generally men, with most unanimous consent, are devoted to profit, as to the immediate scope of their designs and aim of their doings, if with the slightest attention we view what is acted on this theatre of human affairs, we cannot but discern. All that we see men so very serious and industrious about, which we call business; that which they trudge for in the streets, which they work for or wait for in the shops, which they meet and crowd for at the exchange, which they sue for in the hall, and solicit for at the court, which they plough and dig for, which they march and fight for in the field, which they travel for at land, and sail for (among rocks and storms) on the sea, which they plod for in the closet, and dispute for in the schools, (yea, may we not add, which they frequently pray for and preach for in the church?) what is it but profit? Is it not this, apparently, for which men so eagerly contest and quarrel, so bitterly envy and emulate, so fiercely clamor and inveigh, so cunningly supplant and undermine one another; which stuffeth their hearts with mutual hatred and spite,

demanded in the introduction of so serious a discourse as a sermon ought to be.

As the introduction, though not devised till all the main parts of the sermon are provided for, is yet the first to be written, the writer may be presumed to be, at this point, in a state of mind similar to that of hearers; namely, comparatively cool, but entering on a process which will, ere long, enkindle and elevate his feelings. The introduction should, generally, be conformed to such a view of the writer. While, however, it is ordinarily sufficient that this

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which tippeth their tongues with slander and reproach, which often embrueth their hands in blood and slaughter; for which they expose their lives and limbs to danger, for which they undergo grievous toils and drudgeries, for which they distract their mind with cares, and pierce their heart with sorrows; to which they sacrifice their present ease and content, yea, to which commonly they prostitute their honor and conscience? This, if you mark it, is the great mistress which is with so passionate rivality every where wooed and courted; this is the common mark which all eyes aim and all endeavors strike at; this the hire which men desire for all their pains, the prize they hope for all their combats, the harvest they seek for all the year's assiduous labor. This is the bait by which you may inveigle most men any whither; and the most certain sign by which you may prognosticate what any man will do: for mark where his profit is, there will he be. This some professedly and with open face, others slily and under thin veils of pretence, (under guise of friendship, of love to public good, of loyalty, of religious zeal;) some directly and in a plain track, others obliquely and by subtile trains; some by sordid and base means, others in ways more cleanly and plausible: some gravely and modestly, others wildly and furiously; all (very few excepted) in one manner or another, do clearly in most of their proceedings level and drive at."

Besides the nice balancing of clauses, so frequent and so evidently aimed at, the inverted Latin structure of this paragraph is particularly noticeable.

part should be appropriate, simple, and grave, it is susceptible of higher qualities. It may sometimes be made deeply impressive. Some striking thought may be here employed, which will secure to the preacher the interested attention of his hearers. When the means of thus advantageously introducing a discourse occur to a preacher, let him not fail to employ them through subjection to the generally correct rule, that an introduction should not be fervid. Only let him take care that the attention and expectation which may be excited by the brilliancy, or picturesqueness, or fervor of his opening paragraphs, end not in disappointment. If he be not able to maintain the interest which the introduction may create, it would be more judicious to check himself somewhat at the commencement, and trust to the influence of his subject for elevation, or emotion, in less hazardous passages.*

An introduction should be equally free from affected smartness and from dullness. It should not indulge in complaints or censures. It should not, in any way, create a suspicion that the preacher has but little respect for his

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* It would be superfluous, probably, to caution against introductions which distinctly propose a great effort, instead of leading the hearers to a subject in a manner which would insensibly, as it were, enchain attention. Horace (De Arte Poetica, 136 – 142) well illustrates the impropriety of a pretending and pompous introduction, by the instance of an insignificant poet's commencing a poem with the line,

Fortunam Priami cantabo et nobile bellum,

and contrasting with it the modest manner in which Homer commences his Odyssey,

Dic mihi, Musa, virum, captae post tempora Trojae
Qui mores hominum multorum vidit et urbes.

hearers, or that he considers his office as setting him quite above the ordinary courtesies of life.

While he should avoid producing, in this manner, an unfavorable impression in respect to himself, his introduction ought not, on the other hand, to betray a purpose of enlisting the feelings of his hearers by paying them compliments for their intelligence, or other worthy qualities, or by speaking of himself in an apparently humble manner. Apologies and compliments come with an ill grace from the pulpit, where a man stands to explain and inculcate the word of God, where simplicity and godly sincerity should bear sway, and where the preacher should, in self-forgetfulness, be absorbed in the one great purpose of promoting the hearers' spiritual welfare.

As to space, the very design of an introduction requires it to be brief. While it should be sufficiently long to prevent the feeling, on the part of hearers, of abruptness when the subject of the sermon is entered on, it should also be sufficiently short to prevent them from thinking that they are needlessly detained from the subject.

Exposition.

It will sometimes be *necessary* to explain the language of the text, in order to deduce from it in a satisfactory manner the subject of the sermon. Sometimes, too, when the language is not obscure, an exposition is *desirable* in order to refresh the hearers' memory in regard to the passage; or it may be *advantageous*, as furnishing the introduction; for frequently, as has already been remarked, no more suitable introduction can be devised than an explanation of the text.

The tendency at the present day is to avoid, in great measure, that minute and careful explanation of the text which appeared desirable to preachers a century ago, in order to deduce from it the subject of the sermon. Their method was too formal, and entered needlessly into details. But the sound principle on which the practice rested, ought to be more frequently regarded than it is in our day.

An exposition should, of course, be conducted on just principles of interpretation, and unfold the true meaning of the passage. It will thus be adapted to secure the hearers' assent, as being not fanciful, nor forced. As much brevity as is consistent with the purpose should be studied, and the explanation be confined to those terms, or clauses, which need it. It should make as little display of learning as possible; and the less formal the process, the better. In the pulpit, the results of a critical inquiry should be presented, rather than the steps by which those results have been attained. Yet, as the reasons for opinions on all subjects of religious belief should be given, so in an exposition it will often be found desirable for the preacher to state the leading reasons for his view of a text.

It is, however, unnecessary and injudicious for a preacher, whenever he employs a text as suggesting a subject in a somewhat remote or inferential manner, invariably to state this circumstance to the audience, and enter on a vindication of himself for thus employing it. If he has reasons satisfactory to himself for thus using his text, and if no special importance is connected with exact conformity, on that occasion, to the primary use of the text, why should he put his hearers into a questioning, criticising state of mind, instead of aiming at once and with all his might to impress the thought which his judgment, or genius, has at-

tached to the passage? Why should he regard his hearers as a body of critics, rather than as a company of worshippers, of men who need incitement to righteousness and to solicitude for their salvation? The preacher might enforce from the words — My son, give me thine heart — the claims of religion on his hearers, and particularly on his youthful hearers, without first leading them through the chilling process of showing that the passage, in its original connection, had a more limited application, and laboring to convince them that his use of the passage could be easily vindicated. But if some special importance is attached to the use which he makes of a certain passage; as for instance, if it is to be taken as a proof passage, it would be eminently proper to show that the use intended to be made of it is unexceptionable. His hearers would thus see that their faith rests not on the judgment of man, but on the word of God.

Divisions.

The inquiry here is not, whether a sermon should have divisions, but whether they should be distinctly stated. On this point there is diversity of judgment. Fenelon maintains, that while a preacher "ought to choose some method," it ought not to be "promised in the beginning of the discourse:" and he applies to sermons the direction of Cicero in regard to a speech, "that the best method is generally to conceal the order we follow, till we lead the hearer to it without his being aware of it before, — and that we ought not plainly to point out the division of a discourse." Fenelon's views.

Robert Hall's sermon on the Discouragements and

Supports of the Christian Minister, has a paragraph in a similar strain. He says, that "in the distribution of the matter of our sermons we indulge too little variety, and, exposing our plan in all its parts, abate the edge of curiosity by enabling the hearer to anticipate what we intend to advance. — Method, we are aware," he continues, "is an essential ingredient in every discourse designed for the instruction of mankind; but it ought never to force itself on the attention as an object apart; never appear to be an end instead of an instrument; or beget a suspicion of the sentiments being introduced for the sake of the method, not the method for the sentiments."

Robert Hall's views.

Dr. Doddridge, on the contrary, was a strenuous advocate for a very minute statement of the plan of a sermon, and for frequently reminding the hearers of the distinct parts, as the preacher proceeds from one to another; almost as if a grand purpose of a preacher should be, to secure the remembrance of "the heads and particulars." A subordinate purpose, however, this may well be regarded, and one that need not be labored for, in order to secure the true design of preaching; it is one, moreover, that, if desirable, would be hazarded by minutely setting forth the divisions and subdivisions, instead of aiming to leave a strong impression, at last, of the subject itself.

Doddridge's views.

Dr. Doddridge evidently carried this matter to an extreme. His great particularity in unfolding his plan, and in seeming to prepare his hearers for what was to follow, would be eminently unfavorable to fervor and emotion, both in the preacher and in the hearers. The rich and affecting thoughts of Doddridge's sermons — and the same may be said of Tillotson's — could hardly have failed to be attended

with much fervor, had he merely stated his general purpose and then proceeded without interruption, trusting to the force of a natural method and to the hearers' earnestness of attention for such a remembering of the sermon as was desirable.

Mr. Hall's objection, it would seem, lay not against a mention, at the beginning, of the subject and the general divisions of a sermon; but against a minute and formal mention of the various "heads and particulars." For in the very sermon which contains his objection, he mentions at the beginning his purpose to exhibit "the discouragements on the one hand, and the supports on the other, to be looked for in the ministerial warfare," thus stating the two main divisions of the discourse. It was usual with him thus to mention the chief divisions of his sermons. And certainly such a mention does not "abate the edge of curiosity;" it rather sharpens it, and excites an earnest desire to hear what the preacher is about to advance in respect to those heads.

Fenelon would seem to have carried his objection further than did Mr. Hall. But when we consider the very promiscuous character of religious assemblies, as to age, intelligence and cultivation, we shall be inclined to think that sometimes a statement of the preacher's method is desirable, though at other times the sermon, from its very structure, requires no such statement.

Statement of Divisions sometimes desirable.

An illustration here may be of use. When some duty is the subject of discourse, and the preacher designs to persuade his hearers to its performance, a formal statement beforehand of the motives which are to be urged, is cer-

tainly not needed. When some religious principle is to be accounted for, the several considerations which account for it need not be mentioned beforehand. They may succeed one another in the progress of the discussion without being previously named, and thus gradually, one after another, occupy the hearers' minds. But when the materials of a sermon are to be distributed under two or three main divisions, it will generally, if not always, be best to mention these principal divisions, and then proceed to treat each of them, without, however, giving previous notice of the several particulars under them. Thus, to take an example from Mr. Hall's sermon on Family Worship, after a few prefatory sentences, he says — "I shall take occasion from these words to urge upon you the duty of family prayer; a duty, I fear, too much neglected among us, though it is one of high importance and indispensable obligation. In bringing this subject before you, I shall, first, attempt to show the solid reasons on which it is founded; and, secondly, endeavor, with the blessing of God, to suggest a few hints respecting the best method of performing it." Dr. Griffin, also, in his sermon on the Abominable Nature of Sin, thus unfolds his plan: "The doctrine, then, which we may draw from the text is this, *that sin is the abominable thing which God hates.* It will be my object to illustrate and apply this doctrine. That sin is abominable to God, appears, I. From the nature of things; II. From the expressions he has made of that abhorrence." In both these instances, the two grand divisions are stated; and, doubtless, the statement excited curiosity and desire to hear what the preacher was intending to advance. So Mr. Buckminster, in an occasional sermon entitled Christianity and the

Female Sex, proposes two inquiries as the heads of his discourse — "What has Christianity done for that sex to which it seems so well adapted? and, What ought they now to do for Christianity?"

But examples need not be multiplied. It should only be added, that when main divisions are not employed, but all the matter is to be distributed under one general head, utility will sometimes be consulted by mentioning beforehand the three, or four, particulars which are to be unfolded. Thus Massillon, in his sermon on the Disagreeable Circumstances which accompany Piety in this Life, after amplifying the thought that piety has, in this life, its unpleasant accompaniments, observes that this ought not to be a pretext either for abandoning, or for declining, the service of God. "Behold the reasons: first, because disagreeable circumstances are inevitable in this life; secondly, because those of piety are not so bitter as they are represented; thirdly, because they are fewer than those of the world; fourthly, because, whenever they are as many as those of the world, they yet have alleviations which those of the world have not." Having thus stated, at the opening of the discourse, its several divisions, he proceeds to the discussion.* So Theremin, court preacher in Berlin, in a sermon on the Resurrection of Christ an Incitement to Repentance, exhibits the several parts of his plan immediately after naming his subject: "Let us now contemplate the resurrection of the Lord as an incitement to repentance. It is so, because it proves to us, I. That there is an invisible world; II. That we pass, after death, into that invisible world; III. That our destiny in that world depends on the relation in which

* Oeuvres de Massillon, I. p. 483. Paris, 1838.

we stand to Christ: Three truths, which proceed from the resurrection of Christ, and each one of which ought to incite us to a new life and to efforts for holiness." *

Judgment must dictate the proper course; and, particularly, an unvarying uniformity should be avoided.

Treatment of the Subject.

As this is, commonly, the chief part of a sermon, it gives scope for all the preacher's power of reasoning, of imagination, and of persuasion. It lays under contribution all his stores of knowledge, and his skill in the use of language. Here the peculiar genius of each writer will display itself. Rules, consequently, except of a very general character, are not to be expected in regard to this part; particularly, as by the process through which the preacher is considered as having passed, he has collected all his materials, and has judiciously arranged them. Suffice it to say, that the treatment should always be ample and thorough; no point should be left untouched which the case demands; and the hearer should perceive, at its close, that it is not defective, but that what was proposed is actually performed. It should be evident that the whole subject has been fairly surveyed, that every thing which pertains to it has been carefully considered, that extravagance has been avoided, and that the results arrived at are worthy of an intelligent and practical adoption. As far as possible, too, abstruseness should be shunned; the discussion should be rendered lively and attractive by appropriate illustrations and by phraseology which, while level to the comprehension of ordinary minds, shall also be

Rules not needed.

* Die Deutsche Kanzel. p, 127.

adapted to cultivated hearers. Nor is this difficult to a man of good sense and of clear views. Let him express himself naturally and with ease, giving free scope to all his powers, never *affecting* to be profound, or to soar; not seeming excited when only clearness is demanded, nor refusing to kindle with emotion when nature prompts it, aiming always to give a just expression of his thoughts, and he will find that nature in him will call forth the responses of nature in his hearers. If his mind acts thus freely, the various forms of language from the simply didactic to the imaginative, or figurative, and the impassioned, will present themselves in their appropriate places.

Here, as has already been said, it may sometimes be judicious to consider objections against the doctrine of the discourse. In doing this, candor should be a prevailing characteristic; and no advantage, in urging unsound arguments, or unfairly stating, or removing, objections, should be taken of the position which the preacher occupies as being the only speaker, and not liable to be questioned before a congregation. Nor should he allow himself to take a similar advantage of ignorance on the part of his hearers, or of the unsuspecting confidence which they may repose in him. All his statements should be capable of abiding a rigid examination. The same fairness should be observed, as if he were engaged in conversation with a respected friend of opposite views; the aim being, not to gain the honor of a triumph, but to exhibit and defend the truth. Consideration of Objections.

Cases may exist, indeed, in which a host of objections will be best dispelled by other means than by formally and respectfully examining them. Such cases, however, cannot be described, as they depend on circumstances; and

when they occur, the preacher's own ready genius and inherent sense of propriety must prescribe his course.

Proportion of the parts.

On the relative proportion, in length, of the several parts composing the treatment of a subject, no rule can be given. Each part is to contribute its quota to the general result; and one that is very brief may yet be as vitally important as one that fills a wide space. Regard must be had not only to the subject itself, but also to the occasion which requires that subject, or to which it is suitable, and to the hearers of a particular sermon; since some occasions and some hearers would require a certain class of thoughts to be copiously expanded, which on a different occasion and before a different audience, though the same subject is under treatment, need not be so minutely unfolded. Besides, on some points the preacher's mind will naturally be more inventive and fruitful than on others. The nature of each part, and the impulse of genius and judgment, will dictate the length which it requires, or of which it will advantageously admit. The discourse should be always tending to the result without needless delay. Prolixity must be sedulously avoided. In regard to each part, as well as to the whole, the advice of Dr. Witherspoon is of great value — Leave off when you have done.

Transitions.

The mode of transition from one main part to another, and from one subordinate division to another, requires attention. It is undesirable to pass from part to part abruptly, or by the bare mention of a numerical word; for the several members may thus appear rather as separate pieces but slightly connected, than as joint parts of one

whole. They should rather be like the several parts of a garment, properly attached to one another and making a uniform whole; or, like the several limbs of a body, which do not present themselves to the eye separately, but in an agreeable combination, thus forming a body to which each limb is essential, and to which each limb furnishes its proportion of the strength and beauty of the whole.

Suitable modes of transition greatly conduce also, to the orderly action of hearers' minds, and to their more ready remembrance of the main thoughts of a discourse.

Modes of Transition.

The connection, just now hinted, between the different parts of a discourse, may be effected in various ways; and several connecting clauses can easily be framed during the preparation of a sermon, which would much assist the transition from one part to another. The last sentence in a paragraph may be so shaped as naturally to introduce the next paragraph. Or, one head being finished, it may be observed that 'not only is the idea on which we have been dwelling applicable to the case in hand, but there is another thought, also, directly bearing on it;' and then that thought may be introduced as the next head of discourse. Or the preacher may remark — 'We have thus far been occupied *thus and so;* let us now turn to *such* a thought.' It is enough, doubtless, just to have intimated the propriety of devising neat formulas of transition; a preacher's genius will invent at the moment, as occasion requires, such as will suit his purpose.

Use of numerical words.

The passage from one part to another may be made by these forms of expression, either with or without the usual numerical words, secondly, thirdly, &c. It is not a sufficient reason for declining the use of these words, that they give an air of stiffness to the performance,

and bring into too bold relief the joints of the discourse. The judicious use of these words secures ends far more important than the beauty of structure, or the harmony of sound, which may be obtained by avoiding them. Nor do true beauty and harmony require the various parts to be welded together, or even to be so intimately united that the junctures would escape the notice of all, except a few very sagacious individuals. The ready perception, on the part of hearers, of the successive considerations that are employed, must be regarded; and numerical terms may be generally used in connection with formulas of transition, so as not at all to impair neatness or elegance of composition. As, however, variety is desirable, and transitions can be distinctly marked by other terms, a preacher will find it agreeable and useful to have at command several words, or phrases even, that will serve this purpose. Thus, instead of uniformly saying, *secondly*, *thirdly*, &c., a regard to variety and to attractiveness would recommend the employment of such terms as *again*, *still further*, *in addition*, *moreover*, *once more*, *finally*, &c.

The sermons of Mr. Jay, of England, and those of Massillon, furnish fine specimens of transition. Robert Hall's sermons are also, in this respect, excellent models.

Methods of securing continued attention during the progress of a Sermon.

If a sermon does not exceed the ordinary length, and is composed in the style of an address to an assembly, no special attempts will be needed to maintain the hearers' attention. But when the subject is of such a nature as to require more fixed attention than usual, or when the sermon

must exceed the ordinary limit of time, it is desirable to forestall the flagging of attention. Some respectful expressions, not unsuitable to the dignity of the pulpit, might then be of utility: particularly if introduced with ease, and, as it were, spontaneously occurring at the moment.

Though no signs of impatience, or of listlessness, may appear, yet such language may favorably influence an assembly, and secure an undiminished interest in the discourse. Nothing is lost by urbanity in address on the part of the preacher, unless he is guilty of excess either as to his phraseology, or the frequency with which he thus expresses himself. Excess would not only defeat the purpose, but, like all affectation, would call forth feelings akin to disgust. If sparingly used, on proper occasions, and evidently marked by delicacy of feeling, no valid objection can exist to such expedients for preventing weariness. As a specimen of what an ingenious and delicate mind will sometimes prompt for such a purpose, a sentence is here selected from Mr. Buckminster's sermon on Christianity and the Female Sex. Having completed, at considerable length, the first head of his discourse, namely, What Christianity has done for the Female Sex, he introduces the second head by observing — "You have heard us with so much patience on the past condition and character of your sex, we hope you will not be wearied with what remains of this discourse, in which we intend to explain what you may and ought to do for Christianity, which has done so much for you."

Conclusion of a Sermon.

A conclusion, in sermons which properly admit of one, being designed to present the deductions from the subject

which has been under consideration, or to show its proper influence on men's spirit and conduct, should have a strict relation to that subject, and not be of so general a character as to fit some other subject quite as well.

Pertinent to the subject.

Care should be exercised, that the doctrinal deductions be unexceptionably legitimate. They will then often be of signal utility in correcting erroneous opinions; for when a point has been fairly discussed, or properly proved, the necessary inferences from it may be admitted more readily than if made, themselves, the subjects of argumentation.*

Legitimate.

The conclusion will, however, more commonly be directed to men's "bosoms and business," and should be an earnest, solicitous application of the subject discussed, aiming to secure its genuine influence on the hearers' characters and lives. Here, frequently, the preacher's affections will become enkindled, and the earnestness of his spirit and manner will rivet in his hearers the truths he is seeking to enforce.

Earnest and affectionate.

The conclusion, since it exhibits the legitimate results of the subject which has been treated, and aims to direct its diversified practical influences, is evidently too important a part to be omitted, or to be only

To be carefully prepared.

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* "In order," says Dr. Emmons, "to lead my people into the knowledge of the most important and self-denying doctrines of the gospel to the best advantage, I usually brought in those truths which are the most displeasing to the human heart, by way of inference. In this way the hearers were constrained to acknowledge the premises before they saw the conclusions, which, being clearly drawn, it was too late to deny. This I often found to be the best method to silence and convince gainsayers."

slightly provided for, in the collecting of materials, or in the subsequent preparation of a sermon.* It ought to receive as careful attention as any other part, and should by no means be left to the inspiration of the moment of delivery. In secular oratory, the concluding passages of speeches, as having so important a relation to the designed result, have often been elaborated with the utmost care. The conclusion of Lord Brougham's defence of Queen Caroline is said to have been wrought over as many as sixteen times before the speech was delivered. "It is a great mistake," Dr. Ware remarks, "to imagine a closing exhortation easier work than the previous management of the discourse. I know nothing which requires more intense thought, more prudent consideration, or more judicious skill, both in ordering the topics and selecting the words. One may, indeed, very easily dash out into exclamations, and make loud appeals to his audience. But to appeal pungently, weightily, effectually, in such words and emphasis, that the particular truth or duty shall be driven home and fastened in the mind and conscience — this is an arduous, delicate, anxious duty, which may well task a man's most serious and thoughtful hours of preparation. It is only by giving such preparation that he can hope to make that impression which God will bless; and he that thinks it the easiest of things, and harangues without forethought, must harangue without effect. Is it not probable, that much of

* The sermons of President Edwards and of Dr. Emmons illustrate the very copious and diversified applications which a preacher may make of a religious principle he has been unfolding or establishing. Not, however, that the items of "Improvement," or "Application," presented by these distinguished preachers are always just, or judicious.

the vapid and insignificant verbiage which is poured out at the close of sermons originates in this notion that exhortation is a very simple affair, to which anybody is equal at any time?" *

Class of feelings to be addressed.

As the conclusion of a sermon will often be the most fervid and moving part, and as it aims to secure the proper effect of the discourse, it is important to consider what class of feelings it should more particularly address. Regard must be paid, of course, to the nature of the subject which has been treated, and to the characters of those hearers whom it may appear specially desirable, on a given occasion, to influence. In respect to both, it may sometimes be advisable that the final impression should be that of terror. Care, however, should be taken, universally, that terror should not be of an indefinite kind, but should arise from an intelligent and well-proportioned view of the whole truth concerning men's sinfulness and danger, and the divine provision for their pardon and salvation; for only thus can it directly conduce to the preacher's ultimate purpose, namely, persuading men to become reconciled to God, and to lead a life of righteousness. Little doubt, too, can be entertained, that deeper and more salutary impressions are made on men, in general, by addressing their sense of duty, by urging the claims to gratitude and obedience arising from the kindness of the Creator and the Saviour, and by attractive delineations of the recompenses which await the righteous.

The Scriptures aim to excite a spirit of love and obedience to God by the consideration of his love to us: an

* The appositeness of this extract to my purpose must be my apology for quoting from a production, the whole of which is embraced in this volume.

apostle laid much stress on the thought, "We have known and believed the love which God hath to us. God is love."

It is eminently true, "that the goodness of God leadeth to repentance." Conscience, also, is the power in the human soul on which chief reliance must be placed, so far as man is concerned, in endeavoring to effect his recovery to duty and a steadfast adherence to a righteous course. And conscience will be aroused to its office more readily by clearly unfolding men's obligations than by dilating on their dangers; and by addressing the intellectual and moral, than the sensitive nature; especially, than by stimulating fear.

In these hints on the closing passages of a sermon, it is taken for granted that its preceding parts have given the right kind of instruction. The concealment, or the very infrequent, or half earnest mention of what is properly embraced in "the terror of the Lord" must not be allowed; for plainly, from the absorbing nature of secular pursuits, from men's deep moral lethargy, from Scriptural examples, as well as from the religious history of vast numbers, and the experience of many eminently useful preachers, the woes of the lost, presented with the earnestness of deep conviction and with evident solicitude for men's spiritual welfare, must be one of the faithful preacher's commonplaces. But, like the apostle Paul, he must employ this topic as a persuasive to a pious life; and this ultimate purpose is best gained by making "the terror of the Lord" subordinate to the claims of duty, and to the winning motives of the gospel.

In fine, the conscientiousness and tenderness of a deeply pious spirit, careful observation of mankind, and a remem-

brance of the effect on himself of the various topics of religion, will aid a preacher beyond calculation in 'rightly dividing the truth' among the several classes of his hearers, and in giving the respective classes of motives their proper place and prominence.

CHAPTER VII.

TEXT-SERMONS. SEVERAL KINDS OF TEXT-SERMONS: SPECIMENS.

