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SERMON

ON THE ART OF PREACHING,

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE PASTORAL ASSOCIATION

OF MASSACHUSETTS,

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SERMON.

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AND I WILL GIVE YOU PASTORS ACCORDING TO MY HEART, WHICH SHALL FEED YOU WITH KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING.

ONE part of a shepherd's office is to feed the flock. Of our blessed Saviour it was predicted that he should "feed his flock like a shepherd."* The same office he delegated to the under-shepherds. He charged Peter, the chief of the apostles, to feed his sheep and to feed his lambs.† Peter transmitted the charge to the other pastors: "Feed the flock of God which is among you;—and when the Chief Shepherd shall appear ye shall receive a crown of glory which fadeth not away."‡ The food with which the shepherds are to supply the flock is pointed out in the text: they are to feed it "with knowledge and understanding." The principal means of doing this is by the preaching of the Gospel.

I have risen to address the *Pastoral Association*. The first sermon before this body was on the duty of prayer for divine wisdom. It was a good begin-

* Isa. xl. 11. † John xxi. 15—17. ‡ 1 Pet. v. 2, 4.

ning. What subject can I select more suitable for this second sermon than that of preaching? After the pastor has prayed for wisdom to direct him in the investigation of truth and in the discharge of his office, he must then proceed to feed the flock with knowledge and understanding by faithfully and skilfully preaching the Gospel. But how shall he faithfully and skilfully preach the Gospel?

I am not presumptuous enough to think that I can strike out any thing new on this subject; nor does the time or the occasion admit of any thing like a syllabus of the rules which belong to a system of sacred rhetoric. If in the few hints which I shall submit I can encourage even the weakest of my brethren to a more faithful and impressive exhibition of truth, my labour will not be in vain. I shall,

I. Make some observations on the rules of rhetoric as they stand related to the pulpit;

II. Develope some of the leading principles which ought to regulate this species of public speaking;

III. Point out some faults to be avoided.

I. I am to make some observations on the rules of rhetoric as they stand related to the pulpit.

Some advances may be made by native eloquence without rules. There were orators before there were rhetoricians; and rhetoric drew its first rules from observations made on orations previously pronounced. Indeed rules at first rather serve to cramp genius, by deranging its acquired habits without regulating its operations with steadiness and

effect. To preserve the advantages of original genius amidst the necessary restraints, we must make the acquisitions of education a second nature.* But no art can be carried to perfection without the science on which it is bottomed. None in short will deny the necessity of rules who would not place a clown in the pulpit.

But the danger is that a disproportionate stress will be laid on some rules and too little on others; too much for instance on polishing the style, on an orderly conduct of a discourse, and on a graceful delivery; and too little on a deep impression of divine truth, a fervent desire to win souls to Christ, and on following nature out into her impassioned language and tones. A still greater danger is that we shall allow our judgment, (which ought only to be guided,) to be fettered with written rules, instead of following those more important ones which every original and experienced mind forms for itself. Sir Joshua Reynolds says, "What we now call genius begins, not where *rules*—end, but where *known*, *vulgar*, and *trite* rules have no longer any place.—The rules by which men of extraordinary parts—work, are either such as they discover by their own peculiar observation, or of such a nice texture as not easily to admit of handling or expressing in words." A very small part of the rules by which a writer of genius and taste and experience is guided, were ever imbodyed in language.

* Pope has hit this point exactly.

"But ease in writing flows from art, not chance;
As those move easiest who have learnt to dance."

He has formed them for himself by studying the constitution of man and making observations on the success and failure of different attempts and the causes which led thereto; the very sources from which the first and all the later rhetoricians drew their rules. The constitution of man is however a field which still remains in a great measure unexplored. At least the discoveries which individuals have here made have been but very partially reported. Indeed so slavishly attached have the moderns been to the rules of composition laid down in the books, that they have done little more than translate those which originated with Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian. If preachers would resort more frequently to their own studied consciousness under different speakers, and less servilely to those rules which have produced the sermons of a Blair, they would be more eloquent and do more good. Too much attention to rules out of the mind, will just serve to render a preacher elegant and popular and useless. Try it in your common conversation. Let your chief attention be directed to your style and address, and the soul of your conversation has evaporated. Let your attention be engrossed by your subject or by an earnest desire to impart instruction or pleasure to those around you, and you are a different man.

