

LECTURE X.

SELECTION OF AUTHORS, CONTINUED. — PREDOMINANCE OF THE ENGLISH LITERATURE.

BEFORE proceeding to consider other principles bearing upon a pastor's study of books for homiletic culture, let a moment be given to a plausible objection to the principle already advanced, that we should exalt to the first rank the few controlling minds in the world's literatures. It is urged that that principle would practically doom a pastor to reading nothing but the ancient classics, or at best to waste himself on dead or foreign languages.

I have in the sequel much to say of the practicability of literary study to a pastor. But for the present, and in application to the point in hand, I answer, The objection is often a valid one. Therefore I have said that we should rank first in our *estimate* of literature the authors of first rank. Then we should read them, if we can. This is the practical summary of the principle before us. But, further, it is not impracticable for the majority of pastors in active service to know the leading authors in foreign literatures through translations. The prejudice against translations is not sensible. It was originated when literature was less voluminous than now. Ralph Waldo Emerson reads translations, and respects them. His reading would have been

restricted vastly, if he had not done so. Who supposes that he gets his quotations from the originals of the Veda and of Confucius?

It is not impracticable, then, for the majority of pastors to read translations of Homer and Plato. It is not impossible to own, and to read in some vacation, so readable and so portable a book as Carey's "Dante." For the intrinsic value of Dante's "Inferno," let me cite the opinion of Mr. Prescott the historian. He says that he deems it "a fortunate thing for the world that the first poem of modern times should have been founded on a subject growing out of the Christian religion, and written by a man penetrated with the spirit of its sternest creed. Its influence on literature has been almost as remarkable as that of Christianity itself on the moral world." It surely is an irreparable loss to the culture of a preacher to remain through life ignorant of such a poem. So of Goethe's "Faust" and Schiller's "Robbers." Coleridge's translation of Schiller's "Wallenstein" and the "Piccolomini" would promote a double purpose by giving you German classics in splendid English poetry. One might select twenty or thirty volumes of English translations which would give to a hard-worked pastor, not by any means a masterly knowledge, but a very useful and usable knowledge, of the best authors in the great literatures of the world outside of the English tongue.

Again: it is not impracticable for all pastors to exercise the *spirit* of this principle in the selection of authors of our own language. Every educated man can read and enjoy the great writers in English literature. We can spend our time on these rather than on the little ones. In doing this we may really imbibe

much of the best literary culture of all times and countries. The great authors of England have fed upon the ancient and the modern continental literatures of Europe. Wordsworth was right when he said, "We have reproduced all that." He was right to this extent, that English literature has reproduced in Christian forms the best of all that Pagan literature ever was.

(4) The principles of selection in literary study already discussed need to be qualified by a fourth principle, which is, that, in our choice of authors, the literature of the English language should predominate. You have no reason to think meanly of your acquisitions, or to apologize for them, if they are limited to your mother-tongue. In the majority of cases a pastor's reading will be limited thus, be his theory of reading what it may. In such a case he has no reason to be ashamed of the necessity. This view is contested by good critics; and I approach it with a sense of the difficulty of expressing to you what I believe to be the exact truth, without being misunderstood. Yet my conviction is the growth of years, that, if there is one peril greater than another to our scholarly habits, it is that of doing injustice to the literature of England. Intense as our national spirit is in other respects, it does not rise to the level of the birthright we possess as inheritors of the treasures in the English tongue.

In a discussion of the subject, we have to encounter, in the first place, a prejudice which attributes superiority to whatever is foreign. The distant, the strange, the unknown, the half-known, awes a cultivated mind often as it does the rudest. We are apt to stand agape at the wisdom locked up in a foreign speech, as children do in listening to foreign conversation. Did you never

experience this? I must confess to having stood momentarily in speechless wonder, in my first efforts to acquire the German language, because a German truckman in the street could talk the language so much more volubly than I could, and a dray-horse, in understanding him, was my superior. Yet as senseless as that is the feeling which underlies much of the preference often felt for foreign literatures above our own. If indulged with equal knowledge of the literatures brought into the comparison, it is literary cant. This is the ground of the pre-eminence given to the French language in some schools for the education of women.

Then, in approaching the question of the worth of the English literature, we encounter the atmosphere which is created by our system of training in the ancient classic languages. Our collegiate system we have taken chiefly from the English universities. Those grew up at a period when England had no literature of her own. The reverence then paid to the ancient classics was normal and necessary. Generally speaking, there was no other literature which deserved reverence. The revival of the ancient learning created for the modern mind the only models in existence which were of superior finish for the purposes of liberal culture, except the sacred models of Palestine. The new enthusiasm for learning must have looked to Athens and Rome, or nowhere. Hence arose that profound reverence for what is called classic study, which tinges the university system of England, of which the American college is an offshoot. That reverence is not a whit too profound absolutely; but it is, by a vast proportion, too exclusive relatively.