THE plan of the present work favors the consideration, at this point, of Text-sermons; the remaining subjects having reference to each of the classes into which sermons are, in this work, divided, and some of the earlier chapters being also tributary to text-sermons as well as to others. Scarcely anything more is necessary, in regard to this class, than briefly to characterize a few kinds of them, and to furnish specimens.

The general distinction between this class and the other is, that while in the latter a definite subject is treated, as drawn from the text, in the former the text itself, as a collection of words, or clauses, is the ground-work of the discourse; or, sometimes, the text and the context united furnish the materials and the divisions of the discourse.

It will be convenient to subdivide this class. Yet no division can include the numerous methods of forming text-sermons. The aim of this chapter is, merely to notice such modes of formation as are most adapted to the design of sermons, and as may guide the practice of a preacher. The general remark is also requisite here, that in this class of sermons judgment and taste must be particularly consulted; for their structure cannot

Several sorts of text-sermons.

be brought within scientific regulations; and if a preacher prefer oddity to sobriety, he can produce truly ridiculous structures of this sort. Still, as a wide-spread practice has proved, a judicious preacher, simply intent on doing good, will often find discourses of this class highly useful.

1. Of this class, discourses may first be mentioned which are founded on such texts as exhibit one subject and contain several points of instruction, or remark, relating to that subject. These bear a strong resemblance to subject-sermons, since they have one subject to which all the parts of the sermon are related. They differ, however, in that they do not, properly speaking, treat of a definite subject on logical principles, but exhibit various points mentioned in the text, more or less directly related to the main subject.

For instance; Romans 14: 12 — So then, every one of us shall give account of himself to God — might be the foundation of a discourse on our Accountability to God, with the following divisions: I. An *account* is to be rendered *to God;* II. *Every one — of us* — is to render account; III. Every one is to render an account *of himself.**

Another example may be founded on Acts 17: 31 — Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. — On the subject

* The specimens given in this chapter are outlines of the principal part only — the body of a sermon; the statement of thoughts for a conclusion, even when a formal conclusion would be appropriate, not being required by the purpose of the chapter. In these specimens, a greater show of formality also appears, than it would be desirable or requisite to retain in sermons conformed to them.

of the General Judgment, this text might furnish the following plan: I. God will *judge the world;* (*a*) the assurance which God has given of this purpose; (*b*) a time is appointed for this event. II. He will judge the world *in righteousness.* III. He will judge the world *by Jesus Christ.*

The words in 1 Peter 3: 18 — Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, — lead us to contemplate the Sufferings of Christ. They assert, I. That *Christ,* the *just* one, *suffered for sins.* They show, II. *In whose behalf* he suffered — the unjust; and, III. *For what purpose* he suffered — that he might bring us to God.

The passage in 2 Peter 3: 14 — Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless — might suggest the subject of Christian Diligence, to be treated under two divisions; I. The grounds of it — seeing ye look for such things; II. The objects to which it should be directed — that ye may be found of him in peace, &c.

The apostle's declaration in Rom. 1: 16 — For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth — might lead us to consider his Feelings in regard to the gospel, and furnish the Reasons why he cherished such feelings. The reasons are, 1. The gospel effects *salvation;* 2. It effects salvation for *believers,* and for *every one* that believeth; 3. It is a system with which *the power of God* is associated.

In like manner, our Lord's declaration in John 14: 23 — If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make

our abode with him — furnishes materials for a sermon on Love to Christ, with two divisions; I. The Evidence of possessing Love to Christ; namely, Obedience to his instructions; II. The Recompense of this Love; (*a*) The Father will specially love him that loves Christ; (*b*) The Father and Christ will grant to such a person their abiding presence.

Dr. Barrow has a sermon on the Duty of Thanksgiving, founded on Eph. 5: 20 — Giving thanks always for all things unto God. He adopts the following plan: I. The Duty — giving thanks; II. The Object to whom thanks are to be directed — to God; III. The Time of performing the duty — always; IV. The Matter of the duty, and its extent — for all things. — A less formal method, and one which would not require any numerical words, would be the following: The Duty of giving thanks to God — for all things — at all times.

The Bible abounds in passages susceptible of similar treatment. Such passages will be found particularly serviceable, when they inculcate some doctrine or duty, because they furnish considerations having the authority of holy writ. Thus, Eph. 1: 3–6, and 2 Thess. 2: 13, 14, contain all the items of thought which are necessary for discussing the so-called doctrine of election. In like manner, the paragraph in Rom. 13: 1–5, contains all the requisite items of argument for the duty of Subjection to Civil Magistrates.

2. In the class of text-sermons are also included such as present, for successive consideration, several topics found in a text. These topics will have various degrees of relation to each other; so that a common bond among them may

generally be perceived, though a precise unity cannot be claimed for these sermons.

Thus, from Ps. 73: 24 — Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory — the following outline might be formed: I. The pious man is guided by God; II. The guidance which he enjoys conducts to a glorious end.

From a miniature volume by Dr. Stow, of Boston, entitled Daily Manna for Christian Pilgrims, the three following schemes of thought are extracted, which might be expanded into discourses answering to this sort of text-sermons.

Heb. 4: 1 — Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. — I. A Promise stated; II. A Danger suggested; III. A Duty inculcated.

Rev. 22: 17 — Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. — I. The Blessing offered; II. The Gratuitousness of the offer; III. The Extent of the offer.

Ps. 27: 14 — Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart. — I. The required Service; II. The needed Spirit; III. The all-sufficient Encouragement.

To this subdivision may also be referred discourses which are derived from the several parts of a text, these parts being heads of the discourse. Sometimes topics are stated in connection with the several parts of a text.

The works of the Rev. Dr. Mason, of New York, contain two glowing discourses from 1 Tim. 6: 12 — Fight the good fight of faith — the general divisions of which are stated in the following manner: "Let us, therefore, in the order which the text points out, view the Christian

life as a *fight*, as a *good fight*, and as the good fight of *faith*.

A sermon by President Davies, on Prov. 29: 1 — He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy — is constructed on the several clauses of the text; without the formality, however, of any numerical terms of division. Thus, He that being often reproved — (*a*) who are reproved? (*b*) and in what ways? — Hardeneth his neck — (*a*) who are they that harden themselves? (*b*) and how do they harden themselves? — Shall suddenly be destroyed, &c. — the certain, sudden, remediless doom of such persons.

One of Burder's Village Sermons, on John 3: 16 — For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life — is on the following plan: I. The Love of God — *God so loved the world;* II. The Evidence of it — *That he gave*, &c.; III. The End, or Design of it — *That whosoever*, &c.

A sermon by Dr. Doddridge on Col. 1: 28 — Whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus — has the following plan: I. The Subject of the apostle's preaching — *We preach Christ;* II. The Manner of it — *Warning every man and teaching every man;* III. The End of it — *That we may present*, &c.

The passage in 1 Cor. 1: 30 — But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption — has often been employed as the ground of a sermon divided into four parts, corresponding to the four principal terms in the passage.

The passage in James 1 : 18 — Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures — has suggested the following scheme of thought : I. Christians have been regenerated ; II. Their regeneration is a result of the divine will ; III. Their regeneration was effected with the word of truth ; IV. As thus regenerated, they are a kind of first-fruits. — Mr. Hall has a sermon on this text, the plan of which is similar, though verbally different. He observes, " These words instruct us in the cause, the instrument, and the end of the renovation of Christians." After discussing these three points, he closes with three items of Improvement.

The text, 2 Pet. 3 : 14, which has already been employed in this chapter — Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless — might furnish a three-fold division : I. The Expectation which Christian believers cherish — *ye look for such things ;* II. The corresponding Preparation — *that ye may be found of the Lord in peace*, &c. ; III. The Necessity of Diligence in order to attain this preparation — *be diligent.*

Of a similar character are sermons, the plans of which consist of several observations suggested by a text. Thus, a sermon on Ps. 90 : 10 — The days of our years are threescore years and ten ; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow ; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away — has the following plan : " I. Human life, however lengthened out, must come to an end. II. Human life, at longest, is very short. III. That which is added to the ordinary duration of human life is, after all, what is little to be desired."

In a sermon by Mr. Hall, on Eccl. 11 : 8 — But if a man

live many years and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many — which words suggest *the universal exposure of men to affliction*, he presents the following "lessons:" "I. We are not in the situation in which man was first formed. II. Let us not be surprised, when affliction becomes our own lot. III. Let us not look for happiness on earth. IV. Let us seek a suitable preparation for the days of adversity."

Text-sermons of this second sort are liable to the danger either of a superficial treatment of each head of discourse, or of a fatiguing copiousness. Some topics, therefore, or clauses of texts, proposed in such sermons, might, after being mentioned, be dismissed with a sentence or two of remark, and the hearers' attention be directed to those which should be copiously treated.

Notwithstanding the variety and copiousness which may seem to be secured by such sermons, they yet expose a preacher to sameness of thought and expression, because various words and clauses which would attract his attention, or the ideas which they convey, are of frequent occurrence in the Scriptures. Indeed, to construct text-sermons of a permanently interesting character, requires much fertility of invention and intellectual versatility. And as the discussion of religious subjects is so eminently favorable to intelligent conviction and abiding impression, it is advisable that even men whose genius strongly inclines to this diversified, yet often superficial mode of treating passages of Scripture, should, in connection with it, also task their powers frequently to the wŏrk of accurate, yet earnest discussion.*

* The sermons of the Rev. Charles Bradley, of England, have been recommended as furnishing good specimens of textual

3. The third sort of text-sermons may include discourses founded on parables, narratives, and paragraphs, or entire portions of Scripture which relate to one subject.

The parables of our Lord, though intended primarily for his own immediate hearers, and though they ought to be

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plans. The plans of his sermons are very ingenious and apt; and an examination of them would be profitable, as showing various ways in which texts may furnish heads of thought. At the same time, it is questionable whether his plans do not separate the matter of his sermons into too many portions, and whether they are not, occasionally at least, liable to the charge of conducting his hearers hither and thither, instead of fixing them in meditation on some great principles of religion. It must be remembered, however, that he prepared his sermons for hearers whom he did not regard as possessing so much cultivation and force of intellect as would be requisite to profit by regular discussions of subjects; hearers not in a condition to receive "strong meat." In his Dedication, he speaks of the sermons as prepared for a village congregation; and with a truly Christian spirit of condescension, he endeavored to adapt his preaching to the intellectual state of his congregation. But the difference thus implied between a city congregation, and a village or a country congregation, is hardly known in the United States. A reader both of Bradley's and of Hare's sermons must keep this in mind; and while he should admire, and adopt, the principle on which these excellent ministers acted, namely, that of adapting themselves in style and manner to their hearers, he would quite misapply the principle by making their sermons models for himself in preaching to a congregation of greater mental activity, and of wider general knowledge than theirs, whether in the city or the country. In other words, the principle is a good one, and is everywhere applicable; but judgment is everywhere requisite to its proper application. The providence of God has blessed the older portions of our country, at least, with a succession, quite from the beginning in many instances, of so intelligent preachers, and instruction in the ordinary branches of knowledge is so generally enjoyed, that the public mind is not permanently satisfied without sermons of a considerably elevated character.

explained with reference to the circumstances which occasioned them, are yet full of instruction to all men. Discourses drawn from our Lord's own illustrations of the principles and the results, both main and incidental, of his religion, are always interesting.

Similarly instructive and attractive are the narratives which occur in the Gospels. It may suffice just to mention the instances of the Centurion and his servant, Jairus and his daughter, the Woman who obtained healing by touching the Saviour's garment, blind Bartimeus, the Widow of Nain, Lazarus and his sisters. These instances, and others from the Old Testament as well as the New, furnish easy and forcible illustrations of religious principles, and have often been employed with singular benefit to the understanding and the heart, to the slumbering and to the awakened conscience.

The small volume by F. W. Krummacher, entitled ELIJAH THE TISHBITE, happily illustrates the use which can be made, in the pulpit, of narratives found in the Bible. Other specimens of discourses built on Scripture narratives, and on the parables of our Lord, are easily found. It may be well, however, to mention Buckminster's sermon on the Pharisee and the Publican, and Jay's sermon on Genesis 35 : 1 – 3, entitled Vows called to Remembrance. Jay's Family Discourses also contain many of a similar character. Dr. Mason's lecture, as it is termed, on Matt. 27 : 1 – 5, is another instructive specimen.* Dr. Blair's sermon

* The passage of the sacred historian recounts the remorse and the suicide of Judas. In the lecture, after a few pages which vividly describe the scene, the preacher invites his hearers to "look into the lessons which the frightful spectacle" teaches. They are the following:

"I. The sins of men lead often to results which they do not anti-

on "the Power of Conscience" also exemplifies this use of Scripture narratives. From the history of Joseph, he selects the passage in Gen. 42: 21, 22, as originating the following heads of discourse:—"I. That a sense of right and wrong in conduct, or of moral good and evil, belongs to human nature. II. That it produces an apprehension of merited punishment, when we have committed evil. III. That although this inward sentiment be stifled during the season of prosperity, yet in adversity it will revive. And, IV. That, when it revives, it determines us to consider every distress which we suffer as an actual infliction of punishment by Heaven."

Of paragraphs, and of whole portions of Scripture, suitable to be the foundation of discourses, the beatitudes, so called, in our Lord's sermon on the mount, and the other several portions of that sermon, are instances: so, likewise, the statement by the apostle, in Rom. 5: 1–11, of the consequences flowing from justification by faith in Christ. The paragraph occurring in 1 Pet. 5: 1–4, is also favorable to the same purpose. It would suggest, I. The Duty of Pastors—feed the flock of God, &c.;

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cipate. Hence, when men are about committing a sin, they should pause, and reflect, (1) They know not the natural connections of that sin; (2) They know nothing of the secret providence of God respecting that particular sin.

II. We see the accursedness of that maxim, that "the end sanctifies the means."

III. Observe the hardening power of sin.

IV. See the power of a guilty conscience, when fully aroused."

In the Works of Dr. Mason, Vol. II., the numerical notation of the heads in the lecture is strangely erroneous. I have taken the liberty to make the alteration as here presented, and thus to render harmonious what is evidently in the printed lecture discordant.

II. The Spirit in which they should perform their duty — taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, &c.; III. The Encouragement to such a performance of their duty — ye shall receive a crown of glory, &c.

Some of the shorter Psalms could be usefully employed as furnishing materials for such discourses; particularly, those Psalms which are marked by unity of subject.

This last sort of text-sermons has a near resemblance to expository preaching; a form of pulpit instruction which has much to recommend it. It would require a thorough study of the Scriptures, and make such study directly tributary to preparation for the pulpit; while, on the part of hearers, it would also contribute to connected and enlarged views of the Scriptures. It would afford opportunity for seasonable suggestions on various topics of temper and deportment, which it would hardly be proper to make the subjects of separate and entire sermons, but which are highly important to the perfection of Christian character, and to the usefulness — not to say blamelessness — of the Christian profession. An entire sermon on Christian courteousness might not be thought desirable; but a few significant and comprehensive remarks concerning it, in an expository discourse from 1 Pet. 3: 8, &c., would not be out of place. A judicious intermingling of expository preaching with the ordinary exercises of the pulpit, could not fail of utility. Many hearers are more benefitted by detached thoughts, presented in an animated, and even diffuse manner, than by a logical train of thought. As an instructive specimen of expository discourses, Archbishop Leighton's Commentary on the first epistle of Peter deserves an attentive examination.

CHAPTER VIII.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SERMONS.

THE parts of a sermon having been severally considered, the inquiry is now in place, What should be the character of a sermon as a whole, or rather, of sermons as a class of productions? This inquiry receives a ready answer, if we keep in view the design of sermons, or — what is equivalent — the design of preaching.

Design of Preaching.

The design of preaching is, to unfold before an assembly the principles of the Christian religion, in order to secure for them, on the part of the hearers, a personal, practical acceptance. It is thus a means to the great end which the Christian religion is designed to secure; namely, the spiritual well-being of men, both present and eternal. Many subordinate and collateral objects are subserved by it; but these need not, at present, come into notice, since they *are* subordinate and are best attained incidentally, as accompaniments, or consequences of the main result.

The statement just made takes for granted that sermons, in their doctrinal and ethical principles, are truly evangelical; that is, that they truly exhibit the gospel, or the Christian religion. It is the preaching of *the gospel* that we are now contemplating; not of natural religion, nor of morality, nor of any system of belief and practice that either denies,

or conceals, the cardinal principles of Christianity. While the Christian religion contains much in common with various religious codes, it has also its distinctive peculiarities. These should appear in sermons, clearly and prominently; else it is not, properly speaking, the gospel of Christ which is exhibited. The religious and ethical principles which may be found in other systems, as well as in the Christian, are by no means, however, to be excluded from the pulpit; for all the essential truths of religion and morality, however communicated or discovered, are included in the Christian system, and receive from it a new vital power. Whatever is absolutely true and abiding in religion and ethics, Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfil; that is, to perfect and to invest with new sanctions. Every thing of that nature, then, is properly included in the preaching of the gospel; particularly when illustrated by the new light and enforced by the new sanctions of the gospel, and associated in due order and proportion with its distinguishing peculiarities. These peculiarities relate mainly, though with various degrees of directness, to the special provision made for man's recovery from sin, and to the disclosures concerning man's future state.

What, now, should be the general character of sermons? Without entering into detail, the purpose of this chapter will be answered by naming such qualities as either involve, or will secure, all those which should be possessed.

Qualities of sermons.

1. They should be *instructive*.

The very nature of religion requires sermons to be instructive. Religion is not a routine of external ceremonies, but mainly a spiritual service, rendered by the understanding and the heart. Ignorance is neither the mother, nor

the nurse, of Christian devotion. True piety, both at its commencement and in its progress, is most intimately allied to religious knowledge. Preaching ought to contribute to the hearers' enlarged acquaintance with religious subjects, and to their general improvement in religious character. Religion comprises more than penitence and trust in Christ. Sermons should traverse the whole field of Christian doctrine, and apply requisite influences to men's entire character. Not that the elements of the gospel are to be overlooked; they will always be needed: but so will enlarged instruction on the doctrines and duties of religion.

The frequent recurrence of preaching, and the fact that many of the subjects which must be treated in the pulpit have long been, to Christian assemblies, divested of novelty, demand this quality in sermons. Else, they must lack interest; while, on the other hand, the most common subjects, presented in the various lights and the new combinations which will occur to an inventive mind, bent on the great object of the Christian ministry, will be met by hearers not only with an ever-sustained interest, but also with an ever-craving appetite.

The character of our times and of our country also demands this quality in preaching. Knowledge is here universally diffused; the human intellect is aroused to ceaseless activity; the best thoughts and the best specimens of writing and of spoken composition, find their way into every corner of our land; and error in all its Protean shapes, as well as truth in its unpretending simplicity, is everywhere asserting its claims. In such a country, where religion is unfettered, as it should be, and, sustained by its own authority, appeals to the intellect, the conscience and the heart, and where blind acquiescence is at war with uni-

versal habit and with all our institutions, preaching must be instructive, or renounce its claims to men's respect.

Theological subjects.

The preacher is amply furnished with subjects, both from the theology and from the ethics of the Christian system. Men's obligations to God, their guilt and consequent danger, and the divine method of pardon and salvation through faith in Christ, should be regarded as primary subjects, and pervasive elements of sermons. The doctrines of the gospel should be distinctly exhibited, whether formally and systematically or otherwise, whether in technical phraseology or not, according to the preacher's judgment. It is of little importance, comparatively, to preserve, in preaching, any set forms of speech, if the truths of the gospel are distinctly taught. They may be taught without formality; just as "the Scripture presents its doctrines every where imbedded in ever-varied and deeply interesting narratives; as if for the very purpose both of securing the requisite variety in pulpit discourses, and preventing the truths of religion from assuming the form of naked abstractions."

Ethical subjects.

The ethics of the gospel should also appear in sermons, with sufficient clearness and fulness to guide men in the conduct of life, and to correct any actually existing forms of personal and social delinquency. Sermons generally are more defective on this point, than in respect to their inculcation of doctrines. Instruction on the duties pertaining to our various human relations, that is, to Christian morals, seems to be regarded by some preachers as aside from the essential purpose of the gospel, and as not sufficiently spiritual to justify their devoting to it the sacred time in which man's relation to God and to eternity would seem to suggest more fitting

Objections against ethical subjects.

themes. Sermons which aim to make the heart right towards God will, they also think, secure in addition this inferior end; while sermons which are professedly designed to regulate men's conduct and spirit in their earthly relations, will probably fail of their purpose through the lack of a substantial basis in men's character towards God.

Now, beyond doubt, that preaching which overlooks the doctrines of the gospel in the attempt to mend the morals of men, which does not enforce Christian morality by strictly Christian motives and sanctions, which does not insist on the necessity of a radical change of the heart towards God, which does not distinctly recognize the gospel as the divine system for man's recovery from sin, will to a great extent fail of its purpose. Still, a judicious intermingling of instruction on the claims of religion in our social and commercial relations, with instruction more directly pertaining to our spiritual relations, is required by a complete view of the design of preaching. The gospel aims to make men better in their human, as well as their higher relations; for it is a system of entire righteousness, embracing all the circumstances and conduct of men, and designed to affect their entire character. Religion is an all-pervading principle, claiming universal and constant dominion over the heart and the life. Hence, all the conduct of men ought to be brought under its cognizance; and a preacher should endeavor to imbue his hearers with the Christian spirit on all subjects, to leaven their whole character and all their intercourse with the principle of duty and right, of love to God and love to man, that they may feel and practically acknowledge the force of religion in the counting-room and the parlor, as well as at the communion table; and may act, in every thing, as accountable, religious

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beings, serving God in the ordinary duties of life by performing them in reference to his will.

Experience shows, also, that even when the heart is substantially right — since this does not imply perfection either in knowledge or in holiness — instruction and persuasion in regard to right moral practice may be greatly needed and be eminently serviceable. Besides, the proper enforcement of some social duty may be the very means of convincing some hearers, that they are in heart alienated from the principle of duty to God.*

Subjects from Religious Experience and from Divine Providence.

A large class of subjects, in addition, pertaining to the renovated soul's intercourse with God and the culture of the spiritual life, will invite the preacher's attention. The course of divine providence, too, as affecting individuals, or communities, will suggest numerous topics for religious instruction. And by availing themselves of circumstances and events actually arising in a community, or of the various states of feeling which may be presumed to exist in a congregation, preachers would impart to their sermons not only a practical character, but would make them, so to speak, living vehicles of instruction, of encouragement, of warning, and incitement. The sermon, in such a case, grows out of the congregation; the preacher and his hearers have mutual sympathy. And thus it is that the pastoral office, if properly contemplated,

* A correct and comprehensive view of human nature is eminently necessary to a preacher. It will aid him in fixing the proper range of subjects for the pulpit, and in justly modifying the sentiments he inculcates and the motives he employs. As contributing to such a view, Bishop Butler's Fifteen Sermons, commencing with those on Human Nature, will amply repay a frequent, attentive study.

so happily connects itself with the most useful performance of the duties of the pulpit. Dr. Humphrey well remarks, in his sermon before the Pastoral Association of Massachusetts — "I will venture to say, that half the interest of preaching, and more than half the profit, depends upon its being adapted to the ever-varying circumstances of the audience. A discourse may be heard with intense interest at one time, and produce a powerful effect upon a whole congregation, which would have passed off as merely decent a month, or even a week, before. Hence the vast importance of giving a *pastoral* complexion to all your preaching, especially in your own pulpits. Hence, also, the common fact, that those pastors who successfully aim at this, preach better at home than abroad; — a most desirable excellence, and a sure pledge of much usefulness!"

To be properly instructive, preaching should not only take a wide range, but also observe a scriptural harmony and proportion in the views which it presents, both as to the relation of doctrines to each other, and as to the reciprocal relation of doctrines and precepts. A fruitful source of imperfection in religious character, and error in belief, is an undue prominence given to certain favorite principles which may be indisputably true, but can by no means embrace all truth, and which must not be held apart from other principles, or be elevated above any modifying influence from other principles.

2. Sermons should be *discriminating.*

Religious assemblies are variously composed. The broad distinction must not be overlooked between those who are, and those who are not, in heart, disciples of Christ. Each of these classes has, also, numerous subdivisions, which

should be embraced within the preacher's view. When preaching knows only the general distinction of the regenerate and the unregenerate, and neglects, or recognizes but slightly, the many shades of character among professed Christians; or, on the other hand, when it makes no account of any refinement of moral feeling or tenderness of conscience, among those who have not avowed themselves as followers of Christ, it is obviously not that manifestation of the truth which commends itself to *every* man's conscience. A preacher should cultivate an acquaintance with human character, and endeavor accurately to discriminate between the different shades of holiness and of sin, to estimate the modifying influences of constitutional temperament, of education and other circumstances, and by a wise application of divine truth to leave no hearer unaffected and unbenefited.

Such is the discrimination that should prevail in sermons; not a descending to personalities, but a discerning between things that differ, in order that hearers may intelligently apprehend and apply religious truths. Such discrimination will find a response in the hearers' breasts, both pleasant and painful, according to their respective consciousness of its touching their particular cases.

The discrimination which is thus appropriate to a particular congregation is eminently desirable in the preaching of a pastor; and the pastoral office is peculiarly favorable to such appropriateness in respect to hearers' characters, as well as in respect to circumstances.

