

LECTURE XIV.

BREADTH OF RANGE IN PASTORAL STUDY, CONTINUED.—THE STUDY OF LIVING SPEAKERS.

BEFORE we leave the topic of breadth of range in our studies, an *excursus* deserves a brief consideration, upon the fact that the clergy are under peculiar temptations to narrow discipline. Not all is true which is often affirmed of the literary bigotry of the ministry. Yet the fact of the peril is a reality.

The intellectual intensity of the clerical profession is one source of the peril. It demands intense concentration of mind. Like other men of sense, the clergy must be about their business. They must work at it in dead earnest. Reading, therefore, is at the best but an appendage to professional duty. A very large portion of a pastor's waking hours must be given to mental production, not to accumulation, not to the culture which books give. The temptation follows inevitably to be content with a contracted range of reading; if not with professional reading alone, with a range of other reading which has no freshening variety.

Again: intensity of *moral* excitement in the ministry enhances the peril. Professional duty in the ministry draws deep and exhaustively upon the moral sensibilities. It absorbs vitality, as white-heat does oxygen. A pastor, therefore, is often in danger of having no

spirit left in him for literature which does not contribute directly and palpably to professional service. No other profession equals the ministry in respect to this moral pressure from above and around, crowding it down and inward upon its peculiarities. No other enlists such forces of conscience in behalf of its peculiarities.

Further: unenlightened convictions of conscience in the ministry sometimes enhance the peril of a contracted culture. Impulse of conscience must often be balanced by good sense, before it will permit a clergyman to engage happily in any very broad range of reading. Conscientious prejudices against learning constitute one of the perpetual burdens of the church. The clerical right to culture has been purchased at an immense cost of conflict with unenlightened consciences. I have known a clergyman who had passed through a collegiate and professional training of seven years, who, at the end of it, thought it not right for a minister to read Shakspeare. When the Rev. Edwards A. Park, D.D., occupied this rhetorical chair, he formed among the students a Shakspeare Club, for the elaborate discussion of the style, the philosophy, the plots, and the theology of Shakspeare. It encountered so much opposition from timid consciences, in the seminary and out of it, that he thought it necessary to deliver a lecture on the "propriety of studying Shakspeare, and the special usefulness of the study to ministers."

It is to be conceded that the danger apprehended by some fervent pastors, of a spiritual chill from intellectual enthusiasm, is not wholly imaginary. Periods have occurred in which some sections of the church have suffered thus. Such was the case with the Church

Although written in the 1800s and addressing a problem of the 18th century, today, in the 21st century, we can see that the problem addressed is still a prevalent one even though more than another century has elapsed since the writing of the textbook. Dr. VBK

of Scotland in that portion of the eighteenth century in which the characteristic representatives of her pulpit were such men as Dr. Blair and Dr. Robertson. They were eminent in the literature of Scotland, but of arctic temperament in her pulpit. Such periods are singularly alike everywhere. A lenient morality supplants fervid piety; doctrinal Christianity is held esoterically as a thing to be believed, but not preached; truisms and commonplaces make up the staple of sermons; the clergy give themselves to other avocations than that of apostolic preaching; and the great bulk of the people slumber in religious torpor. The awakened mind of Scotland gave to such a ministry a name which is fitting to it in all times, by calling it "Moderate." Every ministry of every age needs protection against the danger of a "moderate" pulpit. We must admit the danger, and be fore-armed against it.

But this need not prevent our recognition of the opposite peril. Our profession appeals so powerfully to the religious part of our nature, that often a young minister is obliged to instruct and to discipline his conscience, and to crowd it to a liberal action, before he can peacefully pursue lines of study which are essential to his intellectual growth, and therefore to his professional success. Probably we have all felt a momentary thrill of sympathy with the rule of a certain evangelist, to read no book but the Bible. Yet one sequence of that rule was, that his range of materials for the pulpit was so limited, that he was obliged to ask the reporters not to report his sermons. A pastor should not cherish a conscience which must be coddled at such a sacrifice of his intellectual breadth. The laws of God require it as little as the canons of good taste. A good conscience is always good sense.

In these several modes, through the mental intensity of clerical duties, through the intensity of moral excitement attending them, and through false convictions of conscience, the clergy are exposed to peculiar temptations to a contracted culture. Therefore we should not read professional literature alone. Even in professional literature we should not confine ourselves to school or sect. One cause of awkwardness and monotony in sermons is often that their authors read little but sermons and kindred theological writings. For the full vigor of the pulpit we need a cross of sermons with other forms of literature. Then, diversity of school and of sect is vital. The Church of England has furnished a very different order of preachers from those of Scotland. The Methodist and the Presbyterian types of preaching are almost antipodes. The Congregational Church of New England has a type of its own. You might search the continent of Europe over, and not find, in all its history of all its sects, a preacher like Dr. Emmons, or another like Dr. Bushnell.