But the rules which have been prescribed by rhetoricians are specially defective as they apply to the pulpit. Instead of directing the preacher to go forth with his eye fixed on God alone, with no weapon in his hands but "the sword of the Spirit," to ex-

cite passions not natural to men, and to produce a radical change of heart and life ; they send him forth to work a transient effect on the natural passions by the mere power of eloquence. This is less to be wondered at when it is considered how different from all other kinds of oratory is that of the pulpit, and that these rules were derived from the heathen who had no idea of simple truth's being employed by a divine power to awaken the highest passions of the soul, passions too not natural to men. The operation which takes place in a Christian church by the power of truth and the divine Spirit, is wholly different from that which took place in a Roman forum by the influence of Cicero's eloquence. Here the aim was to awaken none but natural passions, to subside as soon as awakened, without any regard to the permanent moral dispositions of men, and of course without reliance on any power higher than the native force of oratory. In like manner the modern orator at the bar and in the senate depends on himself alone, and without an ally attempts to take the citadel by storm. Pelagians may do the same in the pulpit : but Calvinists know that here the victory is to be won, "not by might nor by power, but by" the "Spirit" of "the Lord"; and they rely on the energy of truth in the hands of the Spirit to produce, not natural and transient effects, but supernatural and permanent transformations of heart and life.

Another respect in which the rules of rhetoric are inadapated to the pulpit is, that they take no account of that sinking down into nothing which precedes

an acceptance of Christ,—that dying which Paul experienced on the plains of Damascus “when the commandment came.”* None of the rhetoricians seem to consider the condition in which the Gospel finds mankind. It is that of prisoners condemned to die. Ministers are sent to offer them life upon condition that they will humble themselves and submit to their King,—upon condition that they will own the justice of their condemnation and die to all hope in themselves and rise up to a new life of hope in Christ. They are in a far different state from that of an Athenian populace high in their own estimation and preparing to resist the dominion of Macedon. They are not to be excited to live and act with their own native vigour, but to die that they may be made alive. Rhetoricians tell us that when we would persuade we must address only the active passions of hope, ambition, anger, and the like, or at farthest the intermediate ones of joy, love, compassion, &c. and never the torpid passions of sorrow, fear, and shame; implying that some of the most essential principles which the preacher has to address are not fit for the purpose of persuasion. And so indeed it would be if his aim was to rouse his hearers to violent action, as to march against Philip. But if he can move them to sorrow and bring them to lie low at their Maker’s feet, he has gained his point as much as Cicero did when he enkindled a general indignation against Cataline. This mistake has run through society. The greater part of religious people, I fear, do not urge the sinner

* Rom. vii. 9.

on till he is dead, but begin to talk of administering consolation as soon as he is awakened.

The rules of rhetoric, thus derived from a heathen source, and fostered in colleges where the spirit of the world has too much prevailed, have not been sufficiently baptised to apply to the pulpit. They have bestowed too much attention on elegance and too little on utility. They have taught young men how to make a character, rather than how to advance the kingdom of Christ; the very way that every feeling of nature leads. In prescribing the means of moving the passions, they have fastened the attention too much and too immediately on figurative language, and have thus set young men and young ministers upon manufacturing tropes and figures without a particle of feeling. They should have placed the efficiency in *the language of passion*, which when roused always rouses the imagination, and thus transfuses, mostly in figurative language, the feelings of the speaker into the hearers. I will only add, that rhetoric has put the orator upon examining the feelings of the human mind towards natural objects, but has not taught him to examine the motions of the carnal heart and of the pious mind towards God and religion, that he may be enabled to describe these feelings graphically and to address them with effect.

II. I am to develop some of the leading principles which ought to regulate this species of public speaking.

In every sermon the supreme object ought to be to do good. In forming your general style of

preaching, ask yourself, not what will surround you with temporary applause, but what sort of preachers scattered through the world would form the most glorious Church for Christ and bring most souls to heaven, and strive to be one of them. Go forth with a sense of absolute dependance on God. Always approach the sanctuary with a prayer on your tongue and with a strong desire in your heart for the salvation of men. Bathe your mind in your subject and preach every sermon as though it were your last. Keep your eye chiefly on the conscience. Take more pains to show your hearers that they have violated *obligations* and *ought* to do the service required, than that it would be pleasant and for their interest. If you wish to astonish only, make short and eloquent appeals to the passions, and just as your hearers begin to feel, stop : but if you wish to do execution, follow it up ; leave no stone unturned. A man less pressed with desire will state his case and a few arguments in point, and there calmly leave it. But a man who feels unable to quit till he has gained you, will surprise you with specimens of his invention. When you think he has exhausted the subject he will bring forward new matter ; not forced in, (that makes the heavy preacher,) but so necessary that you wonder you should have thought the subject ended without it. It is not the heavy afterpiece of a jaded spirit, but the very speaking of the soul.