3. Sermons should be *earnest* and *affectionate.*

They should carry indubitable evidence that the preacher has a deep conviction of the truth and unutterable moment

of the religion he inculcates, and of its relation to men's everlasting destiny; and that this is united with tenderness of spirit and a solicitude to produce in his hearers a similar conviction and corresponding purposes. The nature of religious subjects, the magnitude of men's spiritual interests, the connection, both personal and official, of the preacher with his hearers, all demand that sermons should, in their prevailing tone, be thus earnest and affectionate, indicating that the preacher is occupied with sober realities, and is 'willing to impart to his hearers not the gospel of God only, but his own soul also.' This union of earnestness with tenderness is needed, in particular, to make sermons — what they should for the most part be — *persuasive discourses.**

* A just theory of persuasion, while it requires us to address our hearers in a style quite remote from that of abstract, bare, and cold statement, does not permit us to assume the attitude of directly aiming, in a hortatory manner, at persuasion. It rather teaches us to present, in an attractive and impressive manner, considerations that should convince the understanding, and stir the conscience, and at the same time indirectly enlist the affections. Direct exhortation is generally powerless, unless in connection with satisfactory reasoning, or a lucid and attractive exhibition of a subject. To Whately's views in the following extract, every judicious man will assent:— "Sermons would probably have more effect, if, instead of being, as they frequently are, directly *hortatory*, they were more in a *didactic* form; — occupied chiefly in *explaining* some transaction related, or doctrine laid down, in Scripture. The generality of hearers are too much familiarized to direct exhortation to feel it adequately: if they are led to the same point obliquely, as it were, and induced to dwell with interest for a considerable time on some point, closely, though incidentally, connected with the most awful and important truths, a very slight application to themselves might make a greater impression than the most vehement appeal in the outset: often indeed they would themselves make this application unconsciously; and if

To awaken in the hearers solicitude respecting their spiritual concerns, and properly to direct it; to cherish their devout affections; to call forth their energies, both for advancement in piety and for usefulness; — these great purposes of preaching require something besides logical habits of mind and ample attainments in professional and general learning. Such habits and attainments may be possessed; and yet no sinner be turned from the error of his way, and no righteous man greatly aided in his spiritual life. On the other hand, in the absence of these very desirable qualifications, the earnestness which a deep conviction of religious truth produces, and the solicitude of a heart alive to the claims of God and to the wants of men, and singly intent on winning men to righteousness, will, in spite of disadvantages, be honored in securing the ends of preaching. For the highest efficiency of the pulpit, ample instruction and cogent reasoning must be pervaded by these animating qualities.

With the passing remark, that sermons should also possess a just dignity corresponding to the purity and elevation of religious themes, and to the powerful influence of the pulpit on the general character of a congregation, — yet a dignity not obtruding itself, nor chilling the warm affections of a soul that would by all means save men — it remains only to say, that the general spirit of sermons is a far more

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on any this procedure made no impression, it can hardly be expected that any thing else would. To use a homely illustration, a moderate charge of powder will have more effect in splitting a rock, if we begin by deep boring, and introducing the charge into the very heart of it, than ten times the quantity exploded on the surface." Elements of Rhetoric, Part II. Chapter II. § 1.

important consideration than any particular excellence of structure and style, or than all such excellences combined.* If they bear the impress of a mind habitually conversant with the eternal world and the final destinies of men, they will be effective even amid marked literary deficiencies: if they are destitute of spiritual unction, they lack the soul of effective preaching. Let them have each class of excellences; be truly evangelical in sentiment, copiously instructive, discriminating, earnest, affectionate, and properly dignified in their tone; they will then be such as human nature requires in any state of cultivation, and such as will eminently conduce to the spiritual well-being of men.

* Of this, the sermons of President Edwards are a signal instance. With acknowledged deficiencies in point of structure and style, they were, in consequence of the spirit which pervaded them, remarkably effective.

CHAPTER IX.

STYLE OF SERMONS.

We have thus far been occupied with the thoughts, or the substance, of a sermon. The wording, or more generally the style, of sermons, next requires attention.

Importance of style.

So intimately connected are thought and language, and so dependent for its proper influence is the former on the latter, that we need not discuss their comparative value. Neither of the two can be safely disregarded. Negligence in respect to style is injustice to one's thoughts; their proper efficacy is denied them. A connection, however, will generally exist, in point of clearness, strength, and other essential qualities, between a man's thoughts and his style. This is only saying that his style will represent his mind; or, in the language of Buffon, that "style is the man himself."

And yet a just expression of thought depends greatly on judicious views of style. If a writer possess such views, his thoughts will never fail, through fault in his language, of producing their true effect. When they fail of a marked effect, the reason will be that the thoughts themselves are not of a striking character.

The power of a good style in contributing to the efficacy of thoughts, is demonstrated by the fact that skill in the use of language will often impart force to obvious and

familiar truths. A truth, or a moral lesson, which was impressed on us when we were taught the Lord's prayer, may, by the charm of the style in which some preacher addresses us, become invested with all the interest of a new truth; and we may almost seem to have never before rightly apprehended it.

The superiority, also, of one man to another in regard to the impression which his thoughts make, is intimately connected with his style. However much is due to the attraction of an impressive delivery in the one case, yet who can doubt that to the diction of the former the effect is in a great measure to be traced!*

This suggests the additional idea, that a man's style of writing will affect his delivery. A vigorous, ardent writer is distinguished, in his delivery, from one of an opposite character. Judicious and successful attempts at improvement in style will often confer the additional satisfaction of a corresponding improvement in public address. The oratory of Demosthenes was no doubt materially affected by his labor, in order to improve his style, of seven times copying the works of Thucydides. If a preacher habitually writes in a simply didactic style, his delivery will be rather that of a teacher, or a reader, than of a public speaker. Let him break up his habit of composition, and adopt, in suitable paragraphs, a bold, nervous, interrogatory style, or the rapid, familiar, brief style of animated conversation, and would not this transformation of style naturally transform also his delivery? If it should fail of this effect, the failure would result from timidity, from a shrinking at

* Compare, with reference to popular effect, a page or two of John Howe with a similar portion of Baxter. Payson, or Griffin.

the incongruity between his accustomed manner and that which his new style of writing would be so strongly urging on him, or from the perverting influence of a bad habit, rather than from a want of natural tendency in this style to call into action an unused class of powers. In truth, the mental qualities which would prompt to such a style could hardly submit to a tame delivery. The importance, then, to a preacher, of cultivating a good style, swells beyond calculation.

Some men, indeed, without the usual opportunities for acquiring a good style in early life, have, subsequently, on some specially interesting occasion, written with ease and clearness, and even with vigor: and this may seem to prove that cultivation of style is needless. But it only proves, that in order to write well a person must have a subject concerning which he has definite ideas, and in which he feels an interest; and that he ought to express his ideas with simplicity and exactness, and without any forced attempt at graces of composition. Nature will always be true to her children who thus obey her own impulses.

It is also true, that much of the time which many an educated man devoted, in early life, to what he called the cultivation of style, was worse than lost; because he was occupied, not in gathering materials for thought, or in tasking his inventive powers on some interesting subject, but in forming beautiful expressions, or in imitating some distinguished writer. Nature was thus forestalled. Words, not things, were sought for; and, as a just retribution, counters were treasured up, instead of real coin. But this only proves either want of judgment in teachers, or, what is more probable, the unwillingness of early youth to obey the dictates of maturity. Hence, the greater necessity, at

a more advanced period, of retrieving past errors and of proposing a proper aim.* It has often happened, that a man, after having actually entered the Christian ministry, has been under the necessity, in order to be a truly natural and impressive preacher, of unlearning in the department of writing much of what he had laboriously sought to learn.

Qualities of the Sermon-Style.

The style of sermons, as of all productions, must be decided by the purposes to which they are directed. These are, to inform and convince the understanding, awaken the conscience, and to engage the heart, on religious subjects. Purposes, thus relating to the higher powers of the soul, and involving so momentous interests, demand in an eminent degree the graver qualities of PERSPICUITY and ENERGY.

Perspicuity.

I. The preacher's thoughts ought, of course, to be very clear and well-defined,† and to be clearly expressed. "If

* The true method of improving in writing is, to improve in knowledge and good sense. Horace wisely tells us — "The origin and fount of all good writing is sound and abundant knowledge;" and Cicero's remark is worthy of constant remembrance — Rerum copia verborum copiam gignit. If you have something valuable to say, language will not refuse its aid. The study of style merely is of little use, except to one who has already acquired large mental stores, or to one who regularly devotes a short time to this purpose while he is mainly occupied in enlarging his acquisitions.

† "Confusion and perplexity in writing," observes Bishop Butler, in the preface to his Sermons, "is without excuse; because any one

I know not the meaning of the voice," says the apostle Paul, "I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian [a foreigner], and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me. — In the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." 1 Cor. 14: 11, 19.

"Perspicuity," Quinctilian remarks, "is a prime excellence. It produces a style which will command the approval of the learned, and be adapted to the capacity of the unlearned. Our language ought so clearly to convey our meaning, that that meaning shall fall on the hearers' minds, as the sun-light falls on our eyes." When the sun *shines*, it is only necessary not to close our eyes. If a public speaker is really expressing valuable thoughts, what a pity that he should envelope them in a hazy medium! *

The sentiments of Augustin on this point are, in prin-

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may, if he pleases, know whether he understands and sees through what he is about; and it is unpardonable for a man to lay his thoughts before others, when he is conscious that he himself does not know whereabouts he is, or how the matter before him stands. It is coming abroad in a disorder, which he ought to be dissatisfied to find himself in at home."

Fontenelle, in reference to his own literary habits, says — "In writing, I always endeavor to understand myself."

* John Foster, in commending the style of Tytler's Life of Lord Kames, observes — "It is so singularly lucid, so free from all affected rhetoric and artificial turns of phrase, that we have never viewed thoughts through a purer medium. It is so pure and perfect, that we can read on, a considerable way, without our attention being arrested by the medium; it is as if there were nothing, if we may so express ourselves, between us and the thought. And we are made to think of the medium after some time, only by the reflection how very clearly we have apprehended the sense, even when relating to the uncouth subjects of law, or the abstruse subjects of metaphysics." Foster's Miscellanies, p. 206.

ciple, so just, that they well deserve a place here; though, happily, on account of the intellectual culture which prevails so generally in our country, the occasions for a close application of them are infrequent. "So anxious ought the Christian teacher to be for clearness in his instructions, as even to forego some of the more cultivated forms of speech; nor will he be so solicitous whether his words will sound well, as whether they will distinctly convey what he wishes to present. In him should be exemplified what Cicero calls a *diligent negligence* [diligence, as to the substance of a discourse; comparative negligence, as to beauty of expression]. He will even descend from his own level, if occasion require, and adopt expressions which are common in the class of people he is addressing. For of what use is purity of style, if, in consequence of that purity, those whom we address do not receive our ideas? Why should we speak at all, if those for whose benefit we ought to speak cannot understand us? A preacher ought, then, to avoid all such forms of speech as are not suited to convey his meaning to the particular assembly he is addressing, however well adapted they might be to another assembly; and in their stead he should endeavor to select other pure words and phrases. But if there are no other of this character, or if none readily occur to him, he will use even less pure words, provided they distinctly and fully convey the thoughts which he desires to communicate. This course is doubly desirable in a minister of the gospel, because a hearer during public worship cannot, as in conversation, stop the speaker and obtain explanations of difficult words."*

These sentiments, while they are recommended by their

* De Doctrina Christiana. Lib. IV. c. x.

spirit of Christian condescension, are sustained also by one of the first principles of rhetoric. In addressing an assembly, what is the preacher's object? To correct the literary taste of his hearers? To gain credit for superior intelligence? Not at all. The point he wishes to carry is, to make his hearers understand and feel a certain religious subject; to impress on them the claims of the Saviour; to quicken their consciences; to induce them to seek eternal life. And what does rhetoric pronounce to be the way to carry this point? To present his thoughts in language, more or less refined according to circumstances, but adapted to secure for them the desired access to his hearers' minds and hearts. More or less refined, according to circumstances; for it is evidently preposterous to make any one assembly, or any one class of hearers, a standard for all; and equally absurd it is to suppose that perspicuity requires the sacrifice of refinement. How very often the most refined language is the most perspicuous!

Perspicuity, then, claims the preacher's special attention. He addresses assemblies, in general, very promiscuously composed; and all classes, whether of cultivated intellect or not, require it in a preacher, just as in a lawyer, or a statesman. And he who is willing to use language which is unsuited to his hearers, either by its being not sufficiently elevated, or by its being too ornate, betrays a defect in his mind, or in his education.

The plan of this work does not admit of formally stating rules for securing perspicuity. Such rules will be found in Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric, and in Whately's Elements of Rhetoric; works which cannot be too highly recommended. The general remark may, however, be here made, that perspicuity in preach-

Directness of Expression.

ing requires the avoidance of a circuitous and inverted style,* and of a scientific phraseology.† In writing for the

* Compare the extract, in Chapter VI., from the Sermons of Dr. Barrow.

† "Even where the topics are not such as are fairly open to censure, a large class of preachers, especially amongst the young, grievously err by investing them with the technicalities of science and philosophy; either because they foolishly suppose they thereby give their compositions a more philosophical air, or because they disdain the homely and the vulgar. We remember hearing of a very worthy man of this class, who, having occasion to tell his audience the simple truth, that there was not one gospel for the rich and another for the poor, informed them, that "if they would not be saved on 'general principles,' they could not be saved at all!" With such men it is not sufficient to say, that such and such a thing must be, but there is always a 'moral or physical necessity' for it. The will is too old-fashioned a thing to be mentioned, and every thing is done by 'volition;' duty is expanded into 'moral obligation;' men not only *ought* to do this, or that, or the other, it is always by 'some principle of their moral nature;' they not only *like* to do so and so, but they are 'impelled by some natural propensity;' men not only *think* and *do*, but they are never represented as thinking and doing without some parade of their 'intellectual processes and active powers.' Such discourses are full of 'moral beauty,' and 'necessary relations,' and 'philosophical demonstrations,' and 'laws of nature,' and '*a priori* and *a posteriori*' arguments. If some simple fact of physical science is referred to in the way of argument or illustration, it cannot be presented in common language, but must be exhibited in the pomp of the most approved scientific technicalities. If there be a common and a scientific name for the same object, ten to one that the latter is adopted. Heat straightway becomes 'calorie;' lightning, the 'electric fluid;' instead of plants and animals, we are surrounded by 'organized substances;' life is nothing half so good as the 'vital principle:' phenomena of all kinds are very plentiful; these phenomena are 'developed' and 'combined,' and 'analyzed,' and, in short, done every thing with except being made intelligible. Not only is such language as this obscurely understood, or not un-

pulpit, we should, as we do in animated conversation, or as in the free, unlabored style of letter-writing, say the very thing we wish to say in the words which our common sense suggests as appropriate to the occasion and to the persons addressed. A feeble expansiveness, not to be mistaken for perspicuity, and an obscure brevity would thus be avoided. A preacher ought not to be anxious for uncommon modes of speech. If, with solid thoughts, his style be eminently lucid, it has an indispensable quality; a quality for the lack of which no graces can atone, and which will often unconsciously attract to itself many of the highest graces.

Saxon-English words preferable.

It should also be borne in mind, that Saxon-English words are generally more perspicuous to the mass of hearers, than words which have flowed into our language from the Greek, or the Latin, or the French, and which, therefore, partake somewhat of a learned air. Perspicuity and energy are both here concerned, it being universally admitted that such words are not only clearer to a common audience, but have also more strength (perhaps, however, only as being more perspicuous,) than those which originated in a different language. Illustrations would readily occur in consulting an English dictionary, or attentively examining the style of standard authors. Our version of the Bible, though by no means free from words of Latin origin, yet abounds in Saxon-English words; and this circumstance has greatly contributed to its being so eminently *the book for the people*. To

derstood at all, but, even if perfectly understood, must necessarily be far less effective than those simple terms of common life, which for the most part may be substituted for them."—Edinburgh Review, Vol. LXXII., Article, The British Pulpit: a judicious and racy article, deserving the careful perusal of every young preacher.

this circumstance the Pilgrim's Progress, also, has been largely indebted for its popularity and usefulness. Let any one imagine himself addressing a company of persons occupied in the ordinary cares of life, or having but little acquaintance with literature — such as are by far the majority in our religious assemblies — and aiming with an absorbing earnestness to effect a practical conviction on a subject felt by him to be of vital interest, and would it not seem almost absurd to say *succumb* rather than *yield*, *incarceration* than *imprisonment*, *inculpate* than *blame* or *find fault with*, *deracinate* than *uproot*, or *root out*? *

Examples need not be multiplied; it is enough to have directed attention to this point. The caution, however, is necessary, that in this particular, as in others, an extreme should be avoided. For, by universal acknowledgment, some of the Saxon-English terms and modes of expression are cumbrous, and yet not more perspicuous than equivalent terms of a different origin. Awkwardness should be shunned, as well as over-refinement.

Energy.

II. The style of sermons ought to be energetic. Some parts of sermons require only perspicuity; but the principal parts require that vigor which flows from deep conviction

* Lord Brougham says of Mr. Fox — "As he rejected, from the correctness of his taste, all vicious ornaments, and was most sparing, indeed, in the use of figures at all; so, in his choice of words, he justly shunned foreign idiom, or words borrowed, whether from the ancient or modern languages; and affected the pure Saxon tongue, the resources of which are unknown to so many who use it, both in writing and in speaking."

and genuine feeling. Without energy, the most momentous truths are, through the sameness of religious exercises, in danger of being heard, if heard indeed at all, with utter indifference.

Energy in style depends greatly on natural genius and religious sensibility; but any man, whether richly endowed by nature, or not, may be materially aided by observing the manner in which a truly earnest spirit expresses its convictions. Scarcely anything, it will appear from such observation, is more inconsistent with energy than showy epithets, nicely balanced and sonorous periods, and all those juvenile indulgences in composition which deserve the name of verbosity. A nervous style is the very opposite of a tumid one. It will be brief and condensed.* It will employ special, rather than general, terms; telling, for instance, of a *tiger's* darting on his prey, rather than the leaping forth of *some ferocious animal.* It will have a liberal amount of well-adapted metaphors (and of such the more the better,) and of brief comparisons; brief, because enlarged and elaborate comparisons, especially if introduced with formality, tend to withdraw a hearer from the subject to the comparison itself, or to the writer. They better suit the poet than the orator.† It will be a suggestive, rather

* Est brevitate opus, ut currat sententia, neu se
Impediat verbis lassas onerantibus aures.
Horat. Sat. Lib. I. 10.

† An imitator of Jeremy Taylor — "the poet of theology" — would be much in danger of erring in respect of comparisons.

"It is a remark of Aristotle (Rhet. book iii. ch. 4.), that the Simile is more suitable in Poetry, and that Metaphor is the only ornament of language in which the orator may freely indulge. He should, therefore, be the more careful to bring a Simile as near as possible to the Metaphorical form." — Whately's Rhetoric, Part III. Ch. II. § 3.

than an expanded style; setting the hearers' minds at work and leaving somewhat for their imaginations to supply; conveying, as do the Scriptures occasionally, in some pithy expression, or aphorism, the comprehensive sense almost of a general principle. It will often employ interrogation; and, in the arrangement of words, it will, in obedience to nature's impulse, give due prominence to that word, or clause, on which a hearer's mind should be chiefly fixed.*

Varieties in style.

It has already been intimated, that not all parts of a sermon alike require energy. Indeed, every sermon will have diversity in its style, according to the nature of its different parts. Nor do all subjects alike require energy. The pulpit demands some subjects which rather need ampleness of description. Some thoughts also, very obvious indeed, but very important, must be presented in a variety of forms and applications. But though diffuseness may, on such occasions, be indulged, it is not diffuseness in the structure of sentences, in opposition to compactness; it is rather a presenting of the same thought in various aspects,† or a multiplying of particulars related to some subject. It is a dwelling on a certain thought; a keeping of it before the mind by the use of diverse views and applications, that, by being distinctly contemplated, it may make an enduring impression, if not on the most active minds in the audience, yet on the generality of the

* On the subject of energy in style, as on other qualities, Campbell and Whately ought to be carefully studied. It may be necessary to remark, that Campbell employs the word Vivacity to express what, in conformity to Whately's use, is here meant by Energy.

† Compare Whately's suggestions concerning Repetition, in his Rhetoric, Part III. ch. I. § 2., and ch. II. § 8.

hearers.* And all this may be done by a skilful writer without verbiage, without feebleness of style; indeed, in a style which, though not positively energetic, will be highly engaging.†

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* This may, however, be carried to excess even for the generality of hearers. When several diverse modes of expressing, or illustrating, a thought, occur to a writer of a fertile imagination, it would be well for him to consider whether he has not employed more than are necessary for an impressive apprehension of the thought; and whether he is not in danger of wearying the hearers, or of occupying them with mere forms of speech, instead of deeply impressing a thought. If so, he should of course dismiss some of these forms of speech, and pass on to new thoughts.

† Compare the following passage from Hare's sermon on the text —"Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one who is in debted to us:"

"Conceive a revengeful, unforgiving man repeating this prayer, which you all, I hope, repeat daily. Conceive a man with a heart full of wrath against his neighbor, with a memory which treasures up the little wrongs, and insults, and provocations he fancies himself to have received from that neighbor. Conceive such a man praying to God Most High to forgive him his trespasses as he forgives the man who has trespassed against him. What in the mouth of such a man do these words mean? They mean — but that you may more fully understand their meaning, I will turn them into a prayer, which we will call the prayer of the unforgiving man, — 'O God, I have sinned against thee many times, from my youth up until now. I have often been forgetful of thy goodness; I have not daily thanked thee for thy mercies; I have neglected thy service; I have broken thy laws; I have done many things utterly wrong against thee. All this I know, and besides this, doubtless, I have committed many secret sins which, in my blindness, I have failed to notice. Such is my guiltiness, O Lord, in thy sight. Deal with me, I beseech thee, even as I deal with my neighbor. He hath not offended me one tenth, one hundredth part as much as I have offended thee; but he has offended me very grievously, and I cannot forgive him. Deal

Essay-style to be avoided.

While preachers should not fall into the error of attempting to be constantly energetic, they should with still greater

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with me, I beseech thee, O Lord, as I deal with him. He has been very ungrateful to me, though not a tenth, not a hundredth part as ungrateful as I have been to thee; yet I cannot overlook such base and shameful ingratitude. Deal with me, I beseech thee, O Lord, as I deal with him. I remember and treasure up every little trifle which shows how ill he has behaved to me. Deal with me, I beseech thee, O Lord, as I deal with him. I am determined to take the very first opportunity of doing him an ill turn. Deal with me, I beseech thee, O Lord, as I deal with him.' Can anything be more shocking and horrible than such a prayer? Is not the very sound of it enough to make one's blood run cold? Yet this is just the prayer which the unforgiving man offers up every time he repeats the Lord's prayer; for he prays to God to forgive him in the same manner in which he forgives his neighbor. But he does not forgive his neighbor; so he prays to God not to forgive him. God grant that his prayer may not be heard, for he is praying a curse on his own head."

The expansion, or detail, which the preceding extract may illustrate, agrees well with that of which Whately speaks in his second chapter on Persuasion. The case of presenting arguments for the single purpose of producing conviction, differs in its requisitions from that in which persuasion is to be conjoined with conviction, and to be sought as the principal purpose — and such should generally be the case in sermons. Whately says — "With respect to Argument, different occasions will call for different degrees of Copiousness, Repetition, and Expansion; — the chain of Reasoning employed may, in itself, consist of more or fewer links; — abstruse and complex Arguments must be unfolded at greater length than such as are more simple; — and the more uncultivated the audience, the more full must be the explanation and illustration, and the more frequent the repetition, of the Arguments presented to them; but still the same general principle prevails in all these cases; viz., to aim

care guard against composing sermons in the manner of an essay, or of a literary disquisition. A public address demands a vivacity which can be dispensed with in a production designed to be read at one's leisure. An essay should be transformed in order to become a sermon, or a component part of a sermon. It would need to be materially new-modelled; many of its sentences it would be necessary to simplify, or wholly to recast. It would require greater copiousness, or amplification; and not only the forms of address, the first and the second persons instead of the third, but also concrete terms instead of abstract, and a general adaptation to the idea of its being a direct and felt communication from the preacher to his hearers. Such ought a sermon to be; but such, for the most part, it cannot be, if composed after the model of an essay.*

merely at letting the Arguments be fully *understood and admitted;* this will indeed occupy a shorter or longer space, according to the nature of the case and the character of the hearers; all Expansion and Repetition *beyond* what is necessary to accomplish conviction, is in every instance tedious and disgusting. On the contrary, in a description of anything that is likely to act on the feelings, this effect will by no means be produced as soon as the understanding is sufficiently informed; detail and expansion are here not only admissible, but absolutely necessary, in order that the mind may have leisure and opportunity to form vivid and distinct ideas. For, as Quinctilian well observes, he who tells us that a city was sacked, although that one word implies all that occurred, will produce little, if any, impression on the feelings, in comparison of one who sets before us a lively description of the various lamentable circumstances; to tell the *whole*, he adds, is by no means the same as to tell *every thing.*

"It is not, however, with a view to the Feelings only that some copiousness of detail will occasionally be needful: it will often happen that the Judgment cannot be correctly formed, without dwelling on circumstances."—Elements of Rhetoric, Part II. Ch. II. § 2.

* While insisting on the necessity, in oratory, of a different style

On this point Lord Brougham remarks, in his sketch of Burke, that "if any one thing is proved by unvarying experience of popular assemblies, it is that an excellent dissertation makes a poor speech. The speaker is not the only person actively engaged while a great oration is pronouncing; the audience have their share; they must be excited, and for this purpose constantly appealed to as recognized persons of the drama. The didactic orator (if, as has been said of the didactic poet, this be not a contradiction in terms,) has it all to himself; the hearer is merely passive; and the consequence is, he soon ceases to be a listener, and, if he can, even to be a spectator."

The idea just presented suggests another, which has already been hinted; namely, that the brief, rapid, and varied forms of speech which appear in animated conversation may be advantageously employed in sermons. They

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from that of books, Herder makes the following quotation from Quinctilian, X. I. 16 — Alia legentes, alia audientes magis adjuvant. Excitat qui dicit; spiritu ipso, nec imagine et ambitu rerum, sed rebus ipsis incendit. Vivunt enim omnia et moventur, excipimusque nova illa, velut nascentia, cum favore et solicitudine. Compare also Cicero's ORATOR, § 40.

Moore, in his Life of Sheridan, observes that "a report verbatim of any effective speech must always appear diffused and ungraceful in the perusal; the very repetitions and redundancy, the accumulation of epithets which gave force and momentum to the career of delivery, but weaken and encumber the march of style when read."

"Some of the best essays in our language," says Gresley, in his Treatise on Preaching, "appear in the shape of printed sermons; but if these were to be preached as they are published, they would be unimpressive *sermons*, precisely because they are good *essays*."