Our usage by which we designate the ancient litera-

See Ed. Note on next page.

tures by the term "classic" is an evidence of the depth to which the preference of the ancient authors over every thing English is embedded in our scholarly inheritance. It is as if nothing English could deserve the title of a classic, i.e., of a model for the education of mind. English authorship has been compelled to contend for its right to the name in its own language. A youth of to-day is at first confused when he hears the phrase "English classics."

Our collegiate discipline — and here lies the precise point of its defect, in my judgment — preserves no just proportions between the ancient and the English classics. The English literature is a fact to which it does no justice in its theory of the education suitable to an English or an American pupil. This literature is now the accumulation of centuries. It is expanding with every decade of years. Yet who of us ever obtained in our collegiate experience any very exalted conception of it as compared with the Greek and Latin models? I think I speak the experience of a majority of educated Americans in saying that a sense of the classic rank of the English literature is a discovery, which, for the most part, they have to make for themselves after they have left our collegiate and professional schools. It dawns upon us as a novelty when we begin to extend our English reading. When we do admit it, when the glory of our native literature forces it upon us, we feel a sense of regret that the discovery has come to us so late in our mental history. We turn to our own language, then, with something of the rebound with which we spring to a long-neglected virtue.

Again: the presumption is always in favor of the pre-eminence of the literature of one's vernacular tongue in

Although this section was written to encourage those steeped in English culture to not neglect the body of English literature, it is applicable to those of our student body, drawn currently from 76 different countries, to rely most heavily on the literature of the country of their origin. If their native language has a body of literature, they have a connection with it that they can never have to a literature of other languages. Therefore, it should be studied by them above the literature of other languages.

one's culture, if that tongue has a literature. If a language has no literature, the mind to which it is vernacular is so far a barbarous mind. Culture, in the high sense of the term, is impracticable to it in its native tongue. But, if a language has a literature, that literature is an expression of the national mind. It is a product of that mind. Of that mind, the man himself is a fragment; his own mental structure is a part of the growth which has made the literature. He sustains to it, therefore, a relation which he can not sustain to any embodiment of foreign thought. It is a relation of sympathy and kindred. The very life-blood of thought flows to and through him by means of the vernacular arteries, as it can not by transfusion from any foreign fountains.

Says Dr. George P. Marsh, "Deep in the recesses of our being, beneath even the reach of consciousness, or at least of objective self-inspection, there lies a certain sensibility to the organic laws of our mother-tongue." He elsewhere adduces two facts in proof of this. One is, that a man's vernacular language, though forgotten, "can never be completely supplanted or supplied by another;" and the second is, that those who grow up speaking many languages very seldom acquire complete mastery over any one of them. That which is true of linguistic acquisition is doubly true of literary culture. The secret sympathies of mind with truth in the vernacular speech more than realizes Wordsworth's fancy of the communings of the seashell with its native ocean. No man can do violence to those sympathies without a loss in the breadth and naturalness of his own development. The confusion of tongues bears every mark of a curse upon the race. It

is an evil of incalculable magnitude, that we must derive so much of our mental training through other media of expression than that which we grow up with, and grow into as our minds expand from childhood.

Experience in the conducting of foreign missions confirms these views. The original idea of foreign missionary work, and the one which first roused Christian enthusiasm most profoundly, was that the heathen world must be Christianized mainly by the agency of preachers sent from Christian lands. I heard in my boyhood the claims of foreign missions urged on American Christians and students for the ministry, on the ground that thousands of preachers must be sent from Christian countries, outnumbering by multitudes the whole Protestant clergy of the world. "How shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be *sent*?" was the text. Inspired authority for it seemed to be given at the outset.

Experience has corrected all that. It has proved that heathen nations are not to be reached, any more than Christian nations, in the large masses, by a ministry which to them is foreign, trained in a foreign civilization, pervaded by foreign modes of thought, and using *their* vernacular under the embarrassments created by the mixture of the idioms of a foreign speech. It has long since become trite that the great bulk of the work of Christianizing the heathen world is to be done by a native ministry trained originally by foreign teachers, but ultimately taking the work into their own hands. Minds created under the influence of the language spoken by a people are needed to become controlling powers in the Christian civilization of that people. The secret sympathies with vernacular speech run very deep. We are all ruled by them.