Some preachers please the Church and some the world. Beware of a wish to be admired. The way to be popular with the serious and wise is not

to seek it. The way to be divinely eloquent is not to set up this for an object, but to steep the soul in heavenly truth. Let it not be so much your aim to polish as to point. Do not always choose the most popular and splendid subjects. Ask your *heart* what text to take. Never write a sermon merely because you must. When you are hunting for matter barely to fill up half an hour, it will always be uninteresting. Live so and study so that you will always have one subject that fills your heart, and take that. Write not so and so because you must fill a sermon, but because with present feelings you cannot write otherwise. Consult your own joys or trials or necessities to know what to say and in what order. Copy your own heart and views. These are the most interesting sermons. Here heart answers to heart.

The great engine to be employed is divine truth, and not arguments drawn from earthly sources, or a mere playing with the imagination and passions at a distance from divine truth. It is by the word of God that men are to be sanctified.* This is "the sword of the Spirit,"† the "fire" and the "hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces."‡ That preaching is the best which displays the most of God. What can Seneca's *Morals* or a treatise on the passions do in comparison with this? Look through Christendom and see: where does the kingdom of Christ flourish most? Is it where ministers are polite time-servers and entertain the ear with some refined moral treatise? or where the

* John xvii. 17. † Eph. vi. 17. ‡ Jer. xxiii. 29.

truth is preached in its plainness and simplicity? A natural effect of a deep dependance on God will be to exhibit the truths of his word in quick succession and to point them at the conscience; not to run out among human relations and events and wander away from the soberness and solemnity of divine truth. There is such a thing as secularizing the most sacred subject by a sort of profane handling. Thus in exhibiting the divine perfections, a man of imagination may take, for instance, the omnipotence of God, and illustrate it by the rolling of the sea and the sweeping of a whirlwind, all fancifully described, and calculated to take the mind from God and confine it to earth about as much as Thompson's Seasons. I go to church with an entirely different feeling and view and expectation from what I have when I sit down to Homer. His image of the helmit emitting fires like the autumnal star of evening, affects me when I have formed my mind for amusement and poetry; but when I am at my devotions such things belong to another world and would chill and disgust me.

Avoid remote matter,—going round and round a subject without coming to the point like Paul. Much of this may be found in the specimens of Claude, where the ingenuity is often racked to bring forth what is of little worth. One would think that this distinguished Protestant regarded preaching as a decent and dignified presiding over the public worship of an assembly in a great metropolis, and nothing more. Whitefield, or any man conversant with scenes of the Holy Ghost, would have

given different specimens. A man with the heart of a Seneca may find matter enough around about Christianity to fill the discourses of half a century, without ever preaching a Gospel sermon.

Shun not to declare the *whole* counsel of God ; not all at once, but as the people are able to bear it ; not in a tortuous manner, but directly and explicitly. Use not circumlocution to avoid the word *hell*. Say not *Deity* or *the Being who rules the world*, but *God*. The greatest prudence lies in obeying him and securing his protection. But use "acceptable words."* Avoid terms that are peculiarly obnoxious when others will do as well. Be gentle and affectionate in your manner. Show no pride in speaking of opposers. Descend not to the unmanliness of making your pulpit your fort from which to assail your enemies. When you have occasion to speak of the character and prospects of sinners, let it appear to be done, (and to appear natural it must be real,) not from delight in their misery, or from exultation at being raised above them, or from a propensity to threaten and arraign, but from necessity and love ; and make it manifest from your compassionate looks and softened tones, that the description gives you pain. There is an opposite manner, as useless as it is disgusting ; a talking of sinners and their punishment in a hard-hearted way ; throwing out things in a disjointed, harsh, unfeeling style, and not in an affectionate, convincing, affecting, pungent manner ; denouncing them in general terms and

* Eccl. xii. 10. See also Prov. xvi. 21. and xxv. 11, 12.

declaiming about hell-fire, without taking any sober pains to fix a conviction of sin upon the heart; in a word, throwing about coruscations of lightning without awakening any sense of guilt.

