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HINTS ON EXTEMPORANEOUS PREACHING.

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

Quinct. x. 7.

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TO
THE STUDENTS
IN THE
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN HARVARD UNIVERSITY,
THIS LITTLE TREATISE,
WITH THE
SINCEREST PRAYERS THAT THEY MAY BECOME
PROFOUND DIVINES AND POWERFUL PREACHERS,
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED
BY
THE AUTHOR.

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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 Quintilian, 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 benefits 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 any thing 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, cold, 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.

HINTS
ON EXTEMPORANEOUS PREACHING.

CHAPTER I.

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 accustomed 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 excellencies 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 rule in this way 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 of itself 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. 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."¹ 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 ensure to himself are so many and so great, as to offer the strongest inducement to make the attempt.

That these advantages are real and substantial, may be safely inferred from the habit of public orators in other professions, and from the effects they are known to produce. There is more nature, more 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 colouring 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 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 Sheridan's, 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 advantages 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 excited 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 a university education, 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 moved and 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; forgetting that the intellectual man is not very easy of access, that it is barred up, 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,” *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*, “were frequently deserted by the audience in the midst of their harangues.”²

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 indeed 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 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.

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 their thoughts. 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.”³ 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 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 extempore speaking is practised by very few except the illiterate, forbids any thing 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 excellencies when it is found in perfection, but which has excellencies 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. Campbell⁴ condemn it. In many parts of the continent of 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 excellencies 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.

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 any 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.

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 also 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.

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,⁵ 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 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 any thing 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 ensures 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?

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. Now an extemporaneous speaker is of course exposed to all this inequality of spirits, 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. There will be more point and vigor and animation, than he could ever throw into writing. “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.”⁶

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 Pope’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.” Fenelon’s *Telemachus* is said to have been composed in this way, and sent to the press with one single erasure in the manuscript. 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 ensure equal success in *extemporaneous speaking*? Nay, we might anticipate occasional superior success; since the thoughts sometimes flow, when at the highest and most passionate excitement, too rapidly and profusely for any thing slower than the tongue to afford them vent.

There is one more consideration in favor of the habit 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 life. 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 principle 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 extempore speaking 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 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 any thing 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 ensure 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 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,⁷ "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 to prepare your illustrations,—and then, appear in public. I am perfectly willing that you should. The 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.

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 extempore 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 the greatest 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 extempore 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,⁸ 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*,⁹ 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.

1. 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 expostulations 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 any thing 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 very 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 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.

2. 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 diligence, and which no man should presume to practice, until he has fitted himself for it?

3. 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 all 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.

4. 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 and careful 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 mechanical 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.

5. 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 the want of habit, and diffidence 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 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 aim and purpose 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.¹⁰ 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, 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. 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 combated 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 the 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.

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 read like schoolboys' 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 extempore 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 expressive 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 benefited 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.

1. 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 thus 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 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 connexion 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.

2. 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 was obliged to sit down without completing it. 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 without 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 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.

3. 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 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 he may safely trust himself in a few sentences, 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 connexion, 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. The next rule is, that the whole subject, with the order and connexion 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. ¹¹ 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 often 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.

7. 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 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 hæsitare 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.

8. 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 assorted, 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 encumbrance. 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 have 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 paragraph. 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 labour 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 dicit aut scribet, institutus liberaliter educatione 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 abundantia ad orationis ornamenta, sine duce, naturâ ipsâ, si modo est exercitata, labetur.*¹²

9. 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, when the mind is burning and glowing, and longs to find vent. There are some topics which do not admit of this excitement. Such should be treated by 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 terrible 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 topics which are at the moment interesting to him. We see it in conversation, where every one is eloquent upon his favorite subjects. 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 vigour 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.

10. 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 attrition with the world, 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, also, 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, endeavour 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 distorts every feature with agony, and distils in sweat from his forehead. 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, but not convincingly; he may declaim eloquently, but not persuasively. There is an immense, though indescribable difference between the same arguments 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 it by a powerful sympathy. This is a difference

which all 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 combated 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.

Footnotes

1. Europe; &c. by a Citizen of the United States. [Return](#)
2. Middleton's Life of Cicero, III. 324. [Return](#)
3. *Cecil's Remains*—a delightful little book. [Return](#)
4. See his fourth Lecture on Pulpit Eloquence. [Return](#)
5. Life, p. 268. [Return](#)
6. Rees' Cyclopædia. [Return](#)
7. Sur l'Eloquence du Corps, ou L'Action du Prédicateur. [Return](#)
8. Sur l'Eloquence du Corps, ou L'Action du Prédicateur. [Return](#)
9. No. LXXI. p. 82. [Return](#)
10. 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 Quintilian's express instructions on the subject. Hume, also, tells us from Suidas, that the writing of speeches was unknown until the time of Pericles. [Return](#)
11. Nemo potest de eâ re, quam non novit, non turpissime dicere. Cic. de Or. [Return](#)
12. De Or. iii. 31. [Return](#)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HINTS ON EXTEMPORANEOUS PREACHING ***

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