This truth is the driving force behind Salt Lake Bible College. Although we are forced to train indigenous preachers world-wide online in English, we encourage them to then take what they have learned and use it in their native language to reach those who speak that language. As the Lord blesses with finances and staff, we plan to have separate websites in other languages for those who speak those languages so that they can learn in their native language. Dr. VBK

Applying this principle, then, to our own preparations for the American pulpit, I contend that if a Greek or a Latin, or a German literature, or all combined, have for us claims superior to those of our English speech, it is a thing to be proved. Perhaps it can be proved; but the presumption, in the nature of things, is against it.

Further: the utility of a man's culture, other things being equal, requires the ascendancy in it of the literature of his native language. Culture is for use, not for display, not for literary enjoyment mainly. The weakest education is that which is aimed at display. The highest homœopathic trituration of the educational ideal is that of a modern French boarding-school for young ladies. It is worthy of the "nugiferous gentle-dame" whom the "Simple Cobbler of Agawam" describes as "the very gizzard of a trifle, the product of a quarter of a cipher, and the epitome of nothing."

But the most selfish education, and therefore the narrowest of all educational ideals which may be respectable for strength, is that which is directed to literary pleasure.

The danger from this source to the integrity of a pastor's studies justifies a brief *excursus* at this point upon the selfish ideal of a scholarly life. No conception of life, not grossly sensual, can be formed, which is more odious for the intensity of its selfishness than the life of a man of letters who is that and nothing more, with no aims in his studies but those of an amateur student. A studious man in dressing-gown and slippers, sitting in the midst of a choice library which is adorned with works of art and costly relics of antiquity, yet from which not a thought goes out to the intel-

lectual or moral improvement of mankind, is a model of refined and fascinating selfhood. Under certain conditions it may do more evil than the life of a libertine. Walter Scott's ideal of life, as expressed in the building and furnishing of Abbotsford, was not the true ideal of a Christian scholar. For their influence on the tastes of educated men, give me rather the drinking-songs of Robert Burns. These are the less seductive to such men, and carry their antidote on the face of them. Prescott the historian pronounces the mental luxury of successful composition one of the two most exalted pleasures of which man is capable; the enjoyment of a reciprocated passion for woman being the other.

Conceive of a man so constituted, or so trained to literary enjoyment, that he can honestly say, as Buffon did of his hours of composition, "Fourteen hours a day at my desk in a state of transport!" It is not difficult to see that such a man's life *may* become as selfish in its literary enjoyment as that of another man in his sensuality. Is there not, indeed, a class of literary men who suggest to us the doubtful query whether they have any large, generous sympathy with their kind? Their studies are conducted with a stolid indifference to the questions which are agitating the masses of mind underneath them. At a sublime altitude above such problems as those which involve the salvation, the liberty, the education, the bread, of the millions, these favorite sons of literary fortune dwell in an atmosphere of rarified selfishness, from which comes down now and then a sneer at the boorishness, or a fling at the fanaticism, of those who are humbly striving to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, and save the lost.

Give us rather the literary spirit of Milton, who returned from his tour in Italy, and gave up his projected visit to the Acropolis of Athens, "because," said he, "I esteemed it dishonorable in me to be lingering abroad, even for the improvement of my mind, when my fellow-citizens were contending for liberty at home." Dr. Arnold was so sensible of the peril of literary selfishness, that he held firmly to the opinion that literary pursuits "should never be a profession by themselves." They should be an appendage always to some business or profession which should keep a man's mind healthy by interesting him in the questions of real life and in his own times. Speaking of Coleridge's "Literary Remains," he says, "There were marks enough that his mind was diseased by the want of a profession. The very power of contemplation becomes impaired or perverted when it becomes the main object of life." Mr. Froude the historian has been heard to say, that, if his son sought to make literature his profession, he would oppose it as he would an imprudent marriage. Yet Froude speaks from experience of the error which he condemns. A pastor's life meets precisely the conditions which such critics deem most healthfully conducive to success in literary study. Literary labor held by the necessities of a profession in adjustment with the real world we live in, and made tributary to great and unselfish uses,—this is the Christian ideal of a scholar's life.

Yet, returning to the main point before us, this is one of the most cogent reasons that can be urged for giving pre-eminence in our culture to the literature of our own language. We belong to the English-speaking stock. With the exception of foreign missionaries, the Ameri-

can clergy must find their life's work among an English-speaking people. If heathen preachers were prepared to carry on the Christian work efficiently, they would do it among their own countrymen more efficiently than you can do it.

It is not merely the accumulations drawn from our vernacular, and applied to direct use in our labors, which will fit us most effectually to influence the minds of our countrymen. It is more than these: it is the very breath of mental life which we take in from the literature of our vernacular. It is the very essence of all there is in us which gives us claim to be called educated men, and which qualifies us for intellectual and moral leadership. We must derive this chiefly from our vernacular literature to fit us to influence most effectively those who speak our vernacular language. That literature is an expression of their minds as it is of ours. That language is a medium of more than speech between us and them. It is a medium of magnetic currents of brotherhood. Speak English, and they understand you. Think in English, and you think their thoughts. Feel the pulsations of an English culture, and you feel the throbs of their heart. Live in an English literary atmosphere, and you live near to their level,—far enough above them to insure their respect for you as their superior, yet near enough to them to feel yourself at home with them, and make them feel at home with you.