But my brethren, we have something more to deal with than the understanding; we must address also the imagination and passions. I have said that the eloquence of the pulpit differs from all other kinds of oratory in two respects; first, in that the power which gives it success is supernatural; secondly, that the only means to be relied on are the truths of God. Now both of these circumstances admit of a qualification which, while it lessens the difference between this and other species of oratory, shows that the whole man must be addressed from the pulpit as well as at the bar and in the senate. The remark which is to qualify the first circumstance is, that the supernatural operations of God go so much in a line with nature, that what would affect a man without the Spirit would be more likely to be carried by the Spirit to his heart. Else there would be no reason for improving our manner by education at all, and all that would be necessary would be to study divine truth and lay it before the understanding in the coarsest plebeian dress. We must therefore conclude that a skilful address to the whole man is consistent with absolute dependance on the Spirit of God; and I will add, as consistent as the use of any other means. The end of all the means of grace is to bring divine truth into contact with the consciousness and sensibilities of the soul. What do sacraments and sabbaths and sacred music and a written

and preached word and the dispensations of providence, more? And just this and no more is accomplished, as I shall presently show, by addresses to all the faculties of the mind. Truth is thus brought into contact with the whole man. But after ministers have preached ever so eloquently and long, when sinners are bowed, as great a wonder is wrought, and by God alone, as when Jericho fell. And if with the most impassioned appeals we go forth relying on God as the only efficient agent, we go forth as Joshua and as Gideon and as David did.

The remark which is to qualify the second circumstance is, that though the preacher, unlike all other orators, is limited to divine truth as his means, he, no more than they, is limited to the understanding as the object of address. For in the first place, he must speak to the whole man in order to bring divine truth clearly before the understanding. That vivacity of style which is addressed to the imagination and passions, serves greatly to strengthen belief, by fixing the attention, by aiding the memory, by exhibiting a lively picture of the subject, giving to the mind a fuller and stronger view of it, and by the analogical arguments contained in rhetorical comparisons and other similar figures.* Every one knows that truth may be introduced to the view of the understanding through the medium of the passions. I

* There is a near relationship between imagery and ratiocination; the latter consisting in a comparison of ideas whose resemblance is more obvious, the former in a comparison of ideas whose resemblance escapes ordinary observation. "Moral reasoning," says Campbell, "is but a kind of comparison;" and "rhetorical comparisons," he adds, are "but arguments from analogy."

never saw the worth of the soul as when I had a child lying at the point of death ; the truth in this instance opening to my understanding through the medium of parental affection. In the second place, truth, in all its interesting aspects and relations, is adapted, not to the understanding alone, but to the imagination and passions and conscience and will. Are the amazing truths of the love of God, the mission and death of Christ, our infinite ruin by sin, the final judgment, an eternal heaven and an eternal hell, to be contemplated, like mathematical verities, without emotion ? There is no holiness in mere speculation. All holiness primarily consists in passion. Nothing but passion is directly enjoined, and nothing outward but the fruit of passion : for love, “ the fulfilling of the law,” is a passion ; and so is gratitude and repentance and desire and compassion and joy in the Holy Ghost. Without passion we could not be holy. Without passion we could not be persuaded to act at all, for there would be nothing to which a motive could be addressed. If we loved or cared for nothing what could induce us ? Without passion therefore we could not exercise the power of will, of course could not move, in short should be nothing but intellectual statues. Doubtless then passion, and the kindred power imagination, were made for the service of God and ought to be enlisted. For what other end was sacred music ordained, with “ psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,” but to operate on these powers ?

We are so constituted that when the passions are excited the imagination is roused, and when it is

roused it naturally pours itself out in its own proper dialect of figures. If then we may not use figurative language, we must either suppress passion or express it in language unnatural to man and incapable of being understood. The former would convert us into intellectual icebergs, the latter would prevent us from imparting our feelings to others. Either would lead to a religion of mere notions. If we take this ground there are other sects who will find out that men have feelings and will bear down all before them. If we take this ground our churches will either sink into a notional religion or go off to other denominations who know how to address the whole man.

On the other hand, a figurative style undictated by passion and got up by labour is still more frigid and disgusting. Like the sky in a wintry night, it may sparkle but it freezes. Never go out of your way to select a flower, but if it comes in your path be not afraid to take it up.

There is no book on the face of the earth which addresses itself so strongly to the imagination and passions as the Bible. The prejudices against appeals to these powers have arisen in part from witnessing bad specimens, in which the onset was made, not by a close application of divine truth, but by a press of other considerations; not to subserve a religious impression, but to produce a stage effect, and often in strained and unnatural language. Nothing of all this is found in the Scriptures. In their appeals to the passions they employ of course nothing but divine truth, though often conveyed

through the medium of natural affections. All their appeals are subservient to a religious impression. Not like some popular preachers who will make you weep, and having dissolved you will turn away; they labour to impress on the molten mass the image of God, and show that they dissolved it for no other end. And as to their style, they address nature in the very language of nature. Look at the story of Joseph and his brethren, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, the parable of the prodigal son, and the visit of Mary to the sepulchre: how infinitely different from those splendid declamations or blustering harangues which, with high professions of warmth, breathe none of the tones of nature and betray a total want of feeling.