Of the particular quality referred to in the text, the sermons of Pres. Edwards, Pres. Davies, Dr. Griffin, Dr. Channing, and the distinguished French preachers, are good specimens.

would thus be familiar, without being undignified, and earnest without display.*

Elegance of Style.

No distinct mention has been here made of *elegance*, as a quality of the sermon-style. The reasons are, that for the purposes of oratory elegance is of minor importance; and that, if the qualities which have been specified are possessed, elegance, such as is suitable, will not be lacking. It will associate itself with those qualities, as a natural attendant; and elegance which comes in a different manner, or seeks a place for itself, is an intruder that should rather be repelled than encouraged. A public speaker ought not to be solicitous for the beauties of language; though against blemishes, since some of the choicest specimens of composition are, by our school-books and our various periodical publications, made familiar to all classes of the community, he should carefully guard. Still, if, through a regard to beauty, he aims at making his sentences particularly fine, his taste is not sufficiently pure, nor his purpose sufficiently disinterested. He is not a true orator. When, however, a beautiful expression presents itself unsought, and will in its proper place fix attention on the real object of thought rather than on itself, or than on the skill of him who uses

* The qualities which sermons demand, or permit, in both thought and style, cannot be better stated than in Denham's two lines descriptive of the Thames —

> Though deep, yet clear; though gentle, yet not dull,
> Strong without rage; without o'erflowing, full.

For these lines, in their present application, though they are the production of an English poet, I am indebted to Dr. Tholuck, of Germany. See Predigten von A. Tholuck. Vorwort; st. XXVII. Hamburg, 1838.

it, then certainly it should be adopted, and be used to the best advantage. But for a preacher to betray a fondness for ornaments of style, is an offence against a first principle of true eloquence: it is ostentation.*

Quinctilian's instructions on this point are marked with his usual good sense. 'Beauty of language,' he cautions us, 'ought not to be regarded as an end in itself. However desirable such beauty may be, when associated with clearness and grandeur of thought, and when it naturally follows the orator's conceptions, to seek for it as a distinct object will insure a failure as to the orator's legitimate end. Not words, but things, deserve our chief solicitude. Besides, the most valuable thoughts in a discourse are such as are recommended by their simplicity and naturalness. Ought we to be dissatisfied with a strictly correct expression of our thoughts, because it does not seem learned? or because any other person might employ it? .... Cicero himself,' he continues, 'cautions us against departing from the ordinary modes of

* "I caution you against committing to memory beautiful expressions and flowery sentences. They entice a person from the right path; and the young man who follows such false lights (ignes fatui) is lost. A man who seizes on beautiful words, and for the sake of them writes out pages of fine sentences, I cannot regard with confidence; he is doing a senseless, childish piece of work. All flowers of language should spring out of the subject itself, just as natural flowers spring out of the earth. — Images and figures should be naturally connected with the subject, as a bough and its twig, or as a blossom and a leaf spring necessarily, as it were, from such a particular root, on such a stem." Herder; Theologie, p. 71.

Herder says, also, that figures thus naturally provided are necessary; and that their absence from the place where they belong would produce a chasm in the discourse.

speech. Such a proceeding in an orator he condemns as one of the greatest rhetorical faults.'

If usual phraseology, not defaced by positive blemishes, and not repulsive by any associated thoughts, clearly and strongly convey our meaning, why should we search far and wide for other expressions? Language is an instrument, not an end; and it ought to be appropriate, and subordinate, to its end. Now, however justly beauty may be demanded in a poem, or in any production designed chiefly to please, beauty in a public discourse, involving some great interest and having mainly in view enlightened conviction and persuasion, is of minor consideration. Appropriateness to conviction and persuasion is, in such a discourse, the chief thing; and even a homely style, if it clearly convey and deeply impress solid thoughts, is incalculably better than the most elegant style which attracts attention to itself. If, in addition to this quality, a preacher, singly intent on the great object of his commission, expresses his ideas in beautiful language, unconsciously as it were, and without alluring the hearers' attention from the subject to himself, or to the beauty of his language, so much the better; for with him *the great object* is held supreme; with that, nothing is allowed to interfere; to that, every thing is made subservient.* But should he be withdrawn from the true purpose, and beauty of language become itself an ob-

* "Perspicuity and Vivacity are qualities of style which minister directly to the great purpose of eloquence, and which, indeed, language must possess before it can reach its rhetorical end by both of its two leading paths; the former being essential for the conviction of the understanding, and the latter for the awakening of the fancy and the feelings. The same thing cannot be said, at least without qualification, as to the third quality of style, namely, Beauty, or El-

ject of anxiety, he would cease to be an orator convincing and persuading men; he would then be exhibiting himself. On a kindred point, Whately well remarks, that "young writers, of genius, ought especially to be admonished to ask themselves frequently, not whether this or that is a *striking expression*, but whether it makes the *meaning* more striking than another phrase would, whether it impresses more forcibly the sentiment to be conveyed." *

This distinguished author observes, also, concerning "antiquated, new-coined and new-compounded words, or words applied in an unusual sense" — a class of words which some men's fondness for the beauties of style inclines them to adopt — "that prose writers should be very cautious and sparing in the use of them; not only because in excess they produce

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egance, whose immediate purpose is the gratification of taste..... If it is found that the gratification of the taste of those whom we address is likely to impede our progress towards impressing on their minds the truth which we wish to teach, we should at once abandon all attempts to furnish such gratification, and pursue our principal end by means of clearness and animation. But if it is found, as it most usually will be, that our purpose may be promoted by gratifying the sense of beauty in our hearers — either through the general elegance of our composition, or even through longer and more sustained addresses to the imagination, not issuing in the excitement of passion, but resting ultimately in the mere pleasure of contemplation, — we shall be bound to use, so far as we are able, this lawful means of persuasion; taking care, however, to recollect, that as soon as we have reason to believe the minds of the hearers in danger of being tempted towards such a lively attention to those incidental ornaments of our discourse as will exclude from their thoughts the main subject of it, we have thus evidence that it is time to discard the assistant, which, like a spoiled domestic servant, has begun to play the part of the master." — Encyc. Brit. 7th ed. Vol. XIX. Art. Rhetoric; p. 215.

* Rhetoric. Part III. Ch. II. § 3.

a barbarous dialect, but because they are so likely to suggest the idea of *artifice;* the perception of which is most especially adverse to energy. The occasional apt introduction of such a term will sometimes produce a powerful effect; but whatever may seem to savor of affectation, or even of great solicitude and study in the choice of terms, will effectually destroy the true effect of eloquence. The language which betrays art, and carries not an air of simplicity and sincerity, may, indeed, by some hearers, be thought not only very fine, but even very energetic; this very circumstance, however, may be taken for a proof that it is not so; for if it *had* been, *they would not have thought about it*, but would have been occupied exclusively with the *subject*. An unstudied and natural air, therefore, is an excellence to which the true orator, i. e. he who is aiming to *carry his point*, will be ready to sacrifice any other that may interfere with it." *

A preacher has the less need of solicitude for elegance, from the fact which has already been intimated, that the style of public address so readily dispenses with that finish

* Rhetoric. Part III. Ch. II. § 5. I may be excused for here introducing the sentiments of John Foster, who says, near the close of his fourth Letter on the Aversion of Men of Taste to Evangelical Religion—"A gaudy verbosity is always eloquence in the opinion of him that writes it; but what is the effect on the reader? Real eloquence strikes on your mind with irresistible force, and leaves you not the possibility of asking or thinking whether it *be* eloquence; but the sounding sentences of these writers leave you cool enough to examine with doubtful curiosity a language that seems threatening to move or astonish you, without actually doing it. It is something like the case of a false alarm of thunder; where a sober man, that is not apt to startle at sounds, looks out to see whether it be not the rumbling of a cart."

which is demanded in a printed work.* The spoken style, while it should not admit positive faults, may be less periodic and more abrupt than the printed; and it will be, in consequence, more fit for the mass of hearers. Oratory requires, mainly, entire perspicuity, energy bordering on vehemence, and frequently vehemence itself. These qualities will atone for many faults of mere expression, and will even prevent those faults from being perceived; while the most finished composition, if destitute of energy, will leave the hearers without any valuable impression, and amount to little more than "tame propriety." Compare the finished sermons of Dr. Blair,† as to the power of strongly impressing the public mind, with the sermons of Dr. South, who, with no particular solicitude about beauty, aimed at a straight-forward and earnest expression of his thoughts. ‡ Beauty of style is desirable in its place; but oratory is not dependent on it.

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* So true is this that a preacher, in delivering a carefully written sermon, would often find it advantageous to alter, omit, add, or repeat, in various passages, according to the promptings of excited genius, or emotion, at the time. Sermons, it is well to remember, are designed for the pulpit, not for the press.

† Yet not *because* they are finished sermons, were they incapable of deeply impressing the public mind; but because, so far as style is concerned, they were not finished according to a correct standard. They are conformed to the idea of a correct and elegant essay-style; not to the style of public address.

‡ While South deserves praise for the quality mentioned in the text, as well as for his thoroughness in treating subjects, his original thoughts, his apt and striking illustrations, he yet indulged so much in unchristian sarcasm and unbecoming wit, and was occasionally so coarse withal, that the satisfaction of naming him in this connection is seriously impaired.

Affectation of beauty.

If genuine elegance of style is not indispensable to the preacher, the affectation of fine language should, certainly, be shunned; and to this, particularly, as well as to seeking for beauty as an object in itself, the preceding remarks are applicable. These remarks by no means aim to banish true elegance of expression; for this is perfectly consistent with entire simplicity and naturalness; indeed, in strict propriety, requires simplicity and naturalness. Nor is it their aim to banish beautiful thoughts; for these may be suggested by the preacher's subject, and may be expressed without affectation. The Bible abounds with beautiful, as well as sublime thoughts, and with beautiful language; but who ever supposed, that the sacred writers sought for beauty as an end in itself? They expressed the conceptions which filled their minds in forms of speech that, as we should say, came naturally. So does every man, under the pressure of real feeling. Without constraint and without thinking, at the time, of beauty, or of any other quality in language, he is intent solely on conveying his conceptions.*

Simplicity.

As simplicity in sermons has been insisted on, it seems desirable fully to explain that term. The following extract

* "It is only to the mere talker, who is hunting after flowers, that every fine-sounding word is equally valuable. The orator *weighs* words, never sacrifices precision and truth in what he has to say, to a favorite form of speech, and employs no embellishments which cannot contribute to the purpose of making his subject more clearly apprehended, or of imparting to his expression of thought more strength, impressiveness and dignity."—J. G. Marezoll; Uber die Bestimmung des Canzelredners.

from Schott's Fundamental Principles of Rhetoric and Homiletics * answers this purpose. "That work of art is called *simple*, which does not suggest to him who examines it any suspicion of the labor which has been expended on its production. It seems to have been produced without pains-taking, without a rigid application of rules. It appears to be as it is, because it could not have been otherwise. The seeming ease and naturalness of its construction make a way for it at once to the heart. A discourse is *simple*, when its propositions are so stated and proved as to ingratiate themselves at once into the belief; instead of being incumbered with such a parade of argument, as to occupy the mind with logical forms rather than the main and substantial truth. It is simple, when its arrangement is such as to disclose the whole subject easily to the view, instead of being disfigured with artificial divisions and subdivisions, concealing the doctrine which is parcelled out thus unnecessarily. It is simple when its sentences are formed as if they could not have been written in any other way, and its ornaments appear to spring spontaneously from the theme; and this noble simplicity is wanting, when the style swells into pompous periods, and the metaphors seem not to have presented themselves of their own accord, but to have been sought out with care. A sermon which glides along in this simple course, enters at once into the hearer's mind. . . . As the simple style insinuates itself at once into the heart, it is better adapted than any other to the purposes of eloquence. It is peculiarly congenial with sacred eloquence; for the spirit, the very nature of the Christian scheme is fitted to raise the sacred orator above all puerile affectation and love of display, and to make his style, like

* See Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. II. p. 45.

that of the earl est records of his faith, artless, and therefore winning." *

General Directions.

A few general suggestions on the subject of style will close the present chapter.

A writer, when composing his discourse, ought not to be thinking of rules, but to give unfettered action to his powers, become absorbed in his subject, and write just as feeling prompts. His production will then bear the stamp of his individual character; and, unconsciously, all the rhetorical excellences which are in harmony with his mind and attainments will be found on his pages. In order, also, that his discourse, though prepared in retirement, may have a general adaptation to public delivery, his mind should adjust itself, as far as possible, to the position of a person addressing an audience.

An acquaintance should be maintained with models of good writing, both in prose and in poetry. The best specimens of oratorical composition, both sacred and secular, may be highly serviceable as cultivating fervor of feeling, and as presenting the principles of eloquence not skeleton-wise, but in living forms, and thus preventing the danger which may attend critical exercises during the course of

* It would be here appropriate to remark on the *theological*, or *religious dialect* which has so much impaired the style of the pulpit. But, as the views already presented tend, indirectly, at least, to correct abuses of this kind, and as the topic is one of great extent, the student's advantage is better secured by referring him to the third and fourth Letters in Foster's Essay on the Aversion of Men of Taste to Evangelical Religion.

education; — the danger of becoming "coldly correct and critically dull." Another danger, however, must be shunned; namely, that of imitating the peculiarities of distinguished writers. Those peculiarities were, probably, in their case, natural; but not being so to another person, an attempt at imitation might repress, if not paralyze, his own original powers. The productions of distinguished men should be studied, in order to discover the principles which guided them, so that a person may give a right direction to his own genius. He may thus approach as near to a good model as his natural endowments and his circumstances will allow; he may thus become even superior to his model. Demosthenes, for instance, was remarkable 'for perspicuity and energy, for freedom from all useless glitter, for keeping close to his subject, for making no remarks and using no illustrations but such as bear directly on the matter in hand;' "he is never found making any step, in any direction, which does not advance his main object, and lead towards the conclusion to which he is striving to bring his hearers."* Let others do likewise.† This is the only proper imitation; namely, an adopting of the principles which guided men who are worthy to be models. All other imitation should be only that unlabored resemblance which flows from familiarity with good writers, corresponding to the effect which is insensibly produced on a person's manners and spirit by intercourse with refined society.

Lastly; a young writer should cultivate the habit of correcting his productions. During composition, he should

* Lord Brougham.

† Not that a sermon is always to be conceived of as an oration; or that Demosthenes is to be considered a universal standard. If so, Chrysostom was no preacher.

allow his thoughts to flow on without interruption, and should surrender himself entirely to his subject. But when this work is performed, he should, after some interval, carefully examine his style, with particular reference to its perspicuity and energy; he should transpose clauses and recast whole sentences, if necessary, to make them more lucid and forcible; diluted and tame expressions should give place to others; and, in general, the phraseology should be conformed to a just conception of a spoken discourse. Adaptation should be observed throughout, in argument, illustration and language, to the particular assembly which is to be addressed. Experience, indeed, is requisite in order to attain this; but attention should be directed to it at the very commencement of public labors. Young preachers, who have just entered public life, should remember that they are more conversant with books than are the mass of hearers; and that, though their thoughts may not be at all beyond the capacity of the common mind, yet their sources of illustration and their diction may be widely different from those which the common mind requires, and may, therefore, rather impede than promote their object.

CHAPTER X.

DELIVERY OF SERMONS.

The trite remark, that the subject of delivery receives far less attention among the moderns than it did among the ancients, is often made to the disparagement of the pulpit in particular. When we consider, however, the many puerilities which were at some periods, among the ancients, combined with the delivery of speeches, and to which even the oratory of Cicero betrayed, to say the least, a tendency, we shall cease to lament that the times are so greatly changed. Indeed, the design of preaching is so different from that of other departments of oratory, whether ancient or modern, that it is scarcely possible to institute a comparison between them. The aim of secular oratory is, not to produce a moral change in men, but to advance some present interest; and it often shrewdly accommodates itself to circumstances, and to the known characters of hearers, in order to obtain its purpose. The preacher, on the contrary, aims, by inculcating religious truth, to produce a permanent change in men's characters, and to foster genuine righteousness; hence, he deals chiefly with the understanding and the conscience. Ancient eloquence concerned itself, also, very extensively with persons; preaching is mainly occupied with religious principles and conduct, and is therefore necessarily more abstract and less exciting. The pulpit

requires not, so much, impassioned oratory, as the winning, persuasive manner of a teacher and friend who is himself deeply convinced of religious truth, and is deeply solicitous that his instructions and counsels should find admission into his hearers' hearts. The idea of a teacher conveying instruction time after time to an assembly, and repeatedly inculcating the lessons of religion, corresponds, better than the idea of an orator, to the true notion of a preacher. The union of the two is, on various occasions, desirable. Yet experience shows, that a high degree of usefulness in the pulpit can be attained without rare oratorical powers; and it is a fact well deserving notice that in the best specimens of ministerial excellence, the idea of an orator, though not lost, yet becomes nearly merged in that of spiritual teacher and guide.

At the same time, justice will concede that the ministry, as a class, contains a fair proportion of eloquent men. Considering the many disadvantages, in regard to this point, under which ministers labor, we should probably find quite as much to commend, as to censure, in their discharge of pulpit services. True eloquence may exist, also, without the reputation of it; for the prevalent taste on this subject is a false one. A sermon may be composed and delivered most appropriately; that is, so as to awaken and fix attention, to make a subject understood, to produce enlightened belief, or conviction, to engage the feelings and the will; in other words, may have the essential spirit of eloquence, while no hearer has for a moment thought of the preacher's eloquence. And such eloquence is certainly more true and more befitting the pulpit, than that which does little else than make the hearers admire the preacher's oratorical powers. Still, preachers and candidates for the

ministry are far from bestowing on this subject the degree of attention which is proportioned to its importance.

The importance of a good delivery cannot easily be overrated. Not only is an indifferent discourse, well delivered, more profitable to the hearers, than a good one, badly delivered, but also a discourse well delivered is often better understood, and is more interesting to the hearers, than if read by them in private. Ambiguities of style, which would occasion inconvenience to a reader, may, by virtue of the speaker's manner of utterance, pass wholly unnoticed. Emphatic words and clauses receive a more just treatment; the peculiar significance of certain words, or sentences, is rendered instantly obvious, and their impressiveness increased, by the speaker's tones and expression of countenance. In an assembly occupied with an interesting discourse, the hearers act insensibly on each other; and their mutual sympathy contributes much to the effect of the discourse. Importance of a good delivery.

The institution of preaching is founded, therefore, in human nature. Men need to be excited and impelled. Public address secures, better than any private methods, the action of divine truth on their minds. Hence, God has made preaching his "great ordinance," * the chief means of bringing and keeping the gospel before the minds of men. Nothing could supply its place. When the gospel was introduced, such was the state of the world that no means of establishing it, by human agency, could have been at all comparable to preaching. And in those Christian communities which are the best instructed in the gospel, and the most imbued with its spirit, to relinquish Obligation to cultivate good delivery.

* Richard Cecil.

preaching would be to make a wilderness of a garden. Preachers of the gospel ought, then, to feel a special obligation to conform to this part of the divine plan, and assiduously to cultivate their power of impressively communicating, as well as that of acquiring, religious knowledge. For who can think lightly of divesting the gospel of half its power by his manner of presenting it?

Qualities of a good Delivery.

The appropriate qualities of pulpit delivery, somewhat like the style of sermons, may be comprehended under the two heads of *simplicity* and *earnestness*:—the simplicity and earnestness of a man who, without any solicitude that terminates on himself, is intent solely on communicating his ideas, and occupied with the sentiments he is uttering. All affectation—every thing that betrays art—is, in the pulpit, entirely out of place; a true minister seeks, not his hearers' applause, but their advancement in the love and practice of religion; not his own glory, but the Saviour's. So great and absorbing are the truths on which he speaks, that dulness, also, is wholly inadmissible. A genuine earnestness should pervade his whole manner.

The becoming delivery of sermons can hardly be better described, than in the reply of the celebrated Garrick to Dr. Stonehouse's question on the subject:—"You know how you would feel and speak in a parlor, concerning a friend who was in imminent danger of his life, and with what energetic pathos of diction and countenance, you would enforce the observance of that which you really thought would be for his preservation. You could not think of playing the orator, of studying your emphasis,

cadences, and gestures. You would be yourself; and the interesting nature of the subject impressing your heart, would furnish you with the most natural tone of voice, the most proper language, the most engaging features, and the most suitable and graceful gestures. What you would be in the parlor, be in the pulpit, and you will not fail to please, to affect, and to profit."

The sentiment of this reply needs but one qualifying remark; namely, that the presence of a large assembly naturally inspires greater earnestness and fervor, than a person would feel in addressing merely an individual.

The various particulars which require attention, as contributing to a good delivery, are better treated in books professedly devoted to elocution, than they can be in such a work as the present; and practical exercises, under a living teacher, are eminently desirable. Scarcely anything more can here be expected, than a few hints.

The importance of a good articulation is at once obvious. More depends on this, than on strength of voice; since men with a comparatively feeble voice, but with distinct enunciation, are often heard even in the remotest parts of large churches. Defectiveness of articulation may sometimes make nonsense of the most intelligible and most important sentences.* Inflection, too, deserves special

* A singular instance of this occurred under my own observation. Sitting in the pulpit during the delivery of a sermon to which I was carefully listening, I understood the preacher, in a certain sentence, to pronounce the words, *within ten centuries.* As these words were wholly incongruous with the course of thought, my mind was at once arrested; and after a moment's reflection, I had no doubt that he meant to say, *with intense interest.* He had connected the first syllable of the word *intense* with the preceding word,

attention; because a passage is correctly, or incorrectly, apprehended, and is impressive, or unimpressive, according as it is uttered with the right, or with a wrong, inflection. The proper modulation of the voice, also, claims regard; particularly, for preventing what is colloquially called a tone in preaching, and for securing the requisite variety of enunciation in different paragraphs, and at the transitions from part to part of the sermon — a variety, corresponding to the variety in style required by the nature of different parts. Attention is likewise demanded to a natural and impressive action, and a manly use of the eyes. On all the particulars relating to good delivery, judicious works can be easily procured.*

Various Modes of Preaching.

The purpose of the present chapter rather requires a few thoughts on the different modes of preaching which have been practised; namely, from a manuscript, from memory, and from a copious scheme of thought.

Use of a Manuscript.

As to the first of these, a bare mention must suffice of that close, confined method of reading a manuscript, which

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and its closing sound with the first syllable of the following; thus— *within ten sinterest.* By failing, too, properly to express the closing sound of the last word, he completed the undesigned illusion.

* Porter's Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery. — Russell's Pulpit Elocution. — The American Elocutionist, by the same author. — Orthophony; or, the Culture of the Voice; by Russell and Murdoch.

hardly permits a preacher to raise his arm, or to remove his eye from the paper. A mode of address so unnatural, and so inconsistent with emotion, ought never to be adopted. Cases, indeed, are known, in which men who have thus performed the duties of the pulpit have been eminently useful.* But they were useful in spite of their unfavorable manner of delivery, and in consequence of local circumstances, or of some rare redeeming excellencies in their discourses; and it is to be lamented, that they did not make themselves more signally useful, by adopting a mode of preaching more in harmony with human nature.

Such constraint is, by no means, necessary. The sermon, having been composed throughout, can be delivered, from the manuscript, without embarrassment. A discourse, intended to be thus preached, should be written on paper of the quarto form, so that large quantities of matter may be under the eye at once, and as unfrequent occasion as possible exist for turning over the leaves. The writing should also be of such a size as to be distinctly legible without the preacher's stooping, or making any special effort. The paragraphs ought to be very distinct from each other; and the emphatic words underscored. The lower corner of each leaf should be partially bent up, so that the leaf may be instantly turned without failure, and without the accident of turning more leaves than one at a time.

Thus externally prepared, the sermon should be carefully read and re-read, paragraph by paragraph, till the whole has become so familiar that the preacher can, by catching a few words here and there, complete a sentence

* President Edwards, for instance.

without keeping his eye fixed on the paper.* So familiar, indeed, ought he to become with the manuscript, and so much interested in the subject of the discourse, as to be able, during the delivery, to substitute in place of what he has written, more energetic expressions, and to introduce new thoughts. For sometimes, while preaching, when his mind is thoroughly occupied with the subject, thoughts will occur highly appropriate, and even more striking and effective than were originated in the composition of the sermon.

The preacher thus fully acquainted with his manuscript, and intent on his subject, can steadily view his audience; his hearers and himself can enjoy the reciprocal benefit of each other's eyes. His arms will be comparatively free to obey the impulse of his soul. His whole person, instead of being statue-like, will be animated; and he may approximate to speaking *from the heart* — the perfection of speaking — as near as one can with a written discourse before him. By such preparation, he may combine many of the advantages of extemporaneous address with those of written discourses.

When written discourses are thus employed, the principal objections against their use are obviated; for the delivery is free from dulness and formality. At the same time, the solid advantages which habitual carefulness in preparation promises both to the preacher and to hearers, may be secured.

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* The point aimed at is, a familiarity with the manuscript and a fresh interest in the subject. Some men may more readily gain this point by other methods, than the one above mentioned.

Memoriter Preaching.