We must be generous, then, in our appreciation of diversities. No other bigotry is so degrading as bigotry in culture. It underlies opinions, and insures bigotry there. Be our reading much or little, we should read always in the spirit of respect for varieties, even opposites, in literary character. I can not more fitly close this review of the necessity of variety in our reading than by quoting the opinion of Dr. Thomas Arnold of Rugby. He thought more profoundly upon the whole of our times.

In a letter on the studies of a clergyman, he expresses himself as follows; viz., "I would entreat every man

with whom I had any influence, that, if he reads at all, he should read widely and comprehensively; that he should not read exclusively what is called divinity. Learning of this sort, when not mixed with that comprehensive study which alone deserves the name, is, I am satisfied, an actual mischief to a man's mind. It impairs his simple common sense. It makes him narrow-minded, and fills him with absurdities. If a man values power of seeing truth, and judging soundly, let him not read exclusively those who are called divines. With regard to the fathers, in all cases preserve the proportions of your reading. Read, along with the fathers, the writings of men of other times and of different powers of mind. Keep your view of men and things extensive. He who reads deeply in one class of writers only, gets views which are sure to be perverted, and which are not only narrow, but false. If I have a confident opinion on any one point connected with the improvement of the human mind, it is on this."

(8) The principles already named should be qualified by another, which is that a scholarly ideal of study includes the study of unwritten literature. The habit which is practicable to a pastor in this respect is not the appropriation of a great amount of time to the purpose, but the cultivation of professional vigilance in improving such opportunities as fall in his way. Do not waste them by making entertainments of them. Make them tributary to your stock of oratorical knowledge. A great oration, a masterly constitutional argument, a powerful forensic plea, a finished sermon, uttered by the living voice, belong, as much as our libraries do, to the literature of the age. A preacher's

culture must suffer, if he ignores them. Generally, a young man's first awakening to the dignity of a scholarly life is the result of his listening to an oral address. My own first conceptions, which have never been essentially changed, of excellence in English style, I owe to my hearing, at the age of sixteen years, an oration ✓ by Edward Everett, at a Commencement of Amherst College. Our debt to such literary models we often undervalue, because they are not a book. We do not see them on our library-shelves. Several things concerning them deserve attention.

This unwritten literature is of great magnitude and variety. Very little, comparatively, of the bulk of cultivated thought, finds its way to the press. The most voluminous and the weightiest part of it is speech, not writing. I say deliberately the weightiest litera- ✓ ture of the world is spoken, not written. That, and that only, is literature, which is power in thought as expressed in language. Thought moving other minds at the will of him who utters it,—this is literature. The weightiest volume of it is not in our libraries. Our schools have little direct concern with it. True, it is a paradox to denominate it literature; but the paradox is not deceptive, and no other word expresses it as well.

Earnest conversation is full of this unwritten literature. The table-talk of many other men besides Luther and Coleridge and Johnson is as worthy as theirs of a place on our bookshelves. Emerson says, "Better things are said, more incisive, more wit and insight are dropped in talk and forgotten by the speaker, than gets into books. The problem of both the talker and the orator are the same."

Dr. Johnson became a scholarly authority in England by his conversation more than by his writings. His sway of English literature proceeded from the club-house rather than from the printing-house. Hence that sway is in our day becoming a myth. We do not find good reason for it in his writings. Walter Scott talked more poetry, and Edmund Burke more eloquence, than they ever wrote. Men used to part with Dr. Arnold at midnight, mourning over the loss to the press of the materials of literature which they had heard from his lips in the few hours before. The "Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table" grew out of the request of the friends of Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes that he would print some of his conversations. There is a humble pastor in Essex County, Massachusetts, who has been repeatedly petitioned by his clerical brethren to save for them in permanent form the seeds of prolific thought which he has scattered at random among them in meetings of ministerial associations. The Rev. Henry Ward Beecher is said to have talked more and sounder theology than he knows how to preach.

Home-life in many cultivated families abounds with unwritten literature. It is often full of healthy criticism of books, of art, of music, of material nature, and full of more than golden links of suggestion which bind these to life and to eternity. A record of the select hours in many cultivated households, through any period of five years' continuance, would form a volume of literature as vital as any in the world.

