LECTURE XIII.

THE EXPLANATION: QUALITIES.

6TH, Continuing the discussion of the qualities of the explanation, we notice, as a sixth quality, unity of exposition. This is an exceedingly subtile quality. We may sacrifice it unconsciously.

(1) It is often sacrificed by the want of unity of text. If a text be a double, triple, quadruple structure, no oneness can grow out of it. Any discussion of such a text will resemble the rattling of a handful of marbles. This suggests one secret of failure in expository preaching. I once proposed to an association of clergymen the inquiry, what their chief difficulty was in such preaching; and their answer almost unanimously was "The want of unity." For this reason they could not interest in that kind of preaching, either their hearers or themselves. The problem is how to interweave the textual materials into one fabric. The sermon is apt to be a string of beads with nothing but the string to make them one. The preacher's instinct for unity of aim is balked at the outset, and the hearer's instinct for singleness of impression is balked in the end.

Where lies the remedy? I answer, it lies in limiting expository preaching to passages of the Scriptures which have unity of structure. Leave more desultory methods of exposition to Bible-classes. Reserve for

the pulpit only such paragraphs of inspired material as admit of unity of discussion. Search for groups of inspired thoughts. These are very abundant. Often, expository treatment of them is the very best that can be given, — the richest, the most original, the most interesting, the most useful. A young preacher's vexed problem of originating materials of sermons is solved when he makes the discovery of the inexhaustible resources of the Bible in unified passages. Many a group of biblical verses has as definite a unity as a constellation in the heavens. You will soon be surprised and delighted by your discovery of the extent to which the Scriptures can be mapped out in such groups. No preacher need despair of success in expository preaching for the want of good homiletic material for it.

(2) Unity of explanation is often sacrificed by a needless suggestion of conflicting interpretations. Sometimes a contested passage may need this method. In the majority of cases, however, it is not needed; and, if not necessary, it is impolitic. We have no occasion for our enemy's guns, unless we can shift them around. Why take the trouble to spike them even, if they can not be used against us? Homiletic policy does not admit that it is a matter of indifference whether hearers shall receive impression from one force, or from four. It admits of no such self-counteracting and disjointing process of instruction. A mind intent on one object does not work so. Such a mind marches to its object by one path: it chooses its own path: it shuts out all needless glimpses of divergent and opposite avenues. So far a preacher is an advocate, not a judge.

(3) Unity of explanation is also sacrificed by irrelevant verbal exposition. I have here in mind one of the most singular indulgences of pedantry that has ever

afflicted oral speech. It is that of hunting a word through its whole philological history in the Scriptures. A few instances occur in which the true meaning of a word is a growth which can be determined only by such historical pursuit. "Baptize," "ransom," "justify," "sacrifice" are specimens of such words. They are the crucial words of certain texts, some of which are the crucial texts of systems of theology. But such words are rare; and the usage to which I refer is not limited to them, nor to any choice selection. It has spread itself enormously, until, in some pulpits, it has become the stereotyped and only method of exposition. Critical commentary is thus imported whole into sermons, with no reference at all to any homiletic demand. The emphatic word, and sometimes a word which has not even the dignity of emphasis, is pursued with philological fury up and down and across the biblical records. Homiletically the result is a ludicrous compound of dullness and irrelevancy.

An example will most clearly define this error. You will see from it that my description is no caricature of fact. A Presbyterian clergyman in a Southern city once preached a sermon on these words, "It containeth much." The text was a fragment broken from a verse in the Book of Ezekiel, "Thou shalt drink of thy sister's cup: . . . it containeth much." The passage is a comminatory one addressed to the ancient people of God. The preacher, probably in that vacuity of thought which is apt to dilute the beginnings of sermons, pounced upon the word "it," which had the distinction of heading the text. He remarked, that, as the context indicated, "the word had for its antecedent the word 'cup.' 'Thy sister's cup: it containeth much:' thou shalt drink of it; of thy sister's cup shalt

thou drink; it containeth much: a full cup, brethren, it containeth much: yes, thou shalt drink of thy sister's cup; it containeth much, — these are the words of our text."

I give you in the rough my impressions of the sermon after thirty years, not claiming verbal accuracy. The impression of the exposition, however, which has remained in my mind, justifies this inane mouthing of the text as the preliminary to the following exposition. The exegesis of the word "cup" was the burden of it. I do not exaggerate in saying that he told us of the great variety of senses in which the word "cup" is used in the Scriptures. A marvelous word is it. The Bible speaks of the "cup of salvation," and, again, of the "cup of consolation;" then it is the "cup of trembling," and the "wine-cup of fury." Babylon is called a "golden cup." The cup of Joseph which was hidden in the sack of Benjamin was a "silver cup." The Pharisees, we are told, "made clean the outside of the cup;" and, "he shall not lose his reward who giveth a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple." And therefore in the text we are told, "Thou shalt drink of thy sister's cup: it containeth much." The preacher rambled on in this manner, with his finger on the right page of the concordance, till at last the sound of the word "cup" was made familiar to the audience; and having accumulated, as I have in this paragraph, a respectable bulk of "sounding brass," the preacher announced as his subject of discourse the future punishment of the wicked.

(4) Unity of explanation may be sacrificed by erroneous representations of the "double sense" of certain biblical passages. This is a peculiarity of biblical style which it is exceedingly difficult to define clearly

to the popular mind. Few commentators succeed well in defining it to the clerical mind. Preachers may destroy the unity of impression made by the explanation of the passages in question, in either of two ways. One is that of distinguishing the two senses of the language too literally. The theory of the double sense, which some advance, borders hard on the Swedenborgian principle of exterior and interior interpretation. Senses absolutely independent of each other are attributed to the words of a text, with no reason for the double sense which is palpable to common sense. A recondite sense superinduced upon an obvious sense, a spiritual sense affixed to a literal sense, a prophetic sense subjoined to a declarative sense, — such is the "double sense" as a hearer obtains it from some pulpits.

The popular mind is impatient of mystic laws of speech, of which it finds no parallel in popular usage. It can not be made to see why two such interpretations should be injected into the same words with any more consistency or continuity of thought than three or thirty. The door seems open to Swedenborg, or any other maniacal interpreter, if such a theory of the double sense be recognized. The people, therefore, dismiss Swedenborg none the less, but the double sense as well.

The true theory of the double sense, as I understand it, always involves the idea of type and antitype. This is not undisputed, and I can not pause to defend it: I can only explain it. The senses of the language are not arbitrarily two: they are reasonably twofold. The reason is obvious. The language is true of the type, first for what it is in itself, then because it is the type of something to come after in the order of time. And to that antitype it passes over with an expanded

and a deepened meaning. Was a Messianic Psalm true of David? Yes. How? First on his own account and as a literal expression of his own experience; then because he was a type of the Messiah; and therefore its meaning passes on to a wider and profounder application to Christ. The one application is an outgrowth of the other. It is the prolongation, or, as the Scriptures so often pronounce it, the fulfillment, of the other. A certain continuity of thought connects them. Standing back of the type, we look through the language descriptive of it to the antitype, as if in perspective. They lie in the same line; the first being suggestive of the second, and the second the fullness of the first.

This is a conception of the double sense, — is it not? — which can be made intelligible to the popular mind without violence to its common sense. A reason is obvious why two, and only two, senses should be attributed to the language. It is a conception which helps marvelously the interpretation of some of the Psalms, and some of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and some of our Lord's predictions of the final judgment. I have called it a peculiarity of the Scriptures. To what extent it may be called a fundamental law of language in the interpretation of history is an open question. Natural science has revealed a similar law of type and antitype in the successions of natural history, which very strikingly reminds one of the double sense of the Scriptures. Whether or not it runs into all history in any such way as to make itself intelligible in the philosophy of events is an interesting query. That the Scriptures recognize it in certain grand responses between the Old Testament and the New is beyond reasonable dispute. Nothing of the style of innuendo, or of play upon words, degrades it.

The same language expresses two things, because they are alike, and are divinely constituted in certain correspondences to each other in the eternal order.

The other method by which the theory of the double sense may be made to sacrifice unity of exposition is that of leaving the full sense of the text in obscurity. The difficulty here is a want of didactic vigor in the preacher. If he have optical vigor so that he sees for himself, he has not power to make others see through the media of his exposition. A cloud is left overhanging the text in any sense. Passages to which the theory of the double sense is applicable are difficult themes for the pulpit at the best. We may prudently defer the treatment of them till we are confident of our power to make them clear.

7th, A seventh quality of an explanation is that it should be as concise as clearness and fullness will permit. Whatever value conciseness has in any thing it has with special emphasis in expository discourse.

(1) Observe especially that in a topical sermon the explanation is a preliminary. Like all other preliminaries, it should be dispatched rapidly.

(2) In either a topical or an expository sermon, conciseness itself stimulates interest. It is an interesting virtue in the explanation of any thing, that it be given briskly. Condense. Make every word significant. Say nothing in a rotary way. Let every step be an advance. Hearers are pleased with you, and pleased with your subject, and pleased with themselves, if they find themselves able to seize your thought nimbly. Have you not been sensible of the difference in this respect between different expounders? One will pare and peel and slice and scrape a text, as if it were an apple. Another will crack it as if it were a nut.

With the one, you must bide your time: the other gives you no time to spare. You have no question which quickens your interest the more skillfully.

(3) In no part of a discourse is the temptation to indolent composition more insidious than in the explanation. The very nature of the process invites delay. We often dally with an explanatory thought when we should not think of doing so with a link in an argument. Even an illustration tells us more plainly when we have done with it, and motions to us to pass on. Nothing but exhortation equals the explanation in its allurements to long-winded speech. Some of the most decisive failures in expository preaching are due largely to its length. If any doubt exists as to the interest of an audience in an expository discourse, condense; pack your thoughts; shorten the process; make haste; come quickly to the gist of things; and you are sure of one element of success. This simple expedient will often save an expository sermon from falling flat.

(4) Conciseness of explanation is sacrificed in several ways. One is by explaining things which in themselves need no explanation. We shall notice again the pettifogging method of explanation. I name it now only as contributing to needless expansion.

Another method is by explaining things of which an explanation is not demanded by the use which is to be made of the text. The distinction which we have observed between the work of the preacher and that of the commentator is forgotten. Much that deserves exposition may not demand it now. No homiletic necessity for it may exist in the aim of the sermon: if so, no exegetical demand at present concerns the preacher or the hearer. Take, for example, the text, "The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now command

eth all men everywhere to repent." Suppose that you preach a sermon from that text on the obligation of all men to repent. Why should you dwell on the phrase "winked at"? Why expand at all the principle of God's toleration of evils in one age which he condemns in another? Why say any thing of the first half of the text? Why not proceed at once to the last half as containing the germ of your sermon? It does so, and every thing back of it is, for your purpose, rubbish. Yet probably four out of five of the sermons preached on this standard text begin with a more or less elaborate discussion of the principle involved in the phrase "winked at." Why is this? Only because this phrase suggests an easy beginning. It points to something to say. It is the prop underneath the keel, which, knocked away, permits the vessel to launch. That is to say, the reason of the unnecessary exposition is vacuity of thought in the mind of the preacher. Keep to your text, not as an independent passage, but as a text. Use it for your aim, nothing more. Act the preacher, not the commentator.

A third method by which conciseness of explanation may be sacrificed is by dwelling needlessly upon things incidental to the text. Tediousness in the detail of familiar facts bearing feebly on the homiletic purpose unstrings the tension of interest in the early part of many sermons. Just then and there, when and where you need to accumulate and to husband resources of interest, this error often introduces a debilitating prolixity which makes the whole discourse flabby. Try the criticism on some of your own sermons. See if a brisk hint at the scenes of a very familiar parable is not of more worth to your conclusion than a laborious recapitulation of them. Make the experiment of

trusting something to the intelligence and the memory of your hearers respecting a miracle which they know by heart. "Mr. Jones," said Chief Justice Marshall on one occasion, to an attorney who was rehearsing to the Court some elementary principle from Blackstone's Commentaries, "there are some things which the Supreme Court of the United States may be presumed to know." Many an audience would give the same reproof to some expository preachers, if they could. Their defenseless position should shield them from assumptions of their ignorance which they can not resent. Be generous, therefore, to the intelligence of your hearers. Assume sometimes that they know the Lord's Prayer. Do not quote the Ten Commandments as if they had been revealed to you, instead of Moses. The Sermon on the Mount is a very ancient specimen of moral philosophy: do not cite it as if it were an enactment of the last Congress. The Parables are older than the "Meditations" of Aurelius Antoninus: why, then, rehearse them as if from the proof-sheets of the first edition? In a word, why suffer the minds of your audience to be more nimble than your own, and to outrun you?

A fourth method by which conciseness of exposition is sacrificed is by evasion of the real difficulties of a text. Explanation which is afraid of its own aim is apt to spin itself out in wretched commonplaces. Did you ever watch the last expiring spurt of an engine-hose whose power is spent? How it droops, and splashes, and wriggles, and drips, and drizzles, and spits, and gurgles, and wets everybody, sending a jet where it is least expected, and wasting its contents in puddles, until everybody frets, and is glad when it stops! Like that are expositions which expound nothing.

8th, An explanation should preserve the dignity which is becoming to the treatment of inspired thought Believers in inspiration repel debasement of it in exposition as they do in the choice of texts.

(1) It is, therefore, a homiletic error to explain that which needs no explanation. This error not only destroys conciseness, but it chiefly offends the dignity of expository speech. It degrades exposition to putter over it in a pettifogging way, trusting nothing to the good sense of an audience, and assuming nothing as already known to them. On the text, "I am the good shepherd," said a preacher in the chapel of this Seminary, — and that after twenty years of experience in the pulpit, — "a sheep, my brethren, is a very defenseless animal. A shepherd is one who takes care of sheep." If a New England audience can not be supposed to know what a sheep is, what do they know? Simplicity in preaching is not driveling.

In gauging the intelligence of an audience, we must take into account the popular use of commentaries. Some of these have had an immense circulation. Barnes's Notes alone have been circulated to the extent of a million of copies. That which fifty years ago would have been an addition to the biblical knowledge of the people may not be such now. A serious difficulty attending expository preaching now arises from the familiarity of multitudes with the most significant parts of the Bible. He must be a learned biblical scholar who can add any thing to the biblical knowledge of some hearers.

(2) Another offense against dignity of exposition is the suggestion of fanciful interpretations. What shall be said of this example from Dr. Gill? In expounding the phrase "Abba Father," he remarks that

the word "abba" reads the same spelled backwards or forwards, and that "this suggests that God is our Father in adversity as well as in prosperity." Suggests to whom? To anybody but the Rev. Dr. Gill? We can readily conceive how it should have disgusted a robust mind like Robert Hall's, and led him to say to a Welshman who expressed the wish that Dr. Gill's works had been written in Welsh, "I wish so, too, sir; for then I never should have wasted my time and patience in reading them."

LECTURE XIV.

THE EXPLANATION: QUALITIES, LOCALITY.

9TH, Continuing the discussion of the qualities of the explanation, we remark in the ninth place, that over against the conservative principle of the dignity of exposition, considered in the last lecture, must be admitted another; namely, that exposition should be made interesting. It is a truism that dignity and dullness are often synonymous. Have you not observed that the act of yawning closes the inner chamber of the ear, so that you are partially deafened by it? That is as true morally as it is physiologically. We may, therefore, better tolerate a respectable eccentricity than be afflicted with tameness.

(1) To promote interest in expository preaching, cultivate the "picturesque expression" recommended by Lord Brougham. Regulated by a chastened taste, that will insure interest. Dr. Arnold is represented by his pupils at Rugby as having been in his biblical discourses the freshest man they ever knew. One of his pupils writes of him, "Our Lord's life and death were to him the most interesting facts that ever happened; as real, as exciting, as any recent event in history. His rich mind filled up the naked outline of the gospel." That was the secret, — "his rich mind." If a preacher's mind is filled with biblical stores, and cultivated

in biblical tastes, and alive with interest in biblical history, biography, prophecy, so that Gethsemane and Calvary are as real to him as Waterloo and Gettysburg, he can scarcely fail to make expository preaching interesting.

(2) Certain expedients of study are valuable aids to the faculty of interesting exposition. Of these, one is familiarity with books of Eastern travel. A preacher should know something of the latest literature of oriental travel and exploration. A fresh mind must have fresh food. Another expedient is a study of the old English pulpit. Not for accuracy of exegesis, but for the means of clothing it in forms which will allure the popular mind, the old English preachers are excellent helpers. They were not trustworthy exegetes; but they abound with fresh illustrations, original uses of the Scriptures, and quaint remarks in the way of comment. The events and characters of the Old Testament especially were very real to their imagination. Familiarity with them will put a preacher in possession of much material of biblical illustration, which, whatever else may be said of it, was fresh and pithy and luminous. A quotation from that source may sometimes be the one thing wanting to light up a modern exposition, and make it interesting to modern hearers.

Again: a department of a commonplace book may be made a valuable help to the interest of expository sermons. Collections of biblical miscellanies, facts of science, incidents of travel, original comments, quotations, anecdotes, infidel concessions, uses of certain texts by illustrious preachers, uses of other passages on certain death-beds, notes of certain conversions attributable to specific texts, connections of other texts with Christian hymnology, missionary experiences in the

use of others, — in brief, every thing of a miscellaneous character which explains, or illustrates, or enforces, or magnifies, or adorns any scriptural passage, is worth preserving.

(3) A preacher needs courage to use the common stock of expository thought. There is no need of straining after expository conceits. Here, as elsewhere, the common stock of thought is the great bulk of true thought. To the popular mind it is the most necessary thought: therefore, for homiletic use, it is the most powerful thought. Jeremy Taylor defends the simplicity of the materials and the structure of his sermons by saying that he cares little if any witty censurer shall say that he has learned from them nothing but that which he knew before; "for no man ought to be offended that sermons are not curious inquiries after new nothings, but pursuances of old truths." But Jeremy Taylor, in his expositions as in other things, was "golden-mouthed." He threw a gorgeous wealth of illustration around his "old truths" and simple plans of thought. Says an English critic, "We may compare one of his discourses to such a country church as we sometimes see in these days, where some loving hand has covered the simple work of village masons with carvings, and filled the old windows with prophets pictured on the panes."

Old biblical truths can be handled in this manner without conceits and without straining; and, thus handled, they are the elementary forces of the pulpit. A preacher needs to believe this. Trust the common stock of biblical thought, and use it courageously. That very courage lifts a preacher's mind to a loftier level of working. Faithful manipulation of such materials is the thing needed. Do not use them, in the

bulk, at second-hand. Work them over. Reconstruct them. Polish them. Put them through the laboratory of your own thinking. Get fresh robes for them from your own emotions. Do something, or the other thing, or all things, which shall make them your own. Quicken thus your own interest in them; and the result will be, that, when they go from you, they will uplift hearers to the heavens.

In illustration of the principle here involved, let me cite a criticism by William Taylor, a contemporary of Walter Scott. Southey's "Madoc" and Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel" were rivals for the popular favor. In about one year after their publication Scott had received above a thousand pounds for the "Lay," and Southey had received, as he says, "just three pounds, seventeen shillings, and a penny." William Taylor, commenting on the contrast, writes as follows: "Sir Walter's great success surprises me. Yet he has this of prudence, that, far from scorning the ordinary, he dwells on *our* manners, *our* opinions, *our* history, *our* most familiar preconceptions. Goldsmith, the most popular of recent poets, is remarkable for saying well what was most obvious to say. Tasso is another dealer in finished commonplace, stolen, everybody knows where. The far-fetched is not ware for the numerous class of readers." This is a gem of criticism. The principle here advanced runs through all popular literature. The success of expository preaching depends largely upon it.

10th, The explanation should be free from certain scholastic weaknesses. In no other part of a sermon is a preacher tempted more insidiously to unconscious scholasticism than in this.

(1) We should especially avoid the needless use of the technical terms of philology. An exposition must

often be more learned than it should seem to be. Never import into a sermon the paraphernalia of a critical commentary. A double reason enforces this caution. Such technicalities are not intelligible to the people; and, if they were, they are not suited to oral address.

(2) On the same principle, we should avoid needless allusions to the authority of manuscripts, ancient versions, various readings, and the original of the English text. The ancient conceit of English preachers in sprinkling their discourses with quotations from Greek and Latin classics was not, in their circumstances, so grave an error as the subjection of the Scriptures to scholastic associations in the minds of the people would be now. Yet that classicism of the English pulpit well-nigh ruined one entire age of that which was otherwise magnificent preaching. To test the principle one asks, "May we ever quote a word or phrase from the original Greek or Hebrew?" I answer, circumlocution to avoid a foreign language in popular oral speech is always in good taste. Say, therefore, "The word in the original which is translated thus," or, "The more exact translation here would be," etc.

(3) The principle involved in this rule should lead us, also, to avoid a pedantic citation of unfamiliar commentaries. Possibly a blatant caviler here and there might be overawed by the names of half a score of mediæval exegetes of whom he had never heard. But Dean Swift's advice to a young clergyman is more pertinent, when he urges him not to "perplex a whole audience of sensible people for the sake of three or four fools who are past grace."

(4) Yet this same principle should lead us to avoid the affectation of independence of scholastic authority. Never give a thrust at the principle of authority in

the attempt to vindicate, or to exercise the right of private judgment. You have, perhaps, an original interpretation of a text: commentaries do not support you. Very well. Exercise your right; but why bray about it? Exercise it modestly: let alone the slaughtered commentators. Speak your own mind without disturbing theirs. It may be that you are right; but the probabilities are five to one that your hearers will not believe that you are, if you fling your opinion in the face of half a dozen venerable teachers who were venerable before you were born. Treat it as a misfortune if you must part company with *other* learned men.

The popular mind feels by instinct a more profound respect for scholarly authority than we often give it credit for. Underneath the current of democratic scorn of books and bookish men, there is an innate reverence for the thing which is thus depreciated. Another element, also, you will discover in the popular instinct on this subject; that is, a sense of a preacher's professional infidelity in such flings at scholastic tribunals. It is human nature to respect a man who respects his own order. It is natural that educated mind should stand by educated mind; that culture should respect culture; that cultivated taste should respond to cultivated taste; that scholarly opinion should defer to scholarly opinion. The thinking common people, who know enough to know what education is, feel this profoundly.

This popular instinct prompts respect for clerical fidelity to commentators. Illiterate men, when they are men of sense, like to know that there are libraries and universities, and historic monuments of learning, and magnificent traditions of ancient wisdom, and mys-

terious insignia of intellectual authority, back of the pulpit. They do not care to see the libraries and the monuments; but they are glad to know that they are there, and that their religious teachers know all about them, and respect them. A parishioner who is a man of good sense receives a silent accession of respect for his pastor, and for every sermon that he preaches, from merely entering that pastor's study, and glancing at a large and well-used library. The very sight of books is an impressive spectacle to an uneducated man of sense. The man must be far down towards barbarism who does not take off his hat amidst such surroundings.

An educated preacher, therefore, who respects himself, is the representative of all the libraries to his people. The wisdom of all the ages is tributary to his sermons. No other man can be master of the situation as he can be, if he appreciates the situation, and respects his opportunity. He unites in himself the authority of his teachers and the sympathy of his hearers. He is on the middle ground between the heights of the university and the popular lowlands; he blends the principle of authority with the principle of sympathy; and that is a union of forces which no other combination of moral powers can equal.

11th, An explanation should, if possible, be in keeping with the rhetorical structure of the text. "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality;" — what kind of an exposition, rhetorically considered, does this text invite? A preacher once introduced a sermon upon it by observing that the word "mortal" is from the Latin word *mors*, "death," and therefore means "deathly;" "immortal" is from the Latin words *mors*, and *in*, which means "not,"

and therefore the entire word means "not deathly." Is the philological dissection of such a text in sympathy with it? Does it prolong and sustain the impression which the text itself creates? Another preacher, commenting on the text, "Now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face," pounced upon the word "glass" as containing the most transparent idea he could find in the text; and in his vitreous exposition he contrived to find a place for the fact that glass was first used for windows in the third century of the Christian era, and stained glass, for ecclesiastical windows, in the seventh century.

The question is, Has not rhetorical congruity something to say respecting such expositions as these? The principle is an obvious one, that a certain rhetorical sympathy ought to blend a subject of thought with thought on that subject. The same principle should, if possible, blend a text and its explanation. An exposition should, if possible, be rhetorically a prolongation of the text; it should make the same impression; it should be on the same level of thought and feeling. Sustain, if possible, the key-note of inspiration.

"If possible," I say: sometimes it is not possible. Three exceptions deserve mention. One is when a text demands only a verbal exposition. The definition of a few words may be all that it needs to put its meaning fully before the hearer. There is no place for a rhetorical expansion of it in the explanation. Another exception occurs when the use to be made of the text in the body of the sermon does not demand the aid of the text. The body of the sermon may be an independent discussion. The text may be a motto only. Having introduced the subject, the sooner the text retires from the discussion, the better. A third exception

occurs, when to sustain the rhetorical impression of the text would neutralize, in whole or in part, the design of the sermon. This may be the case, as we have seen, in the treatment of "promising texts." An imaginative text may contain a principle which you may wish to treat argumentatively. The Psalms are lyric poems: yet they contain themes of sermons which we do not wish to sing. The beginning of the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah is an exhortation, "Ho, every one that thirsteth." But, in a discourse upon it, you may wish to elaborate the doctrine of an unlimited Atonement. In such cases your object requires that you should not prolong the rhetorical impression of the text. These exceptions, however, leave a large range for the principle, that, if possible, the explanation should be so conducted as to be in keeping with the rhetorical character of the text.

12th, An explanation should be so conducted as not to excite frivolity in an audience. Bishop Andrews, of the time of King James I. of England, took for the text of a Christmas sermon before the king the words, "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ." In his exposition occurs the following: "Seeing the text is of seasons, it would not be out of season itself; and, though it be never out of season to speak of Christ, yet even Christ hath his seasons. 'Your time is always,' saith he; 'but so is not mine. I have my seasons,' one of which seasons is this, the season of his birth, whereby all recapitulate in heaven and earth, which is the season of the text. So this is a text of the seasons." Perhaps you can make sense of this: I can not. One of the most useless modes of preaching is that which depends for the interest it excites upon

the risible sensibilities; and the most offensive species of this genus of sermons is that which degrades the Bible to the antics of rhetorical buffoonery. Three radical errors are involved in such preaching.

One is that it almost invariably does violence to the biblical idea of the language used. That is rarely a truthful interpretation of the Scriptures which excites laughter. Moreover, the kind of interest which biblical fun creates is hostile to the main end of preaching. Spiritual success in preaching depends quite as much on the kind as on the degree of the interest it awakens. The interest of mirth at the best, and in its legitimate uses, can perform only what may be called a menial service, so inferior is it relatively to the more noble workings of the pulpit. The instant that it gets above that menial rank, it becomes an encumbrance and an offense. A preacher who depends upon it as the charm of his pulpit has his own work to undo when he would reach the conscience of his people. He is like an unskillful oarsman, who retards his own speed by constant back-water, for the entertainment of making the spray dance in the sunbeams.

Moreover, the interest of mirth directly associated with biblical texts is especially hazardous to the popular reverence for the Scriptures. We may admit, that in one or two instances, like the narrative of Elijah's mockery of the priests of Baal, there are biblical texts, which with vivid painting, and from the lips of a good mimic, might excite the mirth of an audience with no violence to the inspired thought; but the admission is no acknowledgment of the expediency or the right to bring other passages into mirthful associations. Texts are injured by such uses. The interest of conviction, of reverence, of penitence, of love, ought never to be hazarded for the sake of the interest of mirth.

13th, An explanation should be such as to suggest a definite theory of inspiration. Homiletic exposition always involves some theory of inspiration. We can not, if we would, discuss the Bible as if the question of its inspiration were obsolete. Homiletic exposition must often disclose a preacher's theory of inspiration. If you do not define it in form, you must often express it by implication. When you do not express it, you will often hint at it. When you do not consciously hint at it, it will look out of the windows of your sermon, and show itself for what it is.

It is important to observe, therefore, that no indefinite theory of inspiration can live in the popular faith. The fact is a most significant one, that the popular mind never, to any considerable extent, enters into refined distinctions on this doctrine. It receives the doctrine in some strongly defined form, or in no form. Vagueness of teaching destroys the doctrine as effectually as flat denial. Exposition must assume it in a bold form. Undeveloped hints of it must suggest it in such form. If we claim that one text is authoritative, and another not, we must have a reason to give which will not seem to the common sense of hearers to fritter away from inspiration every thing that is clear, and every thing that is decisive.

Yet the pulpit may suggest ill-defined ideas of inspiration by expositions which are regardless of varieties of biblical style. You can not make biblical poetry dogmatic, or biblical argument imaginative, or biblical dogma figurative, or biblical history allegorical, or biblical allegory biographical, without teaching, by implication, ideas of inspiration which no man can so define as to save them from self-contradiction, and yet leave strong points to the popular faith in those ideas. To

the popular mind such interpretations will seem to make the Scriptures contradict all the laws by which thought expresses itself when uninspired.

14th, An explanation should be such as to suggest naturally the proposition of the sermon. Dr. Ross, a professor of theology in Glasgow in the seventeenth century, published a sermon on the text, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." He states his proposition as fourfold: 1. To describe the different parties which distract our divided Zion; 2. To show the malignancy of the sin of schism; 3. To show the necessity of Episcopacy for the support of the concerns of Christianity; 4. To apply *the subject*. "The subject" here seems vast enough; but how shall the gulf between it and the text be bridged? Prefatory remarks may introduce such a proposition; they may introduce any thing. But how, from the point of the text, shall we discover the proposition? The firmament to be explored by our homiletic telescope is immense.