The second mode of preaching which was mentioned is, that of delivering a discourse from memory. Such a method of public address, we learn from Cicero and Quinctilian, was frequent among the orators of Greece and Rome. On the continent of Europe, this is a common mode of preaching; in our own country, it has been practised to a very limited extent. The success of the ancient orators, and the eminence of some modern preachers, show, that the disadvantages which are commonly ascribed to it are, by no means, unavoidable. Men, who by nature and cultivation possess a ready memory, and who can in a short time fix a sermon in mind sufficiently for preaching it, without the dread of failing to recall their language, may advantageously employ this method; particularly when, as is, perhaps, generally the case, this facility of memory is conjoined with a ready perception of rhetorical propriety, or with a sort of instinctive power to avoid errors of language and of delivery. Such men, however, need not depend on memory for every word; they can exercise their inventive power and avail themselves of new thoughts while in the act of preaching.*

* A man of ardent temperament and ready invention should not strictly confine himself to the very words he has written. A singular instance of embarrassment, and yet of surmounting the embarrassment, is related in Dr. Gregory's Memoir of Robert Hall. Mr. Hall's sermon, entitled Reflections on War, was for special reasons (see Hall's Works, Vol. I. p. 21,) delivered from memory; and is the only one he ever thus delivered. "Though it was delivered with a most impressive dignity, and with less rapidity than that to which he usually yielded himself, yet, in one or two parts, he obviously felt

The mass of preachers, not possessing so ready and retentive a memory in regard to language, would not find this mode sufficiently practicable. The duties of a pastor, also, are too numerous, and, from the necessity of the case in most situations, too difficult to be brought within an exact arrangement, to allow him opportunity, every week, for committing discourses to memory. The time, likewise, which this would ordinarily consume, would be better spent in the general culture of the mind. Besides, the reciting of a sermon from memory by one who has not readiness of recollection is unfavorable to emotion; it lacks that freshness which is essential to eloquence; it is too mechanical. Such a man is constantly in danger of becoming anxious about mere words; and should his memory on any occasion fail him, he cannot easily recover himself. He cannot safely allow himself to be stimulated by any interest which his hearers may manifest; nor is he able to vary his language in any passages, even should he perceive this to be necessary. He is a slave to his memory, under a sort of compulsion to pass from sentence to sentence, according to the order in which the words lie in his mind. Not only is this method, in the case of a man not endowed

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great difficulty in checking his inclination either to modify his language, or to expatiate more at large. This was especially observable at the passage commencing with 'Conceive but for a moment the consternation which the approach of an invading army would impress on the peaceful villagers in this neighborhood.' He mentioned afterwards, that the struggle between his desire to correct what he, just then, saw was 'a confusion in the grouping,' and his determination 'not to deviate from his lesson,' was such as rendered it almost impossible for him to proceed. To this kind of perplexity he never again exposed himself." Hall's Works, Vol. III. p. 46.

with a ready memory, unfavorable to emotion; it makes him liable, also, to adopt unmeaning gestures, and to contract an unnatural expression of countenance; it exposes him to lifeless monotony, or to unseemly tones, or to a declamatory style of preaching.

A modified form of memoriter preaching, however, deserves to be mentioned, which is well exemplified both in our own country and elsewhere. The sermon is written; a particular analysis of it is lodged in the memory; perhaps a few passages, as the introduction, or some specially important parts, may be almost verbally fixed in the mind; but for the language, in delivery, the preacher trusts, mostly, to the spontaneous action of his mind in properly clothing the thoughts with which it has been charged, or to the unlabored recurrence, more or less extensively, of his written expressions. Nor does he trust in vain. Memory performs its office; and all the other powers of his mind are busily at work.*

Memoriter preaching, in case of facility of memory, may combine the chief advantages of careful composition with

* Dr. Tholuck, who "in the power of composition and oratory stands unequalled in Germany," employs this method. "He writes his sermons, but does not read them; neither, in strictness of terms, does he preach memoriter. He is careful to retain in memory the course of thought and the most striking illustrations of the written sermon, but beyond this trusts entirely to extemporaneous impulse." GERMAN SELECTIONS; by Professors Edwards and Park, pp. 224, 225.

The combined effort of memory and invention, or rather the transition from the one to the other, creates a serious objection to this mode of preaching. My own experience would not lead me to recommend it.

those of extemporaneous delivery, and be preparatory to this latter mode.

Extemporaneous Preaching.

The third mode of preaching is, from a copious scheme of thought; otherwise called the extemporaneous. It differs from the others, in point of preparation, by the circumstance that the sermon, though carefully *thought out* as to its substance, from the introduction to the close, is not written.

In this way, as well as, on some occasions, with written speeches committed to memory, the ancient orators often addressed their audiences. Hence, Quinctilian gave his instructions on *thinking out* a speech for delivery. Hence, too, Cicero says, Orations are written, not that they *may be* delivered, but as having been delivered. With this sort of preparation, too, speeches are now generally delivered at the bar, in halls of legislation, and in various deliberative assemblies. Some of the ancients carried this mode of preparation to a far higher degree of perfection than can, with very few exceptions, be found in any departments of modern eloquence. They so laboriously *thought out* their speeches and had attained such power of memory, that the process very much resembled that of committing to memory precomposed discourses. Cicero says, that Hortensius, "with his almost divine memory," uttered his sentences as he had arranged them in his mind; and when, after speaking, he wrote some of his speeches, they were to the letter just what he had orally delivered. Robert Hall had similar ability; for some of his sermons, delivered on special occasions and marked with his charac-

teristic grandeur, presented throughout, though not written, language which he had previously selected in his mind.*

* See Dr. Gregory's Memoir of Mr. Hall, in Vol. III. p. 39, of Hall's Works. In describing Mr. Hall's manner of preparing a sermon, after speaking of the grand divisions and of the subordinate trains of thought, Dr. Gregory adds—"In those instances where the force of an argument, or the probable success of a general application, would mainly depend upon the language, even that was selected and appropriated, sometimes to the precise collocation of the words. Of some sermons, no portions whatever were wrought out thus minutely; the language employed in preaching being that which spontaneously occurred at the time; of others, this minute attention was paid to the verbal structure of nearly half; of *a few*, the entire train of preparation, almost from the beginning to the end, extended to the very sentences. Yet the marked peculiarity consisted in this, that the process, even when thus directed to minutiae in his more elaborate efforts, did not require the use of the pen; at least, at the time to which these remarks principally apply. For Mr. Hall had a singular faculty for continuous mental composition, apart from the aid which writing supplies. Words were so disciplined to his use, that the more he thought on any subject the more closely were the topics of thought associated with appropriate terms and phrases; and it was manifest that he had carefully disciplined his mind to this as an independent exercise, probably to avoid the pain and fatigue which always attended the process of writing. Whenever he pleased, he could thus pursue the consecution to a great extent, in sentences, many of them perfectly formed and elaborately finished, as he went along, and easily called up again by memory, as occasion required; not, however, in their separate character, as elements of language, but because of their being fully worked into the substance of thought. It hence happened that the excellence which other persons often attain as to style, from the use of the pen, in written, visible composition (employing the eye upon words, instead of fixing the memory upon substantial mental product, and, it may be, diminishing the intellectual power by substituting for one of its faculties a mechanical

Dr. Johnson, likewise, in the department of writing, was in the habit of so thoroughly meditating on his subjects, and of so carefully, at the same time, clothing his thoughts with language, that when at length he began to write, his labor was scarcely more than the mechanical process of transferring to paper sentences already formed in his mind.*

Extemporaneous preaching, when adequate mental preparation has preceded, has great advantages over preaching from a manuscript. It is the mode which nature

Advantages.

result), he more successfully and uniformly obtained by a purely meditative process. And I am persuaded that if he could have *instantly* impressed his trains of thought upon paper, with the incorporated words, and with the living spirit in which they were conceived, hundreds if not thousands of passages would have been preserved, as chaste and polished in diction, as elastic and energetic in tone, as can be selected from any part of his works. What, however, could not thus be accomplished by the pen, has been achieved, as to immediate impression, in the pulpit; and hence his celebrity, unequalled in modern times, as a sacred orator."

In reference to the tenacity of Mr. Hall's memory, see the interesting statement of Dr. Gregory, prefixed to the sermon on Modern Infidelity.

* A friend of mine, now deceased, thus described his own manner of preparing sermons: — "I find that my mind, such as it is, acts most freely away from the study, and in the presence of nature. I therefore construct in my own mind an exact image of every thing which I intend to write; and this, when completed, can either be spoken or written, as the case requires. My sermons are thus written in my mind during my walks in the fields, the cemetery, or the garden, and, when matured, are committed to paper in very little time. This has given the impression that I write easily and rapidly, when in truth I have no advantage in this respect, except perhaps that of a better system, which, after the experience of years, I would recommend to every writer, whatever his profession may be." — Christian Examiner and Miscellany, Vol. VIII. p. 272.

prompts. It immediately arrests attention, and excites interest, on the part of hearers. It secures to a skilful speaker a ready command of his audience. It will sometimes give a man of slender ideas and poor attainments, and even under disadvantages, a superiority to another man with whom, in regard to sterling qualities, he could not sustain a moment's comparison, but who has not the power of freely addressing an audience. Besides, a minister's duties are often so numerous, and, for their best fulfilment, require, in addition to mental activity, such a compass of knowledge, that the ability to preach without a written sermon will greatly aid him in extending his studies, and in avoiding hasty and careless composition. The consideration is also important, that unless ministers cultivate this power, they must fail, on many occasions, to exert their proper influence. Particularly is this talent necessary for those whom Providence calls to preach elsewhere than in the pulpit and to regular assemblies; missionaries, for instance, and those pastors who, besides attending to their own flocks, have occasion to preach in destitute villages, or neighborhoods.

Extemporaneous preaching has, however, if exclusively practised, injurious tendencies. The great danger is, that it may wean those who thus practise it from the pen; that instrument which Cicero regarded as the best help in forming a good style for oratory, as well as for other purposes, and the disuse of which can hardly but be fatal to an educated man. Without careful writing, a minister, who must so frequently address assemblies, is in danger of contracting sameness of thought and expression. As he becomes familiar with his public duties, facility of execution may degenerate into carelessness, and he may cease to feel,

Disadvantages.

in regard to them, that pressure which would call into action his best powers.

Honorable proofs might be adduced, that these dangerous tendencies, closely connected with this method as they may seem, are not essential to it. They can be obviated by fixed determination; more particularly, by writing a just proportion of discourses, whether to be preached from the manuscript or otherwise, and by impressive views of the dignity and sacredness of the preacher's office.

Requisites to extemporaneous preaching.

An extemporaneous preacher, in order to permanent usefulness, needs habits of exact mental discipline, an ample fund of learning, both professional and general, facility in the use of knowledge, and diligence in adding to its stores.* He should also, on the ordinary occasions of life, be careful in respect to his language. Dr. Johnson, being asked the cause of his ability to express his thoughts easily with so much propriety, mentioned in reply his habit, early formed and constantly maintained, of always selecting good language on common occasions. It hardly need be added, that fervent piety and ready religious sensibility, as they are necessary to good written sermons, so are eminently requisite to good extemporaneous preaching.

In preparing a sermon, the extemporaneous preacher should mark out his subject with nice precision, and carefully collect and arrange the requisite materials. He

* In our country this mode of preaching has suffered in public esteem, from the fact that it has been too much relinquished to uneducated men. Thoroughly educated men, who preach in this manner, seldom fail to secure for it, to say the least, the respectful regard of hearers, and to secure for themselves a wider range of immediate usefulness.

should form a scheme of thought embracing all the essentials of the discourse, and should omit nothing but the composition. By the clear view which he will thus obtain of his subject and all the details which he wishes to present, the subject will engross his mind, and insinuate itself into his affections; and when all his faculties have been vigorously employed, and have furnished him with substantial preparation, he may venture into his pulpit with manly self-possession and undoubting confidence in divine aid.

Two cautions are here requisite. In the first place, the inferiority which a preacher may discover in his spoken style, as compared with his written, ought not to disaffect him with this mode of preaching. If, as has been said in the preceding chapter, the style of the pulpit may advantageously differ from that of the press, eminently true is this of extemporaneous discourse. It may have repetitions, and be destitute of polish, and yet not be unsuited to the purposes of public speaking. If it be free from inelegance, there is ground for encouragement. Educated men have a literary sensitiveness — perhaps a fastidiousness — to which the most of their hearers are strangers. The beauties of style escape the observation of many, who yet highly appreciate good sense, clearly and earnestly expressed. More than this; even men of the highest cultivation insensibly surrender themselves to a public speaker's current of thought and feeling, regardless of occasional irregularities of language, and sympathizing with the speaker who is too intent, in fervid passages, on his great purpose, to be thinking of mere expression. The greatest of modern orators, Fox, was listened to with none the less interest because his stream of eloquence did not always flow on in most perfect beauty. Besides, ease of expression, strength, and appropriate ele-

Two cautions.

gance, are matters of growth to the careful speaker, as well as to the careful writer; and by the one, as well as by the other, may be rationally expected as the result of faithful and conscientious labor.*

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* Fenelon thus speaks of extemporaneous preaching, in the second of his Dialogues concerning Eloquence:—

"A. ... I suppose a person who fills his mind with the subject he is to talk of; who speaks with great ease; (for you would not have anybody attempt to speak in public, without having proper talents for it:) in short, a man who has attentively considered all the principles and parts of the subject he is to handle, and has a comprehensive view of them in all their extent; who has reduced his thoughts into a proper method, and prepared the strongest expressions to explain and enforce them in a sensible manner; who ranges all his arguments, and has a sufficient number of affecting figures: such a man certainly knows every thing that he ought to say, and the order in which the whole should be placed. To succeed, therefore, in his delivery, he wants nothing but those common expressions that must make the bulk of his discourse. But do you believe, now, that such a person would have any difficulty in finding easy, familiar expressions?

B. He could not find such just and handsome ones as he might have hit on, if he had sought them leisurely in his closet.

A. I own that. But, according to you, he would lose only a few ornaments: and you know how to rate that loss according to the principles we laid down before. On the other side, what advantage must he not have in the freedom and force of his action; which is the main thing. Supposing that he has applied himself much to composing (as Cicero requires of an orator); that he has read all the best models, and has a natural or acquired easiness of style and speech; that he has abundance of solid knowledge and learning; that he understands his subject perfectly well, and has ranged all the parts and proofs of it in his head; in such a case we must conclude that he will speak with force, and order, and readiness. His periods, perhaps, will not soothe the ear so much as the others; and for that reason he must be the better orator. His transitions may not be so

The second caution would guard a person against hastily concluding that he cannot, should he attempt it, succeed in this mode of preaching. Perseverance is essential to ability. The purpose of becoming able thus to preach should not be defeated even by serious failures. Thomas Scott and Legh Richmond, who both became good extemporaneous preachers, passed through some mortifications. So too did Robert Hall.* Well worthy, also, of imitation in this particular,

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fine: it is no great matter — though these he might have prepared without getting them by heart; besides, these little omissions were common to the most eloquent orators among the ancients. They thought such a negligence was very natural, and ought even to be imitated, to avoid the appearance of too great preparation. What then could our orator want? He might make some little repetition; but that too must have its use. Not only will the judicious hearer take a pleasure in observing nature here, which leads one often to resume whatever view of the subject strikes strongest on the mind; but, likewise, this repetition imprints the truth more deeply: which is the best manner of instruction. At the worst, one might find in his discourse some inaccuracy of construction, some obsolete word that has been censured by the academy; something that is irregular; or, if you will, some weak or misapplied expression that he may happen to drop in the warmth of action. But surely they must have narrow souls who can think such little escapes worth any one's notice. There is an abundance of these to be met with in the most excellent originals. The greatest orators among the ancients neglected them; and if our views were as noble as theirs, we should not so much regard those trifles, which can amuse none but such as are not able to discern and pursue what is truly great."

* Dr. Scott was for some years in the habit, after having written his sermons for the Sabbath, of reading them to his wife, for the benefit of her suggestions. His "practice of extemporaneous preaching commenced from these private rehearsals of his sermons. Something had occurred in the parish to which he thought it right to allude in the pulpit; but on his reciting the sermon which he had

was the spirit of Sheridan. After an unsuccessful attempt to speak in the House of Commons, he replied to his friends who advised him to abandon the hope of serving his country in Parliament, "Never. I am sure it is in me; and it shall come out."

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prepared, she objected to it, and brought him over to her opinion. He in consequence laid aside the discourse, and was thus, on the Saturday evening, left without one for the next day. This induced him to address his congregation without written preparation, and succeeding in the attempt, he repeated it, and by degrees discontinued the use of written sermons. This change, however, was not made without severe effort. An old parishioner mentioned well remembering his sitting down in a kind of despair and exclaiming, 'It does not signify; it is impossible that I should ever be able to preach extempore.'"—Life of Rev. Thomas Scott, D. D., p. 83.

"The effect of Mr. Richmond's ministry was considerably heightened by the fluency of his addresses. 'It is a singular circumstance,' observes a friend of his early life, 'that his first attempt to preach *extempore* was a total failure. He was so ashamed of it, that he declared he would not repeat the attempt; and it was only in consequence of urgent solicitations, that he was induced to make a second trial; when he succeeded beyond his hopes, and never afterward found any difficulty.'"—Memoirs of Rev. Legh Richmond, p. 82.

Mr. Hall, while a student at Bristol, was appointed in his turn to preach in the vestry of Broadmead chapel. "After proceeding for a short time, much to the gratification of his auditory, he suddenly paused, covered his face with his hands, exclaimed, 'Oh! I have lost all my ideas,' and sat down, his hands still hiding his face. The failure, however, painful as it was to his tutors and humiliating to himself, was such as rather augmented than diminished their persuasion of what he could accomplish, if once he acquired self-possession. He was therefore appointed to speak again the ensuing week. This second attempt was accompanied by a second failure, still more painful to witness, and still more grievous to bear."—Dr Gregory's Memoir of Robert Hall, p. 7.

Choice between the Modes of Preaching.

In endeavoring to estimate the respective claims of preaching from a manuscript and of preaching from a copious scheme of thought, we must remember that more depends, as to effect, on the qualities of a preacher's delivery, than on the fact of his having, or not having, a manuscript before him. A lively and energetic delivery, whether the discourse have been fully precomposed, or have been merely premeditated, whether a manuscript be employed or not, will secure attention and be impressive. Regard should, also, be had, in weighing the claims of these two modes of preaching, to the *occasions* and the *subjects* on which a minister is to speak. For, doubtless, some of the occasions and some of the subjects may not only require the more exact preparation to which writing is favorable, but also admit of the more sedate and simply didactic mode of delivery which would seem accordant with a written discourse. Since, again, all are not gifted alike, a preacher's genius and endowments must be taken into the account. Some who preach well, in every sense of the term, with a manuscript, could not preach so well without one. Yet the ability to preach well extemporaneously is far more common than is often supposed, and only needs to be cultivated. For the same men who are confined to a manuscript in the pulpit would, in other spheres of public life, adopt successfully the extemporaneous mode of address; as in the case of some who enter civil life after spending several years in the ministry, and in the case of ministers when called to address deliberative assemblies on other subjects than those strictly of religion. And certainly, the nature of religious subjects is far from being such as to deny to ministers, above all

men, the ability of addressing audiences unless they have before their eyes the very words they are to utter.

The practical question on this subject is, in reality, not an exclusive one; that is, it should not be, whether a man shall preach always and only from a manuscript, or always and only in the extemporaneous manner. For, as has been intimated in preceding paragraphs, by employing solely the former method, he would deny to himself and his hearers not a few advantages; and by confining himself to the latter, he would also decline some very serious advantages and incur some very serious dangers. Such being the case, it is clearly advisable for preachers to secure the advantages of each method, and the reciprocal influence of the two methods in preventing the dangers incident to each, if exclusively used, and in cultivating to the highest degree the good tendencies of each. Neither method should be used exclusively; both should be used habitually. The pen will tend to prevent inexactitude, shallowness, and consequent tameness of thought; carelessness, extravagance and vagueness of expression. So, on the other hand, the comparative familiarity, directness and earnestness to which extemporaneous address is favorable, may correct the formality, abstractness, and coolness which a preacher, who confines himself to written sermons, is in danger of contracting. Each method may be imperfect without the other; each, if not indispensable, is extremely favorable to the highest efficiency of the other.

A just proportion, however, between written and unwritten discourses, in preaching, cannot be prescribed. It must be regulated by circumstances, which vary indefinitely. Command of time must be taken into account. In most instances, too little time is allotted to preparation for the

pulpit; large numbers of sermons, written as well as unwritten, are produced in so much haste as to be necessarily ineffective. Profound meditation, as contributing to fulness and excitement of mind, is indispensable to the due performance of this kind of labor. If the preliminary work of patiently examining a subject, and of widely surveying its relations, be properly performed, and a scheme of thought devised sufficiently minute and copious to secure felicitous execution in writing, or fearless and earnest extemporaneous address, a very considerable amount of time will be demanded. And probably fidelity in preparing sermons, and in other official labors, and in general mental culture, not to say a regard to health, would in most cases limit the number of carefully written sermons to one in a week. Thus, too, that careless, superficial writing might be avoided, which is death to all substantial and quickening eloquence.

HINTS

ON

EXTEMPORANEOUS PREACHING.

BY

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Maximus vero studiorum fructus est, et velut præmium quoddam amplissimum longi laboris, *ex tempore dicendi facultas.*

QUINCT.

PREFACE.

It is the object of this little work to draw the attention of those who are preparing for the Christian ministry, or who have just entered it, to a mode of preaching which the writer thinks has been too much discountenanced and despised; but which, under proper restrictions, he is persuaded may add greatly to the opportunities of ministerial usefulness. The subject has hardly received the attention it deserves from writers on the pastoral office, who have usually devoted to it but a few sentences, which offer little encouragement and afford no aid. Burnet, in his Treatise on the Pastoral Care, and Fenelon in his Dialogues on Eloquence, have treated it more at large, but still very cursorily. To their arguments and their authority, which are of great weight, I refer the more distinctly here, because I have not quoted them so much at large as I intended when I wrote the beginning of the second chapter. Besides these, the remarks of Quinctilian, x. 7, on the subject of speaking extempore, which are full of his usual good sense, may be very profitably consulted.

It has been my object to state fully and fairly the advantages which attend this mode of address in the pulpit, and at the same

time to guard against the dangers and abuses to which it is confessedly liable. How far I may have succeeded, it is not for me to determine. It would be something to persuade but one to add this to his other talents for doing good in the church. Even the attempt to do it, though unsuccessful, would not be without its reward; since it could not be fairly made without a most salutary moral and intellectual discipline.

It is not to be expected — nor do I mean by anything I have said to intimate — that every man is capable of becoming an accomplished preacher in this mode, or that every one may succeed as well in this as in the ordinary mode. There is a variety in the talents of men, and to some this may be peculiarly unsuited. Yet this is no good reason why *any* should decline the attempt, since it is only by making the attempt that they can determine whether or not success is within their power.

There is at least one consequence likely to result from the study of this art, and the attempt to practise it, which would alone be a sufficient reason for urging it earnestly. I mean, its probable effect in breaking up the constrained, formal, scholastic mode of address, which follows the student from his college duties, and keeps him from immediate contact with the hearts of his fellow men. This would be effected by his learning to speak from his feelings, rather than from the critical rules of a book. His address would be more natural, and consequently better adapted to effective preaching.

CHAPTER I.

ADVANTAGES OF EXTEMPORANEOUS PREACHING.

It is a little remarkable that, while some classes of Christians do not tolerate the preaching of a written discourse, others have an equal prejudice against all sermons which have not been carefully precomposed. Among the latter are to be found those who favor an educated ministry, and whose preachers are valued for their cultivated minds and extensive knowledge. The former are, for the most part, those who disparage learning as a qualification for a Christian teacher, and whose ministers are consequently not accustomed to exact mental discipline, nor familiar with the best models of thinking and writing. It might seem at first view, that the least cultivated would require the greatest previous preparation in order profitably to address their fellow-men, and that the best informed and most accustomed to study might be best trusted to speak without the labor of written composition. That it has been thought otherwise, is probably owing, in a great measure, to the solicitude for literary exactness and elegance of style, which becomes a habit in the taste of studious men, and renders all inaccuracy and carelessness offensive. He who has been accustom-

ed to read and admire the finest models of composition in various languages, and to dwell on those niceties of method and expression which form so large a part of the charm of literary works, acquires a critical delicacy of taste, which renders him fastidiously sensitive to those crudities and roughnesses of speech, which almost necessarily attend an extemporaneous style. He is apt to exaggerate their importance, and to imagine that no excellences of another kind can atone for them. He therefore protects himself by the toil of previous composition, and ventures not a sentence which he has not leisurely weighed and measured. An audience also, composed of reading people, or accustomed to the exactness of written composition in the pulpit, acquires something of the same taste, and is easily offended at the occasional homeliness of diction and looseness of method, which occur in extemporaneous speaking. Whereas those preachers and hearers, whose education and habits of mind have been different, know nothing of this taste, and are insensible to these blemishes; and, if there be only a fluent outpouring of words, accompanied by a manner which evinces earnestness and sincerity, are pleased and satisfied.

It is further remarkable, that this prejudice of taste has been suffered to produce this effect in no profession but that of the ministry. The most fastidious taste never carries a written speech to the bar or into the senate. The very man who dares not ascend the pulpit without a sermon diligently arranged, and filled out to the smallest word, if he had gone into the profession of the law, would, at the same age and with no greater advantages, address the bench and the jury in language altogether unpremeditated. Instances are not wanting in which the minister, who imagined it impossible to put ten sentences together in the pulpit, has found

himself able, on changing his profession, to speak fluently for an hour.

I have no doubt that to speak extempore is easier at the bar and in the legislature, than in the pulpit. Our associations with this place are of so sacred a character, that our faculties do not readily play there with their accustomed freedom. There is an awe upon our feelings which constrains us. A sense, too, of the importance and responsibility of the station, and of the momentous consequences depending on the influence he may there exert, has a tendency to oppress and embarrass the conscientious man, who feels it as he ought. There is also, in the other cases, an immediate end to be attained, which produces a powerful immediate excitement; an excitement, increased by the presence of those who are speaking on the opposite side of the question, and in assailing or answering whom, the embarrassment of the place is lost in the interest of the argument. Whereas in the pulpit, there is none to assault, and none to refute; the preacher has the field entirely to himself, and this is sufficiently dismaying. The ardor and self-oblivion which present debate occasions, do not exist; and the solemn stillness and fixed gaze of a waiting multitude, serve rather to appal and abash the solitary speaker, than to bring the subject forcibly to his mind, or cause his attention to be absorbed in it. Thus every external circumstance is unpropitious, and it is not strange that relief has been sought in the use of manuscripts.

But still, these difficulties, and others which I shall have occasion to mention in another place, are by no means such as to raise that insuperable obstacle which many suppose. They may all be overcome by resolution and perseverance. As regards merely the use of unpremeditated language, it

is far from being a difficult attainment. A writer, whose opportunities of observation give weight to his opinion, says, in speaking of the style of the younger Pitt — "This profuse and interminable flow of words is not in itself either a rare or remarkable endowment. It is wholly a thing of habit; and is exercised by every village lawyer with various degrees of power and grace."* If there be circumstances which render the habit more difficult to be acquired by the preacher, they are still such as may be surmounted; and it may be made plain, I think, that the advantages which he may thus insure to himself are so many and so great, as to offer the strongest inducement to make the attempt.