Specially in crises of history, it does not require knowledge of libraries to create the materials of libraries. In critical periods, like those of the rise of Christianity, the Crusades, the Reformation, the civil

wars in England, the English Commonwealth, the American Revolution, the overthrow of American slavery, men and women who have nothing that the world calls literary culture *live* literature in thousands of humble homes. They talk literature, though it may be ungrammatically. Families by thousands, during the war of the Rebellion, lived books like that of the "Schönberg-Cotta Family."

In a similar manner, the colloquial instructions of schools, the interviews of pastors with their parishioners, the emotive utterances of meetings for religious conference, contain the richest germs of literature. They contain, often, the latest and the wisest and the most hearty developments of that which makes power in books. Say what we may of the dullness of prayer-meetings, churches are sometimes sensible of an intellectual as well as a spiritual quickening in them, which they do not get from an equal amount of discourse from the pulpit. Some pastors are nearer to the very magazine of literary power: they draw more heat straight from central fires in their plain talks on a sabbath evening than in the sermons of the day. The people know nothing of either as literature; but they feel the difference none the less. The difference is just that which they feel between the reading of a bright book and the reading of a dull one. A pastor in the city of Boston has been heard to say, "If I must choose one to the exclusion of the other, between the pulpit and the dais of the conference-room, give me the conference-room. On the latter, I and my audiences are ten feet nearer to each other in more senses than one."

I once inquired of an alumnus of this seminary, what

lived in his memory as having been the most powerful mental stimulus to him in the curriculum of the seminary. He answered without hesitation, "The Wednesday evening conference." He specified particularly the conferences conducted by one professor. Not all the rest of the instructions he received here had laid him under so deep an obligation as the plain, extemporaneous talks of that one man. In a vast variety of these homely forms are found unwritten volumes. I am not insensible of the ease with which this view may be burlesqued. It may seem to be ludicrously disproved in the very next prayer-meeting you attend. I concede drawbacks, but claim that a residuum remains which is worthy of our libraries. Put into type the very thoughts which fly like shuttles back and forth among living minds in their homeliest intercourse about almost any thing in which they are in dead earnest, and you have in the result books which would live by the side of venerable names in folios.

It deserves note, therefore, that a literary man makes a fundamental mistake, who neglects to observe literature in these homely, unwritten forms. No matter how aspiring he may be in his aims, he can not afford to ignore these low grounds of literary expression. No author can afford to lose the discipline of conversation with illiterate men. It supplies a stimulus, and in some respects a model, which he can obtain nowhere else. Sir Walter Scott expressed his opinion on the subject extravagantly; but he was right in the principle for which he contended, that men are original thinkers and talkers on that which is the business of their lives. The professors of Edinburgh, dining out, were recreating: the merchants, of Edinburgh, in their counting-

rooms, were working to the extreme of their mental tension. This made the difference to Sir Walter between dullness and earnestness. No man is dull who is really in earnest about any thing, be it but the twist of a pin's head.

Why does literary seclusion, if long unbroken, induce unhealthiness of mind? Why does literary monasticism always fail in its aims? Why was "Brook Farm" a failure? Poets, philosophers, scholars, seers, went there, expecting to pass their evenings in "high converse" of kindred souls. But I have been told, as coming from one of them after he had outlived the dream, that they sometimes went out at sunset, in the desperation of their mental vacuity, and leaned over the pig-sty, thrusting sticks at the swine for occupation. This is a caricature, doubtless; yet it is quite in the order of nature that its equivalent should have occurred. Literary culture revolts from such seclusion as heartily and inevitably as religion does from the monastery and the convent. It is not good for man to be alone.

Specially is it true that a public speaker can not afford to be ignorant of speech as practiced by those who hear him. A preacher can not afford to part with a knowledge of speech as it exists in the homes of his people. If you become men of power in the pulpit,—I mean if you become spiritual chiefs, and not merely conventional figure-heads to your churches,—you will owe your power in part to the very men and women and children who feel it from you. The power comes in part from them to you, before it goes back as power from you to them. When our Lord would teach his disciples a great principle in the philosophy of religion, "he set a little child in the midst of them." So do the

great principles of truth in many other things come into clearest light by illustration in the most artless and unconscious exemplars. Common things illustrate profound things. Common people are often the most original. Therefore you will discover, that, to move them with your thought, you must know and respect their thought. To reach them with your style, you must master their style. I do not say must *use* their style, but must master it. To reach them at all, you must know what their mental experience is, what they have lived through, and what experiment of life they are trying, when you try your power upon them. Their mental life and your mental life must run in parallels not wide apart from each other. Otherwise your speech can never bridge over the gulf between. Thinking men will hear you incredulously ; good women will sit solitary under your ministry ; and children will look at you from the corners of their eyes.