Yet does not this extreme case illustrate a defect of which, in less degree, we are often sensible in listening to sermons, — that the gulf between the text and the proposition is not bridged in any natural and effective way? The text is explained, the subject is introduced; but neither is linked to the other. With the text in mind we listen to the proposition with surprise: with the proposition in mind we recall the text with surprise. Observe, then, that a good explanation will often show that the proposition is contained in the text. If not this, it will often show that the proposition is naturally suggested by the text. The pertinency of an accommodated text depends wholly upon the explanatory transition from text to theme. No matter how brief the transition: if it be such as to build a natural

bridge between text and theme, it is enough. A good explanation will often give to a subject the inspired authority of the text. This we observed as one of the uses of a text. The value of it often depends wholly on the exposition of the text. If it be so explained that it evidently indorses the subject, inspiration becomes responsible for the subject. The proposition may then be discussed as if it were itself inspired. This is the chief defense of topical sermons.

15th, In a topical sermon the explanation should, if possible, be such as to bring the text to bear directly upon the conclusion. It is often of great value to be able to use a text in the application of a sermon. To repeat it, to urge it home as containing the germ of all that has been said, even to show that text and sermon are in the same line of thought, and the application of one is therefore supported by the other, — this is often of great force in the conclusion. Occasionally the text forms the best possible closing sentence of a sermon. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" may be the most forcible beginning and ending of a sermon on immediate repentance.

But I have said that this adjustment of explanation to conclusion is valuable when it is possible. Sometimes it is not possible; that is, it is not natural. The application of a discourse may flow more naturally from the body of the discussion than directly from the text. The applications may be divergent, not concentrated in one textual thought. A closing appeal may grow out of the last division of a sermon, and may be too remotely connected with the text to invite textual aid in its development. The expedient in question can not be forced. It must be the natural outgoing of the text as unfolded in the explanation, or it will fall flat.

16th, The explanation should be varied on different occasions. A very obvious hint is this when attention is called to it; but often attention is not given to it. Have no stereotyped method of exposition. Do not always philologize by verbal criticism. Do not always explain descriptively. Do not always tell of the author of the text, his character, his condition, his history. Do not always speak of his readers, who and what they were, and why he wrote to them. Do not always cite parallel passages, nor always paraphrase, nor always pass rhetorical criticism on the beauty, the force, the logic, of the text. No one of these varieties can be always becoming: no two, no three of them can generally be so. We must have variety, if we have fitness: then we gain a virtue in variety itself. Any thing will caricature itself in the course of time, if it never varies. "Paradise Lost" would become ludicrous, if we should never hear any thing else. Macbeth and Hamlet would become comedies, if we were doomed to hear them rehearsed once a week, as people listen to sermons. Boys in the street would mouth parodies of them Respect the dignity of a preacher of the gospel enough to protect it from burlesque in your own person.

V. We have now considered the qualities of the explanation. Another general topic demands a brief notice. It is the locality of the explanation relatively to other parts of a sermon. This will vary according to the character of the sermon. In an expository sermon explanation forms the body of the discourse. In a textual sermon the explanation may often be divided. Each clause of the text being a division of the sermon, each may be explained in the development of its own division. Not that this will necessarily be so; but often it will be the natural method to introduce each part of

the explanation in the place where it is wanted for immediate use.

In either a topical or a textual sermon the explanation may sometimes form an introductory division by itself. This will often be the natural method of explaining a very difficult text, or a text which is commonly misinterpreted, or a text which is severely contested. Take the text, "I could wish myself accursed from Christ." You wish to discourse from that text on the passion of love for the souls of men. This is precisely what the text expresses. Yet to evolve it clearly from the text requires time. It can not be well done in a brief, preliminary fragment of a sermon. Very well: let the first division of the sermon propose to explain the meaning of the text; this serves the double purpose of giving time, and of attracting an attention which your exposition might not receive as a preliminary. But in a topical sermon the explanation will, more frequently than otherwise, be a preliminary to the proposition. If an explanation is needed in a topical discourse, it will generally be brief, and, as we have seen, is a bridge from text to subject.

Which shall take the precedence, — the explanation, or the introduction proper, when both are needed, in a topical sermon? As we shall see, these are two things. Which precedes the other, — the remarks explanatory of the text, or other remarks introductory of the subject? I answer, No rule is practicable: follow the homiletic instinct. Sometimes this will give the precedence to one, sometimes to the other, and sometimes it will intermingle them. The question is one of the minutiæ of sermonizing, to which criticism can give no more definite answer than this without hampering homiletic freedom.

LECTURE XV.

EXCURSUS: THE BIBLE SERVICE.

THIS discussion of the subject of exposition suggests another topic, which does not necessarily belong to it as a subject of homiletic theory, but which excites considerable interest at present, and is naturally considered now in the form of an *excursus*. The question is specifically this, Does the biblical instruction of our churches require any change in the present usages of the New England pulpit in conducting the services of the Lord's Day?

I. To answer this question intelligently, we need to note, first, some facts respecting the state of things in which our present usages had their origin. One is, that, in the olden time, the two sermons on the Lord's Day, with the accompanying exercises, constituted the whole of the services of public worship. Sabbath-schools were not. The first Sabbath-school in this country is not yet seventy-five years old. Bible-classes were not common. I am not able to find evidence that they existed, to any general extent, before Sabbath-schools were instituted. Weekly lectures were not frequent, except the single lecture preparatory to the administration of the Lord's Supper. We are within bounds in saying, that, as a general rule, the services of public worship were limited to the Lord's Day and to the two preaching services of that day.

Another fact bearing upon the question is that biblical exposition was not common, except in the exercises of public worship. Nearly all the exposition of the Scriptures which the people received was from their pastors, and was given by them from their pulpits. The formal, religious instruction of children at home was confined mainly to two things, — the Westminster Catechism and the text of the Scriptures, both of which were committed to memory. Aged persons are still living who give evidence of this fact in their own religious culture.

The second Sabbath-school in Massachusetts was established by my father, at the suggestion of a Christian lady, in his parish at West Brookfield. It was done in opposition to the judgment of some of his most devout parishioners. They refused to countenance the innovation by the presence of their children. And he has told me that he and others who favored it had reflected so little on the subject, that they scarcely knew what to do with the children who did attend. At the first they could think of nothing appropriate to the Lord's Day, but the committal to memory of biblical passages, the Catechism, and Watts's Psalms and Hymns.

That state of things could not well have been different; for there were no popular commentaries. Christian parents had not the means of interpreting the Scriptures to their households without aid from the pulpit. "Doddridge's Family Expositor," published about a hundred and thirty years ago, was the first work of the kind in our language, and was not of great value for the discussion of the difficulties of the Bible; nor was the circulation of it at all general. Books were costly, and the country poor. The best biblical commentaries were in Latin, and of course accessible only

to the clergy. Rev. Albert Barnes once told me, that, when he began the preparation of his "Notes on the New Testament," the only books he could depend upon for his assistance were his lexicons, and a copy of the "Critici Sacri,"—a work in thirteen Latin folios, which formed the best part of his library. Yet that was not far from the year 1830. I give these details in evidence of the fact, that, from the necessity of the case, biblical exposition through all the early periods of New England history must have come from the clergy, and must have been a part of the work of the pulpit on the Sabbath.

It is in evidence, furthermore, that the exposition of the Scriptures in the early history of our churches was not neglected by the pulpit. The biblical learning of the clergy was, of course, variable. But among them were at all times to be found excellent Greek and Hebrew scholars. The proportion of those who had a working knowledge of the Hebrew language was at one time probably larger than at present. Many of the old manuscript sermons still found in the archives of our libraries are replete with exposition. So far as I am able to learn, the bulk of the ancient preaching of New England was not of a controversial or a dogmatic character. The majority of those discourses were practical discussions of Christian experience, hortatory appeals to the impenitent, sermons of biblical biography and incident, and expositions and textual discussions.

Another fact points in the same direction. The usage was almost universal of commenting on the passage of the Scriptures which was read as a preliminary to the "long prayer." Many of the early churches of New England would not tolerate the reading of the Bible in their pulpits without such comment. The

rehearsal of the Scriptures as the "lesson of the day," as practiced in the Church of England, and which has now become so common among us, our fathers resolutely discouraged and often denounced. They called it "dumb reading." As they would not "say prayers," but would pray, so they would not read the Scriptures after a manner which tempted them to indolent and listless worship. Whatever else they did, they would not mock God. That state of feeling led to a vast amount of exposition of the Bible outside of sermons.

II. It is very obvious that time has brought about a silent revolution in the relations of our pulpit to the work of explaining the word of God. The ancient usage of the two sermons on the Lord's Day remains, for the most part, without innovation; but that is nearly all that remains unchanged.

Specially should it be noted that biblical instruction has come to be very largely given by laymen. It has become a question for debate in Sabbath-school conventions, what duty and what privilege, if any, belong to the clergy in the working of the whole machinery of biblical teaching to the youth of their parishes. The practical connection of the pastor with the school is in the majority of cases nominal. Again: popular commentaries have greatly diminished the dependence of adult hearers upon the pulpit for their scriptural knowledge. It has become a much more laborious effort than it once was to preach expository discourses which will find listening ears. Exposition, if not more learned, must be more versatile and more spirited.

As a natural consequence of this state of things, exposition in our pulpits has suffered a very general and exhaustive decline. Coleridge pronounced it one of the silent revolutions by which learning had suffered

in England, that literature had to so large an extent "fallen off from the liberal professions." By a similar revolution, scriptural exposition has silently fallen off from the pulpit. Comparatively few expository sermons are preached. In some congregations they would subject a preacher's zeal to adverse criticism. Even textual sermons are not nearly so abundant as they were a century ago. The habit of comment on the passages of the Bible read for devotional uses has almost entirely ceased. Popular taste and clerical compliance have sacrificed this ancient and invaluable usage to the demand for brevity in public worship.

Meanwhile, what of the ancient double service of the pulpit on the Sabbath? It surely is not holding our audiences with sufficient force to prevent their questioning its usefulness. One of the modern "signs," as you very well know, indicative of the relations subsisting between the pulpit and the pew, is the query whether one service for preaching purposes is not better than two. However the question may be answered, it is a very pregnant matter to the pulpit that the question should ever have been asked. It indicates a flagging of Christian interest in the work of the pulpit as now conducted. Why is not the query raised, whether some other labor of the day is a necessity? Why do not thoughtful laymen ask whether the Sabbath-school should be suspended, or the evening conference meeting?

The people are sensible of monotony in the two sermons of the day, as they are not in attendance upon any other services of a crowded Sunday. By parting with expository preaching, the pulpit has parted with its most important aid and stimulus to variety. No other one thing gives to preaching so wide a range of

religious thought as the exposition of the Scriptures, when it comes forth as the fruit of a rich, full mind, — rich in scholarly resources, and full of intense practical aims.

This, in my view, explains why thinking and overtasked laymen are asking how the Lord's Day can be made less laborious. The two sermons, with their devotional accompaniments, are the only two things in the occupations of the day in which, as now generally conducted, the sense of monotony is unavoidable. The second sermon is often a treadmill in its impression of sameness. There is no evidence that the popular interest in preaching *as such* has declined. The largest regular audiences in the land are in churches. No such audiences could be assembled weekly anywhere else. But Sabbath engagements have multiplied, and other *stimuli* to religious thought have crowded within the popular reach, so that, to sustain the preaching at its established height of interest, a new inspiration of variety is indispensable. Under the circumstances, it is the most natural thing that church-going people should seek relief from overtasking by proposing to drop one of the only two services which appear to them to be substantially alike. We can not blame them for not being reverently fond of treadmills.

III. We may then safely answer the main question, so far at least as to say, that, in some form or other, we need to reinstate the biblical instruction of our churches and our youth in the pulpit, and in the hands of pastors. This, it seems to me, is the vital point to be carried. The fatal evil is that preaching should be isolated from the work of scriptural teaching. No preacher can afford to allow that work to fall off from his pulpit. An orator in the pulpit is a great man; but

no man is so great that he can afford to be nothing else than a pulpit orator. The evil thrusts with two edges. It cuts down the worth of the preaching, and it cuts down the worth of teaching as well.

On this last point, both pastors and laymen often need to be wiser than they are. Nothing in the Christian training of a people works as well as it might work, if it is not headed by the pulpit. Men talk more glibly than wisely of the superiority of laymen and of women in Christian work. The notion that on any large scale, and for long periods of time, we can put religious work under the leadership of either men or women who are doing any thing else than religious work is not philosophical. Nothing else of the kind in this world prospers under leadership which is not concentrated upon it, and concentrated in the hands of men. Yet the man who devotes his life to the far-reaching study and conduct of Christian labor becomes *de facto* a clergyman. Call him what you will, dress him as you please, put him where you choose, he is practically a minister of the gospel. Licensed or unlicensed, "in orders," or without orders, or in disorder, he is, to the people among whom he works, a man set apart from themselves. He is not doing their work, nor living their life. He is not "one of them" in any vital sense of the phrase. He is a professional worker for Christ as truly as the Archbishop of Canterbury.

We must not be misled by names in a matter of this sort; and let us not succumb to a senseless prejudice against a clerical exterior. Of some things, we must have the form, if we have the thing. If the leadership of Christian work creates for itself the equivalent of ministers, the fact only indicates that the leadership naturally belongs to ministers, as theoretically we

should suppose it would belong to them. If we do not create the men *for* the work, they will be created *by* the work. The work suffers, if it is deprived of such leadership. Decapitate the clergy to-day, and Christian work has only to give itself for a generation to creating another set of men to take their places. This principle, then, it is reasonable to apply to the work of biblical instruction. We must believe that you can not have that form of Christian labor in its best development, if usages are so framed as to exclude the ministry from the doing of it. They must lead it by actual participation in it, or it must degenerate in quality, whatever it may be in quantity.

If these views are correct, it follows that one of the most vital changes which our present system of Christian work needs is to reinstate in the pulpit the work of biblical teaching; not at all to diminish that work elsewhere; not at all to hamper its freedom anywhere; but to restore the leadership in it to the pulpit. I say "restore," because the pulpit once had that leadership; for it had the whole of the work. It did all that was done. It is no innovation to devise methods of setting the pulpit again at the head of all expedients, and of all training for the scriptural education of the people. It is strictly a restoration of a prerogative which has become partially, and in many cases wholly, obsolete. It is a restoration which I believe nine-tenths, if not even a larger proportion, of our thinking laymen would gladly welcome.

Depend upon it that you have a just and a generous constituency to deal with in this thing. In no development of working power in real life are the true *aristoi* sooner found out and appreciated and obeyed than in our complicated system of labor for the religious cul

ture of the people. Workers of every grade find their honest level here by a gravitation more unerring than that of a plumb-line. The planets are not truer to their orbits. If, among any people of average intelligence and good sense and piety, you do not find your place of *moral* supremacy, where you shine as the stars, it will be because you lack something which belongs to the luster of that supremacy. There is a vacuum or a soft spot in you somewhere. Scholarship, tact, industry, innate force, or the graces of the divine in-dwelling, something or other, which, by the nature of things, lies in the ground-work of success, is always wanting when a biblical preacher fails to grasp and to hold the moral leadership of all the agencies at work among an honest and sensible people for their Christian building and adornment.

IV. But how shall this re-instatement of biblical teaching in our pulpits be achieved? I answer, in view of what has been said, that some modification seems to be demanded in one of the two preaching services of the Sabbath as now sustained in our churches. Reconstruct one of these two services in such a way as shall bring the pulpit more obviously to the front in the work of biblical instruction. The question of expediency as affected by locality, by the public opinion of a church, by the character of a community, must, of course, be decided by the good sense of a pastor in each case as it arises.

The substitution of the Sabbath-school for the usual service of the afternoon is often, but by no means always, the best thing that is practicable. Yet this should never be done, unless it can be so arranged as to make the pastor active in the biblical work of the school. Whether he should be superintendent, or not,

is a minor matter. But the duties of the hour should be so planned as to give the pastor an opportunity, and lay upon him the necessity, of engaging personally and prominently in the scriptural teaching.

Then he should bring to that service the results of the best and latest biblical scholarship at his command He must have not so much the headship of position as the headship of work. No pastor can afford an idle Sabbath half-day as the rule of his ministry. Never make the Sunday-school, therefore, a labor-saving expedient for your pulpit. Change only the form and method of your labor. Prepare for it with scholarly fidelity as laboriously as for a written sermon. Seek to elevate and expand by the change the biblical culture of your people. If you can not do that, by all means let the present usage remain intact. Any change which only gives to you a silent afternoon thrusts you into the rear of the Christian workers of your parish. It drapes your pulpit in token of bereavement of its most sacred prerogative. But in some cases the substitution of the Sunday-school for the preaching service of the afternoon, under the guidance of a studious and quick-witted pastor, is working with unquestioned success. Pastor and people alike are rejuvenated by it.

In other cases the "Bible service," technically so called, can be substituted profitably for the usual sermon of the afternoon. If a pastor has the qualifications requisite for such a service, and if the people are convinced of its value, so that they co-operate heartily in sustaining it, it *is* valuable far beyond the present second sermon. The social pliability of it, the freedom of question and answer, the directness with which it may bring to expression the questionings which are alive in the hearts of the people, render it in some cases the

most spiritual service of the day. Theoretically, at least, it looks very promising. It must be tested by time.

But there are diversities of gifts. Not every pastor can engineer well a Sabbath-school. Not every pastor can conduct a Bible service in a large assembly with Socratic wisdom. There are diversities also of parochial caliber and culture. Not every parish is superlatively wise. Not every parish is open to the innovations of a youthful pastor. Not every parish is co-operative with any pastor in infusing life into a public service. Very well: do not try to force your own nature or the inclinations of your people to distasteful experiments. Bend, rather, to your purpose the system now in vogue. Work into it an increase of expository and textual preaching. Seldom, if ever, preach two topical discussions in one day. Make one, at least, of your two discourses a distinctively and specially biblical one in material and form. Lay yourself out to swell the fund of biblical knowledge among your people. This is practicable to any pastor who will create the resources necessary for it in the culture of his own mind. It requires more than biblical learning. It requires a mental assimilation to the biblical atmosphere of thought. It requires a quick eye, a ready memory, and a nimble tongue. No man can succeed in it who does not love study, or who gives to biblical study the second place in the habits of his life, or who has not patience to train himself to fluent and versatile extemporaneous speech. But any man can make it a success who will give to it the same amount of enthusiasm and of toil which achieves success in other methods of preaching.

At the first there is no saving of labor; but when time has developed a preacher's skill in the selection

and working of biblical materials, and his command of extemporaneous utterance, there is a vast saving of labor, because of the accumulation of *available* materials. I mean a saving of labor relatively to the results achieved. It would be more accurate to say a more productive economy of labor. No other study is so prolific of the finest quality and variety of homiletic materials as the study of the Scriptures. No other materials work into the realities of human life and the emergencies of men's souls so deftly as the materials thus gained. Once full of them, and with a mind assimilated to their quality, with a speech which holds them at the tongue's end, a preacher need never exhaust himself. He need never rack his brain, or roam the streets, for something to say, and something to the point. The stream is perennial. It is the river of the water of life.

I do not speak on this subject without knowing whereof I affirm. You will pardon me if I give you — what you will bear me witness I do not often give in a formal way — a leaf from my own experience. I am not ashamed to say that I spent the larger part of the first night after my ordination in vigils of hopeless despair of ever being able to rise to the level of my pulpit. My sermons were — what they were. I knew it, if nobody else did. The first gleam of confidence that I gained arose from the kindness with which my very indulgent people received my expository remarks in conference meetings, for which I prepared myself as regularly as for the services of the Sabbath.

Led, as I believe, by the Spirit of God, I took up the Prophecy of Isaiah and the Epistle to the Romans as subjects of thorough study. I devoted to them from one to two hours daily, using the best helps at my

command. The first money I earned for my library was spent for books of sacred literature. Wisely or unwisely I made much of Monday mornings in building the biblical foundations of my ministry. The first tangible result was that I very soon found the materials of sermons thronging upon me from those two books of the Bible. I found unique texts for textual sermons, compact and prolific paragraphs for expository sermons, philosophical combinations of inspired thought which nothing else would have suggested to me, novel relations of Scripture to Scripture, discoveries of the secret harmonies of revelation, adjustments of truth to popular wants which I could have met in no other way, illustrations from books of Eastern travel, and, more than all else, an uplifting of my own mind into a biblical atmosphere, specially an atmosphere of faith in God and in this world's future. Then followed a repose of conscience in my labor which was entirely new to me.

Before four months had passed away I began to use the results of my scriptural studies in my pulpit. On every Sabbath afternoon, if I preached twice to my own people, I delivered extemporaneously, though from a full brief, a textual or an expository sermon on a passage selected from one of those two books which were the subjects of my daily research. The sermon was prepared always on Saturday; but the texts and materials were ready to my hand weeks in advance. After the first four months of my ministry I never spent a quarter of an hour hunting for a text or a theme. That course of biblical sermons, with a parallel course of doctrinal discussions, constituted the staple of my preaching; and at the end of my pastorate of six years I had not exhausted those two books of the Scriptures,

and had traversed less than one-third of a system of doctrinal theology.

My success was not brilliant, but I am confident that my biblical course saved my pulpit. Those scriptural sermons brought me near to the best Christian experience of my most godly hearers. They diversified and simplified my preaching, and expanded and deepened my range of thought in all the labors of my pulpit. They assisted me greatly in extemporaneous prayer. Inferior as those discourses seem to me now, and though I have no idea that they did as much good to any one else as to the preacher, yet I am sure that nothing else of which I was master could have held for me the confidence of my people in my ability to be their spiritual teacher. The work of those years is yet to be tried as by fire; but, if any thing in it shall bear the test by that purest of the elements, it will be found in that part of the work in which I went before my hearers with the most elaborate and yet the simplest results of my study of the word of God.

I speak the less unwillingly to you of that chapter of my life, because there was nothing in my experiment which was the fruit of genius, or in any way exceptional. In kind it was a success which any one of you may achieve, I hope in much greater degree. I beg you to try the experiment for yourselves. Supply your libraries at the outset with the best works in biblical literature. Do not spare your purses in so doing. Wear the old coat, and buy the new book. Incur any hazard or hardship, but those of debt or dishonor, to get your outfit of tools to work with. You must have them early in your ministry, if you are ever to use them. Your wedding can wait, but your library can not. Then systematize your biblical studies, and give your

self to them religiously. Let the garden go unweeded, and let the potatoes rot in the ground. Get rid of church councils, and building committees, and executive miscellanies, so far as you honorably can. Leave the social dinners, and the pleasure-parties, and the regattas, and the operas, and the fast horses, to those who need them. Say you, with Nehemiah, to the messengers who tempt you to such things, "I am doing a great work, so that I can not come down: why should the work cease whilst I leave it and come down to you?" Cultivate a stern unity of purpose in your calling of God, and hold to it to the death. Come thus to your biblical sermons with a full mind which aches to deliver itself. Get yourself into a *state* of biblical production in which your materials for the pulpit shall always crowd *you*, you never hunting *them*.

Keep your pulpit thus in advance of your people in reverent knowledge of the word of God, and you may rest assured that the question of the double service on the Sabbath will settle itself, so far as your power to provide for it is concerned. You will at the same time have the leadership of your people in biblical instruction, without asking for it. The pulpit has only to take its own place, and sustain itself ably there, to have its biblical leadership acknowledged as its natural right. The growth of such a ministry in spiritual power is like the "path of the just."

LECTURE XVI.

THE INTRODUCTION: THEORY, SPECIFIC OBJECTS.

THE subject to which we now proceed in the further discussion of the constituent parts of a sermon is the introduction.

I. The theory of the introduction: what is it? In reply it should be observed as a preliminary, that not all that precedes the announcement of the subject is necessarily introductory. In exact definition we must distinguish between preliminaries in general and the introduction proper. For example, the exposition of a text is not necessarily introductory of the theme. It may take the place of an introduction; it may render an introduction proper unnecessary; but in itself it is distinct. An introduction might exist without a text: an exposition could not. An exposition might exist without a subject: an introduction could not. An introduction is a specific process, which resembles no other in the composition of a discourse.

1st, The theory of the introduction relates primarily to the mental state of the audience respecting the subject of discourse. There is my audience, here is my subject: how to bring the two together is the practical question. Every public speaker of much experience feels it to be a question, often, of great moment to his success. All good definitions of an introduction agree

in this, that its characteristic idea is that of preparation of the minds of the hearers. To secure to the audience a natural approach to the subject and to its discussion — this is the aim. No matter how this is secured, the process is the introduction. If you gain it without words, you have an introduction without words. This answers the inquiry, whether the introduction is always necessary in a sermon. Some reply No, and think that their experience justifies them, because they sometimes "dump" a subject upon an audience, without prefatory remarks, yet apparently without loss of power. But let us not dispute about words. Every speaker's instinct teaches him the necessity of gradation in the progress of thought. His own mind has come to his theme by gradation: the minds of his hearers must do the same. With no rule on the subject, a speaker of prompt oratorical intuitions will feel this necessity of his hearers, and will adjust himself to it as best he can. Certain equivalents for an introduction exist, which may enable a preacher to dispense with the form of it in words; but it is because the preparative process is otherwise accomplished. That such a process is a necessity lies in the nature of discourse. To omit it would be scarcely less unnatural than day without a dawn, and night without twilight. Nature never wins us by startling and convulsive changes. These excite only our fears. Even brute mind distrusts nature in an earthquake. Gradation is the law in all agreeable mental processes.

This view of the general theory of an introduction suggests further that this part of a sermon is susceptible of fine rhetorical quality. Why, in announcing to a mother the death of her only child, would you select your messenger with care? Anybody can blurt

out the fact that a child is dead. The hangman might do that. But you desire a thoughtful announcement, a delicate announcement, a humane, sympathetic announcement. The same principle holds in regard to introduction of discourse. In it the rarest qualities of thought and style are practicable. It admits, often, of rare originality of thought. The best method of approach to a theme is often a discovery or an invention. The author deserves a patent for it. It admits, frequently, of condensed logic in its structure. Tact in hints of argument is often as necessary here as in the proof of a proposition. It admits of great beauty of illustration, and of finish in diction. The utmost delicacy of execution may be practicable and needful. Some subjects from some audiences can not get a hearing otherwise. When the prophet Nathan, at the risk of his life, sought to bring King David to repentance, his introduction cost him more thought than all that came after it. An accomplished preacher will disclose his trained mind and practiced pen as clearly in this as in any other part of a sermon. An introduction may be as beautiful as the morning; and it may be like Milton's chaos.

2d, The theory of the introduction involves a certain relation to the mental state of the speaker. Preparation of the audience is needful — for what? For a subject alone? Not so. A speaker's opinion on the subject may contain some unexpected peculiarities for which the audience may need to be prepared. The speaker's opinions, with all that renders them momentous to his own mind, are what is to be floated over from his mind to the minds of his hearers; and very much may depend on a smooth and rapid launch. But is this all? Possibly not. Preparation of the audience

may be needful for peculiarities in a speaker's methods of discussion. The subject and the results being given, a process lies between them which may demand preparatory forethought to enable hearers to follow and to accept it. Your method of argument, your style of illustration, omissions which you purpose may require prefatory remark to put your audience in the way of your line of thought.

Again: preparation is always needed to secure the sympathy of an audience with the effect of a subject upon a speaker's own heart. The work is but half completed if preparation is made for only intellectual results. You are not only in possession of your subject, but your subject has possession of you. You feel it: you are under the moral dominion of it: you represent in your own person the effects of the sermon you are about to preach. A vital object of preaching, therefore, is to lift the audience up to the same level of sensibility on which the preacher stands. Profound sympathies are never spontaneous. They start in preliminary emotions. A magnetic line may sometimes be laid down between the pulpit and the pew in the first five minutes of the delivery of a sermon, which shall vibrate with electric responses all the way through.

3d, We may, therefore, sum up these elements of the general theory of the introduction in the following definition; namely, that an introduction is that part of a discourse which is designed to prepare an audience for agreement in opinion, and for sympathy in feeling with the preacher on the subject of discourse. Two inferences from the views here presented deserve notice

(1) It is obvious that explanatory remarks on the text will often be an equivalent for an introduction Some subjects once evolved from forcible texts, and

thus carrying inspired authority on the face of them, will speak for themselves, and speak for the preacher, so eloquently that he has only to pass on, without a word of purely introductory remark.

(2) When explanatory and introductory remarks are intermingled in a sermon, this should be done intelligently. The most meaningless, and therefore forceless introductions are made up of heterogeneous materials, which, probably, the preacher does not clearly recognize as one thing or another. When you are sensible of such homiletic vertigo, stop; let the brain clear itself; start anew, with clear insight into your bearings.

II. The theory of the introduction is always the same, but it has specific objects which are variable. What are these specific objects? Cicero says that the specific objects of the exordium are "*reddere auditores benevolos, attentos, dociles.*" This statement is comprehensive, yet compact. I can not improve it. Seldom can any one improve a rhetorical statement by Cicero. He was that rarest combination of rhetorical powers, a prince of orators and a prince of critics.

1st, It may be the specific object of an introduction to secure the good-will of an audience towards the preacher, — "*reddere auditores benevolos.*" Power over the majority of men is largely the power of person. Even physical presence is an important factor in the creation of influence with the popular mind. Men of large frame and erect carriage have the advantage over diminutive men in competitive labors. We unconsciously admit this by the very language in which we describe the large men. We talk of their "*commanding* presence." An instinct within us speaks in that phrase, — the instinct of obedience to a superior. Edward Everett used to lament that he could not

add four inches to his stature. In ancient times the Psalmist tells us that a man was famous "according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees." It is commonly mentioned as an anomaly which excites surprise, that Alexander the Great and Napoleon the First were small men.