I.

That these advantages are real and substantial, may be safely inferred from the habit of public orators in other professions, and from the effects which they are known to produce. There is more natural warmth in the declamation, more earnestness in the address, greater animation in the manner, more of the lighting up of the soul in the countenance and whole mien, more freedom and meaning in the gesture; the eye speaks, and the fingers speak, and when the orator is so excited as to forget every thing but the matter on which his mind and feelings are acting, the whole body is affected, and helps to propagate his emotions to the hearer. Amidst all the exaggerated coloring of Patrick Henry's biographer, there is doubtless enough that is true, to prove a power in the spontaneous energy of an excited speaker, superior in its effects to any thing that can be produced by writing Something of the same sort has been witnessed by every one

* Europe; &c. by a Citizen of the United States.

who is in the habit of attending in the courts of justice, or the chambers of legislation. And this, not only in the instances of the most highly eloquent; but inferior men are found thus to excite attention and produce effects, which they never could have done by their pens. In deliberative assemblies, in senates and parliaments, the larger portion of the speaking is necessarily unpremeditated; perhaps the most eloquent is always so; for it is elicited by the growing heat of debate; it is the spontaneous combustion of the mind in the conflict of opinion. Chatham's speeches were not written, nor those of Fox, nor that of Ames on the British treaty. They were, so far as regards their language and ornaments, the effusions of the moment, and derived from their freshness a power, which no study could impart. Among the orations of Cicero, which are said to have made the greatest impression, and to have best accomplished the orator's design, are those delivered on unexpected emergencies, which precluded the possibility of previous preparation. Such were his first invective against Catiline, and the speech which stilled the disturbances at the theatre. In all these cases, there can be no question of the advantage which the orators enjoyed in their ability to make use of the excitement of the occasion, unchilled by the formality of studied preparation. Although possibly guilty of many rhetorical and logical faults, yet these would be unobserved in the fervent and impassioned torrent, which bore away the minds of the delighted auditors.

It is doubtless very true, that a man of study and reflection, accustomed deliberately to weigh every expression and analyze every sentence, and to be influenced by nothing which does not bear the test of the severest examination, may be most impressed by the quiet, unpretending reading of a well digested essay or dissertation. To some

men the concisest statement of a subject, with nothing to adorn the naked skeleton of thought, is most forcible. They are even impatient of any attempt to assist its effect by fine writing, by emphasis, tone, or gesture. They are like the mathematician, who read the Paradise Lost without pleasure, because he could not see that it proved any thing. But we are not to judge from the taste of such men, of what is suitable to affect the majority. The multitude are not mere thinkers or great readers. From their necessary habits they are incapable of following a long discussion except it be made inviting by the circumstances attending it, or the manner of conducting it. Their attention must be roused and maintained by some external application. To them

> Action is eloquence, and the eyes of the ignorant
> More learned than their ears.

It is a great fault with intellectual men, that they do not make sufficient allowance for the different modes of education and habits of mind in men of other pursuits. It is one of the infelicities of education at a university, that a man is there trained in a fictitious scene, where there are interests, associations, feelings, exceedingly diverse from what prevail in the society of the world; and where he becomes so far separated from the habits and sympathies of other men, as to need to acquire a new knowledge of them, before he knows how to address them. When a young man leaves the seclusion of a student's life to preach to his fellow-men, he is likely to speak to them as if they were scholars. He imagines them to be capable of appreciating the niceties of method and style, and of being affected by the same sort of sentiment, illustration, and cool remark, which affects those

who have been accustomed to be guided by the dumb and lifeless pages of a book. He therefore talks to them calmly, is more anxious for correctness than impression, fears to make more noise or to have more motion than the very letters on his manuscript; addressing himself, as he thinks, to the intellectual part of man; but he forgets that the intellectual man is not very easy of access, and must be approached through the senses and affections and imagination.

There was a class of rhetoricians and orators at Rome in the time of Cicero, who were famous for having made the same mistake. They would do every thing by a fixed and almost mechanical rule, by calculation and measurement. Their sentences were measured, their gestures were measured, their tones were measured; and they framed canons of judgment and taste, by which it was pronounced an affront on the intellectual nature of man to assail him with epithets, and exclamations, and varied tones, and emphatic gesture. They censured the free and flowing manner of Cicero as "tumid and exuberant," *inflatus et tumens, nec satis pressus, supra modum exultans et superfluens.** They cultivated a more guarded and concise style, which might indeed please the critic or the scholar, but was wholly unfitted to instruct or move a promiscuous audience; as was said of one of them, *oratio — doctis et attente audientibus erat illustris; a multitudine autem et a foro, cui nata eloquentia est, devorabatur.* The taste of the multitude prevailed, and Cicero was the admiration of the people, while those who pruned themselves by a more rigid and philosophical law,

Coldly correct and critically dull,

* Tac. de Oratoribus Dial. c. 18.

"were frequently deserted by the audience in the midst of their harangues."*

We may learn something from this. There is one mode of address for books and for classical readers, and another for the mass of men, who judge by the eye and ear, by the fancy and feelings, and know little of rules of art or of an educated taste. Hence it is that many of those preachers who have become the classics of a country, have been unattractive to the multitude, who have deserted their polished and careful composition for the more unrestrained and rousing declamation of another class. The singular success of Chalmers seems to be in a considerable measure owing to his attention to this fact. He has abandoned the pure and measured style, and adopted a heterogeneous mixture of the gaudy, pompous, and colloquial, offensive to the ears of literary men, but highly acceptable to those who are less biassed by the authority of a standard taste and established models. We need not go to the extreme of Chalmers — for there is no necessity for inaccuracy, bombast, or false taste — but we should doubtless gain by adopting his principle. The object is to address men according to their actual character, and in that mode in which their habits of mind may render them most accessible. As but few are thinkers or readers, a congregation is not to be addressed as such; but, their modes of life being remembered, constant regard must be had to their need of external attraction. This is most easily done by the familiarity and directness of extemporaneous address; for which reason this mode of preaching has peculiar advantages, in its adaptation to their situation and wants.

The truth is, indeed, that it is not the weight of the

* Middleton's Life of Cicero, III. 324.

thought, the profoundness of the argument, the exactness of the arrangement, the choiceness of the language, which interest and chain the attention of even those educated hearers, who are able to appreciate them all. They are as likely to sleep through the whole as others. They can find all these qualities in much higher perfection in their libraries; they do not seek these only at church. And as to the large mass of the people, they are to them hidden things, of which they discern nothing. It is not these, so much as the attraction of an earnest manner, which arrests the attention and makes instruction welcome. Every day's observation may show us, that he who has this manner will retain the attention of even an intellectual man with common-place thoughts, while, with a different manner, he would render tedious the most novel and ingenious disquisitions. Let an indifferent reader take into the pulpit a sermon of Barrow or Butler, and all its excellence of argument and eloquence would not save it from being accounted tedious; while an empty declaimer shall collect crowds to hang upon his lips in raptures. And this manner, which is so attractive, is not the studied artificial enunciation of the rhetorician's school, but the free, flowing, animated utterance, which seems to come from the impulse of the subject; which may be full of faults, yet masters the attention by its nature and sincerity. This is precisely the manner of the extemporaneous speaker — in whom the countenance reflects the emotions of the soul, and the tone of voice is tuned to the feelings of the heart, rising and falling with the subject, as in conversation, without the regular and harmonious modulation of the practised reader.

In making these and similar remarks, it is true that I am thinking of the *best* extemporaneous speakers, and that

all cannot be such. But it ought to be recollected, at the same time, that all cannot be excellent *readers;* that those who speak ill, would probably read still worse; and that therefore those who can attain to no eminence as speakers, do not on that account fail of the advantages of which I speak, since they escape at least the unnatural monotony of bad reading; than which nothing is more earnestly to be avoided.

II.

Every man utters himself with greater animation and truer emphasis in speaking, than he does, or perhaps can do, in reading. Hence it happens that we can listen longer to a tolerable speaker, than to a good reader. There is an indescribable something in the natural tones of him who is expressing earnestly his present thoughts, altogether foreign from the drowsy uniformity of the man that reads. I once heard it well observed, that the least animated mode of communicating thoughts to others, is the reading from a book the composition of another; the next in order is the reading one's own composition; the next is delivering one's own composition memoriter; and the most animated of all is the uttering one's own thoughts as they rise fresh in his mind. Very few can give the spirit to another's writings which they communicate to their own, or can read their own with the spirit, with which they spontaneously express themselves. We have all witnessed this in conversation; when we have listened with interest to long harangues from persons, who tire us at once if they begin to read. It is verified at the bar and in the legislature, where orators maintain the unflagging attention of hearers for a long period, when they could not have read

the same speech without producing intolerable fatigue. It is equally verified in the history of the pulpit; for those who are accustomed to the reading of sermons, are for the most part impatient even of able discourses, when they extend beyond the half hour's length; while very indifferent extemporaneous preachers are listened to with unabated attention for a full hour. In the former case there is a certain uniformity of tone, and a perpetual recurrence of the same cadences, inseparable from the manner of a reader, from which the speaker remains longer free. This difference is perfectly well understood, and was acted upon by Cecil, whose success as a preacher gives him a right to be heard, when he advised young preachers to "limit a written sermon to half an hour, and one from notes to forty minutes."* For the same reason, those preachers whose reading comes nearest to speaking, are universally more interesting than others.

Thus it is evident that there is an attractiveness in this mode of preaching, which gives it peculiar advantages. He imparts greater interest to what he says, who is governed by the impulse of the moment, than he who speaks by rule. When he feels the subject, his voice and gesture correspond to that feeling, and communicate it to others as it can be done in no other way. Though he possess but indifferent talents, yet if he utter himself with sincerity and feeling, it is far pleasanter than to listen to his cold reading of what he wrote perhaps with little excitement, and delivers with less.

In thus speaking of the interest which attends an extemporaneous delivery, it is not necessary to pursue the

* *Cecil's Remains*—a delightful little book.

subject into a general comparison of the advantages of this mode with those of reading and of reciting from memory. Each has prevailed in different places and at different periods, and each undoubtedly has advantages and disadvantages peculiar to itself. These are well though briefly stated in the excellent article on Elocution in Rees' Cyclopædia, to which it will be sufficient to refer, as worthy attentive perusal.* The question at large I cannot undertake to discuss. If I should, I could hardly hope to satisfy either others or myself. The almost universal custom of reading in this part of the world, where recitation from memory is scarcely known, and extemporaneous speaking is practised by very few except the illiterate, forbids anything like a fair deduction from observation. In order to institute a just comparison, one should have had extensive opportunities of watching the success of each mode, and of knowing the circumstances under which each was tried. For in the inquiry, which is to be preferred in the pulpit — we must consider, not which has most excellences when it is found in perfection, but which has excellences attainable by the largest number of preachers; not which is first in theory or most beautiful as an art, but which has been and is likely to be most successful in practice. These are questions not easily answered. Each mode has its advocates and its opponents. In the English church there is nothing but reading, and we hear from every quarter complaints of it. In Scotland the custom of recitation prevails, but multitudes besides Dr. Campbell† condemn it. In many parts of the continent of

* See also Bridges' Christian Ministry, Part iv. Ch. 5, Sec. 2.

† See his fourth Lecture on Pulpit Eloquence.

Europe no method is known, but that of a brief preparation and unpremeditated language; but that it should be universally approved by those who use it, is more than we can suppose.

The truth is, that either method may fail in the hands of incompetent or indolent men, and either may be thought to succeed by those whose taste or prejudices are obstinate in its favor. All that I contend for, in advocating unwritten discourse, is, that this method claims a decided superiority over the others in some of the most important particulars. That the others have their own advantages, I do not deny, nor that this is subject to disadvantages from which they are free. But whatever these may be, I hope to show that they are susceptible of a remedy; that they are not greater than those which attend other modes; that they are balanced by equal advantages; and that therefore this art deserves to be cultivated by all who would do their utmost to render their ministry useful. There can be no good reason why the preacher should confine himself to either mode. It might be most beneficial to cultivate and practise all. By this means he might impart something of the advantages of each to each, and correct the faults of all by mingling them with the excellences of all. He would learn to read with more of the natural accent of the speaker, and to speak with more of the precision of the writer.

The remarks already made have been designed to point out some of the general advantages attending the use of unprepared language. Some others remain to be noticed, which have more particular reference to the preacher individually.

III.

It is no unimportant consideration to a minister of the gospel, that this is a talent held in high estimation among men, and that it gives additional influence to him who possesses it. It is thought to argue capacity and greatness of mind. Fluency of language passes with many, and those not always the vulgar, for affluence of thought; and never to be at a loss for something to say, is supposed to indicate inexhaustible knowledge. It cannot have escaped the observation of any one accustomed to notice the judgments which are passed upon men, how much reputation and consequent influence are acquired by the power of speaking readily and boldly, without any other considerable talent and with very indifferent acquisitions; and how a man of real talents, learning, and worth, has frequently sunk below his proper level, from a mere awkwardness and embarrassment in speaking without preparation. So that it is not simply superstition which leads so many to refuse the name of preaching to all but extemporaneous harangues; it is in part owing to the natural propensity there is to admire, as something wonderful and extraordinary, this facility of speech. It is undoubtedly a very erroneous standard of judgment. But a minister of the gospel, whose success in his important calling depends so much on his personal influence, and the estimation in which his gifts are held, can hardly be justified in slighting the cultivation of a talent, which may so innocently add to his means of influence.

IV.

It must be remembered also, that occasions will sometimes occur, when the want of this power may expose him

to mortification, and deprive him of an opportunity of usefulness. For such emergencies one would choose to be prepared. It may be of consequence that he should express his opinion in an ecclesiastical council, and give reasons for the adoption or rejection of important measures. Possibly he may be only required to state facts, which have come to his knowledge. It is very desirable to be able to do this readily, fluently, without embarrassment to himself, and pleasantly to those who hear; and in order to this, a habit of speaking is necessary. In the course of his ministrations amongst his own people, occasions will arise when an exhortation or address would be seasonable and useful, but when there is no time for written preparation. If then he have cultivated the art of extemporaneous speaking, and attained to any degree of facility and confidence in it, he may avail himself of the opportunity to do good, which he must otherwise have passed by unimproved. Funerals and baptisms afford suitable occasions of making good religious impressions. A sudden providence, also, on the very day of the Sabbath, may suggest most valuable topics of reflection and exhortation, lost to him who is confined to what he may have previously written, but choice treasure to him who can venture to speak without writing. If it were only to avail himself of a few opportunities like these in the course of his life, or to save himself but once the mortification of being silent when he ought to speak, is expected to speak, and would do good by speaking, it would be well worth all the time and pains it might cost to acquire it.

V.

It is a further advantage, not to be forgotten here, that the excitement of speaking in public strikes out new views

of a subject, new illustrations, and unthought of figures and arguments, which perhaps never would have presented themselves to the mind in retirement. "The warmth which animates him," says Fenelon, "gives birth to expressions and figures, which he never could have prepared in his study." He who feels himself safe in flying off from the path he has prescribed to himself, without any fear lest he should fail to find his way back, will readily seize upon these, and be astonished at the new light which breaks in upon him as he goes on, and flashes all around him. This is according to the experience of all extemporaneous speakers. "The degree in which," says Thomas Scott,* who practised this method constantly, "after the most careful preparation for the pulpit, new thoughts, new arguments, animated addresses, often flow into my mind, while speaking to a congregation, even on very common subjects, makes me feel as if I was quite another man than when poring over them in my study. There will be inaccuracies; but generally the most striking things in my sermons were unpremeditated."

Then again, the presence of the audience gives a greater seeming reality to the work; it is less like doing a task, and more like speaking to men, than when one sits coolly writing at his table. Consequently there is likely to be greater plainness and directness in his exhortations, more closeness in his appeals, more of the earnestness of genuine feeling in his expostulations. He ventures, in the warmth of the moment, to urge considerations, which perhaps in the study seemed too familiar, and to employ modes of address, which are allowable in personal communion with a friend, but which one hesitates to commit to writing, lest he

* Life, p. 268.

should infringe the dignity of deliberate composition. This forgetfulness of self, this unconstrained following the impulse of the affections, while he is hurried on by the presence and attention of those whom he hopes to benefit, creates a sympathy between him and his hearers, a direct passage from heart to heart, a mutual understanding of each other, which does more to effect the true object of religious discourse, than anything else can do. The preacher will, in this way, have the boldness to say many things which ought to be said, but about which, in his study, he would feel reluctant and timid. And granting that he might be led to say some things improperly; yet if his mind be well disciplined and well governed, and his discretion habitual, he will do it exceedingly seldom; while no one, who estimates the object of preaching as highly as he should, will think an occasional false step any objection against that mode, which insures upon the whole the greatest boldness and earnestness. He will think it a less fault than the tameness and abstractness, which are the besetting sins of deliberate composition. At any rate, what method is secure from occasional false steps?

VI.

Another consideration which recommends this method to the attention of preachers, though at the same time it indicates one of its difficulties, is this; that all men, from various causes, constitutional or accidental, are subject to great inequality in the operations of their minds — sometimes laboring with felicity and sometimes failing. Perhaps this fact is in no men so observable as in preachers, because no others are so much compelled to labor, and exhibit their labors, at all seasons, favorable and unfavorable. There is

a certain quantity of the severest mental toil to be performed every week; and as the mind cannot be always in the same frame, they are constantly presenting proofs of the variation of their powers. An extemporaneous speaker is of course exposed to all this inequality, and must expect to be sometimes mortified by ill success. When the moment of speaking arrives, his mind may be slow and dull, his thoughts sluggish and impeded; he may be exhausted by labor, or suffering from temporary indisposition. He strives in vain to rally his powers, and forces his way, with thorough discomfort and chagrin, to the end of an unprofitable talk. But then how many men *write* under the same embarrassments, and are equally dissatisfied; with the additional mortification of having spent a longer time, and of being unable to give their poor preparation the interest of a forcible manner, which the very distress of an extemporaneous effort would have imparted.

But on the other hand, when his mind is bright and clear, and his animal spirits lively, he will speak much better after merely a suitable premeditation, than he can possibly write. "Every man," says bishop Burnet, "may thus rise far above what he could ever have attained in any other way." We see proof of this in conversation. When engaged in unrestrained and animated conversation with familiar friends, who is not conscious of having struck out brighter thoughts and happier sayings, than he ever put upon paper in the deliberate composition of the closet? It is a common remark concerning many men, that they pray much better than they preach. The reason is, that their sermons are made leisurely and sluggishly, without excitement; but in their public devotions they are strongly engaged, and the mind acts with more concentration and

vivacity. The same thing has been observed in the art of music. "There have been organists whose abilities in unstudied effusions on their instruments have almost amounted to inspiration, such as Sebastian Bach, Handel, Marchand, Couperin, Kelway, Stanley, Worgan, and Keeble; several of whom played better music extempore than they could write with meditation." *

It is upon no different principle that we explain, what all scholars have experienced, that they write best when they write rapidly, from a full and excited mind. One of Roscommon's precepts is, "to write with fury and correct with phlegm." The author of Waverley tells us, "that the works and passages in which he has succeeded, have uniformly been written with the greatest rapidity." The same author is understood to have said, that of his principal poems, only one, the "Lady of the Lake," was written over a second time, and that this was completed in six weeks. Johnson's best Ramblers and his admirable Rasselas were hurried wet and uncorrected to the press. The celebrated Rockingham Memorial, at the commencement of the late war, is said to have been the hasty composition of a single evening. And it will be found true, I believe, of many of the best sermon writers, that they revolve the subject till their minds are filled and warmed, and then put their discourse upon paper at a single sitting. Now what is all this but *extemporaneous writing?* and what does it require but a mind equally collected and at ease, equally disciplined by practice, and interested in the subject, to insure equal success in *extemporaneous speaking?* Nay, we might anticipate occasional superior success; since the thoughts sometimes flow, when

* Rees' Cyclopædia.

at the highest and most passionate excitement, too rapidly and profusely for any thing slower than the tongue to afford them vent.

VII.

There is one more consideration in favor of the practice I recommend, which I think cannot fail to have weight with all who are solicitous to make progress in theological knowledge; namely, that it redeems time for study. The labor of preparing and committing to paper a sermon or two every week, is one which necessarily occupies the principal part of a minister's time and thoughts, and withdraws him from the investigation of many subjects, which, if his mind were more at leisure, it would be his duty and pleasure to pursue. He who *writes* sermons, is ready to consider this as the chief object, or perhaps the sole business of his calling. When not actually engaged in writing, yet the necessity of doing it presses upon his mind, and so binds him as to make him feel as if he were wrong in being employed on any thing else. I speak of the tendency, which certainly is to prevent a man from pursuing, very extensively, any profitable study. But if he have acquired that ready command of thought and language, which will enable him to speak without written preparation, the time and toil of writing are saved, to be devoted to a different mode of study. He may prepare his discourses at intervals of leisure, while walking or riding; and having once arranged the outlines of the subject, and ascertained its principal bearings and applications, the work of preparation is over. The language remains to be suggested at the moment.

I do not mean by this, that preparation for the pulpit

should ever be made slightly, or esteemed an object of small importance. It doubtless demands, and should receive, the best of a man's talents and labors. What I contend for is, that a habit of mind may be acquired, which shall enable one to make a better and more thorough preparation at less expense of labor and time. He may acquire, by discipline, that ease and promptitude of looking into subjects and bringing out their prominent features, which shall enable him at a glance, as it were, to seize the points on which he should enlarge.* Some minds are so constituted as "to look a subject into shape" much more readily than others. But the power of doing it is in a great measure mechanical, and depends upon habit. All may acquire it to a certain extent. When the mind works with most concentration, it works at once most quickly and most surely. Now the act of speaking extempore favors this concentration of the powers, more than the slower process of leisurely writing — perhaps more than any other operation; consequently, it increases, with practice, the facility of dissecting subjects, and of arranging materials for preaching. In other words, the completeness with which a subject is viewed and its parts arranged, does not depend so much on the time spent upon it, as on the

* I would here refer the student to Whately's valuable work, ELEMENTS OF RHETORIC, which has appeared since the first publication of this treatise. "A perfect familiarity," he says, "with the rules laid down in the first part of his work, would be likely to give the extemporaneous orator that habit of *quickly methodizing* his thoughts on a given subject, which is essential (at least where no very long premeditation is allowed) to give to a Speech something of the weight of argument and clearness of arrangement, which characterize good writing."

vigor with which the attention is applied to it. That course of study is the best, which most favors this vigor of attention; and the habit of extemporaneous speaking is more than anything favorable to it, from the necessity which it imposes of applying the mind with energy, and thinking promptly.

The great danger in this case would be, that of substituting an easy flow of words for good sense and sober reflection, and becoming satisfied with very superficial thoughts. But this danger is guarded against by the habit of study, and of writing for other purposes. If a man should neglect all mental exertion, except so far as would be required in the meditation of a sermon, it would be ruinous. We witness its disastrous effects in the empty wordiness of many extemporaneous preachers. It is wrong, however, to argue against the practice itself, from their example; for all other modes would be equally condemned, if judged by the ill-success of indolent and unfaithful men. The minister must keep himself occupied, — reading, thinking, investigating; thus having his mind always awake and active. This is a far better preparation than the bare writing of sermons, for it exercises the powers more, and keeps them bright. The great master of Roman eloquence thought it essential to the true orator, that he should be familiar with all sciences, and have his mind filled with every variety of knowledge. He therefore, much as he studied his favorite art, yet occupied more time in literature, philosophy, and politics, than in the composition of his speeches. His preparation was less particular than general. So it has been with other eminent speakers. When Sir Samuel Romilly was in full practice in the High Court of Chancery, and at the same time overwhelmed with the

pressure of public political concerns; his custom was to enter the court, to receive there the history of the cause he was to plead, thus to acquaint himself with the circumstances for the first time, and forthwith proceed to argue it. His general preparation and long practice enabled him to do this, without failing in justice to his cause. I do not know that in this he was singular. The same sort of preparation would insure success in the pulpit. He who is always thinking, may expend upon each individual effort less time, because he can think at once fast and well. But he who never thinks, except when attempting to manufacture a sermon (and it is to be feared there are such men), must devote a great deal of time to this labor exclusively; and after all, he will not have that wide range of thought or copiousness of illustration, which his office demands and which study only can give.

In fact, what I have here insisted upon is exemplified in the case of the extemporaneous *writers*, whom I have already named. I would only carry their practice a step further, and devote an hour to a discourse instead of a day. Not to all discourses, for some ought to be written for the sake of writing, and some demand a sort of investigation, to which the use of the pen is essential. But then a very large proportion of the topics on which a minister should preach, have been subjects of his attention a thousand times. He is thoroughly familiar with them; and an hour to arrange his ideas and collect illustrations, is abundantly sufficient. The late Thomas Scott is said for years to have prepared his discourses entirely by meditation on the Sunday, and thus to have gained leisure for his extensive studies, and great and various labors. This is an extreme on which few have a right to venture, and which

should be recommended to none. It shows, however, the power of habit, and the ability of a mind to act promptly and effectually, which is kept upon the alert by constant occupation. He who is always engaged in thinking and studying, will always have thoughts enough for a sermon, and good ones too, which will come at an hour's warning.

The objections which may be made to the practice I have sought to recommend, I must leave to be considered in another place. I am desirous, in concluding this chapter, to add the favorable testimony of a writer, who expressly disapproves the practice in general, but who allows its excellence when accompanied by that preparation which I would every where imply.