Yet again : unwritten literature has a representative character. Whenever it succeeds, it represents a mass of unwritten thought which lies below it. The great orator in real life is the spokesman of those who hear him. He utters thoughts which are floating in dimmer conceptions and more homely words in their hearts. He is the interpreter to them of their own souls. Therein lies his power over them. He plays upon an instrument which is tuned by a more cunning hand. Listening to such a man, therefore, gives insight into the thought of the living generation. It is studying literature in the very process of its formation. What would we not give, if we could listen to-day to Edmund Burke on the impeachment of Warren Hastings, or to Robert Hall on the death of the Princess Charlotte, or to

Webster in his reply to Hayne? To study these phenomena in the very process of their evolution would give to our culture what no books contain. It would be like watching the crystallization of the Kohinoor.

But such, in kind, are the processes of the oral literature of our own times. They are forming deposits, some of which will be permanent. The next generations will read them, as we now read Burke and Jeremy Taylor. They will regret that they never heard the living orators and preachers of to-day, as we regret that we never heard those whose names bore a halo in our youth. You have heard men say that it would be a lifelong regret to them that they never heard Webster, Clay, and Calhoun, the great triumvirate of the United-States Senate. Let us prize while we have them the opportunities of hearing the models of living eloquence in our day. They are the chief representatives of that immense collection of literature which real life is creating in unwritten forms.

Moreover, an oral address is a form of literature which can not be completely represented by the press. The old idea,—as old as eloquence itself,—that the living voice is above all other media of communicating thought, is confirmed by all the ages. This superiority to the press is the birthright of the pulpit. The press, with its thundering enginery, can not represent the *man* in an oral address. Yet the man is the soul of the oral address. His physical framework is part of it. Attitude, gesture, tone, eye, lip, the muscular varieties of countenance, all that goes to make up what the ancients called the *vivida vultus*, and that secret magnetic emanation from the whole person, the origin of which we can not locate in any one member or feature,

— these are all symbols of a speaker's thought as truly as his words are.

In the old Greek pantomime not a word was uttered; yet it sometimes aroused an audience to such excitement, that, on certain subjects, it was forbidden by law. King Ferdinand of Naples, after the revolutionary movements of 1822, addressed the lazzaroni from the balcony of the palace, in the midst of tumultuous shouting, and used no language but that of signs, and yet made himself entirely intelligible. "He reproached, threatened, admonished, forgave, and finally dismissed the rabble as thoroughly persuaded and edified by the gesticulations of the royal Punch, as an American crowd would have been by the eloquence of Webster." Much more may vocalized thought in the oral address surpass written thought in a book. As a type of literature the oral production must have peculiarities which the press can not preserve to us.

This is illustrated in the standing fact of historic eloquence, that, as recorded, it commonly disappoints us. The great orators of the past seldom or never in the reading equal our expectations. Who feels that the orations of Demosthenes equal the reputation of the first orator of Greece? His name could never have held the place it has in modern criticism, were it not for the momentum given to his fame by Athenian opinion. Our best judgments of the orators of the past are the historic judgments: they are the opinions of them which criticism has inherited. If we had picked up the works of Cicero in a nameless scroll on the coast of Siam, it is doubtful whether we should have discovered for ourselves their superlative excellence. So of the Earl of Chatham: his speeches do

not explain to us why the House of Commons should have quailed before his utterance of the word "sugar." All that remains of Patrick Henry leaves a shadow of mystery over his reputed power with the House of Burgesses of the Old Dominion.

Among preachers none disappoint us more than the most illustrious of them. We can not discover Whitefield and Robert Hall in their published sermons. We have to accept the traditions of their unintelligible success. Of any one of Whitefield's sermons it is literally true, that, though we have every word of it in print, we have but a fragment. The major part of the symbols of his thought are not in his words. The man x is not there. The soul of the orator is not there. The spiritual witness to the union of his soul with the souls of his hearers is not there. These were intangible and evanescent. The audience felt them, but no invention of science could transmit them. One can scarcely read a sermon of Whitefield's, with a remembrance of the effects it wrought, without a feeling akin to that which one has in looking upon a body which is awaiting its resurrection. A living oratory, therefore, should be y regarded as a type of literature which can be thoroughly known in no other form.