Mental and moral qualities are more vitally represented in the influence of person. Do not the words of some men carry weight which you do not discover in their sentiments? The weight is in the men. Let an honest man honestly believe himself to be uttering an original truth, for the want of which the world is suffering, and, though you may find it in Æsop's Fables, yet the chance is that the world will ask with a sneer, "Who is Æsop?" and will believe in the man who is living to believe in himself. This power of person is no peculiarity of influence with the uncultivated. We all illustrate it in our own experience as listeners. Do we not all feel the force of a good elocution? Men of culture may be more quick than others to discover a cheat under the imposing exterior; but the imposing exterior carries weight with them as with others.

The ancient orators cultivated studiously this power of person in the exordiums of their orations, and in their preliminary discipline for public speech. The ancient taste seems not to have been offended, but attracted, rather, by a freedom of personal allusion which was often childlike. The ancient usage is no model for a modern preacher; but it illustrates the deference which the great orators of antiquity paid to the subtle magnetism of good-will between the hearer and speaker. Edmund Burke would have been pronounced by the cautious and painstaking orators of the ancient world a fool for his recklessness of all expedi-

ents of conciliation in the introductions of many of his parliamentary speeches. He aggravated hostility by defying it. He often produced it by inviting it. He gave occasion for it by assuming its existence, and answering it in kind. On one occasion he said, "Mr. Speaker, I rise under some embarrassment occasioned by a feeling of delicacy towards one half of the house and of sovereign contempt for the other half." Cicero would have pronounced him a savage.

This power of person with an audience is a legitimate object of homiletic culture. Why not? That is a false sentiment which prompts a man to say, "I will speak the truth, no matter what men think of me." Something of their respect for truth depends on what men think of you. Such is the divine ordinance of the ministry, that truth is never so powerful that it can afford to part with that alliance with the man appointed to proclaim it. No wise preacher, therefore, will defy a prejudice against himself among his hearers, or invite indifference to himself, by his neglect of any thing which forethought and self-discipline can add to his power of person.

Applying these principles to the subject of homiletic introductions, it should be further observed that a preacher seldom needs to construct introductions made up of fragments of his personal history. This ancient expedient, with rare exceptions, would be an offense in the modern pulpit The general habit of the pulpit respecting things personal to the preacher must be that of silence. He needs the power of person which personal introductions are aimed at; no man needs it more: but he has certain advantages for gaining it which lie back of the pulpit. His personal character is known to his hearers: it may be presumed to be

favorably known. His reputation for intellectual ability speaks for him. His known history as a man of culture, as an *alumnus* of literary institutions, speaks for him. His reputation for piety precedes and introduces every sermon that he utters. Fortunately for every individual of the clerical order, the order as a whole has an accumulated history of qualities which commends it to the respect of men. That history is a common fund from which each one may draw, for his own use, of the power of person, till he does something which proves him unworthy of it. A preacher's chief cultivation of the power of person must be outside of the pulpit. In his home, in the homes of his people, in his study, in his closet, he must build up, in part unconsciously, the reputation on which the power of the man must rest.

Yet it should be remarked that every preacher must meet some occasions on which the introductions of his discourses should be devoted to the work of gaining the influence of person. He may be called to preach to an audience which he knows to be prejudiced against him. He may preach to another which is sublimely indifferent to him. Every preacher, even in the most retired and staid parish, will find that there are some subjects in regard to which, if he would speak, he must undo a personal prejudice, or remove a suspicion, or break up indifference, of which he is the object. He can be heard genially, it may be, on all subjects but one: on that he must charm wisely, if he would get a hearing which shall promise success.

That was not a wise man, who, in the time of the civil war, in a South-western State commenced a sermon by laying a revolver on the pulpit by the side of the Bible, saying that his life had been threatened, and

that he was prepared to defend it, as he would against a mad dog. A humble Massachusetts chaplain was his superior in homiletic tact, who was compelled by Gen. Butler to preach to a wealthy Presbyterian congregation of rebels in Norfolk, who were also in their seats on the Sabbath morning, in obedience to military order. Said the preacher, in commencing his discourse, "My friends, I am here by no choice of mine. I came to your city as a chaplain, to look after the souls of my neighbors who are here, as I am, under military rule. I stand in the place of your honored pastor by command of my military superior; but I am a preacher of the same Christ whom you possess, and I ask you to hear me for his sake." He had a respectful hearing for the next three months.

You can not foresee in what forms the need of such exordiums will arise; but every preacher in a long ministry must meet them, and his success must depend largely on his habit of estimating fairly, and cultivating in a manly way, the influence of person.

2d, The second specific object of the introduction may be to stimulate the attention of hearers, — "*reddere auditores attentos.*" Generally this is the chief object of the introduction: oftener than otherwise, it is the only object.

(1) Preachers labor under disadvantages in seeking the attention of an audience. The frequency of preaching is a disadvantage. No other public speakers speak so much as preachers do. The unchangeableness of their audiences is a disadvantage. It tempts both hearer and preacher to listlessness. The pulpit and the lyceum are sometimes contrasted in respect to the popular interest. You might as well compare vegetation with a cyclone. Nobody notices the one: every-

body is agape at the other. A lecturer spending six months of the year on one lecture, and delivering it to one hundred and fifty different audiences during the other six, is no model either of labor or of success to a pastor. Again: popular satiety with the subjects of preaching is a disadvantage to the pulpit. The great themes of the pulpit are well-known themes. The most necessary themes are those on which a Christian community has the most perfect knowledge. We must not ignore these themes; yet we must recognize the satiety of the people, and must count the cost of meeting it. Further: the indifference arising from the depravity of hearers is a disadvantage to the pulpit. The hostility of sin is less to be feared than the indifference of sin. There is always hope of an audience which can be aroused into a contest with truth. Dr. Johnson complained that one of his books was not attacked by adverse criticism. It is not the "hot water" of our parishes which we have reason to fear: it is the lead.

The pulpit needs to understand, and tacitly concede, its disadvantage as a competitor with other departments of public speech for the interest of the popular mind. The disadvantages are such, that competition is unreasonable. No intelligent critic will ask it of the pulpit: no wise preacher will attempt it. If he does, he ends inevitably by preaching clap-trap. Still the pulpit in its legitimate sphere may do much to commend itself to the popular attention; and this may be done, in part, by skillful introductions.

(2) Therefore an introduction should avail itself of the natural curiosity which hearers feel in the beginning of a discourse, because it is the beginning. The fact that it is the beginning pricks the ears. The first sentence of a sermon and the last are always interesting. That

preacher must have an ancient and sublime reputation for dullness whose hearers look out of the window when he begins to speak. It is wisdom, therefore, to assume the existence of the interest of curiosity, and to use it. It is always a safe principle to begin with an audience where they are. Do not go behind or below them in search of them. Assume, therefore, the interest of curiosity: fall in with it trustingly. Never tug at an introduction as a thing intrinsically spiritless because it is a preliminary. Never distrust its power to interest. Treat boldly the waiting eyes and ears before you.

(3) Again: the introduction should direct interest to the subject in hand. Assuming that an interest exists, give it an object. The bees are swarming: give them something to swarm upon. That object must, of course, be your subject of discussion. Chrysostom used often to announce the subject of his discourse on the Sunday preceding its delivery. His object was to pre-occupy the minds of his hearers with that subject, and that only. Whatever may be said of such an expedient, it gives a valuable hint. The introduction should guide the interest of the hearer in the right groove, to the right end. Therefore a series of disconnected remarks can not form an introduction. Such a series may be interesting. It may be original. It may sparkle with scintillations of genius. Thought, metaphor, antithesis, apothegm, every element of material and form which can fascinate a hearer, may be in it; but, for the want of coherence and aim, it is not an introduction. It leads nowhere: it ushers in nothing. Such prefaces are gay but meaningless arabesques. Furthermore: a preface which creates an independent interest of its own is no introduction. An introduction is a tributary. For the subject, and for that only, it exists. Therefore it is a

defect in an introduction, if it excites an interest which is confined to itself. This is sometimes the radical fault of initiatory remarks, — they introduce nothing. They are interesting; they are connected; they are discourses in miniature: but they transfer nothing to the subject in hand.

Again: a preface, which, though aimed at the subject in hand, does not reach it squarely, is a defective introduction. Such prefaces there are, of which criticism can not say that they are disconnected, or that they are independent structures, but only that they do not come fairly and fully up to the theme in hand. They fall short of it, or on one side of it, or strike beyond it. They do not hit the target in the eye.

(4) Therefore it should be further observed that an introduction should lead the interest of hearers to the subject in a natural way. Did you never listen to the announcement of a proposition which started the inquiry in your mind, "How did the preacher come at it?" Something is faulty in the exordium which leaves honest room for that inquiry. Every subject has certain natural avenues of approach. You can not search them out by more circuitous passages without loss. Our minds are not lawless in this respect. We can not help getting chilled in a North-west passage round the world. We choose, rather, the international pathway of commerce. That introduction is misnamed, which is only a literary adventure from text to theme.

(5) Again: an introduction should sometimes direct the interest of hearers to the details of the discussion. Texts will often suggest to hearers methods of discussion which the sermons upon them do not realize. Yet it may cool the interest of some hearers, if you allow them to anticipate one kind of discussion, and give

them another. Sometimes a text surpasses a discussion in solemnity, and the introduction must be adroitly constructed so as to carry over the interest of the audience from such a text to such an inferior discussion without loss. Theodore Parker once chose for his text the words, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." It was soon after a presidential election, and the body of the sermon was devoted to a discussion of the prospects of democracy in this country. The introduction ought surely to have given the hearer some warning of such a leap as that. A superior sermon may not appear superior to a hearer who is disappointed in his expectations.

3d, The third specific object of an introduction may be to dispose hearers to receive favorably the sentiments of a sermon, — "*reddere auditores dociles.*" Men are often interested when not convinced, nor even predisposed to conviction. Theirs may be an interest of antipathy. The most attentive listeners to Dr. Lyman Beecher and to Dr. Griffin in Boston were Unitarians. The most deeply entranced hearers of Whitefield were men who came with stones in their pockets to assault him.

This suggests that the pulpit labors under a disadvantage growing out of the repulsiveness of many truths to the popular heart. We have before observed the indifference of depravity: its hostility is also a great disadvantage. The pulpit has large scope for sanctified tact in interesting unregenerate men in truth without awakening their latent enmity. If to awaken that is evidence of power, to win it over is evidence of conquest. In evading or conquering the hostility of hearers, much depends on securing the favor of an audience to the person of a speaker. If the man wins us, he will the more probably sway us.

Much depends on suppressing, by the introduction, the consciousness of difference of opinion between preacher and hearer. A French critic says that "eloquence consists in saying every thing without getting into the Bastille, in a country where you are forbidden to say any thing." Every hearer who dissents from you has a Bastille open for you in his own mind. Once get your thought lodged there, and no "reign of terror" can set it loose again. The early abolitionists, under the lead of Mr. Garrison, attempted to circulate a pamphlet which bore the title "The American Church a Brotherhood of Thieves." Was that a wise way to approach opponents? Yet some preachers have as rare a talent as that title displayed for a belligerent introduction of truth. There is a class of men whose chief impression in the pulpit and out of it is that of belligerents. If a subject of discourse can be approached in a militant way, they are sure to find that way. If there can be two opinions upon it, they are sure to advance one mainly as a shot at the other. If the audience can be supposed to contain opposers of a truth, such preachers instinctively present that truth as if it were a loaded musket. Unconsciously and blandly they fire at men in smiling ignorance of any other way of approach to them in public speech.

This belligerence of habit is the secret of a great deal of preaching at imaginary opponents. In many sermons we build our own cob-houses, and beat them down, and that is all. Nobody in the audience is hit. Yet that is a very effective way of creating a temporary opposition. Men will bristle up in self-defense, if we approach them bristling. Such an approach in preaching is as profound an error rhetorically as it is morally An exordium should, if possible, discover common ground

between hearer and preacher. Always start on the common ground, even if truth compels you to leave it. It is not necessary to obtrude into the foreground the obnoxiousness of truth to a depraved heart.

A profound principle of rhetorical skill is involved in the apostolic injunction that the servant of the Lord should be "apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." St. Paul himself exhibited a rare example of this rhetorical skill in his address to the Athenians. We are told that his "spirit was stirred in him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry." A hot-brained, belligerent apostle of a new faith would have blazed out in a fury of denunciation. A man of fanatical conscience, in which there is always an element of malign emotion, would have talked of a "brotherhood of thieves." But St. Paul was too wise a man for that. "I perceive," he says in substance, "that in all things ye are much disposed to the worship of the gods. Among your countless altars I find one to the unknown God: Him declare I unto you." This was a most beautiful model of an eloquent introduction.

In an introduction much often depends on an appeal to recognized authorities. A genial atmosphere is made to envelop a subject, if a preacher approaches it by the aid of authorities which the hearers trust, and which lend to it dignity. Here lies much of the force of biblical references in an exordium. What are such allusions, but appeals to an authority which the hearers acknowledge? In this, also, consists the pertinence of quoting a popular proverb in an introduction. Proverbs are the concentrated wisdom of common sense. The voices of ages are given in them in reduplicated echo. The world recognizes them as an authority.

Indirectly, but often perceptibly, they win acceptance for a truth which might not otherwise obtain a hearing.

Much depends, also, upon a temperate expression of truth in the introduction. Extremes of opinion are not winning anywhere: least of all are they so in an exordium. Impassioned utterances which are natural elsewhere will seem to be extremes here. They need to be approached by gradations of interest. Varied statement, proof, illustration, all natural arts of style may be necessary as preparatives for the utterance of ultimate views of truth. Begin the discussion of bold opinions as the new moon begins, — with a crescent expression only. Leave time for their fullness to grow upon the perceptions of an audience. We all love to be approached with moderation. Paradoxical men are not winning men. The world entertains an extravagant estimate of those whom it calls "safe men." It is astonishing what weakness, what folly, what commonplace will be endured in a public man, if he is only a "safe man." Wise-acres are the most comfortable of men: only a keen and irreverent minority find them out.

Occasionally the aim of an introduction must be to transform an existing hostility to the sentiments of a discourse. The occasions for this are not numerous, but no preacher is free from liability to them. Some of the most notable triumphs of the pulpit have consisted in producing revulsions of popular feeling and in actually using the hostility of an audience as a tributary to the conquest of their hearts. This is not so impossible as it seems. A preacher in such an emergency is assisted by the tendency of excited feeling to produce its opposite. Laughter and tears often succeed each other rapidly in an agitated assembly.

This principle comes into play with peculiar force in aid of a preacher. Conscience, in men who are raging with bitterness towards truth, is always silently struggling against them. The spring is strained against its nature, and its nature is to seek compensation from the opposite extreme. Sudden conversions sometimes illustrate this, and are explained by it. Some of Whitefield's astonishing conquests of hostile audiences are explained, in part, on the same principle. The most marvelous evidences of Whitefield's power appeared often in the fact of his getting a hearing. He was the prince of preachers to mobs. He chose popular gatherings at criminal executions as favorable opportunities for preaching. In Wales he once came to Hampton Common, and found twelve thousand people assembled to witness an execution. A more brutalized audience could scarcely be found in a Christian country. Who could hope to win them to a favorable hearing of the gospel? Yet to Whitefield they furnished one of his great opportunities.

The expedients of a prepossessing introduction are, oftener than otherwise, adopted by an oratorical instinct. In listening to criticisms respecting them, like this which I have attempted, the response is not unnatural that they are cognizable by criticism only; that practically no one thinks of them in the construction of so brief a preliminary as an exordium. I must admit that this is, in part, true. Preachers who adopt these expedients successfully are apt to do so without premeditation. They do it in the exercise of the oratorical instinct. The power to work such expedients well is gained chiefly by the cultivation of that instinct.

LECTURE XVII.

THE INTRODUCTION: SIMPLICITY, UNITY, DIRECTNESS, CONGRUITY.

III. THE specific objects of an introduction which have been considered suggest, further, the inquiry, What are the most important characteristics of a good introduction?

1st, Of these, the first in order and the first in importance is simplicity. Remember the mental state of an audience at the beginning of an address. They are unexcited. They are at leisure to criticise. They are waiting in suspense. Now, if ever, what is done should seem to be naturally done. Ease should pervade the whole movement. It may be elaborate, yet should never appear so. It may be original, novel, striking; yet, when uttered, it should seem the most natural thing to say.

(1) Simplicity in the introduction is obviously sacrificed by abstruse trains of thought. Abstruseness is relative. That which is abstruse to one audience may not be so to another. That which would not appear abstruse in the heat of the argument, supported before and after by a chain of reasonings, and to the level of which the hearer has been lifted by a gradation of remark, may be too obviously elaborate for the introduction. But the exclusion of abstruse thought does not

exclude profound thought from the exordium. Very much profound thought lies so near the surface even of the popular experience, that it is always within reach of the popular consciousness. It needs only to be stated in simple diction to be recognized and approved. The most profound truths of all real philosophy are of this character. The most philosophical aspects of religious truth are those which the popular mind instantly lays hold of when they are clearly stated. Power of sudden recognition of profound truth is no peculiarity of educated mind. It is a property of mind as mind. Deep calleth unto deep of such treasure in every soul. Such material, therefore, does not exclude simplicity from introductions, if a preacher will only be content with simple forms of statement. Let alone a philosophical dialect; seize such thought in its natural approaches to the popular speech, and be sure that the popular mind will greet it with a welcome.

(2) Simplicity of introduction is sacrificed by prolonged argumentation. Vinet mentions a sermon by Bourdaloue, which contained in the exordium the plans of three or four additional discourses. That could not possibly have been a good introduction. Lay no severe tax here on the memory of the hearer. Never seem to drag an audience up to the subject by main force. Therefore never seem to climb up to it yourself, as the railway car climbs Mount Washington, by dint of iron chains, and clamps, and cogs. If they break, what becomes of you?

(3) Simplicity of introduction may be sacrificed by the utterance of impassioned feeling. In the order of time, thought takes precedence of emotion, not emotion of thought. You must kindle the fire before you can use it. Therefore, as a rule, direct appeals are unsea-

sonable in an introduction. A direct appeal is an expression of feeling addressed to feeling. It presupposes emotive excitement on both sides. If thrust into an introduction, it involves a waste of sensibility. Dr. Nettleton was one of the most economical of preachers in his use of the hearer's emotions in the early part of his sermons. He has been known to stay away from the pulpit till after the hour of service, so that the audience might become expectant and impatient. Then, when he did begin, he was often lifeless; he hesitated; he drawled; he uttered truisms, so that he might get the advantage of the contrast when he roused himself to preach. These are artifices. In the pulpit they are affectations. But they illustrate the extreme of a sound principle. It is that of reserving the sensibilities of an audience till a place is reached in the sermon at which an appeal to them will be timely, because of the accumulated force of thought behind.

(4) To this general principle adverse to impassioned introductions, there are some exceptions. Reverting to the mental state of an audience as the test, we derive the rule, Begin on a level with the hearers in point of sensibility. If events have lifted their level of feeling, it will not do to ignore that uplifting: therefore sermons on exciting occasions sometimes demand excited exordiums. Sermons at the height of a religious awakening may admit of hortatory introductions. Sermons by a preacher whose illustrious reputation has preceded him, and has raised great expectations, may admit of such introductions. Sermons before large audiences may admit of the same, when before a meager assembly they would be frigid. Numbers create sensibility. The juxtaposition of a multitude is like the juxtaposition of burning coals. Therefore an excited

exordium before such an audience may be only on a level with their mood of feeling.

(5) An impassioned introduction should not be mistaken for an abrupt beginning without an introduction. The exordium of Cicero's first Oration against Catiline is often adduced as a case of impassioned exordium. It is not that: it is only an abrupt beginning without exordium. Not one word of that renowned invective is fitted or designed to prepare the audience for the subject of the coming discussion. On the contrary, the art of the orator consists in an explosion of his wrath upon the traitor, without forewarning either to him or to the assembly. He vaults into the subject by the spring of his anger. He flings it at the hearers as if by a catapult. The audience are trembling with passionate expectations. To begin at such a crisis with a calm and gradual ascent to the subject in hand would be like prefixing a classic exordium to the cry of "Fire!" In like manner, though rarely, a preacher is so pressed by exciting circumstances, that the question is not whether a cool or an impassioned introduction shall be chosen, but whether he shall have any introduction.

(6) One form of hortatory exordium deserves to be named as a more frequent exception than any other. It is that of asking for the devout attention of hearers. "Hear ye the word of the Lord" is the opening appeal of some of Isaiah's prophetic discourses. Our Saviour called the multitude, and said, "Hear and understand." St. Stephen, in his dying address to the mob, begins by saying, "Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken." So, at the present day, an earnest and brief, by all means brief, request that hearers will give you a prayerful attention may be in keeping with their mood.

(7) Simplicity of introduction is further sacrificed by

an obviously elaborate style. I say "obviously elaborate," because style may often be, must often be, the result of labor, when it has not, and ought not to have, the appearance of labor. Cicero says, "We must not depart from the familiar sense of words, lest our discourse *appear to be* prepared with too much labor."

For example, a succession of inverted sentences, a string of antitheses, a series of laconics, a protracted metaphor, studied changes of metaphor, elaborate involutions of style, an unusual vocabulary are features of a style too labored for an introduction. The difficulty with such a style is that it attracts attention to itself. Its rhetorical character, not what it expresses, the form, not the thing, allures attention. To be consciously allured, even by an excellence in style, to the rhetorical quality of it is an evil. Dr. Whately says that if an absolutely perfect orator could ever have existed, his hearers would not at the time have discovered that he was such. That discovery would have been an after-thought. Eloquence is necessarily unperceived as such. Its presence is invisible; its tread, inaudible.

To illustrate one form of this defect in introductory style, I quote from a sermon by Dr. Barrow, on "the profitableness of godliness." The preacher starts off in the following canter: "How generally men, with most unanimous consent, are devoted to profit, as to the immediate scope of their designs and aim of their doings, if with the slightest attention we view what is acted on this theater of human affairs, we can not but discern." This style is a fair imitation of the gait of a cantering nag. It is clumsy style anywhere, but imagine it as an opening sentence! Fancy the delivery of it! Who could escape with it the clerical humdrum?

We can readily believe the fact stated in the biography of Dr. Barrow, that he composed many of his discourses with no intention of preaching them.

2d, The second characteristic of a good introduction is unity.

(1) Unity of introduction includes all that is essential to oneness of impression. Certain ancient homiletic writers recognized three divisions in this part of a discourse: 1. The *exordium generale*, which was an introduction to the text; 2. The *exordium speciale*, which was a transition from the text to the subject; 3. The *exordium specialissimum*, which was an introduction following the proposition, and preparatory to the discussion. This is a fair symbol of many introductions in the practice of the modern pulpit. They are loose, disjointed, digressive, exhaustive. They are constructed on the principle of saying all that can be said. They make rubbish for the sake of clearing it away. A true exordium is always an aim and a shot. No part of a discourse should be more intensely one in its impression.

(2) Unity does not exclude from the exordium diversity of material. You may wish to dignify your subject, and yet to remove a prejudice, and, again, to explain a peculiarity in your method of discussion. Very well: these are pertinent materials for the introduction. But where is the point of unity? I answer, In the subject. All these objects of your introduction point inward to that. They are *radii* to a center; or, to change the metaphor, they are figures painted in one group. If critical taste can only fore-arm a preacher against talking at random in this diversity of remark, oratorical instinct will use the diversity in the service of unity. This is one of the *minutiæ* in which the

work of criticism is wholly negative. It simply checks rambling, and thus gives the oratorical instinct a chance to work. It will work as surely as the *vis medicatrix* will work when disease is once held at bay.

(3) The oratorical instinct thus assisted will commonly secure unity of introduction by subordinating all other materials to one. Materials theoretically equal practically fall into the rank of subalterns and chief. Two yield to one. The oratorical instinct perceives this, and it works as Joseph's fancy did in his dream: the inferior sheaves make obeisance. Criticism has practically no direct concern with it. It can only fend off intruding materials, leaving the instinct of the orator free to work its own way to unity of aim.

(4) Neglect of criticism, however, results commonly in double-headed introductions. The form which the want of unity most frequently assumes in this part of a sermon is not that of incoherent rambling, but that which suggests a wavering in the preacher's mind in the choice of a subject. He discourses, first as if one phase of truth were to be his theme; then as if not that but another though kindred phase; and perhaps the subject shapes itself at last as the result of the tentative process through which his own mind has passed in composing his exordium. He has had no controlling wind in his sails to carry him straight on in one course. The introduction, therefore, flaps first this way, then that. Criticism, however, can do no more than to point out the error, and say, "Fix the subject to start with. Define it. Stop that wavering of preliminary thought. Give your oratorical instinct a chance to work in its own way." It will always work in one way, and but one.

3d, The third characteristic of a good introduction

is directness of approach to the subject in hand. Recalling again the mental state of the audience, we observe, that, during the delivery of an exordium, they feel only the interest of expectation. This interest of expectation is from its nature temporary. It flags if it is dallied with. Hence the necessity of direct advance. Several things are needful to secure this quality of directness.

(1) The introduction should not begin at a needless distance from the subject. No defect of discourse is more frequent than that here indicated, — that the sermon begins in a nebulous remoteness from the real theme. How many sermons, think you, are written every year which begin in the garden of Eden? Something or other about the creation of man is the first thought. Adam is nowhere else so important a character, not even in the Turretinian theology, as he is in the introductions of sermons. Eve herself was not so essential to the blessedness of paradise as she is to the comfort of certain preachers in their homiletic exordiums. Long-winded introductions generally possess, in some form, this fault of antipodean beginning.

You will often find that the best beginning is in the middle of your exordium, and this by no hap-hazard. The first half of an introduction often represents, not the demands of the subject, but the disciplinary laboring of your own mind to come at the subject. It may have cost you by far the most toil; but it is the toil of mental apprenticeship. It is a great art, which does not come to a preacher by intuition, to be able to strike into the trail of a subject at the outset, just at the right point of ease in drawing hearers after you. Do not be economical, then, of first thoughts in the introduction Let them go: give them wings. Their

worth is not equal to their cost. If you are to preach on the perseverance of the saints, it is not necessary to begin by remarking that we are all the creatures of one Creator. If you are to discourse on infant baptism, your theme does not hang on the story of the deluge. If your subject is the fall of St. Peter, it is not imperative that you must start with the fall of Adam. If you are to discourse on the end of the world, it does not follow that you must begin with its creation. Begin always with your finished thinking on a subject, not with your first crude attempts to grasp it.

(2) Directness of approach obviously requires progress of thought. An introduction should never return upon itself. It should never do that, which, in the chase, sportsmen call "doubling the course." Of one thought we should say all that is to be said connectedly. On the same principle, the exordium should never dally with a thought. To linger when a preliminary is finished, to pause as if we were delighted with our own work, to yawn as if we knew not what to say next, is indicative of any thing but an eager mind.

(3) Directness of approach requires as great rapidity of progress as the nature of the subject will permit. Progress we must secure always. The degree of rapidity depends on the manageableness of the theme, but it is always safe to press on. Make every thing clear as you proceed, but press on. This one thing do, forgetting the things which are behind. A paragraph, a sentence, a clause, a word, a syllable, which can be omitted, omit. Rapidity of introduction is desirable especially for the sake of brevity. Nothing but experience effectually teaches a preacher the value of brevity in preliminaries. Keep your eye open to it in your own experience. Watch your subjects: see how large

a proposition of them are more deftly introduced with few remarks than with many. Watch your audiences: see how fresh they are for a discussion where you have not wearied them with a long exordium. Watch your own mind: see what a sense of conquest you have when you have come up to a proposition by a quick march.

Rapidity of approach is desirable also as a stimulus to interest. It is a stimulus to the preacher. Rapid movement in composition exhilarates like riding a spirited horse. On the same principle, a rapid introduction is a stimulus to the hearer. Once get the idea into his mind that you do not mean to waste words, and he will not waste attention. He will hear with the same alertness of mind with which you speak. Rapidity of approach to a subject is desirable, furthermore, for the confidence which it wins from hearers in the preacher's mastery of the subject. Napoleon's soldiers trusted him as much for the tremendous marches which he gave them as for the battles in which he led them. They used to say, that, under his leadership, victory was due as much to their legs as to their arms. On a similar principle we trust or distrust a speaker. His quick approach to a theme, if it be clear, is a sign of mastery. We trust him for the business-like way in which he executes the first movement.

(4) Directness of approach is not abruptness. One preacher announces his text, and then remarks, "Without further introduction I invite your attention to the following theme." This is misnamed an introduction. Not a word is uttered preparatory to the subject. We come to the subject by no gradation, but by a leap. If you will observe honestly the inducement to an abrupt beginning, you will find that it is not any homiletic

advantage, but mental vacuity. We adopt it only as a device of ease. Yet directness of introduction admits of exceptions. Eloquence has room for adroitness, if you please to call it such, in the structure of exordiums. Obnoxious doctrines, difficult discussions, special occasions, peculiar relations of speaker to theme and of speaker to hearers may demand such exordiums, and to withhold them for religious reasons is simply not good sense. You might as reasonably refuse to sail obliquely against a head-wind, because oblique sailing resembles deception.

4th, The fourth characteristic of a good introduction is congruity with the character of the sermon.

(1) This requires that the introduction be characteristic of the subject in hand. This suggests the point of defect in many textual exordiums. You will find it to be sometimes the secret of a heavy exordium, that the text has suggested general religious ideas not explanatory of its meaning, not needed by the coming subject, yet good in themselves; and therefore your pen has dropped them as it passed along. They burden the introduction, as scattered barley is a nuisance in a field of wheat. Have you not detected procrustean introductions of this character, in which the preacher seems to have aimed, not to say only necessary things, but to make the introduction of a given length, no more, no less? Of such material as he has, he might add a page or subtract a page, prefix a page or append a page, insert a page or intersperse a page, and it would make no difference, except to change the measure. The subject would neither gain nor lose.