"You are accustomed," says Dinouart,* "to the careful study and imitation of nature. You have used yourself to writing and speaking with care on different subjects, and have well stored your memory by reading. You thus have provided resources for speaking, which are always at hand. The best authors and the best thoughts are familiar to you; you can readily quote the Scriptures, you express yourself easily and gracefully, you have a sound and correct judgment on which you can depend, method and precision in the arrangement of proofs; you can readily connect each part by natural transitions, and are able to say all that belongs, and precisely what belongs to the subject. You may then take only a day, or only an hour, to reflect on your subject, to arrange your topics, to consult your memory, to choose and prepare your illustrations, — and then, appear in public. I am perfectly willing that you should. The

* Sur l'Eloquence du Corps, ou l'Action du Prédicateur.

common expressions which go to make up the body of the discourse, will present themselves spontaneously. Your periods, perhaps, will be less harmonious, your transitions less ingenious, an ill-placed word will sometimes escape you; but all this is pardonable. The animation of your delivery will compensate for these blemishes, and you will be master of your own feelings, and those of your hearers. There will, perhaps, be apparent throughout a certain disorder, but it will not prevent your pleasing and affecting me; your action as well as your words will appear to me the more natural."

CHAPTER II.

DISADVANTAGES OF EXTEMPORANEOUS PREACHING. OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

AGAINST what has been advanced in the preceding pages, many objections will be urged, and the evils of the practice I recommend be declared more than sufficient to counterbalance its advantages. Of these it is necessary that I should now take notice, and obviate them as well as I may.

It should be first of all remarked, that the force of the objections commonly made, lies against the exclusive use of extemporaneous preaching, and not against its partial and occasional use. It is of consequence that this should be considered. There can be no doubt, that he would preach very wretchedly, who should always be haranguing without the corrective discipline of writing. The habit of writing is essential. Many of the objections which are currently made to this mode of address, fall to the ground when this statement is made.

Other objections have been founded on the idea, that by *extemporaneous* is meant, *unpremeditated.* Whereas there is a plain and important distinction between them, the latter word being applied to the thoughts, and the former to the language only. To preach without premeditation, is altogether unjustifiable; although there is no doubt that a man

of habitual readiness of mind, may express himself to great advantage on a subject with which he is familiar, after very little meditation.

Many writers on the art of preaching, as well as on eloquence in general, have given a decided judgment unfavorable to extemporaneous speaking. There can be no fairer way of answering their objections, than by examining what they have advanced, and opposing their authority by that of equal names on the other side.

Gerard, in his Treatise on the Pastoral Charge, has the following passage on this subject.

"He will run into trite, common-place topics; his compositions will be loose and unconnected; his language often coarse and confused; and diffidence, or care to recollect his subject, will destroy the management of his voice." At the same time, however, he admits that "it is very proper that a man should be able to preach in this way, when it is necessary; — but no man ought always to preach in this way." To which decision I have certainly nothing to object.

Mason, in his Student and Pastor, says to the same effect, that "the inaccuracy of diction, the inelegance, poverty, and lowness of expression, which is commonly observed in extempore discourses, will not fail to offend every hearer of good taste."

Dinouart, who is an advocate for recitation from memory, says that "experience decides against extemporaneous preaching, though there are exceptions; but these are very few; and we must not be led astray by the success of a few first rate orators."

Hume, in his Essay upon Eloquence, expresses an opinion that the modern deficiency in this art is to be attributed

to "that extreme affectation of extempore speaking, which has led to extreme carelessness of method."

The writer of an article, on the Greek Orators, in the Edinburgh Review,* observes, that "among the sources of the corruption of modern eloquence, may clearly be distinguished as the most fruitful, the habit of extempore speaking, acquired rapidly by persons who frequent popular assemblies, and, beginning at the wrong end, attempt to speak before they have studied the art of oratory, or even duly stored their minds with the treasures of thought and language, which can only be drawn from assiduous intercourse with the ancient and modern classics."

These are the prominent objections which have been made to the practice in question. Without denying that they have weight, I think it may be made to appear that they have not the unquestionable preponderance, which is assumed for them. They will be found, on examination, to be the objections of a cultivated taste, and to be drawn from the examples of undisciplined men, who ought to be left entirely out of the question.

I.

The objection most urged is that which relates to style. It is said, the expression will be poor, inelegant, inaccurate, and offensive to hearers of taste.

To those who urge this it may be replied, that the reason why style is an important consideration in the pulpit, is, not that the taste of the hearers may be gratified,—for but a small part of any congregation is capable of taking cognizance of this matter;—but solely for the purpose of presenting the speaker's thoughts, reasonings, and expostula-

* No. LXXXI. p. 82.

tions distinctly and forcibly to the minds of his hearers. If this be effected, it is all which can reasonably be demanded. And I ask if it be not notorious, that an earnest and appropriate elocution will give this effect to a poor style, and that poor speaking will take it away from the most exact and emphatic style? Is it not also notorious that the peculiar earnestness of spontaneous speech, is, above all others, suited to arrest the attention, and engage the feelings of an audience? and that the mere reading of a piece of fine composition, under the notion that careful thought and finished diction are the only things needful, leaves the majority uninterested in the discourse, and free to think of anything they please? "It is a poor compliment," says Blair, "that one is an accurate reasoner, if he be not a persuasive speaker also." It is a small matter that the style is poor, so long as it answers the great purpose of instructing and affecting men. So that, as I have more fully shown in a former place, the objection lies on an erroneous foundation.

Besides, if it were not so, it will be found quite as strong against the *writing* of sermons. For how large a proportion of sermon writers have these same faults of style! what a great want of force, neatness, compactness, is there in the composition of most preachers! what weakness, inelegance, and inconclusiveness; and how small improvement do they make, even after the practice of years! How happens this? It is because they do not make this an object of attention and study; and some might be unable to attain it if they did. But that watchfulness and care which secure a correct and neat style in writing, would also secure it in speaking. It does not naturally belong to the one, more than to the other, and may be as certainly attained in each by the proper pains. Indeed, so far as my

observation has extended, I am not certain that there is not as large a proportion of extempore speakers, whose diction is exact and unexceptionable, as of writers — always taking into view their education, which equally affects the one and the other. And it is a consideration of great weight, that the faults in question are far less offensive in speakers than in writers.

It is apparent that objectors of this sort are guilty of a double mistake; first, in laying too great stress upon mere defects of style, and then in taking for granted, that these are unavoidable. They might as well insist that defects of written style are unavoidable. Whereas they are the consequence of the negligent mode in which the art has been studied, and of its having been given up, for the most part, to ignorant and fanatical pretenders. Let it be diligently cultivated by educated men, and we shall find no more cause to expel it from the pulpit than from the forum or the parliament. "Poverty, inelegance, and poorness of diction," will be no longer so "generally observed," and even hearers of taste will cease to be offended.

II.

A want of order, a rambling, unconnected, desultory manner, is commonly objected; as Hume styles it, "extreme carelessness of method;" and this is so often observed, as to be justly an object of dread. But this is occasioned by that indolence and want of discipline to which we have just alluded. It is not a necessary evil. If a man have never studied the art of speaking, nor passed through a course of preparatory discipline; if he have so rash and unjustifiable a confidence in himself, that he will undertake to speak, without having considered what he shall

say, what object he shall aim at, or by what steps he shall attain it; the inevitable consequence will be confusion, inconclusiveness, and wandering. Who recommends such a course? But he who has first trained himself to the work, and whenever he would speak, has surveyed his ground, and become familiar with the points to be dwelt upon, and the course of reasoning and track of thought to be followed; will go on from one step to another, in an easy and natural order, and give no occasion to the complaint of confusion or disarrangement.

"Some preachers," says Dinouart, "have the folly to think that they can make sermons impromptu. And what a piece of work they make! They bolt out every thing which comes into their head. They take for granted, what ought to be proved, or perhaps they state half the argument, and forget the rest. Their appearance corresponds to the state of their mind, which is occupied in hunting after some way of finishing the sentence they have begun. They repeat themselves; they wander off in digression. They stand stiff without moving; or if they are of a lively temperament, they are full of the most turbulent action; their eyes and hands are flying about in every direction, and their words choke in their throats. They are like men swimming who have got frightened, and throw about their hands and feet at random, to save themselves from drowning."

There is doubtless great truth in this humorous description. But what is the legitimate inference? that extemporaneous speaking is altogether ridiculous and mischievous? or only that it is an art which requires study and discipline, and which no man should presume to practise, until he has fitted himself for it?

III.

In the same way I should dispose of the objection, that this habit leads to barrenness in preaching, and the everlasting repetition of the same sentiments and topics. If a man make his facility of speech an excuse for the neglect of study, then doubtless this will be the result. He who cannot resist his indolent propensities, had best avoid this occasion of temptation. He must be able to command himself to think, and industriously prepare himself by meditation, if he would be safe in this hazardous experiment. He who does this, and continues to learn and reflect while he preaches, will be no more empty and monotonous than if he carefully wrote every word.

IV.

But this temptation to indolence in the preparation for the desk, is urged as in itself a decisive objection. A man finds, that, after a little practice, it is an exceedingly easy thing to fill up his half-hour with declamation which shall pass off very well, and hence he grows negligent in previous meditation; and insensibly degenerates into an empty exhorter, without choice of language, or variety of ideas. This is undoubtedly the great and alarming danger of this practice. This must be triumphed over, or it is ruinous. We see examples of it wherever we look among those whose preaching is exclusively extempore. In these cases, the evil rises to its magnitude in consequence of their total neglect of the pen. The habit of writing a certain proportion of the time would, in some measure, counteract this dangerous tendency.

But it is still insisted, that man's natural love of ease is

not to be trusted; that he will not long continue the drudgery of writing in part; that when he has once gained confidence to speak without study, he will find it so flattering to his indolence, that he will involuntarily give himself up to it, and relinquish the pen altogether; that consequently there is no security, except in never beginning.

To this it may be replied, that they who have not principle and self-government enough to keep them industrious, will not be kept so by being compelled to write sermons. I think we have abundant proof, that a man may write with as little pains and thinking, as he can speak. It by no means follows, that because it is on paper, it is therefore the result of study. And if it be not, it will be greatly inferior, in point of effect, to an unpremeditated declamation; for in the latter case, there will probably be at least a temporary excitement of feeling, and consequent vivacity of manner, while in the former the indolence of the writer will be made doubly intolerable by his heaviness in reading.

It cannot be doubted, however, that if any one find his facility of extemporaneous invention, likely to prove destructive to his habits of diligent application; it were advisable that he refrain from the practice. It could not be worth while for him to lose his habits of study and thinking for the sake of an ability to speak, which would avail him but little, after his ability to think has been weakened or destroyed.

As for those whose indolence habitually prevails over principle, and who make no preparation for duty excepting the mechanical one of covering over a certain number of pages, — they have no concern in the ministry, and should be driven to seek some other employment, where their me-

chanical labor may provide them a livelihood, without injuring their own souls, or those of other men.

If the objection in question be applied to conscientious men, whose hearts are in their profession, and who have a sincere desire to do good, it certainly has very little weight. The minds of such men are kept active with reflection, and stored with knowledge, and warm with religious feeling. They are therefore always ready to speak to the purpose, as well as write to the purpose; and their habitual sense of the importance of their office, and their anxiety to fulfil it in the best manner, will forbid that indolence which is so disastrous. The objection implies, that the consequence pointed out is one which cannot be avoided. Experience teaches us the contrary. It is the tendency — but a tendency which may be, for it has been, counteracted. Many have preached in this mode for years, and yet have never relaxed their diligence in study, nor declined in the variety, vigor, and interest of their discourses; sometimes dull, undoubtedly; but this may be said with equal truth of the most faithful and laborious writers.

V.

Many suppose that there is a certain natural talent, essential to success in extempore speaking, no less than in poetry; and that it is absurd to recommend the art to those who have not this peculiar talent, and vain for them to attempt its practice.

In regard to that ready flow of words, which seems to be the natural gift of some men, it is of little consequence whether it be really such, or be owing to the education and habits of early life, and vain self-confidence. It is certain that diffidence and the want of habit are great hindrances

to fluency of speech; and it is equally certain, that this natural fluency is a very questionable advantage to him who would be an impressive speaker. It is quite observable that those who at first talk easiest, do not always talk best. Their very facility is a snare to them. It serves to keep them content; they make no effort to improve, and are likely to fall into slovenly habits of elocution. So that this unacquired fluency is so far from essential, that it is not even a benefit, and it may be an injury. It keeps from final eminence by the very greatness of its early promise. On the other hand, he who possesses originally no remarkable command of language, and whom an unfortunate bashfulness prevents from well using what he has; is obliged to subject himself to severe discipline, to submit to rules and tasks, to go through a tedious process of training, to acquire by much labor the needful sway over his thoughts and words, so that they shall come at his bidding, and not be driven away by his own diffidence, or the presence of other men. To do all this, is a long and disheartening labor. He is exposed to frequent mortifications, and must endure many grievous failures, before he attain that confidence which is indispensable to success. But then in this discipline, his powers, mental and moral, are strained up to the highest intenseness of action; after persevering practice, they become habitually subject to his control, and work with a precision, exactness, and energy, which can never be in the possession of him, who has depended on his native, undisciplined gift. Of the truth of this, examples are by no means wanting, and I could name, if it were proper, more than one striking instance within my own observation. It was probably this to which Newton referred, when he said, that he never spoke well till he

felt that he could not speak at all. Let no one therefore think it an obstacle in his way that he has no readiness of words. If he have good sense and no deficiency of talent, and is willing to labor for this as all great acquisitions must be labored for, he needs not fear but that in time he will attain it.

We must be careful, however, not to mistake the object to be attained. It is not a high rank in oratory, consummate eloquence. If it were, then indeed a young man might pause till he had ascertained whether he possessed all those extraordinary endowments of intellect, imagination, sensibility, countenance, voice, and person, which belong to few men in a century, and without which the great orator does not exist. He is one of those splendid formations of nature, which she exhibits but rarely; and it is not necessary to the object of his pursuit that the minister be such. The purposes of his office are less ambitious, — to impart instruction and do good; and it is by no means certain that the greatest eloquence is best adapted to these purposes in the pulpit. But any man, with powers which fit him for the ministry at all, — unless there be a few extraordinary exceptions, — is capable of learning to express himself clearly, correctly, and with method; and this is precisely what is wanted, and no more than this. I do not say eloquently; for as it is not thought indispensable that every writer of sermons should be eloquent, it cannot be thought essential that every speaker should be so. But the same powers which have enabled him to write, will, with sufficient discipline, enable him to speak; with every probability that when he comes to speak with the same ease and collectedness, he will do it with a nearer approach to eloquence. Without such discipline he has no right to

hope for success; let him not say that success is impossible, until he has submitted to it.

I apprehend that these remarks will be found not only correct in theory, but agreeable to experience. With the exceeding little systematic cultivation of the art which there is amongst us, and no actual instruction, we find that a great majority of the lawyers in our courts, and not a small portion of the members of our legislatures, are able to argue and debate. In some of the most popular and quite numerous religious sects, we find preachers enough, who are able to communicate their thoughts and harangue their congregations, and exert very powerful and permanent influence over large bodies of the people. Some of these are men of as small natural talents and as limited education, as any that enter the sacred office. It should seem therefore that no one needs to despair.

In the ancient republics of Greece and Rome, this accomplishment was a necessary branch of a finished education. A much smaller proportion of the citizens were educated than amongst us; but of these a much larger number became orators. No man could hope for distinction or influence, and yet slight this art.* The commanders of their armies were orators as well as soldiers, and ruled as well by their rhetorical as by their military skill. There was no trusting with them as with us, to a natural facility,

* It is often said that extemporaneous speaking is the distinction of modern eloquence. But the whole language of Cicero's rhetorical works, as well as particular terms in common use, and anecdotes recorded of different speakers, prove the contrary; not to mention Quinctilian's express instructions on the subject. Hume, also, tells us from Suidas, that the writing of speeches was unknown until the time of Pericles.

or the acquisition of an accidental fluency by actual practice. But they served an apprenticeship to the art. They passed through a regular course of instruction in schools. They submitted to long and laborious discipline — *infinitus labor et quotidiana meditatio.** They exercised themselves frequently, both before equals and in the presence of teachers, who criticised, reproved, rebuked, excited emulation, and left nothing undone which art and perseverance could accomplish. The greatest orators of antiquity, so far from being favored by natural tendencies, except indeed in their high intellectual endowments, had to struggle against natural obstacles; and instead of growing up spontaneously to their unrivalled eminence, they forced themselves forward by the most discouraging artificial process. Demosthenes combatted an impediment in speech and ungainliness of gesture, which at first drove him from the forum in disgrace. Cicero failed at first through weakness of lungs, and an excessive vehemence of manner, which wearied his hearers and defeated his own purpose. These defects were conquered by study and discipline. Cicero exiled himself from home, and during his absence in various lands passed not a day without a rhetorical exercise; seeking the masters who were most severe in criticism, as the surest means of leading him to the perfection at which he aimed. Such too was the education of their other great men. They were all, according to their ability and station, orators; orators, not by nature or accident, but by education; formed in a strict process of rhetorical training; admired and followed even while Demosthenes and Cicero were living, and unknown now, only because it is not possible that any but the first should survive the ordeal of ages.

* Tac. de Or. Dial. c. 30.

The inference to be drawn from these observations, is, that if so many of those who received an accomplished education became accomplished orators, — because to become so was one purpose of their study, — then it is in the power of a much larger proportion amongst us, to form themselves into creditable and accurate speakers. The inference should not be denied until proved false by experiment. Let this art be made an object of attention, and young men train themselves to it faithfully and long; and if any of competent talents and tolerable science be found at last incapable of expressing themselves in continued and connected discourse, so as to answer the ends of the Christian ministry; then, and not till then, let it be said that a peculiar talent or natural aptitude is requisite, the want of which must render effort vain; then, and not till then, let us acquiesce in this indolent and timorous notion, which contradicts the whole testimony of antiquity, and all the experience of the world. Doubtless, after the most that can be done, there will be found the greatest variety of attainment; "men will differ," as Burnet remarks, "quite as much as in their written compositions;" and some will do but poorly what others will do excellently. But this is likewise true of every other art in which men engage, and not least so of writing sermons; concerning which no one will say, that as poor are not written, as it would be possible for any one to speak. In truth, men of small talents and great sluggishness, of a feeble sense of duty and no zeal, will of course make poor sermons, by whatever process they may do it, let them write or let them speak. It is doubtful concerning some, whether they would even steal good ones.

The survey we have now taken renders it evident, that the evils, which are principally objected against as attending this mode of preaching, are not necessary evils, but are owing to insufficient study and preparation before the practice is commenced, and indolence afterward. This is implied in the very expressions of the objectors themselves, who attribute the evil to "beginning at the wrong end, attempting to speak before studying the art of oratory, or even storing the mind with treasures of thought and language." It is, also, implied in this language, that study and preparation are capable of removing the objections. I do not therefore advocate the art, without insisting on the necessity of severe discipline and training. No man should be encouraged or permitted to adopt it, who will not take the necessary pains, and proceed with the necessary perseverance.

This should be the more earnestly insisted upon, because it is from our loose and lazy notions on the subject, that eloquence in every department is suffering so much, and that the pulpit especially has become so powerless; where the most important things that receive utterance upon earth, are sometimes read like school-boys' tasks, without even the poor pains to lay emphasis on the right words, and to pause in the right places. And this, because we fancy that, if nature have not designed us for orators, it is vain to make effort, and if she have, we shall be such without effort. True, that the noble gifts of mind are from nature; but not language, or knowledge, or accent, or tone, or gesture; these are to be learned, and it is with these that the speaker is concerned. These are all matters of acquisition, and of difficult acquisition; possible to be attained, and well worth the exertion that must be made.

The history of the world is full of testimony to prove how much depends upon industry; not an eminent orator has lived, but is an example of it. Yet in contradiction to all this, the almost universal feeling appears to be, that industry can effect nothing, that eminence is the result of accident, and that every one must be content to remain just what he may happen to be. Thus multitudes, who come forward as teachers and guides, suffer themselves to be satisfied with the most indifferent attainments and a miserable mediocrity, without so much as inquiring how they might rise higher, much less making any attempt to rise. For any other art they would have served an apprenticeship, and would be ashamed to practise it in public before they had learned it. If any one would sing, he attends a master, and is drilled in the very elementary principles; and only after the most laborious process dares to exercise his voice in public. This he does, though he has scarce any thing to learn but the mechanical execution of what lies in sensible forms before his eye. But the extemporaneous speaker, who is to invent as well as to utter, to carry on an operation of the mind as well as to produce sound, enters upon the work without preparatory discipline, and then wonders that he fails! If he were learning to play on the flute for public exhibition, what hours and days would he spend in giving facility to his fingers, and attaining the power of the sweetest and most impressive execution. If he were devoting himself to the organ, what months and years would he labor, that he might know its compass, and be master of its keys, and be able to draw out, at will, all its various combinations of harmonious sound, and its full richness and delicacy of expression. And yet he will fancy that the grandest, the most various, the most expres-

sive of all instruments, which the infinite Creator has fashioned by the union of an intellectual soul with the powers of speech, may be played upon without study or practice; he comes to it, a mere uninstructed tyro, and thinks to manage all its stops, and command the whole compass of its varied and comprehensive power! He finds himself a bungler in the attempt, is mortified at his failure, and settles it in his mind forever that the attempt is vain.

Success in every art, whatever may be the natural talent, is always the reward of industry and pains. But the instances are many, of men of the finest natural genius, whose beginning has promised much, but who have degenerated wretchedly as they advanced, because they trusted to their gifts and made no effort to improve. That there have never been other men of equal endowments with Demosthenes and Cicero, none would venture to suppose; but who have so devoted themselves to their art, or become equal in excellence? If those great men had been content, like others, to continue as they began, and had never made their persevering efforts for improvement, what would their countries have benefitted from their genius, or the world have known of their fame? They would have been lost in the undistinguished crowd, that sunk to oblivion around them. Of how many more will the same remark prove true! What encouragement is thus given to the industrious! With such encouragement, how inexcusable is the negligence which suffers the most interesting and important truths to seem heavy and dull, and fall ineffectual to the ground, through mere sluggishness in their delivery! How unworthy of one who performs the high function of a religious instructor — upon whom depend, in a great measure, the religious knowledge and devotional sentiment and final

character of many fellow beings — to imagine that he can worthily discharge this great concern by occasionally talking for an hour, he knows not how, and in a manner which he has taken no pains to render correct, impressive, or attractive; and which, simply through want of that command over himself which study would give, is immethodical, verbose, inaccurate, feeble, trifling. It has been said of the good preacher, that "truths divine come mended from his tongue." Alas, they come ruined and worthless from such a man as this. They lose that holy energy by which they are to convert the soul and purify man for heaven, and sink, in interest and efficacy, below the level of those principles which govern the ordinary affairs of this lower world.

CHAPTER III.

THE observations contained in the preceding chapter make it sufficiently evident, that the art of extemporaneous speaking, however advantageous to the Christian minister, and however possible to be acquired, is yet attended with embarrassments and difficulties, which are to be removed only by long and arduous labor. It is not enough, however, to insist upon the necessity of this discipline. We must know in what it consists, and how it is to be conducted. In completing, therefore, the plan I have proposed to myself, I am now to give a few hints respecting the mode in which the study is to be carried on, and obstacles to be surmounted. These hints, gathered partly from experience and partly from observation and books, will be necessarily incomplete; but not, it is hoped, altogether useless to those who are asking some direction.

I.

The first thing to be observed is, that the student who would acquire facility in this art, should bear it constantly in mind, and have regard to it in all his studies, and in his whole mode of study. The reason is very obvious. He that would become eminent in any pursuit, must make it the primary and almost exclusive object of his attention.

It must never be long absent from his thoughts, and he must be contriving how to promote it, in every thing he undertakes. It is thus that the miser accumulates, by making the most trifling occurrences the occasions of gain; and thus the ambitious man is on the alert to forward his purposes of advancement by little events which another would pass unobserved. So too he, the business of whose life is preaching, should be on the watch to render every thing subservient to this end. The inquiry should always be, how he can turn the knowledge he is acquiring, the subject he is studying, this mode of reasoning, this event, this conversation, and the conduct of this or that man, to aid the purposes of religious instruction. He may find an example in the manner in which Pope pursued his favorite study. "From his attention to poetry," says Johnson, "he was never diverted. If conversation offered any thing that could be improved, he committed it to paper; if a thought, or perhaps an expression more happy than was common, rose to his mind, he was careful to write it; an independent distich was preserved for an opportunity of insertion, and some little fragments have been found containing lines, or parts of lines, to be wrought upon at some other time." By a like habitual and vigilant attention, the preacher will find scarce any thing but may be made to minister to his great design, by either giving rise to some new train of thought, or suggesting an argument, or placing some truth in a new light, or furnishing some useful illustration. Thus none of his reading will be lost; every poem and play, every treatise on science, and speculation in philosophy, and even every ephemeral tale may be made to give hints toward the better management of sermons, and the more effectual proposing and communicating of truth.

He who proposes to himself the art of extemporaneous speaking, should in like manner have constant regard to this particular object, and make every thing co-operate to form those habits of mind which are essential to it. This may be done, not only without any hindrance to the progress of his other studies, but even so far as to promote them. The most important requisites are rapid thinking, and ready command of language. By rapid thinking I mean, what has already been spoken of, the power of seizing at once upon the most prominent points of the subject to be discussed, and tracing out, in their proper order, the subordinate thoughts which connect them together. This power depends very much upon habit; a habit more easily acquired by some minds than by others, and by some with great difficulty. But there are few who, should they have a view to the formation of such a habit in all their studies, might not attain it in a degree quite adequate to their purpose. This is much more indisputably true in regard to fluency of language.

Let it, therefore, be a part of his daily care to analyze the subjects which come before him, and to frame sketches of sermons. This will aid him to acquire a facility in laying open, dividing, and arranging topics, and preparing those outlines which he is to take with him into the pulpit. Let him also investigate carefully the method of every author he reads, marking the divisions of his arrangement, and the connection and train of his reasoning. Butler's preface to his Sermons will afford him some fine hints on this way of study. Let this be his habitual mode of reading, so that he shall as much do this, as receive the meaning of separate sentences, and shall be always able to give a better account of the progress of the argument and the

relation of every part to the others and to the whole, than of merely individual passages and separate illustrations. This will infallibly beget a readiness in finding the divisions and boundaries of a subject, which is one important requisite to an easy and successful speaker.