Let me, in passing, notice one phenomenon in the history of theological education which I do not entirely understand, but which illustrates the peril into which an educated preacher sometimes falls. It is that foreigners educated for the pulpit in this country

are seldom inclined to spend their professional life among their own countrymen. A German educated here seldom wishes to preach to Germans; or a Jew to Jews; or a Swede to the Swedes of our north-west; or a Welshman to the Welsh churches of Pennsylvania. I have repeatedly known them to struggle with the infirmities of an imperfect knowledge of the English language, and persist for years in the conflict with the adverse influences they encounter among American congregations, rather than to preach in their vernaculars to their own countrymen. Even a black man I have known to throw away the advantages of kindred race to lift himself up into competition with the white race. Such struggles are among the saddest mistakes in professional policy. They are struggles against nature. They abandon invaluable advantages ready to one's hand, for the sake of others which must be gained by years of toil, and which, if gained, never can equal the treasure lost. A preacher, above all men, should never abandon his vernacular if he can help it. As well may a fish leap out of the sea.

Even those contributions to our culture which we receive from foreign sources need to be Anglicized in our use of them. They should be received with English tastes, seen with English eyes, interpreted with English idiom, wrought into our opinions under the superintendence of English discipline, and adjusted to our use with a certain sifting and weighing process conducted with a heavy preponderance of English habits of thought. Every literature which is transferred from its native soil to be used as an exotic in another land needs to be passed through some native mind of that land, which shall act in a spirit of loyalty

to its own language. Otherwise that exotic literature can not be largely useful there. It will not be useful because it can not be used. No national literature is ever dug up, and transported and replanted bodily. The living forces of a nation's libraries can not migrate in any such way. Laws of national character represented by diversities of speech forbid such violent transitions.

Therefore nothing dooms a man to greater sterility in the pulpit than the attempt to import whole the spirit of a foreign culture. Sermons to an Anglo-American audience, founded upon an exclusive or ascendant German model, expressive of German habits of thought, clothed in German idioms, though in English words, are useless,—necessarily so, though they may not contain an error or a distortion. I once knew a pastor, who, under the pressure of severe pastoral duties, preached to his people through a winter, on Sunday afternoons, a free translation of the sermons of a German preacher. He was dismissed in the spring. Similar would be the tendency of German sermons to a German audience expressive of English culture alone. The same is true if the ancient literatures have predominated in the forming of a preacher's mind.

Said a clergyman of high repute in the ministry, "I always fear for the result when I see a very scholarly man enter the pulpit." The remark was founded on his observation of the fact that eminently scholarly men are often alienated unconsciously in their tastes from the national mind of their own country. They live so much in dead or foreign languages, among modes of thought which are alien to those of their

Remember. although this segment is written to those who's native tongue is English, the precept is absolutely applicable concerning the native tongues of those of every nationality.

own times and kindred, that they do not sympathize with their audiences, and therefore have no magnetic power to move them. No literature is so universal in its adaptations to the mind of the race as to be absolutely independent of its national history. Even that of the Bible is not so. It is Jewish in its type and spirit. We can not use it with power until we Anglicize it. We are obliged to bring to it our own minds, trained in the school of English thought, and to receive it into our own culture as into English molds, before we can reproduce it in English sermons to which the sympathies of an American audience will respond.

De Quincey entertained such strong convictions on the subject of servitude to foreign languages, that he said the act of learning a new language was in itself an evil. "Unless balanced" by other studies, he declared it to be "the dry rot of the human mind." He expressed more temperately the true principle of culture in this respect by saying to a young man, "So frame your selection of languages, that the largest possible body of literature available for your purposes shall be laid open to you at the least possible price of time and mental energy." "The largest available for your purposes:" this is common sense. And to every man of English or American stock, except a professional philologist, it requires the subjection of every thing outside of the English tongue to acclimation in the atmosphere of English libraries.

Ed. Note: Today, our schools in the USA no longer operate as learning institutions offering what is called a "classical education." Nor do they promote education in "classic" literature and languages. That lack is one of the reasons for the deterioration of the level of education in this country among secular college students. It is also one of the reasons for a woeful lack of education in our clergy.

For various comments on this subject, please click the following link:

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/07/a-classical-education-back-to-the-future/>

All of the various comments found online on that page are required reading for this current course.