(2) Indolent composing produces incongruous introductions. Are you never afraid of your subject, loath to attack it at once, fain to linger in its out-

skirts, pleased to dally with straggling thoughts which occur to you without effort? In such moods your style of thinking is not intense. You do not glow with the consciousness of a heated theme within. You muse, but the fire does not burn. You feel none of that necessity of production which Dr. Arnold said he often had in reflecting upon the political and social state of England. "I must write," he exclaimed, "or I shall die." Writing then, there, on that theme, he would inevitably have introduced his theme in some intensely characteristic way. Dr. Holmes represents one of his clerical characters as publishing a book of which the title is "Thoughts on the Universe." Similar to this are the introductions composed by a mind which feels no sense of the necessity of delivering itself of a burning theme. Such a mind acts indolently. Its work is discursive and slow. It will be but an accident of authorship if the result is otherwise. True, a man can not feel himself on the verge of syncope in every introduction that he composes: but some sort of necessity must crowd him, growing out of the inspiration of his theme.

(3) Congruity of introduction requires that it be true to its own character as a tributary. "An exordium," says Cicero, "is only the porch." In this respect, congruity may be sacrificed by excessive length. Dr. Johnson has a lay-sermon one-half of which is introductory. This is a temple one-half of which is vestibule. Entire relevance of material does not redeem an introduction of this kind. Disproportion is itself incongruous. Raciness of material is no compensation for prolixity. If it is not interesting as a tributary to the subject, the greater the interest, the greater the incongruity.

(4) The congruity of an introduction may be sacrificed by its superiority to the rest of the sermon in rhetorical qualities. If it is more original in thought, or more brilliant in imagery, or more beautiful in diction, or more stimulating in historical or biographical allusion, or more compactly finished in structure, what is the effect? It is that the discussion flags in the sequel. Instead of rise of interest, you have a fall. Have you not sometimes been sensible of an ebbing of interest after an introduction in which a very stimulating anecdote was told? Through the whole discourse the tide never reached again the high-water mark of that anecdote. There was no more of absolute stillness in the audience, or other evidence of entranced attention. The stimulus of the introduction, whatever be the source of it, should be proportionate to that of the discussion, and therefore must be inferior to it. A sermon should never be remembered by the splendor of its exordium.

(5) Congruity of introduction may be sacrificed by anticipating in it materials which belong to the main body of the sermon. The proper locality of materials in a sermon is a matter requiring very delicate adjustment. Vital forces may depend on the question of location. Even the decision of logical instinct is sometimes neglected. An introduction is sometimes so formed, that the proposition follows from it as a conclusion from premises. The preacher affirms that this is true, and that is true, and the third is true; and therefore the proposition follows. Then he proceeds in his discussion to prove his proposition. The first division, perhaps, explains it; but the second proves it. What is the defect here? It is that of an incongruous location of materials. The introduction has been related

to the proposition as premise to conclusion. The proposition has been proved at the outset, and now it is proved again in the sequel. The introduction has pilfered from the discussion.

In other cases, rhetorical instinct must decide the question of location. Here a more delicate culture is requisite. Shall a didactic paragraph appear as a preliminary, or in the application? Shall an original thought be used in the introduction, or reserved for the discussion? What shall we do with a capital illustration? The logical connections may not be decisive. Rhetorical considerations must settle the question. The introduction should lay claim to nothing which will serve the purpose of the sermon more effectually elsewhere.

(6) The congruity of the introduction requires that it should resemble the body of the sermon sufficiently to suggest it. The first impression which the front of St. Peter's at Rome makes upon a spectator does not suggest to him a church. The architecture of the grand façade is not that of a place of worship, but rather of an immense palace, — rich, gorgeous, imposing, but still a palace, — not a cathedral. Not unlike this is the impression of the introductions to some discourses. They naturally suggest something else than the discourses they precede. The vestibule and the temple do not match well. The result is like that of the juxtaposition of unsympathetic colors.

If, therefore, you have a superlative theme of discourse, and if your thought and style approach its magnificence in your treatment of it, let your introduction give intimation of this. Let logic usher logic. Let beauty herald beauty. Let grandeur prefigure grandeur. Let solemnity foreshadow solemnity. This is as

natural as that the primary rainbow should reflect itself in the secondary one in the sky. If this kind of congruity is too ethereal a grace for criticism to create, yet criticism does much if it recognizes the authority of the oratorical instinct, and defends it.

(7) Congruity of introduction demands also, that, if possible, it shall cover every thing in the sermon which needs introductory remark. That is, every thing in the discourse which needs any preparatory work should, if possible, be prepared for at the beginning. This comprehensiveness of exordium is aimed mainly at the prevention of two defects. One is the omission of some preparatory remark which is needed for subsequent uses. Great force is often gained by making a conclusion seem to return upon and illustrate and use truths with which the sermon began. As a text may be thus used with effect, so also may introductory principles. Why did Mr. Webster, at the close of his celebrated imitation of the eloquence of John Adams, reiterate the language of the exordium? Why say, "I leave off as I began: 'Sink or swim, live or die,' etc."? He did it in unconscious obedience to the oratorical instinct which invented this expedient for reduplicating impression. It is often worth very much to be able to leave off as you began.

If you will study critically the works of Sir Walter Scott, you will often find a singular compactness of structure connecting his beginnings with his endings. The beginnings are preparatory to the endings, and the endings throw back a light upon the beginnings. A perfect discourse will often have a similar plot in its construction. Its introduction is a storehouse of materials which do not fully disclose their design till the conclusion returns upon and appropriates them. When

a sermon has this unique and compact structure, the introduction and conclusion are like the buttresses of a suspension-bridge. One is as necessary as the other, and they support all that hangs between. I am aware that this may seem fanciful when stated thus as a point in homiletic theory; and to prove it by illustration would be tedious. Yet you will all experience illustrations of it in your own sermons. Your oratorical instinct will much more frequently construct such retrospective conclusions, if your introductions are so comprehensive as to make it possible to "leave off as you began."

The other defect which a complete introduction will prevent is that of a cumbrous interspersion of preliminaries in the body of a sermon. By observing critically the structure of sermons, you will often discover a multitude of remarks scattered here and there, which are strictly introductory in their character. Their bearing is preparative entirely: they have no other purpose. Now it is to explain, then to excite attention, again to dignify the subject; to do, in a word, just that which it is the aim of the introduction to do. Some discourses are marked by nothing else so strikingly as by the abundance of these interspersed preliminaries. Some of them must be interspersed; but the large majority can be, and ought to be, packed into the introduction.

It should therefore be a study to say in the exordium as nearly as possible every thing of a preliminary nature which must be said anywhere. Clear the deck thus for action. Sermons which are begun without an introduction are, in the majority of cases, laden with interspersed encumbrances; and their utterance in the body of the sermon commonly requires more time than if they are given in their proper place in the exordium.

LECTURE XVIII.

THE INTRODUCTION: MODESTY, SUGGESTIVENESS.

5TH, Continuing the discussion of the theme of the last lecture, I remark that the fifth characteristic of a good introduction is modesty.

What does modesty in an exordium require? The reply should aim at two things: one is to answer the inquiry as related to the exordium alone; the other is to treat by way of *excursus* the quality of modesty in all parts of pulpit discourse. This is one of the many topics of homiletic discussion which branch over the limits of the case in hand. Modesty limited to the introduction would not require prolonged treatment; but, extended through a sermon, it is a vital quality, and yet it comes most prominently to view in the exordium. To save repetition, therefore, let us consider it as a generic quality, essential to all parts of effective speech, the exordium included.

(1) Thus extending the inquiry, I answer, Modesty requires a sensible reserve in allusions to the person or character of the speaker. Such allusions should be made, if at all, only to meet necessities, never to gratify self-consciousness. It is said of Mr. Grattan, the Irish orator, that he never once indulged in such allusions through his whole parliamentary career. In listening for six years to the preaching of Rev. Albert

Barnes I heard but two allusions to himself from his lips. On the Sunday after his restoration to the pulpit, when he had been suspended for heresy for six months, and when a packed audience had assembled to hear from him a personal discourse, he said not one word about himself, or his recent history.

Three varieties of fault deserve mention with special reference to the modesty of the pulpit. Though not by any means limited to introductions, they are more frequent there than in the other parts of a sermon. One of these is a needless obtrusion of professional authority. It is an offense in the pulpit, if the preacher harps upon his divine mission, the sacredness of his trust, the solemnity of his vows of ordination, the obligation of men to hear him as the messenger of God. This seems very solemn: occasionally, peculiarity of circumstances may render it impressive. But it may be, also, and if often done must be, flat even to the point of disgust. Another form of unwise self-disclosure is the needless expression of the speaker's religious experiences. The principle here involved is the same as before. To speak of one's own awe in view of the magnitude of a subject, of one's inability to do justice to it, of the weight of its burden on the heart, of the prayers and the tears with which it has been considered, and of the overwhelming convictions of the truth which one is about to utter, may be occasionally pertinent, and may, therefore, carry its own justification on its face. But it may also be, and if often done it must be, religious twaddle. No man can safely make a hobby of his own religious life. Such self-disclosure in the pulpit will never be used by a modest preacher as a homiletic make-shift for a solemn introduction. The religious experience of a preacher must be worked

into sermons indirectly, and for the most part unconsciously.

Another form of immodest intrusion of self in discourse is a mannerism of style in the excessive use of the pronoun "I." Have you ever observed how much more difficult it is to avoid the excessive use of the *ego* in introductions than in any other part of a discourse? In the introduction we are struggling to lift our subject up into sight. The mind in that labor seems often to work as sailors do in weighing anchor, when they sing a chant which means nothing, but is a nervous help to the muscular strain. So a preacher will measure off an exordium with the formulæ, "I think," "I suppose," "I believe," "I know," "I feel," when he is not at all chargeable with conscious egotism. Yet the impression of egotism will be made upon an audience if the use of the *ego* be immoderately frequent.

(2) Modesty in the exordium requires certain things indicative of respect for the audience. A modest self-appreciation is twin-brother to a respectful appreciation of others. This will make itself obvious in the relations of a speaker to his hearers. Among other things of this class may be named a carefully constructed introduction. A sloven in his dress betrays disrespect for others as well as for himself. So a heedless jumble of materials in an exordium indicates indifference to the claims of an audience upon a speaker's courtesy. But, on the other hand, modesty requires freedom from excessive care to make things plain. Vigorous thought, a manly style, the omission of needless explanations, and celerity of progress in the exordium are tacit signs of the speaker's estimate of the abilities of his hearers.

Modesty demands freedom from arrogant insinua-

tions. You may betray disrespect for your hearers without uttering it in words. If you feel it, you will insinuate it unconsciously. One preacher says, "If I succeed in making you understand my meaning." Another says, "If I succeed in making my meaning understood." What is the difference? In words, almost nothing: in spirit, the whole distance between respect and arrogance. In countless forms of speech you may turn a contemptuous shoulder to an audience, and yet not utter a word of literal disparagement. On the same principle, modesty requires a genial judgment of the character of an audience. It stands to reason, that, if you would win men, you must assume all that can be honestly assumed of good in them. Modesty in any preacher will breathe into his discourse, wherever occasion calls for it, a genial opinion of an audience. Without a word of flattery, it will often disarm a suspicion, or break up indifference, by convincing a hearer that you are predisposed to think well of him.

Modesty of discourse, and in exordiums especially, requires often a kindly treatment of the prejudices of hearers. None but an egotist of intense type will fail to see something to respect in a prejudice which is shared by many minds. Such a prejudice is always the extreme of a truth. An intelligent preacher can not help respecting it, and he may honestly express that respect as a help to correcting it.

(3) Modesty in introductions, and elsewhere as well, requires freedom from certain affectations of excellence in the preacher. A truly modest mind is wedded to realities. It will not stoop to an affected virtue. It demands, therefore, among other things, freedom from affected virtues of style. An inflated style not only offends simplicity, as we have seen, in the introduction

itself, but it implies vanity in the preacher. He affects a style which he knows to be unreal to himself. He puffs; he swells; he blusters. In like manner, modesty requires freedom from an affectation of dramatic power in the preacher The dramatic faculty is a magnificent gift for the uses of the pulpit, but a perilous one, there is so powerful a temptation to overact by affecting a form or a degree of it which is unreal.

Modesty of discourse, and in introductions especially, requires freedom from an affectation of humility. It is difficult to say which is the more repulsive extreme, — the vanity which parades itself in egotism, or the vanity which disguises itself in humility. Genuine modesty forbids each as imperatively as the other. If an affectation of this virtue could always be as transparently humble as it was on the death-bed of Dr. Samuel Parr, we might tolerate it as a *lusus naturæ*. "England," said he, "has produced three great classical scholars: one was Bentley; another, Porson; the third modesty forbids me to mention." But not all preachers have the artlessness of Dr. Parr. In homiletic exordiums this affectation is usually found in the use of stereotyped expressions of humility. Confessing personal unworthiness, acknowledging that the sermon is the least of God's mercies, invoking divine forgiveness for sin about to be committed in the preaching of it commonly mean nothing when thrust into the preliminaries of a discourse. They are relics of monastic morbidness, which, in a healthy Protestant mind, may be something much worse than that. If not conscious hypocrisy, they may make the worst impression of that upon an audience.

(4) Modesty of discourse demands freedom from excess of modesty. Affected modesty is not excess, but

an assumption of unreal virtue. A more respectable because a more honest fault is an excess of genuine modesty. In introductions peculiarly, it is apt to betray itself in apologies for the sermon, a pleading for charitable criticism of its defects, a depreciation of the preacher's abilities, all of which are perfectly genuine. They make the impression of entire sincerity, yet of a morbid selfhood. Modesty is a robust virtue. It has in it a large vein of self-respect. It not only consists with, but in part consists in, self-appreciation. It demands in a preacher a sense of what is due to him as a man, and due to his professional position as a religious teacher. A cringing introduction may be becoming to a speech on the scaffold, never to a sermon in the Christian pulpit. St. Paul's charge to Timothy probably had this virtue in view, among others, "Let no man despise thy youth." Be a man in thy youthful graces. Speak, act, look, the manly preacher. Robert Hall said the same thing more tartly, when he advised that no man should ask pardon for having been born.

6th, A sixth characteristic of a good introduction is suggestiveness. It is an advantage to a discourse, if the introduction be one which lays a moderate but positive tax upon the intellect of the hearers. Set them to thinking early in the progress of a sermon. Thus you most effectually prepare them for a vigorous train of thought in the sequel. Were you ever stimulated to an attentive hearing by listening to an introduction made up of such discoveries as these, "man is everywhere in pursuit of happiness;" "life is short, and death certain;" "by all men's confession all men are sinners;" "there is a great difference in the characters of men"? Yet are not these weighty truths? Doubtless. But stupendous truths must often be assumed as

too well known to excite interest in their hackneyed forms. John Foster remarks it as one of the collateral evidences of human depravity that men can think of the most affecting truths without emotion; but mental inertia, on even the most appalling realities, is not necessarily a sin. It may be only the inevitable sluggishness of the intellect over hackneyed thought.

(1) The suggestive quality may often be cultivated by selecting the narrative form of exordium. Animated narrative always interests. An historical incident, a biographical fact, a mythological legend, a scientific phenomenon, if it illustrates a principle which the subject needs in the introduction, may be the most stimulating material for your purpose. One such brief narrative may be sufficient to save a hearer from listlessness.

(2) Nearly allied to this is the descriptive form of introduction. If description of a place, a scene, an event, a monument, a picture, a statue, a person, a process of manufacture, an invention, can be naturally made to freshen a stale truth of religion, and if your subject needs that truth in some unhackneyed form, one page of such description may be the one lively passage which shall arouse and hold a hearer's interest. A good description is a truth painted. Almost anybody will look at a painting of that which nobody would listen to, if droned in the ear. Nobody is uninterested in an illustrated newspaper. The eye is a lens; the ear, a drum. The eye magnifies; the ear only echoes.

(3) Raciness of introduction may often be gained by originality of philosophical remark. One thought which to the hearer is new may carry the weight of many old thoughts in company with it. The exordium need not sparkle with brilliants. Even one old thought

vitalized by a speaker's experience of it, so that, as rejuvenated by him, it emits the sparkle of novelty, may set a hearer upon the same experience. Original thinking is marvelously self-diffusive. Very little of such thinking exists. One such thought speedily becomes everybody's thought. The reason is that everybody's mind is a fertile soil for it, and instantly sets the reproductive energy of nature at work. You can never waste a new thought upon any audience, if you succeed in making it clear. Fairly plant it, and nothing is more sure to grow.

(4) Suggestiveness in an exordium may be promoted by tact in improving the circumstances of an occasion. Here opens an immense field of illustration from the history of eloquence. The pulpit furnishes its full share. St. Paul's introduction at Mars Hill is an example. Rev. Dr. Stillman, a pastor in Boston in the time of the Revolution, preached, on the Sunday after the arrival of the intelligence from England that the Stamp Act had been repealed, on this text, and with this introduction, "Were I to serve you in the ministry of the gospel for a century, I might never again have so favorable an opportunity to address you upon these words: 'As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.'" He then described the exultation of the people over the news from England, which was in everybody's thoughts, and from that he passed on to consider the greater joy which the gospel should excite in the minds of men. How to make the popular excitement tributary to the aim of the pulpit and the uses of holy time was a critical question. Many preachers would have given it up in despair, and preached a political harangue in keeping with the bonfires the cinders of which were smoking in the streets

Not so Dr. Stillman. He exhibited his power to control events, instead of being controlled by them, by that simple yet really studied and elaborate exordium. It combined the religious spirit of a preacher with the genius of an orator.

Great orators in the pulpit have generally evinced their oratorical tact in turning to account providential circumstances. One of the most successful pastors of New York owes his reputation largely to the fact, that, for many years after he began his ministry, he employed a member of his church to gather up for him all the local events of interest occurring during the week, in the politics, the commerce, the police, and the religion of the city, and to bring to him confidentially a *resumé* of them on the evening of Saturday. From these he then selected such as he could usefully employ in introducing his subjects of discourse on the following day. He had the reputation of being a studious man. His sermons were evidence that he did not spend his time in the streets. Yet often, on Sundays, he had a strange knowledge of events not announced in the papers till Monday morning. He seemed to be a marvelous combination of the studious pastor with the man of the world.

(5) The remarks above made indicate, further, that the suggestive quality of exordiums may easily be overwrought. This may be done by an over-crowded introduction. Being a preliminary, this part of a sermon will not bear to be crammed with materials. No matter how skillfully condensed, it must not be burdensome in its weight. It ought not to sparkle all over with gems of thought, and novelties of incident, and inventions of style. The raciness of an exordium may be overdone by a startling kind or form of material

A moderate paradox is not objectionable, but a glaring paradox is intolerable. Terrific material is not becoming to an introduction. Exclamatory exordiums are generally extremes. The boldest forms of rhetorical figure, like vision and apostrophe, are abuses of the exordium. Whitefield's famous apostrophe to "Father Abraham," in his well-known introduction to the sermon on the non-existence of sects in heaven, was too violent for the locality it occupied in the sermon.

The suggestiveness of an introduction may be exaggerated by a hortatory style. Very few forms of speech are so difficult to sustain as that of direct hortation. Extraordinary circumstances may justify it. Chrysostom, just after an earthquake, began a sermon thus, "Do you see the power of God? Do you see the benignity of God? His power, because the solid world he has shaken; his benignity, because the falling world he has supported." We may safely preach similar exordiums when our audiences have been shaken by earthquakes.

(6) An inquiry which deserves a brief *excursus* from this point in our discussion is this, Is it expedient to preface a sermon by remarks upon the topic of current interest in the community at the time? A sudden death, a political crisis, a recent effort of charity, a conflagration, a declaration of war, an insurrection, exciting news from abroad may often have filled the newspapers of the previous week. Everybody's mind is full of it. All are talking about it, before the service and afterwards. Some preachers so far bend to the breeze of local excitement, in such a case, as to remark upon it extemporaneously by way of preface to the sermon. Is it a wise method of introducing the sermon of the day? Much may be said for and against this habit.

The following particulars suggest the most important principles respecting it.

This expedient has certain obvious advantages. It is an advantage to a preacher to take hearers in their own mood of interest. The preacher thus comes down to the hearer. This gives him a powerful leverage in his attempt to move them.

It may be the means of augmenting a hearer's respect for the preacher. If he handles the interpolated subject wisely, it is a sign of his intelligence, it is a token of his enterprise. He seems to know what is going on in the world. He reads the newspapers. For the moment he is the peer of laymen in their own vocations. Therefore this expedient helps to relieve the clergy from the prejudice which always exists against them, — that they are men of a different world from the common world; that they live in the past; that they live in abstractions; that they move in ruts; that they are so intent on another world that they know little and care little about this world. The habit in question tends to rid a preacher of that stereotyped criticism.

Often such prefatory remarks can be made directly tributary to the purpose of the sermon. The theme of local interest may be directly in line with the theme of discourse. All human experience is an illustration of something with which the pulpit is concerned. Human government illustrates divine government; human society is full of suggestions of divine relations; the events of every man's life are divine providences; human actions are divine decrees; a sudden death is a voice from eternity; a shipwreck is a divine mystery suggestive of some of the profoundest problems of religion; a great crime is a divine warning; a great war may be the fulfillment of a prophecy; a commercial

panic involves the whole principle of faith, which is central to salvation. The analogies which bind together temporal life and eternal life are innumerable. The habit of a preacher's mind discloses them to him in their most instructive and fascinating forms. The Bible itself, the model of the wisest religious teaching, is but a section of real life, — the life of individuals, of families, of cities, of nations, of races, the life of our common humanity, taken from universal history, and recorded, under divine illumination, for a divine purpose.

Further: the method in question serves to unite a heterogeneous audience in the same mood of feeling. Often the prime difficulty in moving an audience is that of bringing them into unison about any thing. Much is gained if we can start the current of sympathetic interest. The magnetic influence of numbers may sustain it in a transfer, when it is once in flow. Again: it is something in favor of the device in question that it uses divine providence as a tributary to the preaching of the divine Word. In the profound Christian view of things, all events which arouse communities are providences. Divine providence is the ally of divine grace; and divine grace uses divine providence. The preacher's words are the connecting link. They may often be the "word in season."

These are weighty reasons for the habit in question, and would often be conclusive in the judgment of an alert preacher. On the other hand, certain perils attend the habit, specially if the habit of one becomes the usage of many. They may wisely restrict it to occasional use. One such peril is the danger that it may occupy time which would be more valuable in the delivery of the sermon. Often the sermon will be such that not a moment should be added to the service of the pulpit needlessly.

A second danger is that the topic of local interest may not be in keeping with the Lord's Day. The very thing most needful for the right use of the hour may be to divert attention from the secular fever. A third peril may be that the subject of popular excitement will not be in tune with the sermon. Unity of impression from the services of the hour may be hopelessly destroyed by it. A fourth contingency is that it may tempt to ill-digested remarks. They will often be made on the spur of the moment. A fifth danger is that such remarks may revive an interest which nothing in the sermon can equal. The sermon may, therefore, suffer in the contrast. Better silence than such an overwhelming of the sermon with matters superior to it in the feelings of the hearers.

These are perils which always threaten such a device, if it becomes the usage of the pulpit. They suggest obvious practical restrictions. The restrictions would, in the large majority of cases, prevent the expedient in question from being habitually used. They would make it an occasional device, not a constant nor a very frequent one. The advantages of it are contingent on the avoidance of its evils. The objections to it, when they apply, are imperative.

LECTURE XIX.

THE INTRODUCTION: VARIETIES, COMPOSITION.

IV. We may gain some advantage in the practical application of the principles which have been thus far advanced, by observing, as a fourth general topic, the most important varieties of method in approaching subjects of discourse.

In any prolonged service in the pulpit, the most serious defect of introductions will commonly be a want of variety. If you have ever listened for years to the preaching of one man, your experience has been exceptional, if you have not learned to anticipate his exordiums from the announcement of his texts. Not only is there a sameness of individual preachers, but certain hackneyed introductory thoughts and phrases are the common property of the pulpit. Because a preacher has a text, why should he never, by any felicitous accident, allow himself to practice the varied introductions which are often so stimulating and so graceful in the best addresses of the best class of secular orators? Certain it is, that the principles we have considered, if practically applied to the construction of sermons, would result in diversity. The most important of these varieties I proceed now to name at the risk of occasional repetition of things already discussed in other connections.

1st, I name them varieties of approach, rather than

introductions, in order to include the first of them, which is that of approach to a subject without an introduction. An explanation of a text, and a derivation of a subject from it are often the whole of the preliminary material. Such sermons have no introduction proper. I can not assent to the view of Theremin, which Vinet indorses, that what they call the "expository introduction" is always suitable. The expository equivalent for an introduction, as I should prefer to call it, often excludes more interesting materials which the subject needs. Sometimes, also, it is positively an evil, because it is needless. The text does not need it: the sermon does not need it. In such a case it is a heap of rubbish thrown in to fill a gap. Nothing grows in it: nothing is built upon it.

Further: it has become a stereotyped formulary of the pulpit. For this reason it is often less impressive than intrinsically it deserves to be. We shall be in little danger of an extreme, if we never use it when we can not defend it as the best approach possible. There is always one best avenue to the subject. The expository approach, if chosen, should be that one. Choose it for its specific congruity, as you would choose any other, never for its convenience only, never in blind imitation of clerical usage. One sign of the weakness of the German pulpit is the indolent frequency with which the text and the subject are linked by the most tame of commonplaces in expository remark.

2d, Another variety may be named the introduction applicatory of the text; not explanatory, but applicatory. Its design is to attract attention to the subject of the text as one which concerns the present audience. To this variety belong all forms of exordium which are designed to modernize the practical bearings of the

text The text is a promise to Abraham, or a confession of David, or a rebuke to the Pharisees, or an exhortation to the Church at Laodicea. You wish to transfer it to modern times, to American hearers, to a dozen persons in the audience whom you believe to need it, to one hearer for whom your whole sermon is written. Whatever you say in making that transfer of the text, and in aiming it well, is an introduction applicatory of the text. The practical necessity of it is obvious.

3d, Another variety of approach may be named the introduction intensive of the text by comparison with other Scriptures. It may be much to your purpose to call attention to the fact that your text is not a solitary one; that it expresses a truth often affirmed in the Bible; that the doctrine of St. Paul was taught by Moses; that the precept of St. John was originated by Christ; that the fact in the Acts was foretold by Isaiah; that the principle in the Hebrews pervades the whole economy of the Old Testament. What is the exact aim of such comparisons? Not necessarily explanation, not chiefly confirmation. They are intensive expedients. They magnify the importance of the truth which the text teaches: they are, therefore, a purely rhetorical method of setting the subject in position before the audience.

4th, A fourth variety of approach is the introduction explanatory of principles involved in the discussion. You propose, for instance, to show "the necessity of an Atonement from the convictions of the human conscience." You introduce the subject by remarks upon conscience as a source of evidence of truth. You affirm that it is a reliable source; that it is one form of divine revelation; that the common sense of men recog-

nizes its authority. You proceed, therefore, to interrogate it, to learn what are its teachings as to the forgiveness of sin. Such a train of remark has nothing to do with the text: it is explanatory of a principle which underlies the whole argument which you are about to unfold. This kind of introduction elaborate preaching will often necessitate.

5th, A fifth form of approach may be the introduction narrative of facts which are necessary to an appreciation of the subject. The narrative introduction looks forward to the subject, not backward to the text. Dr. Blair introduces a discourse on "the value of religion in adversity" by describing human life as a series of changes, disappointments, bereavements. This naturally leads to the inquiry how men can best be prepared for such a life. The answer is the theme of the sermon.

6th, A sixth variety of approach may be the introduction illustrative of either facts or principles involved in the discussion. "The moral uses of the existence of wicked men" is a profound philosophical subject for a sermon. The patriarch furnishes a text inspired for the purpose: "Wherefore do the wicked live?" But how shall I come at the subject vividly? How shall I approach it by some other avenue than the hackneyed remarks that the author of the text was Job; that he uttered it in a mood of despondency; that we, also, often ask the same question; and so on? I answer, Take an individual case of the injury done by one wicked man. Take such a character as that of Richelieu, or the Duke of Alva, or Lord Byron, or Aaron Burr. Choose your example shrewdly from that class of minds which your hearers will be likely to appreciate. Show the evil of one such life to the world,

to the Church, to the souls of men. Paint it till it seems, as it is, a great mystery that such men live. Such an example might be so pictured that every hearer in your congregation would be silently asking the question of your text for himself. No other subject should seem for the time so natural and so necessary as that of your sermon. To this class of exordiums belong those which are founded on historical or mythological anecdote. A dignified anecdote may illustrate the germinal principle of a discourse, and therefore may introduce it felicitously.

7th, A seventh variety of approach to a subject may be the introduction commendatory of the subject. The object of this is simply to exalt the dignity of the subject in the estimation of the hearer. Several subordinate varieties are worthy of mention under this class.

(1) One is that in which the commendation consists in direct assertion of the importance of the theme. An ingenious assertion of the dignity of a theme may be a magnifying lens between it and the hearer. Said one preacher, after announcing his text, "The truth I am about to discuss is, in my view, of such magnitude, that it may probably decide the eternal destiny of some soul which hears it proclaimed to-day."