In a similar manner, let him always bear in mind the value of a fluent and correct use of language. Let him not be negligent of this in his conversation, but be careful ever to select the best words, to avoid a slovenly style and drawling utterance, and to aim at neatness, force, and brevity. This may be done without formality or stiffness, or pedantic affectation; and when settled into a habit is invaluable.

II.

In addition to this general cultivation, there should be frequent exercise of the act of speaking. Practice is essential to perfection in any art, and in none more so than in this. No man reads well or writes well, except by long practice; and he cannot expect without it to speak well — an operation which is equivalent to the other two united. He may indeed get along, as the phrase is; but not so well as he might do and should do. He may not always be able even to get along. He may be as sadly discomfited as a friend of mine, who said that he had made the attempt, and was convinced that for him to speak extempore was impossible; he had risen from his study table, and tried to make a speech, proving that virtue is better than vice; but stumbled and failed at the very outset. How could one hope to do better in a first attempt, if he had not considered beforehand what he should say? It were as rational to think he could play on the organ with-

out having learned, or translate from a language he had never studied.

It would not be too much to require of the student, that he should exercise himself every day once at least, if not oftener; and this on a variety of subjects, and in various ways, that he may attain a facility in every mode. It would be a pleasant interchange of employment to rise from the subject which occupies his thoughts, or from the book which he is reading, and repeat to himself the substance of what he has just perused, with such additions and variations, or criticisms, as may suggest themselves at the moment. There could hardly be a more useful exercise, even if there were no reference to this particular end. How many excellent chapters of valuable authors, how many fine views of important subjects, would be thus impressed upon his mind, and what rich treasures of thought and language would be thus laid up in store. And according as he should be engaged in a work of reasoning, or description, or exhortation, or narrative, he would be attaining the power of expressing himself readily in each of these various styles. By pursuing this course for two or three years, "a man may render himself such a master in this matter," says Burnet, "that he can never be surprised;" and he adds, that he never knew a man faithfully to pursue the plan of study he proposed, without being successful at last.

III.

When by such a course of study and discipline he has attained a tolerable fluency of thoughts and words, and a moderate confidence in his own powers; there are several

things to be observed in first exercising the gift in public, in order to ensure comfort and success.

It is advisable to make the first efforts in some other place than the pulpit. The pulpit, from various causes already alluded to, is the most embarrassing place from which a man can speak. One may utter himself fluently in a spot of less sanctity and dignity, who should be unable to summon his self-possession or command his thoughts in that desk, which he never names or contemplates, but "filled with solemn awe." Let the beginner, therefore, select some other field, until he have become accustomed to the exercise, and disciplined to self command. Let him, in the familiar lectures of the Sunday school, or in classes for the biblical instruction of young people, or in private meetings for social religious worship, when there is less restraint upon his powers and he is warmed by near contact with those whom he addresses — let him in such scenes make the first rude trial of his gifts. Practice there will give him confidence and facility; and he may afterward make the more hazardous and responsible attempt before a Sabbath congregation.

IV.

It has been generally recommended to beginners, that their first experiments should be hortatory; and for this end, that after having written the body of the discourse, the application and conclusion should be left to the moment of delivery. Then, it is said, the hearer and speaker having become engaged and warm in the subject, the former will less observe any blemishes and inexactness of language, and the latter will have a freedom and flow of utterance, which he would be less likely to enjoy at an earlier

and colder moment; besides, that the exhortation is a much easier achievement than the body of the discourse.

It is probable that for some persons this rule may be found best; though if I were to give one founded on my own experience, it would be directly opposed to it. I should esteem it a much safer and more successful mode, to attempt *ex tempore* the commencement, than the close of a discourse. The commencement, if the sermon be worth preaching, is laid out in an orderly succession of ideas, which follow one another in a connected train of illustration, or argument, or narrative; and he who is familiar with the train, will find its several steps spontaneously follow one another, and will have no difficulty in clothing them in ready and suitable terms. But the application is a matter which cannot so well be thus arranged, and the parts of which do not so closely adhere to each other. This makes the actual effort of mind at the moment of delivery more severe. And besides this, it will generally be found more difficult, I apprehend, to change the passive state of mind which exists in reading, for the action and ardor of extemporaneous address, than to start with this activity at the beginning, when the mind in fact is already acting under the excitement of a preparation to speak. Not to forget, that a young man, who is modest because of his youth as much as he is bold because of his office, is naturally intimidated by the attempt to address with direct exhortation those whom he sees around him so much older than himself, and many of whom, he feels, to be so much better.

I am persuaded, too, that it is a great mistake to imagine a closing exhortation easier work than the previous management of the discourse. I know nothing which

requires more intense thought, more prudent consideration, or more judicious skill, both in ordering the topics and selecting the words. One may indeed very easily dash out into exclamations, and make loud appeals to his audience. But to appeal pungently, weightily, effectually, in such words and emphasis, that the particular truth or duty shall be driven home and fastened in the mind and conscience — this is an arduous, delicate, anxious duty, which may well task a man's most serious and thoughtful hours of preparation. It is only by giving such preparation that he can hope to make that impression which God will bless; and he that thinks it the easiest of things, and harangues without forethought, must harangue without effect. Is it not probable, that much of the vapid and insignificant verbiage which is poured out at the close of sermons, originates in this notion that exhortation is a very simple affair, to which any body is equal at any time?

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that minds are differently constituted. Some may find that mode the best for themselves, which to me seems the worst. It remains therefore for every one to try himself, and decide, from a proper acquaintance with the operations of his own mind, in what method he shall most probably be successful.

V.

It is recommended by Bishop Burnet and others, that the first attempts be made by short excursions from written discourses; like the young bird that tries its wings by short flights, till it gradually acquires strength and courage to sustain itself longer in the air. This advice is undoubtedly judicious. For one may safely trust himself in a few sen-

tences, who would be confounded in the attempt to frame a whole discourse. For this purpose, blanks may be left in writing, where the sentiment is familiar, or only a short illustration is to be introduced. As success in these smaller attempts gives him confidence, he may proceed to larger; till at length, when his mind is bright and his feelings engaged, he may quit his manuscript altogether, and present the substance of what he had written, with greater fervor and effect, than if he had confined himself to his paper. It was once observed to me by an interesting preacher of the Baptist denomination, that he had found from experience this to be the most advisable and perfect mode; since it combined the advantages of written and extemporaneous composition. By preparing sermons in this way, he said, he had a shelter and security if his mind should be dull at the time of delivery; and if it were active, he was able to leave what he had written, and obey the ardor of his feelings, and go forth on the impulse of the moment, wherever his spirit might lead him. A similar remark I heard made by a distinguished scholar of the Methodist connection, who urged, what is universally asserted by those who have tried this method with any success, that what has been written is found to be tame and spiritless, in comparison with the animated glow of that which springs from the energy of the moment.

There are some persons, however, who would be embarrassed by an effort to change the operation of the mind from reading to inventing. Such persons may find it best to make their beginning with a whole discourse.

VI.

In this case, there will be a great advantage in selecting for first efforts expository subjects. To say nothing of the importance and utility of this mode of preaching, which render it desirable that every minister should devote a considerable proportion of his labors to it; it contains great facilities and reliefs for the inexperienced speaker. The close study of a passage of Scripture which is necessary to expounding it, renders it familiar. The exposition is inseparably connected with the text, and necessarily suggested by it. The inferences and practical reflections are, in like manner, naturally and indissolubly associated with the passage. The train of remark is easily preserved, and embarrassment in a great measure guarded against, by the circumstance that the order of discourse is spread out in the open Bible, upon which the eyes may rest and by which the thoughts may rally.

VII.

A similar advantage is gained to the beginner, in discourses of a different character, by a very careful and minute division of the subject. The division should not only be logical and clear, but into parts as numerous as possible. The great advantage here is, that the partitions being many, the speaker is compelled frequently to return to his minutes. He is thus kept in the track, and prevented from wandering far in needless digressions — that besetting infirmity of unrestrained extemporizers. He also escapes the mortifying consequences of a momentary confusion and cloudiness of mind, by having it in his power to leave an unsatisfactory train at once, before the state of

his mind is perceived by the audience, and take up the next topic, where he may recover his self-possession, and proceed without impediment. This is no unimportant consideration. It relieves him from the horror of feeling obliged to go on, while conscious that he is saying nothing to the purpose; and at the same time secures the very essential requisite of right method.

VIII.

The next rule is, that the whole subject, with the order and connection of all its parts, and the entire train of thought, be made thoroughly familiar by previous meditation. The speaker must have the discourse in his mind as one whole, whose various parts are distinctly perceived as other wholes connected with each other and contributing to a common end. There must be no uncertainty, when he rises to speak, as to what he is going to say; no mist or darkness over the land he is about to travel; but, conscious of his acquaintance with the ground, he must step forward confidently, not doubting that he shall find the passes of its mountains, and thread the intricacies of its forests, by the paths which he has already trodden. It is an imperfect and partial preparation in this respect, which so often renders the manner awkward and embarrassed, and the discourse obscure and perplexed. *Nemo potest de eâ re, quam non novit, non turpissime dicere.* But when the preparation is faithful, the speaker feels at home; being under no anxiety respecting the ideas or the order of their succession, he has the more ready control of his person, his eye, and his hand, and the more fearlessly gives up his mind to its own action, and casts himself upon the current.

Uneasiness and constraint are the inevitable attendants of unfaithful preparation, and they are fatal to success.

It is true, that no man can attain the power of self-possession so as to feel at all times equally and entirely at ease. But he may guard against the sorest ills which attend its loss, by always making sure of a train of thought, — being secure that he has ideas, and that they lie in such order as to be found and brought forward in some sort of apparel, even when he has in some measure lost the mastery of himself. The richness or meanness of their dress will depend on the humor of the moment. It will vary as much as health and spirits vary, which is more in some men than in others. But the thoughts themselves he may produce, and be certain of saying *what* he intended to say, even when he cannot say it *as* he intended. It must have been observed, by those who are at all in the habit of observation of this kind, that the mind operates in this particular like a machine, which, having been wound up, runs on by its own spontaneous action, until it has gone through its appointed course. Many men have thus continued speaking in the midst of an embarrassment of mind which rendered them almost unconscious of what they were saying, and incapable of giving an account of it afterward; while yet the unguided, self-moving intellect wrought so well, that the speech was not esteemed unwholesome or defective by the hearers. The experience of this fact has doubtless helped many to believe that they spoke from inspiration. It ought to teach all, that there is no sufficient cause for that excessive apprehension, which so often unmans them, and which, though it may not stop their mouths, must deprive their address of all grace and beauty, of all ease and force.

IX.

We may introduce in this place another rule, the observance of which will aid in preventing the ill consequences resulting from the accidental loss of self-possession. The rule is, utter yourself very slowly and deliberately, with careful pauses. This is at all times a great aid to a clear and perspicuous statement. It is essential to the speaker, who would keep the command of himself and consequently of his hearers.

One is very likely, when, in the course of speaking, he has stumbled on an unfortunate expression, or said what he would prefer not to say, or for a moment lost sight of the precise point at which he was aiming, to hurry on with increasing rapidity, as if to get as far as possible from his misfortune, or cause it to be forgotten in the crowd of new words. But instead of thus escaping the evil, he increases it; he entangles himself more; and augments the difficulty of recovering his route. The true mode of recovering himself is by increased deliberation. He must pause, and give himself time to think; — *ut tamen deliberare, non hesitare, videatur.* He need not be alarmed lest his hearers suspect the difficulty. Most of them are likely to attribute the slowness of his step to any cause rather than the true one. They take it for granted, that he says and does precisely as he intended and wished. They suppose that he is pausing to gather up his strength. It excites their attention. The change of manner is a relief to them. And the probability is, that the speaker not only recovers himself, but that the effort to do it gives a spring to the action of his powers, which enables him to proceed afterward with greater energy.

X.

In regard to language, the best rule is, that no preparation be made. There is no convenient and profitable medium between speaking from memory and from immediate suggestion. To mix the two is no aid, but a great hindrance, because it perplexes the mind between the very different operations of memory and invention. To prepare sentences, and parts of sentences, which are to be introduced here and there, and the intervals between them to be filled up in the delivery, is the surest of all ways to produce constraint. It is like the embarrassment of framing verses to prescribed rhymes; as vexatious, and as absurd. To be compelled to shape the course of remark so as to suit a sentence which is by and by to come, or to introduce certain expressions which are waiting for their place, is a check to the natural current of thought. The inevitable consequence is constraint and labor, the loss of every thing like easy and flowing utterance, and perhaps that worst of confusion which results from a jumble of ill-sorted, disjointed periods. It is unavoidable that the subject should present itself in a little different form and complexion in speaking, from that which it took in meditation; so that the sentences and modes of expression, which agreed very well with the train of remark as it came up in the study, may be wholly unsuited to that which it assumes in the pronunciation.

The extemporaneous speaker should therefore trust himself to the moment for all his language. This is the safe way for his comfort, and the only sure way to make all of a uniform piece. The general rule is certain, though there may be some exceptions. It may be well, for example, to consider

what synonymous terms may be employed in recurring to the chief topic, in order to avoid the too frequent reiteration of the same word. This will occasion no embarrassment. He may also prepare texts of Scripture to be introduced in certain parts of the discourse. These, if perfectly committed to memory, and he be not too anxious to make a place for them, will be no incumbrance. When a suitable juncture occurs, they will suggest themselves, just as a suitable epithet suggests itself. But if he be very solicitous about them, and continually on the watch for an opportunity to introduce them, he will be likely to confuse himself. And it is better to lose the choicest quotation, than suffer constraint and awkwardness from the effort to bring it in. Under the same restrictions he may make ready, pithy remarks, striking and laconic expressions, pointed sayings and aphorisms, the force of which depends on the precise form of the phrase. Let the same rule be observed in regard to such. If they suggest themselves (which they will do, if there be a proper place for them), let them be welcome. But never let him run the risk of spoiling a whole paragraph in trying to make a place for them.

Many distinguished speakers are said to do more than this, — to write out with care and repeat from memory their more important and persuasive parts; like the *de bene esse's* of Curran, and the splendid passages of many others. This may undoubtedly be done to advantage by one who has the command of himself which practice gives, and has learned to pass from memory to invention without tripping. It is a different case from that mixture of the two operations, which is condemned above, and is in fact only an extended example of the exceptions made in the last para-

graph. With these exceptions, when he undertakes, *bonâ fide*, an extemporaneous address, he should make no preparation of language. Language is the last thing he should be anxious about. If he have ideas, and be awake, it will come of itself, unbidden and unsought for. The best language flashes upon the speaker as unexpectedly as upon the hearer. It is the spontaneous gift of the mind, not the extorted boon of a special search. No man who has thoughts, and is interested in them, is at a loss for words — not the most uneducated man; and the words he uses will be according to his education and general habits, not according to the labor of the moment. If he truly feel, and wish to communicate his feelings to those around him, the last thing that will fail will be language; the less he thinks of it and cares for it, the more copiously and richly will it flow from him; and when he has forgotten every thing but his desire to give vent to his emotions and do good, then will the unconscious torrent pour, as it does at no other season. This entire surrender to the spirit which stirs within, is indeed the real secret of all eloquence. "True eloquence," says Milton, "I find to be none but the serious and hearty love of truth; and that whose mind soever is fully possessed with a fervent desire to know good things, and with the dearest charity to infuse the knowledge of them into others, — when such a man would speak, his words, like so many nimble and airy servitors, trip about him at command, and in well ordered files, as he would wish, fall aptly into their own places." *Rerum enim copia* (says the great Roman teacher and example) *verborum copiam gignit; et, si est honestas in rebus ipsis de quibus dicitur, existit ex rei naturâ quidam splendor in verbis. Sit modo is, qui dicet aut scribet, institutus liberaliter edu-*

*catione doctrinâque puerili, et flagret studio, et a naturâ adjuvetur, et in universorum generum infinitis disceptationibus exercitatus ; ornatissimos scriptores oratoresque ad cognoscendum imitandumque legerit ; — næ ille haud sane, quemadmodum verba struat et illuminet, a magistris istis requiret. Ita facile in rerum abundantiâ ad orationis ornamenta sine duce, naturâ ipsâ, si modo est exercitata, labetur.**

XI.

These remarks lead to another suggestion which deserves the student's consideration. He should select for this exercise those subjects in which he feels an interest at the time, and in regard to which he desires to engage the interest of others. In order to the best success, extemporaneous efforts should be made in an excited state of mind, when the thoughts are burning and glowing, and long to find vent. There are some topics which do not admit of this excitement. Such should be treated with the pen. When he would speak, he should choose topics on which his own mind is kindling with a feeling which he is earnest to communicate; and the higher the degree to which he has elevated his feelings, the more readily, happily, and powerfully will he pour forth whatever the occasion may demand. There is no style suited to the pulpit, which he will not more effectually command in this state of mind. He will reason more directly, pointedly, and convincingly; he will describe more vividly from the living conceptions of the moment; he will be more earnest in persuasion, more animated in declamation, more urgent in appeals, more ter-

* De Or. iii. 31.

rible in denunciation. Every thing will vanish from before him, but the subject of his attention, and upon this his powers will be concentrated in keen and vigorous action.

If a man would do his best, it must be upon subjects which are at the moment interesting to him. We see it in conversation, where every one is eloquent upon his favorite topics. We see it in deliberative assemblies; where it is those grand questions, which excite an intense interest, and absorb and agitate the mind, that call forth those bursts of eloquence by which men are remembered as powerful orators, and that give a voice to men who can speak on no other occasions. Cicero tells us of himself, that the instances in which he was most successful, were those in which he most entirely abandoned himself to the impulses of feeling. Every speaker's experience will bear testimony to the same thing; and thus the saying of Goldsmith proves true, that "to feel one's subject thoroughly, and to speak without fear, are the only rules of eloquence." Let him who would preach successfully, remember this. In the choice of subjects for extemporaneous efforts, let him have regard to it, and never encumber himself nor distress his hearers, with the attempt to interest them in a subject, which excites at the moment only a feeble interest in his own mind.

This rule excludes many topics, which it is necessary to introduce into the pulpit, subjects in themselves interesting and important, but which few men can be trusted to treat in unpremeditated language; because they require an exactness of definition, and nice discrimination of phrase, which may be better commanded in the cool leisure of writing, than in the prompt and declamatory style of the speaker. The rule also forbids the attempt to speak, when ill health, or lowness of spirits, or any accidental cause,

renders him incapable of that excitement which is requisite to success. It requires of him to watch over the state of his body — the partial derangement of whose functions so often confuses the mind — that, by preserving a vigorous and animated condition of the corporeal system, he may secure vigor and vivacity of mind. It requires of him, finally, whenever he is about entering upon the work, to use every means, by careful meditation, by calling up the strong motives of his office, by realizing the nature and responsibility of his undertaking, and by earnestly invoking the blessing of God — to attain that frame of devout engagedness, which will dispose him to speak zealously and fearlessly. One who has been particularly successful in extemporaneous efforts, once said to me, "My only rules are, to study my subject thoroughly, and seek for feeling on my knees."

XII.

Another important item in the discipline to be passed through, consists in attaining the habit of self-command. I have already adverted to this point, and noticed the power which the mind possesses of carrying on the premeditated operation, even while the speaker is considerably embarrassed. This is, however, only a reason for not being too much distressed by the feeling when only occasional; it does not imply that it is no evil. It is a most serious evil; of little comparative moment, it may be, when only occasional and transitory, but highly injurious if habitual. It renders the speaker unhappy, and his address ineffective. If perfectly at ease, he would have every thing at command, and be able to pour out his thoughts in lucid order, and with every desirable variety of manner and

expression. But when thrown from his self-possession, he can do nothing better than mechanically string together words, while there is no soul in them, because his mental powers are spell-bound and imbecile. He stammers, hesitates, and stumbles; or, at best, talks on without object or aim, as mechanically and unconsciously as an automaton. He has learned little effectually, till he has learned to be collected.

This therefore must be a leading object of attention. It will not be attained by men of delicacy and sensibility, except by long and trying practice. It will be the result of much rough experience, and many mortifying failures. And after all, occasions may occur, when the most experienced will be put off their guard. Still, however, much may be done by the control which a vigorous mind has over itself, by resolute and persevering determination, by refusing to shrink or give way, and by preferring always the mortification of ill success to the increased weakness which would grow out of retreating.

There are many considerations besides, which, if kept before the mind, would operate not a little to strengthen its confidence in itself. Let the speaker be sensible that, if self-possessed, he is not likely to fail; that after faithful study and preparation, there is nothing to stand in his way, but his own want of self-command. Let him heat his mind with his subject, endeavor to feel nothing, and care for nothing, but that. Let him consider, that his audience takes for granted that he says nothing but what he designed, and does not notice those slight errors which annoy and mortify him; that in truth such errors are of no moment; that he is not speaking for reputation and display, nor for the gratification of others by the exhibition of a

rhetorical model, or for the satisfaction of a cultivated taste; but that he is a teacher of virtue, a messenger of Jesus Christ, a speaker in the name of God; whose chosen object it is to lead men above all secondary considerations and worldly attainments, and to create in them a fixed and lasting interest in spiritual and religious concerns; — that he himself, therefore, ought to regard other things as of comparatively little consequence while he executes this high function; that the true way to effect the object of his ministry, is, to be filled with that object, and to be conscious of no other desire but to promote it. Let him, in a word, be zealous to do good, to promote religion, to save souls, and little anxious to make what might be called a fine sermon; let him learn to sink every thing in his subject and the purpose it should accomplish — ambitious rather to do good, than to do well; — and he will be in a great measure secure from the loss of self-command and its attendant distress. Not always — for this feeble vessel of the mind seems to be sometimes tost to and fro, as it were, upon the waves of circumstances, unmanageable by the helm and disobedient to the wind. Sometimes God seems designedly to show us our weakness, by taking from us the control of our powers, and causing us to be drifted along whither we would not. But under all ordinary occurrences, habitual piety and ministerial zeal will be an ample security. From the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak. The most diffident man in the society of men is known to converse freely and fearlessly, when his heart is full, and his passions engaged; and no man is at a loss for words, or confounded by another's presence, who thinks neither of the language, nor the company, but only of the matter which fills him. Let the preacher consider this, and be

persuaded of it, — and it will do much to relieve him from the distress which attends the loss of self-possession, which distils in sweat from his forehead, and distorts every feature with agony. It will do much to destroy that incubus, which sits upon every faculty of the soul, and palsies every power, and fastens down the helpless sufferer to the very evil from which he strives to flee.

After all, therefore, which can be said, the great essential requisite to effective preaching in this method (or indeed in any method) is a devoted heart. A strong religious sentiment, leading to a fervent zeal for the good of other men, is better than all rules of art; it will give him courage, which no science or practice could impart, and open his lips boldly, when the fear of man would keep them closed. Art may fail him, and all his treasures of knowledge desert him; but if his heart be warm with love, he will "speak right on," aiming at the heart, and reaching the heart, and satisfied to accomplish the great purpose, whether he be thought to do it tastefully or not.

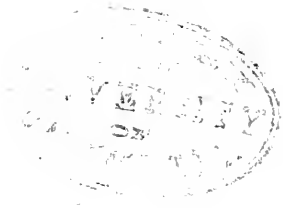
This is the true spirit of his office, to be cherished and cultivated above all things else, and capable of rendering all its labors comparatively easy. It reminds him that his purpose is not to make profound discussions of theological doctrines, or disquisitions on moral and metaphysical science; but to present such views of the great and acknowledged truths of revelation, with such applications of them to the understanding and conscience, as may affect and reform his hearers. Now it is not study only, in divinity or in rhetoric, which will enable him to do this. He may reason ingeniously, yet not convincingly; he may declaim eloquently, yet not persuasively. There is an immense, though indescribable difference between the same argu-

ments and truths, as presented by him who earnestly feels and desires to persuade, and by him who designs only a display of intellectual strength, or an exercise of rhetorical skill. In the latter case, the declamation may be splendid, but it will be cold and without expression; lulling the ear, and diverting the fancy, but leaving the feelings untouched. In the other, there is an air of reality and sincerity, which words cannot describe but which the heart feels, that finds its way to the recesses of the soul, and overcomes by a powerful sympathy. This is a difference which all can perceive and all can account for. The truths of religion are not matters of philosophical speculation, but of experience. The heart and all the spiritual man, and all the interests and feelings of the immortal being, have an intimate concern in them. It is perceived at once whether they are stated by one who has felt them himself, is personally acquainted with their power, is subject to their influence, and speaks from actual experience; or whether they come from one who knows them only in speculation, has gathered them from books, and thought them out by his own reason, but without any sense of their spiritual operation.

But who does not know how much easier it is to declare what has come to our knowledge from our own experience, than what we have gathered coldly at second hand from that of others; — how much easier it is to describe feelings we have ourselves had, and pleasures we have ourselves enjoyed, than to fashion a description of what others have told us; — how much more freely and convincingly we can speak of happiness we have known, than of that to which we are strangers? We see, then, how much is lost to the speaker by coldness or ignorance in the exercises of

personal religion. How can he effectually represent the joys of a religious mind, who has never known what it is to feel them? How can he effectually aid the contrite, the desponding, the distrustful, the tempted, who has never himself passed through the same fears and sorrows? Or how can he paint, in the warm colors of truth, religious exercises and spiritual desires, who is personally a stranger to them? Alas, he cannot at all come in contact with those souls, which stand most in need of his sympathy and aid. But if he have cherished in himself, fondly and habitually, the affections he would excite in others, if he have combatted temptation, and practised self-denial, and been instant in prayer, and tasted the joy and peace of a tried faith and hope; — then he may communicate directly with the hearts of his fellow men, and win them over to that which he so feelingly describes. If his spirit be always warm and stirring with these pure and kind emotions, and anxious to impart the means of his own felicity to others — how easily and freely will he pour himself forth! and how little will he think of the embarrassments of the presence of mortal man, while he is conscious only of laboring for the glory of the ever present God!

This then is the one thing essential to be attained and cherished by the Christian preacher. With this he must begin, and with this he must go on to the end. Then he never can greatly fail; for he will FEEL HIS SUBJECT THOROUGHLY, AND SPEAK WITHOUT FEAR.



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