Once more: a study of printed literature alone may give us false conceptions of what oral eloquence is. Some excellences of printed thought are not adapted to oral speech. You have heard it said of a sermon, "That will read better than it sounds." It is a severe criticism. An oral address ought not to read better than it sounds: if it does so, it is an essay, not a speech. On one occasion, when a speech in the House of Commons was highly praised in the hearing of Mr.

Fox, he inquired, "Does it read well?" — "Yes, grandly," was the answer. "Then," said Mr. Fox, "it was not a good speech." The principle is a subtle one, but the facts of parliamentary eloquence confirm it. The converse of the principle is equally true, — that a production which does *not* read well may for that reason have been a good speech.

From this principle it follows that a man who studies only printed literature may obtain a false theory of oral eloquence. This peril is no fiction. It is working evil in the living ministry. Scores of ministers are preaching after the model of the essay. They are literally "talking like a book." They are not orators. They will not be such, till they form an ideal of eloquence which involves the act of imagining an audience, and constructing thought for expression to the ear.

Here let a brief *excursus* be indulged upon the question, often asked, "What is it in oral speech which distinguishes it from the essay?" I can not answer this very perspicuously by definitions; but perhaps it can be answered by a contrast of examples. The following is an extract from a recent essay on the "End of God in Creation:" —

"What was the final cause of creation? The transition from the unconditioned to the conditioned is incomprehensible by the human faculties. What that transition is, and how it could take place, and how it became an actualized occurrence, it is confessed on all hands are absolutely incomprehensible enigmas. We can not reasonably imagine, then, that, if we are thus ignorant of the nature and the mode of this stupendous fact, we can nevertheless comprehend its primitive ground, can explore its ultimate reasons, can divine its final motive. Nor can we think to unveil the Infinite Soul at that moment, when, according to our conceptions, the eternal uniformity was interrupted, and a new mode of being, abso-

lutely unintelligible to us, was first introduced. We can not think to grasp all the views which were present to that Soul, extending from the unbeginning past to the unending future, and to fathom all its purposes, and to analyze all its motives. If anywhere, we must here repel every thing like dogmatic interpretation of the phenomena, and admit whatever is put forth only as conjectural in its nature, or at all events partial, and belonging far more to the surface than to the interior of the subject."

This is essay. Listening to it, one can not fail to see that it needs to be read in order to be appreciated. To a hearer it is dull; to some hearers, obscure. Yet are not some sermons constructed on this model? Are they not inevitably delivered with intonations and a cadence which almost compel the sense of humdrum in the listener?

Take, now, the same theme, and the same leading thoughts, and the same succession of thoughts, but expressed in the following style:—

"Why did God create the universe? Creation is incomprehensible to man. What is creation? How was it possible? How did it ever come to be? I can not answer. Can you? Every man of common sense confesses his ignorance here. But if we are ignorant of what creation is, and how it is, can we imagine that we understand why it is? Shall we think to unveil the mind of God in the stupendous act? That moment when God said, 'Let there be light,' was a moment of which we can know nothing but that 'there was light.' Shall we think to see all that God saw? Can we look through the past without beginning, and the future without end, and fathom all his purposes and all his motives? Can we by searching find out God? If we must repel assertion anywhere, we must do so here. Whatever we may think, it is but little more than guess-work. At the best, it can be but knowing in part. The most we can know must be on the surface. It can not penetrate to the heart of the matter."

Is not this speech, as distinct from essay? Is not the difference obvious? Is it not vital to oral style? Some critics would underrate it. They would pronounce it superficial, because it has not the ponderous structure, and the swelling cadence, of the original. They would call it popular, as distinct from scholarly, because it can be appreciated in the hearing.

Whatever may be true of such criticism, my point is, that oral speech to any class of hearers requires certain peculiarities which do not belong to the essay, and are not largely illustrated in printed forms of thought. Therefore, by studying those forms alone, a preacher may obtain false ideas of oral eloquence. The natural fruit of such a training is, that a preacher should read essays from the pulpit all his life without knowing it. The mystery of his ministry to him may be, that he can interest his people so much more effectively out of the pulpit than in it. But the mystery is no mystery. It is simply, that, out of the pulpit, he *speaks*, and in it he *essays*. This is the reason why preachers are so often requested to repeat or to publish their extemporaneous sermons, while their written sermons, of vastly more solid worth, lie unhonored in their desks. This is the secret reason why the conference-room sometimes sustains the pulpit which stands in ponderous dignity above it. It is because in the one the preacher talks, and in the other he soliloquizes. In the one he is eloquent therefore; in the other — what shall I call it?