(2) Another variety of the commendatory introduction is that which consists of a comparison of the subject with an inferior topic of interest. When Professor Webster was on trial in Boston for the murder of Dr. Parkman, a pastor in that city preached on the final judgment. He began by alluding to the thrilling excitement with which many of his hearers had thronged the court-room on the day before; and from that scene he proceeded to lift their thoughts up to the great tribunal, which, also, they would one day

throng, no longer as spectators, but as sinners on trial. Such an exordium exalted the dignity of the subject by comparison with an inferior theme.

(3) A third variety is that in which the commendation consists of cumulative remarks from which the importance of the subject grows into view gradually. The plan of a discourse was once proposed in this lecture-room on "the ascension of Christ." The introduction was a series of philosophical remarks. The preacher observed that every event in the life of a founder of a new religion is important to a believer in that religion; that this is eminently true of Christ; that the significance of Christ's life accumulates in the events which crowd its closing scenes; and that with his ascension are associated the last words he uttered on earth. From this series of reflections the dignity of the subject of our Lord's ascension receives fresh illustration.

(4) A fourth variety is that in which a subject is exalted by association with illustrious human authorities. This is the effect of exordiums in which occur apt quotations of the opinions of eminent men. Introductions in which expressive proverbs are used are of the same character. Our sense of the worth of the subject is stirred by its association with authorities.

(5) To these may be added a fifth variety not often heard in the American pulpit. It is that in which the dignity of the subject is suggested by a prayer. In the German pulpit one often hears the text announced, and, soon after, a prayer for divine guidance in the discussion and the reception of the theme derived from it. In some parts of Germany this is the more usual method What is the purpose of that parenthetic prayer? It has a double purpose. It is an act

of worship: it is also an indirect commendation of the subject to the hearers. It deserves to be named, because it exists among the usages of the pulpit. Still it is not a natural expedient. A simple rhetorical taste does not approve it. Prayer should, under no circumstances, be regarded or used as a rhetorical expedient. To an American audience, under any circumstances, it has the look of sanctimonious formality.

8th, An eighth variety of approach is the introduction connective with the preceding discourse. This will often, not always, be the most natural exordium in serial preaching. In controversial sermons an exordium will often grow naturally out of a reference to the discourse of the opponent whose positions you are controverting. The late Rev. Mr. Merrill of Peacham, Vt., was once called upon to preach to an audience which had just listened to a terrific and denunciatory sermon by a preacher of the Second Advent. The preacher's text had been, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." When Mr. Merrill rose to address them, he began by turning the alarm of the audience into mirth, by saying, that, whatever might be true of the second coming of Christ and the world's end, there was one lesson of the text to which they had been listening, which the preacher had forgotten; and that was that it was of no use to attempt to scare men into religion, for even a ghost could not do it. His opponent's whole discourse, and the oppressive effect of it upon the hearers were swept away in a moment by that use of his opponent's text.

9th, A ninth variety of approach to a subject may be that in which the introduction is a condensed review of another subject related to that of the sermon

in hand. Some subjects are the natural preliminaries to other subjects: therefore a natural introduction of one proposition may be an epitome of a discussion of another. You will often find in published discourses the introductions of which strike you as especially weighty, that those introductions are practically compressed preliminary discussions. You may find that you have yourselves sometimes unconsciously fallen upon this method of introduction. Without designing it, you observe that a peculiarly rich exordium to one of your own sermons would, with little or no change, be itself the plan of a distinct discourse. Your oratorical instinct has done just that which rhetorical criticism would have advised as an expedient of condensation. This, if not carried to an extreme, is a grand quality in preaching. It enriches the productions of the pulpit. Often it is a necessity. No other form of exordium seems natural, for the want of this.

10th, A tenth variety of approach to a subject may be the introduction which consists of a request for the attention of an audience. Some subjects as developed from some texts need no other introductory process than this. A sacramental sermon may be so far suggested to a hearer by the time, the place, the symbols before him, and by the preparatory lecture, that no other preparatory process is needful than the single step of asking the audience to follow you in certain meditations on a certain theme. Liable as this method is to abuse, it is legitimate. It is not necessarily confined to a brief and single request. It may be expanded into an appeal for devout attention, for patient attention, for an uninterrupted attention.

I sum up the result of our discussion of the introduction, thus far, in this enumeration of varieties, not

as furnishing models by example, not as a schedule from which selection in any given case can be made. They are useless for any such purpose. The main object of the enumeration is, by thus grouping these varieties together, to illustrate how much variety is practicable. There is no need of humdrum. There is no need of the uniform expository equivalent for an introduction. If you are once possessed of this conviction, and if, then, your critical judgment is disciplined by practice to a varied selection of methods, your rhetorical instinct will at length work unconsciously in shaping this part of a sermon, as in every other. Your exordiums will be rich, inviting, quickening, because they will be growths, — natural growths, — not pieces of mechanism.

V. Before passing to the next topic of discussion in the analysis of a sermon, I wish to suggest a few hints on the work of composing the introduction. The exordium has been called a preacher's cross. It is the most facile subject of criticism, but the most difficult of execution. Vinet says that it is like the fine and precise operations in mechanics, in which every workman may end in success, but only after having broken more than once the instruments employed. You have probably already experienced in some degree the common lot of preachers in this respect. A subject has opened richly to your mind; thoughts upon it have been fluent and affluent; illustrations of it have been luxuriant; details of style, even, have flashed upon you invitingly; your fingers have felt nimble with the pen; and you have plunged into the heart of the discussion with bounding eagerness. But this drudgery of an introduction has balked you; it has exhausted your invention; it has chilled your imagination; it has put out the light

of your subject; and you have found yourself, perhaps, floundering in the middle of it, as in a slough of despond, feeling no bottom, and unable to reach a margin. Perhaps, after a hard morning's work, the thing is finished; but it dissatisfies and annoys you; it seems forced, insignificant, disjointed, objectless; and you feel that a critic, comparing your mental labor with its result, would be severe, but severely just, in saying with Ahimaaz, "I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was." To those beginners in the work of sermonizing who know any thing of this experience, the following hints will not be untimely.

1st, Define to your own mind, to start with, the specific object of the introduction in the case in hand. Inquire, What does this subject, as I propose to treat it on this occasion, for this audience, need in the way of preparatory remark? does it need one thing? more than one? any thing? what is the most imperative thing? will the expository equivalent be the best thing? not will the expository equivalent be passable, occupy the time, but will it advance my work to the heart of the discussion in the most natural and quickening way? These questions, perhaps, may be answered in the asking; but they should be asked. No other composing is so difficult as that in which the mind does not know itself. Did you ever witness the composition and the chirography of "Planchette"? How the pen sprawls and splutters, and caricatures sense, till it requires an expert in "spiritualistic" phenomena to make sense of it! Like that is the composing of an exordium in which the pen does the work without a self-conscious and intent mind behind it.

The effect is as painful to the hearer as to the preacher, if you labor to introduce a subject which

needs no introduction. It resembles the awkwardness of introducing to each other, with fastidious forms of politeness, two strangers, as you suppose, who happen to have been old friends before you were born. It is equally painful to see a preacher laboring at the wrong object in an exordium. Why should you insinuate your way along, like an Indian warrior in the grass, against a prejudice which nobody feels? Why vindicate your divine commission before an audience in which nobody doubts it? Why affirm and prop up your right to speak when the fact of your speaking is a proof of your right? Why wriggle your way to a theme which is one of the standard subjects of the pulpit? Why begin at the expulsion from Eden, to bring up the attention of your hearers, by slow and zigzag approaches, to a present emergency which they are trembling with eagerness to meet? What would Cicero have achieved in the first oration against Catiline, if he had begun with the story of Romulus?

More distressing still is it to see a preacher laboring in an exordium without an object. This you will find to be sometimes your real peril. We lounge and saunter into some introductions. We must say something. Something comes to mind which we can say. It may surely enough as well be said now as ever; and down it goes upon the page, and we try to feel encouraged that we have made a beginning. Then we go up and down in the earth, seeking what we may devour, till with another remark, and a third, and a fourth, we have gathered a sufficient number to make up a loose, ragged, patched piece of manufacture, rather than of brain-work, which, by the usage of the books, we call an introduction. But it has no object; therefore no cohesion; consequently, for the purpose of an exordium, no

ning. One of the old creeds found in the archives of a certain church in this State, and once presented according to the ancient Congregational usage, by a candidate for admission into the church, commences thus: "I believe in one God. I believe that he is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. I believe that he made this world, partly out of nothing, and partly out of unfit matter." A good symbol that of the materials of some introductions to sermons.

2d, Review the growth of your subject in its working upon your own mind. Every subject on which you are at all prepared to preach has a history in your own thinking. It has a growth there. You have not come to it at a bound. There is an avenue of thought somewhere by which you have come into consciousness of that growth. Some good angel has been practicing an introduction of that subject upon you. Look back, therefore, and recall your own mental history upon it. What has interested you in it? what has defined it clearly? what illustrations of it, or about it, have made it vivid? what uses of it have been valuable to you? Two benefits will be likely to follow from such inquiries. They will commonly suggest the best materials for an introduction of the subject to an audience. Nothing else is so prolific of available thought for transmitting a truth as the history of one's own mind upon it. That which has clarified a subject to you will help you to invent ways of clearing it to others. Difficulties conquered often show how they might have been avoided. A fortress taken by storm discloses how it might have been taken by stratagem. So your conquest of a subject may put you in possession of the means of leading others to it without the struggle of conquest.

Your own history upon a subject will be likely, also, to save you from the error of assuming too much in favor of the intelligence of your hearers. This is sometimes the occasion of a defective exordium. It assumes too much knowledge, too much interest, too much readiness, therefore, to follow the discussion. It gives to hearers no sufficient time or help to grow to the subject as the preacher grew to it in his experience. Results of a long mental training are sprung upon a hearer unawares. You will be spared this mistake, if you consider wisely the process of your own mind in mastering your theme. If preliminary thinking was necessary to you, still more may it be so to your audience. You will not be likely to ask them to leap a chasm under which you were obliged to dig a tunnel.

3d, Compose the introduction with the whole discourse in view. Does not this suggest a very obvious cause of unfitness in many exordiums? They are written before the subject is mentally digested. I sometimes detect evidence in sermons that the introduction was written before the subject was even defined. The preacher has started with a text, and has written up to the proposition. What the subject is has shaped itself on the way. A good exordium can not possibly be composed thus at random. To construct and charge, and aim and discharge, an introduction well, you must know what you want to introduce. The subject, the discussion, the application, all the structural elements of the sermon, should be before you. The living spirit of the sermon, too, must be in you A lifeless exordium is often lifeless for the reason that it has no living union with the subject in the mind of the preacher. He has mechanized it, instead of grafting it. Worse even than that, it may be a piece of

dead timber nailed to a living tree. You can not neutralize this error by any artifices of style. Nothing can live but life.

4th, Therefore do not compose the introduction till the plan of the whole discourse is outlined. Write out a plan of the entire sermon from text to *finis;* adjust the form of the proposition; devise the outline of the argument; invent the chief illustrations; shape the application; decide upon the method of closing: in a word, get every thing before you which is to be introduced. Put it on paper, if your mind needs, as many do, the help of the eye. Then you know what the exordium ought to be: you can set about it intelligently, and you will save time by this preliminary work of getting ready to work. Why not, then, write the body of the sermon in full before composing the exordium? Some advocate this. I would not say that it should never be done. Some minds may work well in that way; but the majority of minds, I think, will experience in it this disadvantage, that, when the body of a sermon is written in full, the mind of the preacher has lost the introductory mood. This, too, is a matter for experiment. In composing a sermon, you will discover that your mind moves with your work. Transitions in that are changes of mental mood in you. Your sensibilities change with the demands of your work. You pass through an introductory mood, an argumentative mood, an illustrative mood, an applicatory mood At the close you are absorbed in practical application. The excitement of your sensibilities is more intense than it was, or ought to have been, at the beginning. It is not natural, then, for your mind to go back upon its track, and set about introducing the theme.

5th, Throw yourself into the work with enthusiasm.

Daniel Webster said of the American Revolution, that our fathers went to war against a preamble. A preamble, then, may be the very gist of the business. Treat it as such in sermonizing. Prepare an introduction as if every thing depended on the first impression. Strike as if the blow were to be like that of stamping a coin — there being no second blow.

Critics have observed of Shakespeare, that he always aims to make his characters define themselves at their first appearance. Their individuality is clear in the first words they utter. They never run together in our first conceptions of them. They are like faces with strong features: we see them once, and always remember them. Guizot observes of Othello and Desdemona, that their characters are distinct on their first appearance, though one speaks but thirty lines, and the other but fifteen. So introductions should be composed with keen appreciation of the significance of first impressions. I repeat, therefore, make a business of them. Be in earnest in them, and you will find earnest hearers from the very first word. Not only strike when the iron is hot, but make it hot by striking. Modern science tells us that motion is heat: a blow, therefore, evolves heat. A flash of fire is often visible at the moment and at the spot at which a solid cannon-ball strikes the plate of an iron-clad ship. The principle involved in the phenomenon is as true of mind as of iron. Mind has a quality corresponding to that by which iron evolves latent heat. The concussion of mind with mind will often evolve an interest which will make itself obvious in the faces of hearers. It is quickening to a speaker to observe the instantaneousness with which the first gleam of earnest working on his part will reproduce itself in an audience

Dr. John Blair Smith, president of Hampden-Sidney College, was the most eloquent preacher of his day in Virginia. He was accustomed to write in full no part of his sermons, except the introductions. These he elaborated with unwearied care. Such introductions gave to a man of his temperament a momentum in public address which enabled him to proceed extemporaneously on the same level. His experience justified his estimate of the value of a good beginning.

LECTURE XX.

THE PROPOSITION: DEFINITION, NECESSITY.

THE proposition is that part of a discourse by which its subject is defined. It includes, therefore, but is not restricted to, that which is termed proposition in the nomenclature of logic. It embraces all varieties of rhetorical form by which a subject is indicated to the audience. An interrogative may be in rhetorical dialect the proposition of a sermon.

I. Upon this latitude in the signification of the term depends the answer to the first question which meets us in the discussion of the thing; namely, Is the statement of a proposition necessary to the completeness of a discourse? Let us understand clearly the limits of the question. It is not whether a point to be proved is essential in every discourse; it is not whether the most scholastic form of statement is necessary to the proposition; it is not whether any single form of statement should be invariable in the proposition. The only point of inquiry on which difference of opinion can exist is this, Should the subject of a sermon invariably be so stated as to make hearers sensible at the moment that the subject is defined?

In discussing this inquiry, I aim at three things. One is to establish the affirmative; another and more essential one is to illustrate the vitality which inheres

in this very brief fragment of a sermon; and the most essential of all is to vindicate that style of thinking in the pulpit to which a definite statement of propositions and divisions is a necessity. I say propositions and divisions, because the practical question covers both; and we shall avoid repetition by considering once for all those bearings of it which concern the style of thinking in the pulpit which divisions, as well as propositions, represent.

It may seem disproportionate to discuss in a succession of lectures a fragment of discourse which may occupy but a single line in the writing, and less than a breath in the delivery. But the disproportion is like that of treating by an octavo volume of medical discussions only the single topic of an organ of the body which you can hold in the palm of your hand. The proposition is to the discourse what the heart is to the physical system. The relation is organic. Because it is so, the question of statement or no statement can not be fairly dismissed as a question of form only. It is a question of the inner quality of preaching. Decide it in one way, and you decide in sympathy with shallow and effervescent preaching. Decide it otherwise, and you cultivate thoughtful, solid, elemental preaching. This will be obvious from a consideration of the following particulars.

1st, The oratorical instinct of a good speaker demands that he shall have a proposition. Expressed or latent, the proposition must exist. We acknowledge this in the demand which we make upon every speaker, that he shall "speak to the point." What point?

2d, The instinct of good hearing demands, on the same principle, that a speaker shall state his proposi-

tion. For what purpose does a speaker need to have a proposition for which the hearer does not also need the statement of the proposition? There is a hearing to the point, which is correlative to speaking to the point. The eye follows the arrow most easily if it sees the target.

3d, It lies especially in the nature of a spoken address that it needs a statement of the theme. If an essay written might dispense with this, not so a speech delivered. In hearing, do we not instinctively, and soon after the commencement of an address, ask ourselves, What would the speaker be at? what is the aim? where is the target? If it seems to be concealed, are we not restless till it is discovered? This mental experience of a hearer is only the silent demand made upon the preacher that he shall not only have a proposition, but shall announce it. The instinct of hearing and the instinct of speech, in this respect, are of one mind.

4th, The popular mind is peculiarly dependent on knowledge of the theme as an aid to unity of impression. Performers on the tight-rope steady their whole muscular system by fixing the eye intently on a point in the distance. Thus they cross a ravine where the wavering of the eye might be death. Not unlike this is the mental effort by which the common mind must often follow the mental operations of its superior. The knowledge of the subject at the outset will be to the power of attention what the fixed eye is to the muscles of the gymnast.

5th, The subjects of the pulpit are in their nature liable to confusion in the popular conceptions of them. At this point the inquiry before us ceases to be a question of forms: it deepens into a question of things.

Let the following particulars be observed, in the way of *excursus* from the question of form into the thing which it represents.

(1) The common mind is burdened with the sense of sameness in the discourses of the pulpit. No other criticism of the pulpit is so common as this, "The preacher repeats himself. He is for ever reiterating the old story." This does not always imply fault in the preacher. Hearers judge of sermons by their own consciousness of the effect of sermons. Sameness of effect is often, in their judgment, equivalent to sameness in materials. If the shot fall fast and long in one spot, they lose the sense of succession in the sense of continuity. The tendency, therefore, is to a fusion of the popular conceptions of truth. Such fusion is confusion. Thoughts on religious themes run together, and themes themselves are blended in the popular theology.

(2) The tendency to confusion of religious thought often increases with the excitement of religious emotions. Nothing in the nature of religious sensibility protects it from that law of mind by which thought and emotion are often in inverse proportion. Hence revivals of religion are in one aspect occasions of unusual peril to religious character. This is especially true, if revivals occur under the lead of uneducated or incautious preachers. President Edwards thought it necessary to publish his work on "The Religious Affections," as a corrective of errors, and a protection against dangers, into which the churches of New England were falling. Such errors and dangers were involved in an indiscriminate interest in religion, arising from the disproportion between emotive excitement and thoughtful convictions in the experience of converts. Audiences

which Whitefield addressed were sometimes swayed by the mere infection of sympathy to the very circumference of the twenty thousand in the field, when it was physically impossible, in the case of thousands, that they should have heard one word from the preacher's voice.

Hume relates, that he was present on one such occasion, when the audience was so immense and so restless, that no human voice could have been intelligibly heard by them all. He wandered to the outskirts of the crowd in amazement at the evidences of emotion which met him at every step. He paused at length by the side of a woman who was weeping piteously, and inquired, "My good woman, what are you crying for?" —"O sir! for the parson's sermon."—"But can you hear what the parson is saying?"—"No, sir."—"Have you heard any thing since he began?"—"No, sir."— "Pray tell me, then, what for do you cry?"—"O sir! don't you see that holy wag of his head?"

(3) One part of the mission of the pulpit, therefore, must be to divide and define and identify religious thought in the popular experience. Preaching ought to educate the religious sensibilities of the people, as well as to stimulate them. You perform a work of questionable usefulness, if you only awaken those sensibilities, and then leave them to take care of themselves. They will crystallize about something; and if you do not furnish the right thing, error, weakness, depravity, and Satan will always be at hand with the wrong thing. Preaching ought to break up the conglomerate in which thought and feeling, error and truth, spiritual power and animal magnetism, divine suggestion and Satanic temptation lie molten together. Men need to be taught by the pulpit to know what they believe, and why they feel, what emotions are

legitimate to one truth, and what to another, and why they differ. Truths need to be individualized by analytic preaching. Only thus can the popular experience of them be deepened by discriminating knowledge.

It deserves to be noticed here, that, in our own day, there is comparatively little questioning of the spirit of revivals. The pulpit commonly welcomes them, and assumes that they are the work of God. To doubt this, and to express that doubt, expose a pastor to suspicion of his consecration to the Lord's work. Sometimes pastors find themselves borne along by a tide of popular feeling, of the purity of which they entertain serious doubts. They see evils which they dare not condemn, lest they should be thought to be opposers of revivals and of the men who are their conspicuous leaders. They see converts but half converted, men coming into the Church with false or infirm ideas of sin and regeneration and atonement. President Edwards did a courageous thing, when, as an antidote to the very same class of evils which we often witness, he published his work on "The Religious Affections." When has a similar work appeared in our day? Many pastors who have attempted to apply similar correctives of popular excitement from their pulpits have met with the rebukes of evangelists, and have been silenced by their misguided people.

It is one of the perils of evangelism, which requires skill and courage in the encounter, that the conspicuous instruments of a revival originated under such instrumentalities do not and can not apply the educating influences which every revival creates the need of. I say can not, because the educating work is a work of time. That work is turned over to the hands of pastors: it is a work not of stimulation, but of discipline;

not of emotion, but chiefly of instruction, — a work unsupported by the sympathy of large assemblies, the novelty of strange voices, and the *éclat* of special measures. Thus it often subjects pastors to the severest trials of their patience and their faith. Foresight of this after-work following a religious excitement produced by other agencies than that of the settled pastor should always be taken into account in deciding upon the expediency of importing evangelistic labor as an aid to the permanent pulpit.

Yet very many of the dangers of this class may be avoided, or at least safely encountered, if the work of the permanent pulpit is what it ought to be in point of instructive and discriminate preaching. To a people thus trained under an educating pulpit, revivals of religion may come and go as the most natural process of religious experience, creating no morbid excitement, and leaving behind them no perils to be feared, and no evils to be corrected. They may be as natural as the tides, — themselves a purifying agency, instead of needing, as actual revivals often do, to be themselves purified. To a people educated by such a ministry, evangelists may come and go as auxiliaries, instead of revolutionists.

6th, Returning, now, to the question of rhetorical form immediately before us, I remark with emphasis, the fact, that, to achieve this education of a people, preaching must use freely the expedients by which a logical mind naturally makes itself understood in the expression of strong thought on great themes. We must generalize less, and analyze more; exhort less, and argue more. We must divide and isolate, and specify and concentrate our most profound conceptions of elemental truths. That kind of preaching to which

a free use of the expedients of logical expression is a necessity is the only preaching by which the pulpit can accomplish its work as an educating power.

Therefore preach very little in the general, and very much in the detail. Preach little on truth, and much on truths. Preach rarely on religion, but constantly on the facts, the doctrines, the duties, the precepts, the privileges, of religion. Divide, discriminate, define, sharpen, clarify, doctrine by doctrine, duty by duty, fact by fact, till the whole map of Christian faith is outlined and clear. You thus gain the power of pointed preaching. Thought will take the precedence of feeling, and intelligent action will be the resultant of both. The final product which you accumulate and build up will be not beliefs alone, not sensibilities alone, but character in those forms in which character is power. Your church will become to the religious world what any other body of men of character is to the secular world, — a consolidation of forces, and a power of control.

7th, The use of that class of expedients to which definite propositions belong, and of that kind of preaching to which they are a necessity, tends to form and consolidate the theological faith of a people. This illustrates in another aspect what I mean in saying, that, in some relations of it, the question ceases to be one of forms, and becomes one of things. Dr. Lyman Beecher accomplished more for the evangelical faith in Boston by his bony sermons than by all other expedients of his pulpit. They were not graceful discourses; they were not literary discourses; they were not classically finished discourses (they would have been improved if they had been all these); but they were definite discourses. They reined up hearers to specific think

ing. They made them see that the preacher was aiming at something. It was impossible to mistake what and where the target was. In this respect his sermons were in striking contrast with those of his opponents, whose antipathy to an angular theology expressed itself in smooth and rounded rhetoric, which presented to the popular conscience no protuberances of thought, no points of convergent force, and therefore no centers of burning power. The fruits of the two methods of preaching have entered into the history of New England, and are known and read of all men.

The question, then, of the formal statement of the themes and the salient thoughts of sermons, is not a question of taste only. Still less is it a question of forms only. It affects vitally a policy of thought; and its decision is an index of a policy in preaching, upon which success depends. To achieve that success, you must have constructive methods; for constructive methods, you must have a positive faith; and for a positive faith, you must have centers of discussion which shall be visible. To make these centers visible, you must make them luminous; to make them luminous, you must have definite statements of them which shall penetrate the understanding, and remain in the memory. In no other way can you get possession of available forces with which to work upon the popular life.

All this comes by intuition to a live man who understands his mission in the pulpit. Yet even such a man may hang a mill-stone around his own neck by cultivating an antipathy to the natural forms of logic in the construction of discourses for the pulpit. By banishing those forms from his sermons, he may banish the things they express; and then strong, positive, argumentative preaching is no longer possible. This is one of the

things of which you must have the forms, or, in the long run, you can not have the things.

8th, Yet the best analytic methods of sermonizing will sometimes fail to define truth in the popular theology. The perils of the pulpit in this respect are nearly all on one side. A hundred sermons fall still-born from the pulpit because of their pointless structure, where one repels hearers by excess of angularity. That is sure to be a still-birth which produces a body without *vertebræ*. Life must have an osseous framework.

You will very soon begin to observe, in remarking the effects of sermons upon your audiences, that a structure which seems needlessly formal to you often is not so to them. Not only will you discover that subjects which you have tried to express by hint, by covert announcement, by silent inference from a text, are not detected by your hearers; but subjects which to you are as positive as a triangle in their statements, some of your hearers will misunderstand. They will suppose you to be preaching on the omnipotence of God, when, in fact, you are discoursing upon his sovereignty. They will be thinking of the degree of depravity while you are describing its extent. You will preach upon Christ's work of intercession, and some of your hearers will advance no nearer to your thought than to imagine that they have heard a sermon on prayer. You will be praised or censured for sermons which you never preached. You will be invited to repeat, and asked to publish, discourses of which you never heard. Some hearers will label a sermon with a theme derived from a single division of it, from a paragraph, from an illustration, from an application.

But is not this view contradictory to an opposite

view, which has been as positively expressed? I affirm the confusion of religious ideas among the people, yet I have claimed for the popular mind great keenness of intelligence. Is not this a contradiction? I answer, No. It is a brace of opposites. Any practical art, when reduced to its ultimate facts, must involve many such paradoxes. The popular mind is both intelligent and ignorant. The same individual mind may be both. The masses of men have sagacity without culture. Whatever intuition can teach them, they see with the eye of an eagle. But whatever depends on mental training, they need to be taught line upon line, precept upon precept. They will appreciate keen distinctions, if you once make those distinctions palpable. Gain attention to them, and assent is swift. But the multitude do not originate distinctions nicely. Therefore they need statements made for them, and so made as to command their understanding.

9th, Looking, now, for a few moments, away from the pulpit, we discover another illustration of the value of definite statements of themes, and of the style of thinking which such statements represent, in the importance attached to them in other departments of oratory. Out of the pulpit public speaking is commonly a business. It has an object in real life. Men are in earnest in it. Speakers speak for a purpose: hearers hear for a purpose. What, then, is the testimony of the senate and the bar on the question of the necessity of propositions? Why is a lawyer expected to state his case to a jury? Why must a senator speak to a motion, upon a resolution, for or against a bill? Why is legislative business printed and circulated before it passes to a second reading? These expedients of legislative and forensic usage are among the equivalents of those helps to

precision which a preacher seeks in choosing texts, and stating themes, and announcing divisions of sermons.

The ablest forensic orators have aimed to give to statements of truth the force of arguments for those truths. Said the chief justice of New Hampshire, in commenting upon one of Daniel Webster's early efforts, "That young man's statement of his case was an unanswerable argument for its justice." The judge borrowed the criticism from Edmund Burke, who had said the same of Lord Mansfield. The main force of Mansfield's eloquence lay in this, — his power to pack into the lucidness of a statement the weight of invincible logic. The consequence was that the House of Lords paid greater deference to his speeches than to those of any other man in England. From Mansfield, Chief Justice Marshall derived the same taste for elaborated and finished statements. Says one critic, "Marshall's force lay in three things: first, he understood his own purpose; secondly, he so stated it as to make a jury understand it; thirdly, he so stated it as to make them feel that neither they nor he had any concern with any thing else. For the time, the opposition was nowhere." This criticism suggests an admirable model for the statements of the themes of sermons.

Look over the ranks of eminent legal minds, and you will observe, that, almost without exception, those who command the position they hold, and hold the position they choose, are men of this type of intellectual force. Their productions when analyzed exhibit a polished compactness in the expression of vital truths which gives to mere statement literally the force of a syllogism. Their propositions are proofs. They prepossess conviction. We accept the statement, and say, "What is there here to argue about?"

A notable instance of this axiomatic style of statement, which carries its demonstration on the face of it, is found in the title of Dr. Bushnell's work on female suffrage, "The Reform against Nature." Nothing else could be so perfect, nothing else so unanswerable. The verbiage and the sophistry with which the press is deluged on that subject are rebuffed by that compression of the whole case into one idea in four words. We speak of truth in a nutshell: this is truth in a bombshell. Such a proposition is worth any volume which can be written on the subject. Half the work of constructing the book was finished in the invention of the title.

For the reasons which have now been given, the principle, I think, will be admitted, that a proposition, and a proposition studied, and a proposition stated, and often a proposition finished in elaborate and compact form, is a very vital part of pulpit discourse. Though but a fragment in form, it is an index to the whole style of thinking which underlies the form. Without it, the most valuable style of thinking is impracticable in the pulpit; and with it, all styles may be at command.

LECTURE XXI.

THE PROPOSITION: NECESSITY, SUBSTANCE.

II. THE views thus far presented suggest the further inquiry, in the second place, Does the necessity of a proposition in a sermon admit of exceptions?

1st, In answer let it be observed that some apparent exceptions are not real exceptions. Apparent exceptions occur in such cases as the following. One is where the theme of a sermon is naturally inferred from the occasion. A biographical discourse at a funeral may not require distinct announcement of its subject. Why? Because the audience already know what must be the center of thought in the sermon. The occasion is the proposition. There is an apparent exception where a subject of discourse has been announced by previous notice. An advertisement in a newspaper, or an announcement from the pulpit, may have anticipated the work of a proposition; so that to announce the theme may be unnaturally formal. Why? Only because such announcement would be a repetition where repetition is needless. A textual or an expository sermon may not need a distinct declaration that the text is the theme. Why? Because the explanation of the text may be so constructed that it shall be impossible for a hearer not to understand that the text is the center of interest. In a series of expository discourses,

formal statement of subject may be needless after the first discourse. Why? Because that first of the series has informed the audience, both of the subjects and of the method of discussion in the subsequent sermons.

These, you will perceive, are not real exceptions to the principle we have considered. But a class of discourses exist which are distinct from these, and which seem to involve the omission of a proposition. You say, and not unreasonably, "I do not wish always to disclose my object in a sermon till I reach its application to my hearers. How can I thus advance to my object under cover, if I must reveal every thing in a formal proposition? I must sometimes catch hearers with guile."

2d, This suggests the inquiry, Shall a proposition be omitted for the sake of politic concealment of the aim of a sermon? In answer let several facts be noted.

(1) In the first place, rhetorical concealment in the pulpit is itself exceptional. Preaching may, by the truthfulness of its character, venture upon an openness of policy which would not be wisdom of policy elsewhere. Diplomatic reserve of truth is the exception, not the rule, in the discourses of the pulpit. If it become the favorite art of a preacher, people distrust it, and are repelled. Dr. Emmons suffered in the estimation of some of his hearers by his fondness for concealed conclusions. The springing of a mine was his favorite symbol of the application of a sermon. His hearers used to say, "Beware of conceding the doctor's premises: nobody but he knows where he will lead you in the end." A Machiavellian reputation is not a desirable one in the pulpit. We want a docile, not a suspicious hearing. If, therefore, exception be made to the rule requiring a statement of proposition in a sermon

as an expedient of rhetorical policy, that exception should itself be rare.

(2) Concealment of an aim at the intellect of hearers is widely different from concealment of an appeal to their sensibilities. In the nature of the case, and therefore always, it is unphilosophical to announce an intention of appeal to the feelings. It is not in the nature of the case, and therefore it may never be as unphilosophical, to announce a design upon the convictions of men. Imagine a speaker, in the pulpit or out of it, saying to you, "Come now, I am about to excite your emotions: smile, weep, pity, fear, mourn, rejoice, with me." Imagine another saying, "Come, now, let us reason together. I wish to convince you: I propose to address your sober judgment: I ask you to hear my arguments: I hope to show you the truth of my conclusion." Is there no distinction between these two disclosures of rhetorical intent? Are we not repulsed by the one, when we should be attracted by the other? The one is a burlesque of oratory: the other may be its triumph.

The preacher may offend hearers by arrogance of manner in revealing the purpose to address their intellect. Said Luther, "I shall prove this doctrine so unanswerably, that any one of you who does not believe it will be damned." The repulsion here is caused by the dogmatic manner, not by the fact of disclosure. Intellect courts visible approach: sensibility evades such approach. Intellect is bold, and craves bold treatment. Sensibility is coy, and hides itself: it would be secretly won. This is human nature. We should never, therefore, carry over into the policy of treating the understanding the reserve which true policy requires in the treatment of the feelings. Each should

be managed according to its kind. A proposition for the intellect may be even the more necessary, because of a reserved aim at the sensibilities.

(3) Therefore the omission of all forms of proposition is not necessary, even when the application is concealed till the end. A proposition may involve your conclusion without stating it. Your proposition may announce a theme in the general: your conclusion may disclose a specific truth on that theme. Your proposition may be an interrogative: your conclusion may be its answer. Your proposition may ask attention to some thoughts suggested by the text: your conclusion may educe results which the hearers would not have tolerated at the outset.

Note a single illustration of one of these methods in which concealment is wisely practiced, yet in which a definite proposition is stated and held as a center of interest. The doctrine of eternal punishment is unpopular, we may suppose, among your hearers. You wish to preach it, yet would not arouse their prejudices needlessly. You therefore approach it gradually by a discussion which covers it from sight till your conclusion reveals it behind impregnable defenses. Must you withhold a proposition in order to do this? By no means. Adopt the text, "Are not my ways equal?" Announce as your proposition this, to consider some illustrations of the reasonableness of God's ways with men in certain things of which men often complain. This is a harmless statement, offensive to none, yet sufficiently definite to give to the intellect of hearers a center of attention and interest. You proceed to develop it by a cumulative series of remarks. You observe: 1. That God is reasonable in creating man without giving him a choice as to his own existence

2. That God is reasonable in subjecting man to a government of law; 3. That God is reasonable in placing man on probation under law; 4. That God is reasonable in sustaining law by adequate sanction of which he only is the proper judge; 5. That God is reasonable in the reprieve of violators of law by a scheme of grace, of which, also, he alone can intelligently judge; 6. That God is reasonable in executing the sanctions of law against transgressors; 7. Especially is God reasonable in the punishment of sinners who have violated both law and grace.

In a cumulative discourse of this kind, your final object is reached by a gradual approach, which may be made to cover the whole of the popular objection to the doctrine of retribution. Yet a proposition is announced which conceals that final object till you are prepared to declare it advantageously. True, the proposition is not the most specific conceivable; but it is sufficiently so to answer the hearer's natural and irrepressible craving for a center of attention, and to be a protection against rambling thought. I repeat, therefore, it is not necessary to a politic concealment of the aim of a sermon that all form of proposition be withheld.

(4) To withhold all form of proposition is an impediment to the policy of concealment. To withhold a proposition implies an obvious concealment. The fact of concealment in discourse is a stroke of art. A disclosure of the fact that the drift of a discourse is concealed excites distrust. Our minds instinctively brace themselves against a hidden purpose on the part of a speaker, if the hint be given us that he has a hidden purpose. Therefore the perfection of art requires that the policy of concealment be itself concealed, and this demands that some form of proposition

be announced as a center of interest to the mind of the hearer.

III. The third general topic in the discussion of propositions is the inquiry, What principles should regulate the substance of a proposition? The substance of a proposition may be regarded in three relations, — the relation of its elements to each other, the relation of the whole to the text, and the relation of the whole to the sermon.

1st, The elements of a proposition should be so related to each other, that they shall be susceptible of unity of discussion. No art requires oneness of character in its productions more imperatively than that of oratorical discourse. A good discourse is a structure, — one structure, a whole, not a congeries of alien particles.

(1) A sermon, therefore, comes under all the laws of unity which regulate discourse in other forms. As we have seen that nothing is a sermon which is not a structure, so every part of it, if perfectly formed, must be constructed. Every part gravitates to every other part. The demand for this grows out of the very nature of persuasive speech, and is inevitable in every mind. The demand is one which reason always makes upon reason. If not, why should incoherent speech be a sign of delirium?

(2) The foundation of unity of discourse must be laid in unity of proposition. The parts can not gravitate towards each other without resultant forces which meet in a center. The most vigorous elements in a sermon, if they have not the centripetal attraction, can only jostle and defeat each other. Thoughts let loose in speech, and left there, neutralize each other. The more powerful they are individually, the weaker they

are as a whole. The more intense the emotions in which they are draped, the more frigid is their effect upon intelligent purpose. Of such purpose they have none. They can move a hearer only to a state of bewilderment.

Hence it is, that, in the history of the pulpit, those discourses which commonly produce epileptic and cataleptic phenomena in the audience are rambling discourses. Thought without an aim, emotion without a purpose, stimulation of the sensibilities without intelligent gravitation to an object let loose upon feeble minds the most unmanageable tendencies to pathological distortion. A center of thought rigidly adhered to, even in the wildest of ranting discourse, would tend to preserve the mental balance of hearers by the mere conservatism of intellect in its control of feeling. Animal sensibilities can scarcely master a mind which is thinking intensely and consecutively to one point. Such a singleness of point in discourse is gained by a proposition. The first constructive idea we can form of a discourse must be an idea of its proposition, and that, as Vinet remarks, we always assume to have been one, and but one. We never ask what were the subjects. We assume unity, never plurality, unless we mean to burlesque a rambling speaker. The reason is that nature prompts us to seek the germ of a discourse in its proposition. Fénelon only expresses the same truth in another form, when he says, "The discourse is the proposition unfolded, and the proposition is the discourse condensed."

Another phenomenon which deserves notice is that, if the discourse has no unity of theme, a good hearer instinctively struggles to create it and insert it as the discourse proceeds. Something he must have to put

under the superstructure, and support its weight by some sort of logical form. We observe, therefore, one of the axioms of homiletics in the fact before us, — that the elements of a proposition must be so related to each other as to be susceptible of unity of discussion. A sermon may be devoid of unity, if a proposition is not; but it surely will be devoid of unity, if the proposition is.

(3) The inquiry arises here, Does not this requisition of unity of proposition restrict freedom of discourse? Not at all; for unity of proposition admits of every variety of discourse which has an object. It restrains only discourse at random. In illustration of this we must observe that unity itself admits of great diversity of kind. Vinet specifies twelve varieties of unity, giving rise to as many kinds of consecutive and intelligent discourse. The whole subject of unity is simplified by recalling the four radical varieties of composition by which we have classified sermons. Explanation, proof, illustration, persuasion, — this enumeration is exhaustive. A preacher who speaks with an object must do one or more of these four things, and only these. Observe, then, how the subject of unity in preaching clarifies itself by adjustment to these radical diversities of composition. From the nature of the case, there must be four fundamental varieties of unity in discourse, and therefore in propositions; and there can be no more. Let us note these varieties.

First, a proposition may admit of a logical unity of discourse. It may suggest a process of argument; and the discourse, if true to its object, will be an argumentative production. Its aim will be to prove one thing. But this logical unity is susceptible of very great diversity. One variety is that in which the object of

discourse is to consider the objections to a doctrine. Another variety is that in which a truth is proved, and inferences from it are considered. Again: unity of logical aim may be consistent with a consideration of truths mutually related. Still further: logical unity admits of a combination of truth with other processes as subordinates. Explanation may be a preliminary to the proof of a doctrine. The complications are innumerable in which a logical unity inheres in great diversity; yet in the proposition itself we detect perfect unity of aim.

Secondly, a proposition may be adjusted to a didactic unity of discourse. The aim of a discourse being explanation, not proof, that aim may be single; and, if the sermon obeys it, a perfect oneness will result in the whole structure. This didactic unity also may be unimpaired by variety in the elements of the proposition. Jeremy Taylor discourses upon "growth in grace, with its proper instruments and signs." Here one thing is treated in certain relations, and these relations introduce variety. Unity of aim is not impaired by plurality of elements. Again: the didactic, like the logical unity admits of the combination of topics mutually related. Bourdaloue preached upon "the severity and mildness of Christian law." This is a dual proposition, but dual only in form. Each of the two elements is the complement of the other, and therein consists the unity of theme. The didactic even exceeds the logical unity in the freedom it gives to the range of discourse. It admits of a union, in one proposition, of contrasted truths. Massillon treats in one sermon "the death of the sinner and the death of the righteous." Jeremy Taylor yokes into one proposition "lukewarmness and zeal." Antithetical propositions may be the most compact units. Antithesis is often intense in the singleness of its im-

pression. Lightning is never at other times so vivid as at midnight. Didactic unity without losing itself may subside into a textual unity. The singleness of a sermon must often consist in the preacher's fidelity to one text. For the inspired thought, either in its elements or its order, he is not responsible. A discourse is one if it develops fully the force of one text, and no more. Therefore a proposition is one, if it invites attention to the teachings of one text.

Thirdly, a proposition may be fitted to a picturesque unity of discourse. Did you never listen to a sermon of which the details would appear to a superficial criticism to be chaotic in their confusion, but which still left upon your mind a burning impression of one thing? Did it explain any thing? No. Did it prove any thing? No. But did it not intensify something? Was not the last charge you could bring against it that of talk at random? The sermon was illustrative. But what kind of unity had it, or could it have? Precisely the unity of a good painting. As in a painting variety of personage may exist, and lights and shadows, diversities of form and feature and drapery and attitude, even contrasts of coloring and expression and character, yet all may be grouped so as to be vividly one in design and in effect, so an illustrative sermon may admit of infinitely varied details with no loss of a genuine unity. It is not the unity of a dialectic or a didactic aim; but for immediate impression, especially upon the popular mind, it may be more intense than either. The effect may be like vision. The unpretending proposition may be to the hearing of the sermon what the optic nerve is to the brain.

Examples of this kind of unity are found in Jeremy Taylor's discourse on the "Apples of Sodom," and again

on "Doomsday-book," and in Professor Park's discourse on "the character of Judas," and again on "the character of Peter." Such sermons are pictures. We must look for the point of unity in them, as we look for the interpretation of a painting. Our eye must be adjusted to the right focus. We must judge as of perspective. Very many sermons which a mincing critic would condemn find the key to their structure in the single fact that they are rhetorical paintings. Their unity is æsthetic. It may be rather suggested than defined by very simple forms of proposition.

This picturesque unity of discourse, like the other forms of unity which have been named, is susceptible of variety in unity. Even the proposition of such a discourse may suggest such variety. Rev. Albert Barnes once preached on the "Life and Times of Isaiah." The unity of the structure was not impaired by representing the prophet thus as the central figure to be illustrated by his surroundings. Even contrast may be contained and expressed in such a proposition without loss to its unity. A discourse was once delivered on "a comparison of St. John in the Isle of Patmos, and Napoleon at St. Helena." The sermon was a series of contrasts between the two exiles, of which the proposition gave an unmistakable hint. True, the statement of the theme of a picturesque discourse does not admit of as great variety in unity as that of a didactic or an argumentative sermon; but the difference is in statement only, not in the substance of the theme. All picturesque art is made up of hints of truth. More is meant than words define. It is not unbecoming, therefore, if the proposition of a picturesque discourse partakes of the same fragmentary character.

Fourthly, a proposition may be adjusted to a purely

oratorical unity of discourse. "The practice of religion enforced by reason" is the theme of one of Dr. South's sermons. What is the point of unity in this? Argument, explanation, illustration are found in the sermon, but as subordinate elements only. They do not express the aim of the sermon. Yet that is expressed in the proposition. The object is direct persuasion to a religious life. This is a purely oratorical aim. This kind of unity characterizes a very large class of discourses in the practice of the pulpit.

These four radical varieties of unity — the logical, the didactic, the picturesque, and the oratorical — are exhaustive of the analysis of unity in discourse. From the nature of rhetorical composition, it follows that these are the fundamental varieties, and that there can be no more. The entire question of unity of discourse, which often seems blindfold in rhetorical discussion, may be, in any case, determined by bringing the discourse to the test of the inquiry, Can its materials be all brought under the cover of a proposition, which, in any of these senses of the term, is one? On the other hand, the unity of a proposition may, in any case, be tested by the inquiry, Does it admit of a discussion which shall be, in any of these senses, one? All the freedom of range in discussion which is possible in speaking to a purpose may be illustrated in sermons constructed upon these models of oneness in proposition.

But it is often said, and truly, that all the materials of a sermon can not always be brought within the range of a unique proposition. A certain class of evangelists are never weary of decrying the scholastic training for the pulpit, because they claim that it binds the preacher by rules of unity which hamper freedom. "I want to let my tongue loose in preaching," says one of this class

of divines, "and say what comes to me: I must utter whatever the Holy Ghost shall put into my mouth."

(4) This leads us to observe that the great excellence of the scholastic requisition of unity in a proposition is that it does restrain heterogeneous discourse. That which "comes to me" should not be uttered, if it is nothing to the purpose. The Holy Spirit is the author of order, not of confusion. He no more prompts to disorderly, inconsecutive discourse, than he prompts to raving. If a preacher's materials can not be built into one kind of structure, for one purpose, they ought not to be thrust together at one delivery. Piling such materials in layers, and capping them with a text, and adding the appendage of an exhortation, does not make a sermon of them.

A preacher at court in the time of the Stuarts once proposed to consider as the theme of his sermon three things: "First, the justice of God; secondly, the mercy of God; thirdly, that the actions of princes are not to be inquired into." Here is juxtaposition of materials, but no possible unity. What one proposition could cover them? what one text? what one aim of applicatory discourse? It is an admirable test of the materials gathered for a projected sermon, to inquire, Can they all be compressed under the shelter of a proposition which shall have unity of substance? If not, they will make but a rambling or disjointed sermon. Like will produce its like. The unity of a sermon is to be provided for chiefly in the proposition. "Do not disturb the unity of military thought in Italy. One bad general is better than two good ones;" — so wrote Napoleon to the French Directory. The art of discourse requires that which is equivalent to unity of command in a campaign; that is, oneness of proposition.

2d, Having thus regarded the elements of a proposition in their relations to each other, it would be in place now to consider them in their relation, as a whole, to the text, observing as a second principle respecting the substance of the proposition, that it should be congruous with the text. It is an excellence peculiar to the themes of the pulpit, that they can be formed in keeping with inspired authorities. Proposition and text should sustain each other. If the proposition is the trunk from which the body of the sermon expands itself, the text is the root from which, in some sense, the proposition should grow. To avoid repetition, I refer you here to the discussion which we have already presented of the pertinency of the text. In the treatment of that theme the topic of congruity between text and proposition was sufficiently considered.

LECTURE XXII.

THE PROPOSITION: SUBSTANCE.

3D, We pass now to the relation of a proposition as a whole to the body of the sermon; observing as a third principle respecting the substance of the proposition, that it should be identical with the body of the sermon.

(1) A proposition should not comprise more material than can be impressively discussed in one sermon. The necessity of this caution will be seen from remarking, in the first place, the tendency of imperfectly disciplined minds to indulge in excessive latitude of subject. What is the result of such excessive propositions? Usually the discussion falls short of the proposition. Sometimes, however, the sermon is sacrificed to the preacher's strain to equal his proposition. It ceases to be a discourse: it becomes an abstract of a discourse. Elaborate it may be, but as a table of contents is elaborate. Arguments are stated which there is no time to amplify. Facts are affirmed which there is no room to prove; or proved, which there is no space to illustrate. Conclusions are reached logically which the bulk of the structure will not suffer to be impressed by any natural method of application. Inferences are named of which even the logical accuracy is not made obvious. The structure is not discourse: it is only a mammoth skeleton of discourse. Like Bun

yan's Apollyon, it "straddles over the whole breadth of the way."

In other cases, the result of excessive latitude of theme is the sacrifice of the vitality of the sermon by commonplace in details. Generalities in thought naturally take on hackneyed forms in style. These flow in monotonous succession, like the fall of a mill-stream. Weigh them down with a sympathetic delivery, and you will have the clerical humdrum in comical perfection. Hence have arisen dull, ponderous, indolent, corpulent bodies of divinity in sermons, which remind one of a child's first attempts at composition on duty, friendship, truth, education, industry, time, eternity. Such discourses are not necessarily an indication of a feeble or inactive intellect. They betoken only a mistake in rhetorical policy. The most mercurial minds may be cheated of all their originality of invention by the selection of one of these oceanic themes.

This leads us to observe, further, that restriction of subject assists the invention of original materials. A youthful writer is often led to the choice of an excessive bulk of substance, if he chooses it consciously, by the belief that vastness of subject will insure abundance of materials, and that for him, in his inexperience, it may be necessary in order to secure sufficiency of materials. Just the reverse of this is true in fact. If your inventive power is sluggish, restriction of theme will stimulate it: if it is active, restriction of theme will give it scope. Invention exercised on a restricted proposition is microscopic. It discovers much, which, in ranging over a broader surface, it would lose. It is penetrative. It goes in to the heart of a theme. The mind labors, if the expression may be allowed, perpendicularly, not horizontally, not

obliquely. The result of such labor is that kind of discussion which is the opposite of discursive. The sermon impresses a hearer with the conviction that the marrow of the subject has been reached. The preacher speaks from a full experience of its richness in his own mind. Such preaching seems inspired.

Observe a few illustrations of this stimulus to invention from restriction of theme. Do not certain packed propositions quicken your thinking upon them in the very hearing? Listen to Dr. South: "Religion is the best reason of State;" "Good intentions are no excuse for bad actions;" "Concealment of sin is no security to the sinner." Do not such aphoristic propositions invite thought? Hear Reinhard: "Faithfulness in present duty qualifies for higher functions;" "The instruments which God chooses are not such as man would have chosen;" "The temptations attending opportunities of doing good." Who does not feel that he could enjoy constructing a sermon on any one of these themes? The singleness of them is interesting: the compactness of them is quickening. Yet the whole of them, and as many more, have often been spread out sprawling, and with ample room to spare, in one flabby discourse on the Importance of Religion.

Moreover, restriction of subject has a tendency to freshen stale truths. "Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee;" — a stale text is this. How shall we elude a stale sermon? Thousands of discourses have been preached from this text, on procrastination of repentance. Can we get any thing better from it? Study the text for a moment in its surroundings. From the context, it appears that Felix was deeply interested in St. Paul's preaching. What was it which attracted him so greatly at

the first? It was the "faith in Christ," we are told; that is, it was the theory of the new religion. What was it in the second hearing which led the governor to give the polite rebuff to the Apostle? It was the preaching of "righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come." That is, when the preacher began to develop the practical bearings of Christianity upon certain sins of which Felix was notoriously guilty, then it was that the message was so coolly given, "Go thy way." Therefore we educe from the text this proposition, that "Men who are deeply interested in religion as a theory often revolt from it as an experience." Are not the stale text and the commonplace subject, by such restriction of range, freshened to the thought of both preacher and hearer?

This vitalizing of stale themes is one of the great arts of the pulpit. Avoid such themes we can not. Treat them in the rut of centuries of preaching we dare not. We must accept them for dead truths; and all the ingenuity of homiletic art, and the magnetic force and the prophetic inspiration of the preacher must be called into requisition to resuscitate them. We must brood over such subjects with the intensity of our own being, as the prophet stretched himself upon the dead body of the widow's child, till a new life is breathed into them. Any expedient which can assist that inspiration may be vital to our success. One such expedient is that of a retrenchment of theme for the sake of concentration of force.

Further: restriction of subject is of special value to the interest of doctrinal preaching. Doctrinal preaching and dull preaching are, in the popular estimate, synonymous. We deceive ourselves, if we charge the unpopularity of doctrinal sermons to the account of

depravity, and leave it there. The prime cause of the popular distaste for theological discussion in the pulpit is its want of certain elements which are essential to vivacity. Study the experience of the pulpit candidly, and you will discover that audiences will listen attentively to any thing which seems to them to be alive.

Why did such events as the burning of the "Lexington," the wreck of the "Arctic," the duel between the "Merrimack" and the "Monitor," and the conflagrations at Chicago and Boston start up all over the land discussions of the doctrine of a special Providence? Not only in pulpits and prayer-meetings, but in secular newspapers, in magazines, in railway-cars, in steamboats, at coroner's inquests, and at tea-tables, within three months after each of those events, men wrote and talked enough on the doctrine of Providence to make up the sermons of a lifetime. Goethe tells us that a similar state of things all over Europe followed the earthquake at Lisbon. Was it dull talking and stale reading? Did men go to sleep over it? Why not? Simply because it was religious doctrine born into real life, and reproduced in living speech. Men felt the need of it; and they gave and took it in the forms of real life. The same is true of any other doctrine. Make the doctrine live, and live men and women will accept it as their spiritual food. Truth or falsehood, it makes little difference. Any thing can obtain an interested hearing which has any mental oxygen in it.

Infidelity will outstrip orthodoxy in any community, sooner or later, if all the electric force seems to be given over to error, and truth has to bear all the dead and dying and decaying things of civilized life, and to struggle through the consequent mephitic vapors. Let the resources of learning, the courage of inquiry,

the energy of reform, a vitalized style be found in infidel literature, and there only, while the religious press falls behind and below in these tokens of mental quickening, and we must not croak over the degeneracy of the times, if truth goes under for a while, and error rides the wave. This world is, in the main, a living world. Life craves life. Thought runs to thought. Originality springs to greet originality. Awakened readers clamor for quickened authors. Live hearers will throng upon live speakers. The pulpit, in this respect, is subject to no hardship. It only comes under the common law of all living thought. The Holy Spirit does not work miracles to give success to dullness.

We must, therefore, meet fairly the question, How shall life be infused into doctrinal discussions? Many things are requisite, but at present we are concerned with one only. It is the rhetorical expedient of restricting the substance of the theme for the sake of stimulating the invention of the preacher. A standing grievance in the pulpit on this subject is that of attempting too much in one discourse. Rarely, if ever, should a standard doctrine of theology be presented entire in one sermon. What is the necessary effect of such crowding of material? Recall your own experience as listeners. Have you not heard sermons of this kind which were only synopses? They had not a fragment of any oratorical element in them. They were abstracts of theological treatises. A sermon, so called, was once preached in Boston, in which the nature, the necessity, the proofs, the extent, and the moral influences of the Atonement were all treated in succession. It was one of the most unimpressive discourses I ever heard, yet on a theme imperial in its grandeur. It was delivered

to a most listless handful of an audience. It fell like lead. No fault of the hearer was it, if he was neither sanctified nor converted by such a sermon. Preaching under such a load of subject is like swimming in a diving-bell. Such synopses of theology are not made for the pulpit any more than the diving-dress is made for speed.

If preachers should treat every other class of themes in this suffocating method, all preaching would soon become as lifeless and as unpopular as much of the so-called doctrinal preaching is to-day. On the other hand, if you will preach upon doctrines as you preach upon duties, by analyzing the themes in bulk, and retrenching the range of single topics, and thus securing opportunity to use your materials as you would use other means of moral impression, you will find no other themes of the pulpit so popular as the doctrines of the theological system. Dr. Griffin's most powerful discourses were doctrinal discussions. Look at the "Park-street Lectures," doctrinal sermons every one. They were so high-toned in their severity of legal preaching as to win for the junction of Tremont and Park Streets the nickname of "Brimstone Corner." Yet they were preached to crowded and entranced assemblies. Dr. Nettleton's most popular sermons were upon "election" and "decrees."

Dr. Chalmers's sermons on depravity were delivered to enraptured crowds; and the few in the windows reported fragments to the multitude which filled the street below. One reason of the popularity of those discourses was that he threw aside the historic formulæ of the doctrine, and restricted attention in each sermon to one leading thought, repeating and reiterating that thought in such variety of rhetorical forms that his

cumbrous style was no impediment to its reception, but a help rather. It operated like a sledge-hammer to drive the matter home. The series numbers seventeen discourses. Listen to some of the propositions: "The Necessity of the Holy Spirit to give Effect to the Preaching of the Gospel;" "An Estimate of the Morality which is without Godliness;" "The Judgment of Men compared with the Judgment of God;" "The Folly of Men who measure Themselves by Themselves;" "The Affection of Moral Esteem towards God;" "The Power of the Gospel to dissolve the Enmity of the Heart against God."

Compare these propositions with the stereotyped method of discussing the doctrine of depravity. They could all of them, and several more, be compressed into a sermon in which a preacher should announce as his subject the doctrine of total depravity. "First, what is not the true doctrine; secondly, what is the true doctrine; thirdly, biblical proofs of the doctrine; fourthly, the evidences of the doctrine from reason and from experience; fifthly, applicatory inferences and remarks." Hearers of such a sermon would retire,—the pious hearers silent, or wishing, for their children's sake, that they could have more "practical" preaching, and the profane hearers grumbling, or scoffing at antiquated theology. Chalmers, on the other hand, sent home his hearers of both classes delighted with the attractiveness, and impressed with the power, of the same theology, even in the forms of Scotch Calvinism. His power to do this was due, in part, to his taking time to do it, and concentrating his invention on fragments of the truth, instead of massing the whole in one unwieldy and indigestible bulk.

Preach by the scholastic model, and you doom your-

self to drudgery, and your hearers to somnolence. Preach by the (if I may coin the word) Chalmerian model, and, with precisely the same ultimate materials, you become a genius to your hearers for your originality, and they become converts at your will. The distinction between doctrinal and practical sermons, by which the one is the synonym of dullness and the other of life, vanishes. Both are alive, because you give yourself room to put life into them.

The principle advocated in these remarks suggests the inquiry whether the more comprehensive method of discussion is ever expedient in the pulpit. This leads me to observe that comprehensive themes may sometimes be demanded by speciality of occasion. The discourse for which Rev. Albert Barnes was first arraigned for heresy before the Presbyterian courts was upon substantially the whole system of the gospel. It was entitled "The Way of Salvation." Its object was to present in a single bird's-eye view the whole plan of God in saving men. That sermon he afterwards amplified into thirty-six discourses, which he published as a volume of nearly five hundred pages.

In like manner any preacher may find special occasion for presenting an entire doctrine, or even a group of kindred doctrines, in one sermon. One may wish to run over the keys of all those doctrines which appeal to fear, for the sake of showing the legitimacy of that emotion in religious experience. Occasionally, to show that a doctrine is one of a group of doctrines, and that without it, the symmetry of divine truth would be defective, may be a valuable work. One of the most convincing proofs of the truth of eternal punishment, to thoughtful inquirers, is the fact of the necessity of it to a certain balance with other truths of divine revela-

tion. Depravity, Regeneration, Atonement, and Eternal Retribution form a quadrilateral system of theology. No one of them can be obliterated without loss to the rest. They are in keeping with each other. The intensity of each requires the intensity of the others to preserve an equilibrium of moral impression. To show that an endless retribution is one of such a fourfold group of truths may be, to a certain class of thinkers, the only decisive proof of its reality.

All such examples are exceptional. They are justified, if at all, by some speciality of aim. They are not thorough discussions of all the truth presented. They would have no moral force if they were the common product of the pulpit. They need to be preceded and followed by more analytic discussions requiring restriction of theme.

(2) Passing now from the topic of retrenchment of proposition, let us observe further, that the substance of a proposition should not comprise less material than is sufficient for impressive discussion in one sermon. A theme of discourse may be diminutive in itself considered. A German preacher once discoursed on the best method of manufacturing vinegar. Another preached on benevolence in the care of bees. A pastor in Massachusetts preached on the sin of raising apples for cider; another, on the evil of lounging on the door-steps of the church during the intermission of divine service on the Sabbath. A preacher in New Jersey preached on the marriage of Adam. Each of these subjects, except the first, had a religious or a moral idea as its basis. Even upon the first, a useful, though acid, discourse might be delivered. Yet it is obvious that intrinsically they are puny themes. A preacher's mind is in a molecular mood in selecting such themes. They

are scarcely crumbs from a Master's table. Yet in more doubtful cases a discussion may suffer from excessive restriction of subject. A subject is to be suspected of this defect, if, in planning a discourse upon it. you find yourself straining to dignify it by force of style. A good subject sustains the style, not the style the subject.

Again: a theme may be diminutive relatively to the materials amassed for its discussion. It was a mark of prolific genius that Cowper could evolve so long and so rich a poem as "The Task," and one which entered at once into the rank of the standards of the language, from the subject of "A Sofa," accidentally suggested to him by Mrs. Unwin. Yet such productions are unnatural structures. They build materials in unnatural proportions. They are pyramids on apexes. They do not grow out of a symmetrical taste. To such a taste it is no defense of a diminutive subject to say that it has remote and underground connections with themes the noblest and most profound. All thought has such connections. But the highest inventive power will not, therefore, exhaust itself by choosing diminutive centers of thought. An Indian tobacco-sign has remote resemblance to the anatomy and muscular development of a man. But an artist does not, for that reason, choose it as his model of an Apollo. Nothing is greatest which is eccentric. Michael Angelo is said to have abandoned painting on canvas, because of his disgust at the pettiness of it as compared with painting in fresco. Fresco-painting, he said, was the art for heroes, because no other gave scope to the execution of great designs. So genius in literature craves a certain naturalness of things to things in its productions. On this principle perfect discourse demands naturalness of materials to

subject in this element of size. That can not be a comely structure in which immense or profound thought hangs as a pendant to a proposition of which the first and the last impression is trivial.

Further: a theme of discourse may be diminutive relatively to the dignity of the pulpit. Not every useful theme is sufficiently useful to deserve a place in the pulpit. Not every useful theme is religious enough for the pulpit. Not every religious theme is important enough for the pulpit. No other spot on earth is so environed by associations of dignity as a Christian pulpit. Its subjects should bear proportions to such associations. The popular instinct, which prompts a man to lift his hat on entering a place of worship, should be honored by a preacher in the selection of a subject of discourse which deserves such an act of popular reverence. We need something of the character of command in the proposition of a sermon. The first impression of it, and the last, and the dignity of it, therefore, in the memory, should be such as to sustain the pulpit in its appeal to the reverence of men. For this end a certain bulk of substance is essential. We should often inquire whether a restricted theme is not more properly a division than a proposition. That which is necessary as a division, or valuable as an application, may have no such commanding importance as to be worthy of a place at the head of a sermon.

Yet again: a theme of discourse may be diminutive relatively to the claims of other subjects upon the pulpit. Time in the pulpit is invaluable. No preacher can afford to squander an hour of it. The vital, the necessary, the imperial topics of homiletic discussion are more in number than the opportunities of preaching in any one lifetime. Multitudes of such themes throng

every pulpit. Great themes are always waiting for a hearing. Young preachers sometimes fear a dearth of subjects in looking forward to a life's work. That is the last thing you need to fear, if you are studious preachers. Dr. Archibald Alexander is reported, though I doubt the fact, to have advised a young minister, that, when he had exhausted his stock of subjects, he could always "pitch into Romanism." Never was advice more useless. "Pitch into" your Bibles, rather, would I say. Keep a commonplace book of fertile texts and suggestive themes, and you will find that no other inventory of your intellectual property will crowd your pulpit so soon or so hopelessly. Your despair will soon be, not "What shall I preach?" but "What may I omit in preaching?" Ten subjects for one which you can find time and place for in your preaching will you accumulate in your inventory. Select, then, the choice themes of discussion, and only those. Of important themes, choose the most important. Of prolific themes, give place to the most prolific. Deal only with superlatives. Accept only the aristocracy of thought. Apply mercilessly the law of natural selection. Let only that live which must live.

The Rev. James Alexander says on this subject, "I am impressed with the importance of choosing great subjects for sermons. . . . They should be the great themes which have agitated the world, which we should like to have settled before we die, which we should ask an Apostle about if he were here. They are to general Scripture truth what great mountains are to geography. . . . A man should begin early with great subjects. An athlete gains might only by great exertions." In this view of the matter, then, it is clear that no pulpit

has room for diminutive propositions. We should not be deterred from the adoption of this policy by the fact that the great themes are the hackneyed themes of the pulpit. They doubtless are such. This is an inevitable evil which must be met, but it is less than it seems. The great subjects are not the same to any two minds. No two preachers would treat them alike, unless one or both should borrow. The range of suggestion of a great theme is immeasurable. The opportunity for versatile treatment is immense.

Mark the analogy of the work of the pulpit in this respect with other great arts. The great sculptors and painters have chosen the same scenes and characters. Their fame rests, for the most part, on a few great subjects; yet no two productions are alike. Go through the galleries of Italy, and you will find that the really great works of painting and sculpture are on very few subjects, and these often repeated. So the great tragedies of the drama revolve in dramatic passion a few great ideas. From Æschylus and Sophocles downward, the greatness of the drama has not consisted in the multitude of its ideas. Shakespeare originated but very few plots. He elaborated those which had already proved their power over the human sympathies. The same principle holds good in preaching. The great subjects, though few, never lose their power if treated by a fresh mind. The need of them never grows old. Put your soul into them, and they are always fresh.

Further: a theme of discourse may be diminutive relatively to symmetry of impression. Some propositions it is not safe to divide, and discuss on different occasions. The objections to a doctrine may be in themselves an ample subject for one sermon; but it might be unwise to construct a discourse of such

materials, reserving the answer to a subsequent time. This experiment was once tried by a preacher to the students of a New England college. In the morning he delivered a sermon composed almost wholly of objections to a certain doctrine, and gave notice that he would answer them in the afternoon. He laid out his strength upon an effort of candor; stated the skeptical argument in full, as if he were himself the skeptic; and ended in the triumphant consciousness that he would demolish the whole structure in a few hours. The students enjoyed the skeptical preacher hugely. The afternoon came, and with it a furious thunder-storm while the church-bells were ringing. Very few students were present; and the preacher had the credit of having delivered an unanswered, if not unanswerable argument against his own faith.

Again: certain subjects contain opposite elements of impression which symmetry may forbid us to sunder. They lie over against each other. They are fortresses which have an outlook to the east and to the west. One of such twin doctrines discussed alone may not be truthful. As the human body has double brains, so the human mind has affinities for these double truths. In some connections, to separate them is like looking at one only of the two sections of a stereoscopic picture. Finally: the force of cumulative arguments may be weakened by dismemberment. Cumulative argument depends on continuity of impression. Separate the links of the chain and the magnetic accumulation of impression is impracticable: cumulation demands unity.

LECTURE XXIII.

THE PROPOSITION: SUBSTANCE, FORMS.

LET the suggestions of the last lecture concerning the relation of a proposition to the sermon be now applied by observing certain indecisive reasons for retrenchment. We often meet with inducements to frame a restricted proposition, which may, but which may not, be good reasons for such a policy. All that can be said of them, in general, is that they are not conclusive.

One of these indecisive reasons is fruitfulness of theme. We may be beguiled into the policy of restriction by the excitement of composition. Under that excitement a subject opens luxuriantly. In the midst of the discussion we may seem to be more distant from the end than at the beginning. A traveler never seems to himself so far away from everywhere as when he is in mid-ocean in a gale. Fruitfulness of theme may be good reason for retrenchment; but it may not. Do not trust implicity to the glow of composition. Your original survey of the subject in a calmer mood may be the more trustworthy.

For the same reason, convenience in composition is no conclusive defense of a restricted theme. This will often tempt you. You will state a subject in its fullness; but you will often find that composing is unexpectedly easy in the first half of the discourse. You

come upon a ledge of soft stone in the quarry; you prefer to work it for the ease of the working. Hence you fall back, and retrench your proposition. In the majority of such cases the restrictive policy for such a reason is unwise. The original bulk of subject, treated by a wise selection from the superabundant materials, and packed well into one sermon, would do more execution at the time, and would live longer in the memory of hearers, than if it were bisected, and expanded into the double sermon which has been so common in the history of the American pulpit. The soft ledge in the quarry is probably not the most desirable material with which to build. Select materials from a full mine are the ideal matter for a sermon.

Another inconclusive argument for retrenching a proposition is the desire to exhaust the subject proposed The idea of exhausting a subject as distinct from a proposition we must often abandon. Some subjects we can not exhaust. The best subjects we can not exhaust. Yet these are subjects which may require a large area of proposition to give even an impressive fragment of them. But some minds are so constructed, that they can not traverse a large area of material without losing all sense of its limitations, and therefore they ramble on indefinitely. Have you not found preachers and authors who never seem to know when to let go of a subject? They cling to it with a tenacity which is exhaustive to themselves, and afflictive to their hearers and readers. Such a mind was that of Dr. Owen. Such was that of Dr. Charnock. The English pulpit of their day was distinguished by nothing more generally than by pertinacity of discussion. The sermon which Baxter preached before King Charles II. could not have been recited in less than two hours.

Charnock's sermon on "the duty and reward of bounty to the poor" required three hours and a half. We must not feel obliged to hunt down a subject into all its possible lurking-places. In preaching, as in common life, it is the fool who is able to utter all his mind. Yet we must not, in order to escape this extreme, dwarf a proposition. Give to it its natural dimensions, and then expand the sermon to those, and with that be content.

(3) We have observed of the substance of the proposition, that it should not contain more material than can be well discussed in one sermon, and that it should not contain less material than is sufficient for impressive discussion in one sermon. These principles suggest a third, — that the proposition should not contain other material than that which is discussed in the sermon. An obvious yet not uncommon defect in sermons is that their propositions do not express the real topics of discourse. The proposition may promise one thing: the sermon may realize another. Three forms of this defect deserve notice. One is that in which the proposition does not even contain the subject of discourse. Want of accuracy in analysis of a subject, or heedlessness in its definition, may lead a preacher to announce as his theme that which he has no intention to discuss. This occurs more frequently than one would suppose it to be possible to an educated mind. You propose, for example, to treat of the privilege of fellowship with Christ; but in fact you treat of the duty of fellowship with Christ. What is the difference? It is the difference between an appeal to conscience and an appeal to the sense of liberty. This represents a considerable class of sermons, in which we make an unconscious transition from the higher plane of liberty

to the lower plane of law. Have you not been sensible of this in listening to sermons? A subject as stated has promised a cheering side of truth; as developed, it has insensibly veered around to the sterner side. Beginning with "may," it has ended with "must."

Another form of the defect before us is that in which the method of discussion promised in the proposition is not that realized in the development. One preacher proposes to consider the nature of repentance, but the thing he discusses is the duty of repenting. What is the fault? Not only is there here an unwarranted change of subject, but a necessary change of rhetorical character in the discussion. In discussing the nature of a thing, you must explain: in discussing the duty of the thing, you must either prove or persuade. These are very different rhetorical processes, — different to the extent of producing a radical difference of discourse. The difficulty originates in a want of a thorough digestion of the materials before the proposition is framed. The remedy lies in the construction of a well-framed plan of discourse at the outset. Keep always in mind that a proposition is a promise: it demands foresight of your means of payment.

A third variety of the defect under consideration is that in which the proposition suggests a different point of unity from that which the discourse develops. What is the point of unity in a discourse? It is that point to which all the impressions of the discourse converge. It corresponds to the hero of a drama or of an epic poem. It is to a sermon what Hamlet and Othello are to the tragedies which bear their names. Must a sermon have a point of unity? Yes, if well constructed. It lies in the nature of persuasive discourse. Such discourse is a structure; it must have an aim; that aim

must gather into itself all the forces of impression which the discourse creates. Must, then, the unity of a proposition and the unity of a discussion coincide? Certainly: there can be no perfect discourse without this coincidence. A proposition is but a figure-head to a sermon, if it does not suggest the true center of interest in the sermon.

Observe an illustration of this defect in secular literature. Shakespeare's "Julius Cæsar" has been censured by critics for its title, because Cæsar is not the central character of the drama. Brutus is its center of interest. Brutus gives unity to the plot. Around Brutus every other character and every event revolve. The intensity of the drama deepens with the development of the destiny of Brutus; and, when Brutus dies, nothing remains to sustain tragic impression. On this theory the title of the play should have been "Marcus Brutus." Dryden was so much impressed by the justice of this criticism, that he once edited the drama with an amended title: "Julius Cæsar, with the death of Brutus." This shows at least the need of identity between the center of interest in a work of art and the center expressed or hinted at in its title. The title should not look one way, and the work another. The same principle should regulate a proposition and its discussion in a persuasive discourse. The point of unity which the proposition suggests should be identical with that which the discourse develops.

The violation of this principle is often illustrated in sermons on the governmental theory of the Atonement. Discourses explaining and defending that theory are often framed upon some such propositions as these: "The Grounds of the Atonement of Christ;" "The Reasons for the Necessity of an Atonement;"

"Why is an Atonement necessary for the Pardon of Sin?" These forms of proposition, you will observe, are sweeping. They profess to cover the whole ground of the philosophy of the Atonement. Upon them, or their equivalents, hundreds of sermons have been preached, advancing the moral necessities of the universe under a government of law, as explanatory of the necessity and the fact of Christ's work in atoning for sin. What, now, is the defect in such propositions for such discourses? It is, as before, that proposition and sermon suggest different points of unity. Who knows that the governmental theory of the Atonement comprises all the grounds of it in the mind of God? Who can prove that it expresses, therefore, all the reasons for the necessity of the Atonement? Who can venture to affirm that it answers in full the question, "Why?" Who knows in full the reasons for the Atonement? Anybody can ask, but who can answer, the question "Why?" We know but in part: we see through a glass darkly. When we have traced the Atonement to the moral government of the universe, and that to the mind of God, we have followed the rivulet to the Amazon, and the Amazon to the sea, and we can go no further. We discern the coloring or the eddies of the stream a little distance from the shore, but beyond that we lose it in an infinite unknown. This example illustrates the importance of the defect we are considering, in its bearing upon some of the most critical discussions of the pulpit.

In judiciary decisions it is a standing principle never to anticipate a case, never to expand a principle beyond the necessities of the case in hand. Such should be the policy of the pulpit in the construction of propositions. Specify: specify: so far as the aim of the dis-

course admits, always specify. Propose no other than the thing to be realized. Volunteer nothing in the proposition which the sermon will not redeem. Meet in the proposition the exact demand of the discussion: no more, no less, no other.

IV. The fourth general topic in the discussion of propositions is that of their forms. In the treatment of this subject I must trust to your patience. The form of any thing in literature is a dry theme. Yet in practice you will find the form of the proposition to be a striking feature in the face of a sermon. It is not less significant in discourse than the nose is in the human countenance. Both are expressive of character. The principles of perfect form apply to propositions and divisions, to a great extent, alike. Therefore, although at present I shall speak mainly of propositions, in order to avoid repetition I shall sometimes illustrate by application of a principle to divisions.

1st, Let us, first, observe certain fundamental distinctions of form in the statement of propositions.

(1) Your collegiate studies have made you familiar with the distinction between logical and rhetorical propositions. A logical proposition affirms or denies. A rhetorical proposition states a subject for affirmation or denial. This, it should be remarked, is a distinction in form only. Any subject of discussion can be stated in either form. Still it is not, on this account, a matter of indifference which form of statement is selected. The foundation of the Hollis Professorship in Harvard College requires the incumbent to preach to the collegians on the divinity of Christ. The report was once current that the last occupant of the chair preached against the divinity of Christ. If he did so, the design of the founder was frustrated by so small a matter

as the difference between a rhetorical and a logical proposition.

(2) Logical propositions are distinguished as affirmative or negative in form. This, also, is a distinction in form only. You can state the same truth either by affirming it, or by denying its opposites. You may deny an error by affirming the opposite truth. Any logical truth can be clothed in either form. Yet often we may discern very positive rhetorical reasons for preferring one form to the other.

(3) Rhetorical propositions are distinguishable as declarative or interrogative in form. Dr. Barrow has a sermon on "the unsearchableness of God's judgments." Dr. Emmons proposes, as a theme of discourse, "to inquire whether the eternal foreknowledge of God is true, and how can it be true." It is not difficult to see that very significant reasons may exist for a choice between these two forms of statement.

(4) All the forms of proposition thus far defined may be further distinguished as simple, or complex, or plural forms of proposition. Dr. Bushnell has a sermon, the proposition of which is, "obligation to God is a privilege;" and another, the proposition of which is, "we require to be unsettled in life by many changes and interruptions of adversity in order to be most effectually loosened from our own evils, and prepared to the will and work of God;" and a third, the proposition of which is: "1. That we live under a cloud, and see God's way only by a dim light; 2. That God shines at all times above the cloud; 3. That this cloud of obscuration is finally to be cleared away." These are specimens of the simple and the complex and the plural propositions. A simple proposition mentions a subject only, with no appendage of relations. A com-

plex proposition pursues a subject into its relations, and yet retains singleness of form. A plural proposition specifies a group of topics which have unity of subject, but not unity of form. These are diversities in form only. In substance they may be interchanged.

(5) As the interchangeableness of propositions is a vital point, let me ask you to observe an illustration of it. For the sake of simplicity let us select the most trite of the themes of the pulpit, — that of repentance. Observe how the substance of one sermon can be put through all the forms of statement which have been defined. (*a*) You first announce as your theme the subject "Repentance." This is a rhetorical declarative proposition, the most general conceivable. Under it you can discuss any thing pertaining to repentance. (*b*) You inquire, Is it the duty of all men to repent? You thus obtain a rhetorical interrogative proposition. Yet you may array under it the very same materials as before. (*c*) You propose to show that it is the duty of all men to repent. With the same ideal as before, so far as the materials are concerned, you have now a logical affirmative proposition. (*d*) You declare as your theme, "No man can be exempted from the obligation to repent." You thus, with no necessary change of materials, exchange the affirmative for a negative logical proposition. (*e*) But we may suppose that the design of your discourse involves some consideration of the necessity of the Holy Spirit to induce repentance. You ask attention to repentance considered as the duty of man and the gift of God; or you propose the inquiry, Is repentance both a duty and a gift? or you affirm the fact, all men are under obligation to repent, notwithstanding their dependence on the Holy Spirit; or you deny the fact

that any man is exempt from obligation to repent, by the necessity of the influence of the Holy Ghost. By our hypothesis, there is no essential change in your ideal of what the sermon is to be; but, by variations in form of statement, you construct four varieties of complex proposition. One is declarative; one is interrogative; one is affirmative; one is negative; and all are complex in form. (*f*) But suppose, further, that the character of your audience seems to you to require the extreme of clearness in specification of theme. You therefore adopt none of the preceding forms of proposition. But you say, after the model which Dr. Emmons so often adopts, "I design in this discourse to establish three things: 1. That every man is under obligation to repent; 2. That every man is dependent on the Holy Spirit for repentance; 3. That obligation and dependence in the act of repenting are mutually consistent." Or you propose to prove negatively three things: "1. That no man can free himself from the duty of repentance; 2. That no man will repent while unregenerated by the Holy Ghost; 3. That duty and dependence in the matter of repenting are not contradictory." Or you propose to answer three inquiries: "1. Is the obligation to repent universal? 2. Is divine interposition indispensable to secure repentance? 3. Are dependence and obligation in repentance consonant with each other?" Or you suggest as the theme of remark three topics: "1. Man's responsibility for his own repentance; 2. Man's dependence on God for repentance; 3. The relation of repentance as a duty to repentance as a gift." By the supposition, your ideal of the discourse is still substantially unchanged. But, from variations in the form of statement, you obtain four additional varieties of

proposition. One is affirmative; one is negative; one is interrogative; one is declarative; and all are plural in form. Can you not conceive of precisely the same substance of discourse as coming under every one of these twelve varieties of form in proposition? Yet is it not plain that it would by no means be a matter of indifference which form should head the discussion?

(6) Yet it is necessary to remark, further, that a choice from among these fundamental varieties of proposition will not necessarily insure a perfect statement of a theme. In a good proposition every word is vital to the structure. The locality of every word is of moment to the whole. The relations of each word to every other, the collocation of words into clauses, the number of words, and the syntax of the whole are essential subjects of criticism in the construction. A proposition is the embodiment of emphasis: it is all emphatic. *Minutiæ* of style, therefore, must often be considered in its making, which criticism can not determine by rules laid down in advance. We must have the case in hand in order to frame the decision of taste. A preacher needs, therefore, that state of mental culture, and that degree of practice in stating themes of sermons, which shall enable him to frame his propositions with unconscious skill, as a good writer constructs all other composition. All that criticism can do in anticipation of the work is to observe, as we have now done, the fundamental varieties of form in propositions, and then to add certain general principles for the regulation of good taste in the choice from among them.

LECTURE XXIV.

THE PROPOSITION: SIMPLICITY.

2D, Having considered the fundamental distinctions of form in proposition, let us, in the second place, observe certain principles which should regulate their forms.

(1) The form of a proposition should be characterized by as great a degree of simplicity as is consistent with a full statement. The prime virtue in a perfect statement of any thing is its simplicity. In such a process we require nothing extraordinary, no ambitious strain of style, no imaginative garnish, no affectation of an excellence. The verdict of centuries upon the quality before us is packed into the formula of the oath administered by civilized courts to witnesses. Just such, also, is the character of a perfect proposition. We give a faultless description of it in saying it is a statement, a full statement, and nothing but a statement, of the thing in hand.

Notice, in the first place, that, in framing such a proposition, we must especially avoid words of unintelligible or doubtful meaning to the hearers. Among other words of this class may be specified the technical vocabulary of natural science. A college professor, in a discourse on "certain mineralogical illustrations of character," sacrificed classic English to the nomencla

ture of science in the structure of nearly all the statements of the divisions. They are these: 1. The transparent character; 2. The hydrophanous character; 3. The semitransparent character; 4. The translucent character; 5. The doubly-refracting character; 6. The phosphorescent character; 7. The dichroic character; 8. The chatoyant character; 9. The irised or pavonine character; 10. The opaque character. Scarcely one of these forms of statement, except the first, is intelligible outside of a mineralogical cabinet. A preacher should not be ashamed to confess the weakness of wishing to be understood. The best apology for the sermon in question — and the apology had some force — was that it was preached in a college chapel, to hearers who were daily frequenting the cabinet of minerals, and, therefore, by the majority of them, it was understood. It may be, that, before such an audience, its scientific labels gave piquancy to the train of thought. Still the dialect of preaching should be the dialect of literature as distinct from science. The taste of scholarship, not that of the laboratory or the museum, should control its diction. Such a taste will prescribe a simplicity which will eject from propositions and divisions every thing but the purest and simplest English.

On the same principle, we should also avoid in the structure of propositions an abstruse philosophical vocabulary. One offers as a proposition "the subjective ground of justification." The truth which he discusses is "faith considered as a condition of salvation." Why not call it so, and be understood? Another proposes to discourse upon the "ethical laws of Christianity." The subject turns out to be "the excellence of Christ's morality over that of other religions." Why not say this, and speak to the good sense of nine-tenths of the hearers?

A third indicates as his subject, "the norm of sanctification." This is getting into deeper water. The discussion resolves itself into an illustration of this principle, that "grace grows by exercise." Why not have the courage to accept this? It is a gem of a subject. What is added to it by starching the proposition to the primness and pedantry of a philosophical diction in which nobody recognizes the beautiful and friendly truth? If we must have the general rather than the more specific proposition, why talk of the "norm" of a thing, when we have such stanch old words as "law," and "rule," and "principle"? Even the derivatives "normal" and "abnormal" are barely tolerable in a popular dialect; but the root "norm" is an affectation of philosophical pedantry which old Roger Ascham would have flung from him as an "inkhorn term" which scholasticism had "caught by the tail."

Again: the principle before us should exclude from propositions many of the technical terms of theology. A large proportion of theological technicalities will almost necessarily be unintelligible to some hearers, and of doubtful meaning to others. From time immemorial they have burdened the dialect of the pulpit. Especially in the statement of subjects, the dialect needed in the pulpit is not that of the university, but the cultured dialect of common life and common men. Some masters of language can do in speech what masters of painting do in colors, — make varieties illustrate each other. Rufus Choate could make the technicalities of law and of literature deepen and adorn the thoughts, which, for the most part, he expressed in language level to the minds of a miscellaneous jury. So there are princes of expression in the pulpit, who can make the technicalities of theology enrich the

materials of their sermons, and at the same time make the popular elements of their style illuminate and interpret those technicalities. The effect is that the hearer is sensible of a range of thought and style above his own use, yet not above his own comprehension. To the extent of a preacher's power to produce this illuminated compound of opposites in style, he may safely employ the dialect of theological schools. But, beyond the limit of that power, no man can hope to be understood in the use of that dialect, except by the rare audiences who have been trained by a quarter of a century of technically dogmatic preaching. The number of such audiences in our day may be reckoned on one's fingers.

Aside from such exceptions, the best general test by which to admit or to exclude the technical style of theology in framing the propositions of sermons is that of the degree of its assimilation to the language of the Scriptures. The sacred books of a reading nation become, almost of necessity, a literary standard to that nation. Thus the Scriptures have become throughout Christendom, so far as the people are permitted and taught to read them, a standard of literary intelligence. The vocabulary of the Scriptures forms the greater part of the vocabulary of such a people in all their expression of dignified thought. In biblical connections and for biblical uses the people understand words which they never use, and might never understand, in different connections. As a consequence, the religious vocabulary of a people, as in Great Britain and Germany and America, is by several degrees more elevated than their secular vocabulary.

At the same time, it is true that the Scriptures have given to theological science some of its most salient

phraseology. The scholastic theologian often finds, that, even for scientific use, he can not improve upon the style of the Bible. A preacher, therefore, will commonly be on safe ground, as it respects the intelligibility of his style to the people, if he employs in the construction of his propositions and divisions only those technicalities of theology which the Bible has originated, and omits those which are the pure product of the schools. On this principle, therefore, we do not scruple to employ such technicalities of theology as "redemption," "justification," "predestination," "foreknowledge," and similar terms which a Christianized people can not but understand.

But how stands the case with certain other technicalities of theology? Is it wise to propose as the theme of a sermon "the free moral agency of man"? I think not. Why? Because it is scholastic in its origin and in its associations; and its scholasticism is not relieved by any thing that the Bible has to say on the subject. What, then, can we substitute for it? Such a statement as this, — "man's responsibility for his own character." It is worthy of note, on all topics involving the question of freewill, that the Scriptures never directly discuss that question. They teach responsibility, and stop there. The rest is left to human consciousness. Ability, freedom, fate, necessity, — the whole group of topics with which philosophy in all ages has dealt so freely, — are not treated in the Bible. We may wisely follow its example in the selection and statement of the themes of sermons. We gain thus the advantage which the Bible gains by its policy, — the support of every man's consciousness. Responsibility every man feels conscious of: ability in certain connections no man feels conscious of. It matters little whether men

believe in their moral freedom or not: their consciousness of responsibility remains intact on either hypothesis. That is, men are conscious, not of ability directly, but of that which implies ability The policy of the inspired preachers is to throw the whole brunt of the question of ability upon the consciousness of responsibility Back of that they never go. Therefore I would never discuss directly the subject of moral freedom in the pulpit.

Is it desirable to propose as a subject "the doctrine of original sin," or "the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity"? I think not. This phraseology is the product of the school alone. Common usage has never adopted it: men never confess conviction of sin by the use of it. The Scriptures do not contain it, nor do they give any such prominence to the truth which the schoolmen convey by it as to have exalted and illuminated it in the intelligence of the people. What, then, can we substitute for it? Such a form of proposition as this, "the connection of the sinfulness of the race with the fall of Adam," or the inquiry, "How has the fall in Eden affected the character of mankind?" The subject as thus expressed is a biblical theme. It can be discussed, if need be, without reference to the historic controversies on the subject.

The same principle should be applied to the phrase "total depravity" and to that of "the trinity of persons in the Godhead." Why is it, that if you adopt as the proposition of a sermon a statement containing the phrase "total depravity," or that of "three persons in the Godhead," you must exhaust one-half of your sermon to explain what the doctrine is not? This has become the stereotyped method of the pulpit of New England in discoursing on these doctrines, if

they are presented under the shelter of these technical statements. What, then, can we substitute for these scholastic statements of the doctrines? Such forms of proposition as these, that "man is by nature destitute of holiness;" or, "that the moral nature of man is sinful and only sinful;" or, "What is the natural character of man?" that "God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost;" or, "that the Scriptures teach a threefold distinction in the being of God;" or, "What is the scriptural doctrine of the mode of divine existence?"

At this point should be noticed a peril to which preachers may expose themselves through inattention to the growth of certain forms of statement in their own minds. Statements may be obscure to hearers, which meditation has rendered elementary to preachers. Studious preachers are studious of truth in its philosophical relations. Themes of sermons, therefore, will often suggest themselves in a philosophical dialect. In that form their obscurity to hearers may escape the preacher's detection. Abstractions, to a mind which feeds upon them, become like concrete realities. But, for the purposes of discourse to an audience, there is great power and great beauty in calling things by their simple names. Call water, water, and fire, fire, remembering always that the first object of language is to be understood.

In the second place, the simplicity of propositions may be promoted by avoiding figurative forms of statement. We have before observed, that a proposition is a statement, and nothing more. If so, it is not an explanation, it is not an appeal, it is not an illustration, it is not primarily an argument: therefore the defect in a figurative proposition is that it is not the simplest form of statement. A figure may give clearness to an

explanation force to an argument, vividness to an illustration, eloquence to an appeal, but not simplicity to a statement. It may therefore be more pertinent anywhere else in a sermon than in the statement of a proposition or division. Why is a metaphorical description of a crime not allowable in the enactment of criminal law? Why is a metaphorical boundary of real estate not pertinent in a title-deed? For a similar reason, figure is not becoming in a proposition. Literalness is essential to simplicity in any thing which professes to be a statement, and nothing more.

It has been sometimes advised that a proposition should be so framed as to be a good title to a sermon if it were printed. This is by no means a safe criterion. A good proposition, it is true, may be a good title; but a good title may not be a simple proposition. A title may be only a hint of the contents of a discourse: therefore it may be imaginative. The Rev. Nehemiah Adams, D.D., of Boston, delivered a sermon on the introduction of the Cochituate water into the city, and printed it under the beautifully significant title: "A Song of the Well." What would that title have been worth as a proposition? A metaphorical hint of a theme is not a simple statement of it.

Figurative propositions are sometimes vindicated on the ground of their biblical origin. Simeon, on the text, "I am the vine, ye are the branches," advances the proposition, "God's treatment of us as branches of the true vine;" and from the text, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself," he derives the proposition, "eating and drinking our damnation." These examples will recall to you a multitude of sermons in which the statements of the subjects embody biblical figures; such as "Baal,"

"Mammon," "the flesh," "the old man," and other scriptural modes of representing sin or its objects; and such as "Zion," "Israel," "Jerusalem," "The walls of Zion," and other scriptural modes of indicating the Church. Such figurative statements are not obsolescent in the modern pulpit. A discourse was preached within a few years on the subject of Samson's riddle, the divisions of which were: (1) There are lions in every man's path; 2. The slaying of these lions yields the sweetest rewards of life.

Is the argument for such propositions and divisions, that they are often founded upon figurative texts, an adequate defense of them? Surely not, if they are not intrinsically the best fitted to the purpose of a simple statement of the subjects of discourse. Why employ biblical poetry for a literal purpose, rather than any other poetry? The extreme of ill taste to which the usage exposes a preacher is illustrated in the following instance. A preacher in Massachusetts, a few years ago, wished to present the growth in a Christian character in its several phases from conversion to a mature Christian experience. He defined three phases, which he stated in his three divisions thus: 1. At the beginning of the Christian life we are all babes in Christ; 2. As we advance in experience we become young men, of whom the Apostle says "Ye are strong;" 3. In the final stages of our growth we all become mothers in Israel. What defect has this example which many others by more tasteful preachers have not in less degree?

Figurative propositions and divisions are often defended on the ground that the usage of the pulpit has indulged in them from time immemorial. They have, in the minds of some, the prestige of a venerable an-

tiquity. It is not always easy to reply to this saintly predilection for the antiquities of the pulpit. We should judge of it as men of sense rather than men of feeling. Remember that preaching is a business. Its object is an immediate object, a pressing object: it is the business of an emergency. Like any other such business, it can not be more fatally embarrassed than by wrapping it in the folds of romantic feeling.

Witness the unreal, often the dreamy, descriptions of Christian experience by Christian laymen who speak glibly in the use of biblical figures in meetings for prayer and conference. Why do they talk on religious subjects in a dialect the like of which they never use on any other subject? Why clothe religious thought in metaphorical forms such as they would never think of imitating in the concerns of business? One reason is that they take the infection from the pulpit. If preachers envelop religious ideas in figure, to the detriment of the business-like character of preaching, hearers will bury their own religious experience under the same verbiage; and how much of it is a reality and how much romance, they may never know. This preachers do when they put propositions into figurative forms. If any thing is a business in the pulpit, and ought to take on the forms of plain, business-like speech, it is that calm unpoetic part of a sermon in which a preacher has merely to tell an audience what he proposes to talk about. There, if nowhere else, we should come at the intelligence of hearers by the shortest, plainest, most natural, and hence most literal way. We should use the dialect of our own times, not that of Spenser or Chaucer, and as little that of Baxter and John Howe. Instead of seeking to throw around a proposition the drapery of a venerable homiletic usage, we should

rather think of the mathematical definition of a straight line.

Figurative propositions and divisions are sometimes vindicated on the ground of their raciness. One preacher, martial in his tastes, proposes as his theme "the great battle of the Lord Almighty." Another, in more feminine mood, proposes to contemplate "the rainbow of divine promise." A third, of more practical turn, asks attention to "the sin of being a stumbling-block." A fourth, whose tastes incline to science, suggests "the anæsthetic power of the world over Christian hearts." A fifth canvasses the signs of the times, and proposes "the pioneer character of the church." A sixth meditates at eventide, and invites to "a walk about Zion." These, and an interminable catalogue like them, many would defend as being pithy forms of statement. They prick curiosity: they please fancy. True; but does this shield them from the censure of good taste? I think not; because, valuable as raciness of statement often is, it ought not to take the precedence of simplicity. In stating any business in hand, raciness should be sought in plainness of speech and directness in coming to the point. Figurative hints are out of place.

The taste which chooses figurative propositions and divisions is perilous to chasteness of style in other respects. A writer is never safe who indulges himself in one habit hostile to good taste. A certain integrity characterizes the decisions of good taste. Joubert says that it is "the literary conscience of the soul." He that is guilty in one point is guilty in all. You can never know to what friskiness of rhetorical judgment you may be tempted, if you tolerate in yourself one habit of conscious indifference to the claims of taste, or a single recognition of eccentric standards of taste.

In the third place, the simplicity of propositions and divisions requires that they should not be stated in the language of popular proverbs. "Honesty is the best policy;" "A penny saved is a penny earned;" "God helps those who help themselves;" "In the midst of life we are in death;" — why should not these be made the propositions of sermons? Christian discourses might be constructed on any one of them. But, because they are familiar proverbs, they have an atmosphere about them which is not kindred to that of simple speech. They are the pert remarks of the highway. Their original dignity is gone, and now they are pedestrian and dusty. Often they are the make-weights of pleasantry. A suspicion of eccentricity is awakened by their obtrusion as propositions of sermons. Eccentricity is not simplicity.

In the fourth place, simplicity in propositions and divisions demands still more imperatively the exclusion of fantastic forms of statement. From the text in Ezekiel respecting "the wheels" and the "living creatures," one preacher derived the proposition, "the wheels of providence." The Rev. Parson Moody of Boston, on the text, "They know not what they do," preached on the proposition, "when men know not what to do, they should be careful not to do they know not what." On the text, "This year thou shalt die," a quaint preacher in Hopkinton, Mass., once discoursed on this proposition, "nobody in Hopkinton will die this year."

We feel without comment the unseemliness of these propositions. But why are they not good forms of statement? What canon or instinct of good taste do they offend? I answer, that which requires simplicity in the statement of a theme. Earnest minds, pressed

by the duty of the pulpit as that of an exigency, have neither time nor taste for the creation of such sports of ingenuity.

Finally, simplicity in propositions and divisions requires the avoidance of extreme paradox in their forms of statement. A slight paradox is not inconsistent with a calm statement, but an extreme paradox implies excited statement. Simeon has a sermon on "the mutual abhorrence of God and sinners." This is not true. It sets a thoughtful hearer to recalling the text, "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Whitefield has a discourse on the proposition, "persecution is the lot of every Christian." Either this is not true, or the vast majority of the Christian Church are hypocrites. William Jay expresses the truth more simply when he proposes to consider that "a Christian is not apt to be a favorite with the world." The Rev. Dr. Bushnell has published a sermon, the proposition of which is, in substance, "men are bound to do what they can not do." This is not true in any sense in which the popular mind will understand the language. You must either make the language figurative, or put into it one of the technicalities of polemic theology to make it true in any sense.

Some of these examples of propositions will be vindicated by some preachers, on the ground that they are fair paraphrases of certain biblical texts. Thus, in the prophecy of Zechariah, it is said of God, "My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me." This certainly looks like "mutual abhorrence between God and sinners." Paul affirms, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." This appears to sustain Whitefield. Doubtless, texts enough can be

found in the Scriptures, which, when woven together with adroit theologic fingers, make out an express command to men to do what they can not do. Dr. Bushnell's use of his text to this effect is not without plausibility. The inquiry, then, is a fair one, — does not the objection which rhetoric urges against such propositions lie with equal force against these biblical texts? I answer, No: simply because texts are not necessarily absolute propositions. Texts are limited by other texts, interpreted by contexts, illumined by occasions and events, qualified by the characters concerned in their delivery. Isolate them, as propositions are isolated, from these interpretive surroundings, and often they are not true. Texts, therefore, are not inspired models of propositions.

One object of a proposition often is to reduce to a literal and independent statement the truth which a text presents half buried in intricate relations. To translate the poetry of a text into logical prose, to exchange the metaphor of a text for the literalism of science, to evolve the simplicity of a text from the labyrinth of its antecedents, to transport the germ of a text from an oriental to an occidental atmosphere, — these are often the very purposes of propositions. Simplicity requires them, as it requires that diamonds should be polished, not worn in the rough.

LECTURE XXV.

THE PROPOSITION: BREVITY, SPECIFICNESS, ELEGANCE, ITS PREFACE.

(2) PASSING now from simplicity in propositions, let us observe a second principle affecting their qualities; namely, that a proposition should be as brief as it may be, consistently with clearness. A French critic says that "genuine depth comes from concentrated ideas." So of propositions: the deepest, the truest, the most magnetic are susceptible of compactness in form.

In the first place, propositions are often expanded by needless synonyms. "The willfulness and perverseness of sin" is one of Dr. Payson's propositions. "The danger of obstinate and willful disobedience" is a theme proposed by Simeon. "The nature and design of a Christian Church" is a subject of one of Dr. Lathrop's sermons. What is the evil of these couples of words? They dilute the thought beyond the demand of perspicuity. Beyond this demand, words are a solvent of thought. The more, the weaker. We judge thought by weight, not by bulk. Again: needless synonyms may excite false expectations of the range of a discussion. "The willfulness and perverseness of sin" suggests, does it not, a double aim; yet the discussion has but one. From the nature of the case no words employed in a proposition can be

unimportant. Theoretically every word is emphatic. Practically every word will attract attention. With no theory of criticism on the subject, hearers will by instinct take every word as meaning something which can not be spared. Before using a word, therefore, in a proposition, find a use for it.

In the second place, we notice that the objections are similar to the expansion of propositions by needless epithets. "Man's proud contempt of God" is one of Simeon's subjects. What is the force of the epithet? What weight does it carry? Can contempt of God be otherwise than proud? Does the preacher mean to discuss different kinds of sinful contempt? If not, what is the purpose of the epithet? On the contrary, does not a nice discernment of good taste see a force in the substantive alone, from which the epithet makes a positive deduction? "Contempt of God" expresses more than "proud contempt of God." Compression itself gives force to thought, as it does to a bullet. Epithets, nevertheless, are sometimes necessary to strengthen a proposition. The vast majority of epithets used in propositions are designed to produce this intensive effect. Preachers employ them in the involuntary effort to intensify thought. The practical question, therefore, is when to use them, and when not. The discrimination of the preacher must answer. This may be assisted by observing three principles.

One is, that, if accuracy of statement requires an epithet, it is a necessity. Unqualified, the proposition may be untrue. Another principle is, that, if an epithet contains the characteristic idea of the sermon, it becomes a necessity to the proposition. "The greatest of these is charity;" — from this text, a sermon was once preached on "the incomparable excellence of love

Why was the epithet necessary? Because it contained the distinctive idea of the whole discussion. Such epithets are condensed sentences. They are the discourses in miniature. A third principle is that the proposition is not the place in which to intensify a subject merely for rhetorical impression. To do that may be the design of the development or of the conclusion; but the purposes of mere statement limit the aim of the proposition. "The horrible guilt of those who strengthen the hands of the wicked;" "The awful doom of the finally impenitent;" "The glorious rewards of the righteous,"—do you not perceive, that, in these examples, the epithets have no definitive value? They are inserted only to magnify the idea. The accuracy of the statement does not demand them, nor is the characteristic thought of the proposition in any one of them. They are like the lens of a magic-lantern, — inserted only to augment the diagram behind. The use of them indicates the straining of style to express on the instant and at first sight that which it is the province of the discussion to develop as an ultimate result. They put the whole structure out of true perspective.

Again: propositions may be needlessly expanded by circuitous or indolent grammatical constructions. Which of the two following forms of proposition is the more forcible? — "Let us consider the duty of believers to make incessant advances in holiness, notwithstanding the temptations of the world, the trials of Providence, and the assaults of Satan;" "Let us consider the duty of Christians to use the conditions of a probationary life as a means of growth in grace." For the purposes of a statement of theme, does not the latter of these forms express all that is requisite, and express it the more forcibly for its brevity?

Further: propositions may be needlessly diffuse through repetition in varied language. If any single sentence of a discourse should be such as not to need varied repetition, it is the proposition. It may need repetition to make sure of the ear of the hearer, but should never be repeated by variations of statement for the sake of his understanding. Yet prolixity from repetition is an inveterate infirmity of the pulpit. It may result from a preacher's want of clear conception of his theme. A foreign critic says, that, with some writers, style grows out of thoughts; with others, thought grows out of style. In the case now in hand, the preacher's thought grows in the process of his anxious experiments in trying to give it intelligible form. The thought of the proposition grows out of its style. The same labor of mental apprenticeship to a subject which we noticed as often bungling an introduction produces, also, a confused proposition.

The subject of a discourse once presented here for criticism, when it was denuded of its mock profoundness, was this, "long-continued sin hardens the moral sensibilities of the sinner." But the preacher had not distilled it in his own mental laboratory down to this simple residuum. It was still seething and sputtering in the crucible of his own thinking. Said he, "Your attention is invited to a consideration of the fact that a disregard of the voice of duty, if long continued through a series of many years, exerts an injurious influence upon the entire moral man; that it is the nature of moral evil thus to infect and poison man's moral being, producing moral disease and death; that a violation of the moral laws of our being tends to an entire destruction of the moral sensibilities and to a degradation of all that distinguishes man as a subject of God's

moral government; and, in illustration of this subject, I remark first," etc. What subject? Who could divine it at the first guess?

Prolix repetition, again, may result from a certain mannerism in composing. Some writers crave rotundity of style for all important statements. They are unconsciously fascinated by fullness of sound in enunciation, — by what Cicero calls the *ore rotundo*. Their style, therefore, takes on the corpulent build whenever an emphatic thought is to be expressed. I select an example to the point, from Alison's "History of Europe." He is introducing a discussion of the principle of human progress, which, he says, lay at the foundation of the French Revolution. He announces his purpose as follows: "It is of the highest importance to inquire to what extent this principle is well-founded." Here, observe, is one statement of his proposition. But he proceeds: "to examine how far it is consistent with the experience of human nature." This is a second statement. But he adds: "and in what degree it is warranted by the past annals of mankind." A third statement, this, of the same proposition. One thing only is proposed in this threefold form. The thought is entirely clear, but as clear in its first statement as in its last, and more clear in either one than in three statements. The writer is beguiled into a cumbrous and prolix statement by the sheer mannerism of a rotund style. He was unconsciously straining after the "dignity of history." Had he been colloquially telling a friend what he just then wished to talk about, he would have said it, probably, in one utterance of a dozen Saxon words. But, because he was writing history for generations unborn, he must swell his utterance into this trimountain of a proposition.

Further: prolix repetition sometimes arises from a false conception of the object of a proposition. The error here suggested is the same with that which we have noticed, as often tempting to the needless use of intensive epithets in a proposition. It is that preachers strive to make propositions rhetorically impressive instead of lucidly expressive of the subjects. The theme may be clear: the speaker knows what he is about to discuss; but, instead of making it clear to the hearer in the proposition, he struggles to make it vivid. A case in hand will best illustrate this. A plan of a sermon once presented here for criticism was on the subject that "man by nature is destitute of holiness." This is a compact, lucid statement of the theme, and, so far as mere statement is concerned, this is the whole of it. But this was too calm for the preacher's mood. Flushed with the excitement of reflection on the subject, he was not content with clearness: he must gain intensity as well. Light was not enough: he must have a calcium light. He therefore ejected his theme in words like these: "Man, until regenerated by the Spirit of Almighty God, is absolutely sinful; wholly an enemy to God; in all the faculties of his being, distorted, depraved, guilty, and corrupt; so that no remnant of spiritual life remains in him, but he is dead in trespasses and sins, and an object of God's utter abhorrence."

Abstract attention, for a moment, from the theology of this invective: look only at its rhetoric. The preacher knew what he was at; he had very definite notions, as the result proved, of what the sermon was to be. He meant to give the hottest of hot blasts of hyper-Calvinistic theology. The misfortune was that his proposition was not fire-proof. It caught a flame

from his theology, and in a moment was ablaze. That is to say, the preacher put into the proposition the impressions which it was the business of the discussion to create. The result was prolix repetition, and, what is so often a further result of such a rhetorical error, gross exaggeration. Impression out of place very easily flares up into an extreme. Again and again it deserves to be repeated that a proposition is a statement, and only that. To vary it, and repeat it, and reiterate it, and intensify it, and magnify it, and dignify it, for the sake of rhetorical effect, are all foreign to its purpose. A perfect proposition never needs such handling. To inflict it on a good proposition is only hammering at the nail when it is already driven to the head.

This view leads to the further remark, that it is not good policy to lift a proposition, in point of impressiveness of structure, to a level with the conclusion. A proposition must always contain the conclusion; must often, in substance, be the conclusion; but it should invariably fall below the conclusion in impressiveness of statement. No single principle of homiletic policy is more variously applicable than this, "Leave room for increase of impression." Begin low, and work up. Leave space for rise of interest. Begin with a clear but calm statement of the truth; then set that truth to revolving; prove that truth; illustrate that truth; vary the position of that truth; disclose in light and shadow the proportions of that truth; till, as the discussion advances, the hearer feels that truth, and only that. Then in the conclusion you may assume that he feels it, and may proceed to apply it in the assurance that no language which it prompts you to employ will be an exaggeration, or will seem to be such to the

hearer's quickened conscience and deepened sensibilities. But to anticipate all this in the structure of the proposition is sheer reversal of nature. It can not succeed in its aim, and it would be an injury to the discourse if it should succeed.

Further: the proposition is often rendered needlessly diffuse by making it consist of the divisions of the sermon. That which has been termed the plural proposition is not relatively desirable. Unity may exist in such a proposition: necessity may rarely require it. But, when no necessity for it exists, its prolixity should exclude it. Test this in your own experience, when you incline to adopt Dr. Emmons's method of stating the theme by enumerating the divisions: pause, and ask yourself, "Why?" You will often find that you do it only for your own convenience in the discussion. It is always attended with this incidental evil, that it discloses the plot of a discourse at the outset. It leaves nothing to stimulate expectation by suspense of curiosity. This is often a sufficient objection to a prolix proposition, — that it discloses too much. Instead of furnishing only a center of interest, it marks out all the *radii* of the circle. To justify this the necessities of the subject should be imperative. When the gist of the subject can be made palpable without it, the plural form is an encumbrance. Only the gist of the subject is needed in a proposition.

The defects in point of prolixity which have now been named are illustrated in some sermons by distinguished preachers. Let me instance two examples which will at least show that it is scarcely possible to caricature the extreme of these defects beyond the reality of them in the literature of the pulpit. From the text, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed

lest he fall," Bishop Lowth proposes thus: "That these words may not only enter into your ears, but sink down into your hearts, I shall first consider the instability of human affairs and the change of things; that both particular men and particular churches may fall from their steadfastness; and that, even while they think they stand, they may be in the greatest danger of falling: and, secondly, I shall endeavor to find out the way in which we may secure ourselves against such misfortune; that, whatever come, we may not fall, but stand against all assaults, and so persevere, till our work is done, to the end of the day, when we depart hence, in the Lord, to receive our reward or doom."

Two examples were promised. A young painter once requested permission to exhibit to his master two specimens of his handiwork for criticism. Only one was sent at the first to the master's studio. It was examined, and returned with this opinion: "I prefer the other." Wait till you hear "the other" before you hazard so adventurous a criticism. Dr. Donne, from the text, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," proceeds in this style: "These words will be fittest considered like a goodly palace, if we rest a little in an outer court upon a consideration of prayer in the general; and then draw the view of a palace in a second court, considering this precious prayer in particular as the face of the whole palace; and then we will pass through the chiefest rooms of the palace itself, and then insist on four steps being taken." This leads him to specify four subdivisions.

What conceivable object of a proposition can be gained by such harangues as these? They are scarcely intelligible; they certainly are uninteresting, except as caricatures no man can remember them; and their

bulk is frightful. There is scarcely a quality of a good proposition which they do not sacrifice. The proposition of a French preacher resembled these in magnitude of theme, but was infinitely superior in brevity and in sprightliness. Said he, "I shall discourse today, first, upon things which I know and you don't; secondly, upon things which you know and I don't; thirdly, upon things which neither of us knows."

(3) A third principle affecting the form of propositions is that a proposition should be as specific as it can be consistently with brevity. Specific statement is desirable specially for three reasons. It limits the range of a discussion; it concentrates attention; it stimulates interest.

Observe, therefore, in the first place, that, to promote the specific quality, the logical form of propositions should generally be preferred to the rhetorical form. Which is the more specific of the two following themes? First, "The divine government;" second, "The divine government is founded upon mingled justice and benevolence." Which is the more stimulating to attention? Again: on the same principle, the plural form of propositions must sometimes be preferred to the single form. Clearness occasionally demands a proposition in which the whole discussion is mapped. The divisions need to be specified like harbors on a chart. "I propose to consider, first this, secondly that, thirdly the other," is a form of proposition which may assist undisciplined hearers to follow an intricate discussion of an abstract theme. Any one of these contingencies — the mental character of the hearers, or the abstractness of the subject, or the involution of its treatment — may justify such a proposition; and all combined may demand it.

Further, to promote the specific quality, a proposition should always convey a complete idea in itself. "Let us consider this subject." What subject? "The reasons which enforce this duty upon all men." What duty? "I propose to show that this practice is condemned by reason, conscience, and the word of God." What practice? These forms of proposition, you perceive, are incomplete. An exposition of a text does not necessarily define a theme sufficiently as derived from the text. We may naturally call attention thus to the text itself, when the text is the subject. We may define a subject only in the general by designating it as "The subject presented in the text." But these are very different forms from that in which we ask attention to "this subject," "this duty," "this principle," and leave the hearer to his wits in discovering the theme of discussion. This will be best illustrated by an example in full. Take the following from the Rev. Dr. Romeyn, omitting the text, that you may see what a headless trunk a proposition may be to one who had not given attention to the text. Dr. Romeyn proposes thus: "To the means by which the latter were preserved from the desolation of the former, the manner in which this means was used, and the success which accompanied the manner of using the means, our attention is directed in the text. A few remarks explanatory of each of these particulars will first be offered, after which such a use will be made of the text as is suitable to the solemnity of the present occasion." What one specific idea do you derive from such a proposition? How much do you know of the object of the sermon?

Again: the specific quality requires that the proposition should not generally be stated in the exact language of the text. From the text, "It pleased the

Father that in him should all fullness dwell," Simeon derives the subject, "The Fullness of Christ." From the text, "Christ is all, and in all," he deduces the theme, "Christ is All." From the text, "Wrath is come upon them to the uttermost," President Edwards draws the proposition, "Wrath is come upon the wicked to the uttermost." What is the cause of the dullness of these forms of proposition? They are not obscure; they are not prolix: why are they so devoid of stimulus? It is because they specify nothing in advance of the letter of the texts. Scarcely do they vary the language of the texts. They do nothing to reproduce the ideas of the texts in modern and vivacious style. As propositions, therefore, they add nothing to the texts. As well might the texts stand alone. Contrast such propositions with this from Dr. Emmons. Text: "The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it." Proposition: "A man's religion may be his ruin." This is clear, pithy, and alluring to attention, because it specifies in modern dialect the literal sense of the text. For the uses of a proposition it improves upon the text.

The specific quality in a proposition demands, further, that it should not specify any thing which is not discussed in the sermon. The proposition sometimes overreaches the sermon, not by needless or irrelevant synonyms, but through inadvertence. "The folly and guilt of being ashamed of Christ" is the theme of a sermon which discusses only the guilt of that sin. "The folly" of it is an excrescence. This example represents a class of cases in which the defect is not primarily in the substance, but in the form of the proposition. The cause of the defect is an unmeaning overflow of the style.

(4) A fourth principle respecting the form of the proposition is that it should be framed with as great degree of elegance as is consistent with clear and forcible expression. Finish of form often reduplicates force. Sculpture owes much to the purity and polish of marble. Similar qualities produce similar effects in style. The style of a proposition should comprise that rare blending and proportion of qualities which never make one think of the style. To this perfection of form, elegance is essential. Two things are fundamental to it.

Elegance requires the restriction of the vocabulary of propositions to classic English words. "The unbelief of gospel-sinners" is the subject of a sermon by the late Professor Shepherd. Imagine the sermon addressed to Lord Macaulay, or to Edward Everett. "Soul-prosperity," "soul-dejection,"—these are themes of sermons by Whitefield. What right have preachers, more than other scholars, to create a mongrel dialect? "Warning to carnal and worldly-minded professors" is the proposition of a discourse by Simeon. Professors of what? A few years ago, a sign over a shop in the Strand in London announced that a "professor of shirt-making" offered his services there. A sermon was once read in this lecture-room, for criticism, the preacher standing at the right hand of the presiding officer; and the proposition was "To consider the sins of professors." The usage of the pulpit has from time immemorial been unscholarly in retaining obsolete words, cant words, technical words, words never heard outside of the pulpit, which deform a proposition even more than any other fragment of a discourse, because its pre-eminence of position enforces attention to them.

Again: elegance in a proposition requires purity and

ease of English construction. "The guilt of unbelief under gospel light and the strivings of the Spirit, conscience can not but discern and condemn." Why is not this an elegant proposition? Because its construction is Latinized. It is Ciceronian, not English, except in the hybrid style of English for which critics have coined the epithet "Johnsonese." That is not a perfect proposition which attracts attention by its clumsiness. It may be clear; it may be forcible: but why not adorn and even augment these qualities by adding elegance as well?

(5) The fifth rule respecting the form of a proposition is that its preface should be distinct, simple, and on different occasions, varied. I refer here to the few prefatory words by which the announcement of a subject is foretold. These are often of more importance than they seem to be. First, the preface should be distinct. Let it indicate clearly, for the moment, that the subject is about to be defined. Give always a momentary forewarning, which shall be to the announcement of the subject what the bell of the telephone is to the message which is to follow it. Again: the preface should be simple. It is only a rhetorical expedient to call attention: do not make a parade of it. The most obvious thing to say is the best thing to be said.

The preface should be varied on different occasions. Five things suggest the most natural variations. One is the preacher; as when you say in announcing your subject, "I invite your attention;" "I propose to speak of;" "I design to prove;" "I intend to illustrate;" "It is my wish to consider;" "It is my purpose to remark upon," etc. But this form, always adopted, is egotistical. A second suggestion of variety is the text; as when you introduce your theme by observing, "The

text contains;" "The text invites;" "The text suggests;" "The text illustrates;" "The text is an example of," etc. But this form, always chosen, is monotonous. A third suggestion of variety is the sermon; as when you indicate your proposition by saying, "This discourse will be devoted;" "The remarks this morning;" "The discussion before us;" "The subject of our meditations;" "The theme of our reflections," etc. But this form, unvaried, is an excess of form. Sometimes the occasion may suggest the preface; as when you open the way by saying, "The occasion is favorable;" "The day is becoming;" "The services of the hour;" "The improvement of holy time," etc. But this, without variety, is stiff. The fifth thing which may pave the way to the subject is the audience; as when you say, "My friends and brethren;" "The experience of many of you;" "The inquiries of some of you;" "The difficulties which you have felt;" "The interest which some have expressed;" "The afflictions which some of you have suffered." The personal history of the audience may thus be made to suggest many subjects of discourse. This is not a hackneyed form of preface. It gives a gentle stimulus to attention. Always use your audiences in every natural way. As you prove, illustrate, explain, by reference to them, so build your subjects upon their thoughts, if you can. Seem to have selected the theme at their suggestion. It is an innocent art.

But the point I would emphasize is to aim at variety. You perceive that the possible forms of these rhetorical prefaces are innumerable. There is no need of monotony. A preacher, even in trifles, should not be a parrot. Charles Lamb used to exercise great ingenuity in his modes of subscribing his name to his letters. Genius

is not above care for such trivialities. But in preaching, nothing that saves a momentary sense of monotony is a triviality. Any thing that must be done is worth doing vivaciously. We should imitate Nature, which never makes two anemones alike. Even snowflakes, which are to melt in the falling, the microscope shows to be copies of an interminable variety of geometric figures, some of which science has never conceived till our times. If we were to select the one most significant and omnipresent sign of *life* in matter, mind, or spirit, it would be this one grace of all discourse, — variety.