We have but few specimens of the preaching of Paul; but there is one sentence in his address to the elders of Ephesus which lets us in to his manner of preaching in that city for a considerable time: "Remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day WITH TEARS."* Surely a preacher standing on this isthmus of time, with two worlds opening upon him, with Calvary on the one hand and a dying race on the other, has enough to rouse his feelings. By all the means which the most impassioned eloquence can furnish, he ought to strive to bring the truth of God home to the soul; not to set off his own character, nor to sooth with pleasant sounds, nor to dazzle with the splendour of tropes, but to set the loveliness and glory of truth in full blaze before the eye. Here

* Acts xx. 31.

let him spurn the earth and rise above criticism itself.*

But you say, I would not exclude the passions, I only object to what may be called a *passionate religion*, and to that impassioned preaching which is calculated to produce it. The dispute then is not about the *thing* but the *degree*. I shall doubtless acknowledge that among some enthusiasts, passion, instead of being the handmaid, has become the mistress of the house. For nothing of this do I plead. Reason is unquestionably to rule and passion to be subordinate. And as to the degree of passion allowable, I know of no other limit. As long as

* The following is one of the best passages in Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric. "The imagination is charmed by a finished picture, wherein even drapery and ornament are not neglected; for here the end is pleasure. Would we penetrate further and agitate the soul, we must exhibit only some vivid strokes, some expressive features, not decorated as for show, (all ostentation being both despicable and hurtful here,) but such as appear the natural exposition of those bright and deep impressions made by the subject upon the speaker's mind; for here the end is not pleasure but emotion. Would we not only touch the heart but win it entirely to cooperate with our views, those affecting lineaments must be so interwoven with our argument, as that from the passion excited our reasoning may derive importance and so be fitted for commanding attention, and by the justness of the reasoning the passion may be more deeply rooted and enforced; and that thus both may be made to conspire in effectuating that persuasion which is the end proposed." This amounts to the vehement or impassioned, which, he says, has "always been regarded as the supreme qualification in an orator." Book I. Chap. I.

The following is among the best passages in Blair's Lectures. "There is a third and still higher degree of eloquence, wherein a greater power is exerted over the human mind; by which we are not only convinced but are interested, agitated, and carried along with the speaker; our passions are made to rise together with his; we enter into all his emotions,—and are prompted to resolve or to act with vigour and warmth.—The high eloquence which I have last mentioned is always the offspring of passion.—A man may convince and even persuade others to act by mere reason and argument; but that degree of eloquence which gains the admiration

reason governs, I see nothing to blame in the fervours of “the rapt seraph that adores and burns.” Who will say that the sacred passions which glowed in the heart of a David, a Watts, a Whitefield, and a Brainerd, though far removed from the ordinary coldness of mere didactic preachers, were disproportionate to the sublime truths they contemplated?

Still there is a counterfeit. Men may be carried away by a religious phrensy who have very little religion. This is doubtless a thing to be guarded against. And this must be done by a clear and well proportioned display of truth. One truth disproportionately dwelt upon may destroy the balance of the mind. Thus a part of the rays of the sun separated from the rest will stain your page red or orange or violet, but if the full light of heaven falls

of mankind and properly denominates one an orator, is never found without warmth or passion. Passion, when in such a degree as to rouse and kindle the mind without throwing it out of the possession of itself, is universally found to exalt all the human powers. It renders the mind infinitely more enlightened, more penetrating, more vigorous and masterly, than it is in its calm moments. A man actuated by a strong passion becomes much greater than he is at other times. He is conscious of more strength and force; he utters greater sentiments, conceives higher designs, and executes them with a boldness and a felicity of which, on other occasions, he could not think himself capable. But chiefly with respect to persuasion is the power of passion felt. Almost every man in passion is eloquent. Then he is at no loss for words and arguments. He transmits to others, by a sort of contagious sympathy, the warm sentiments which he feels; his looks and gestures are all persuasive; and nature here shows herself infinitely more powerful than all art. This is the foundation of that just and noted rule, ‘*Si vis me flere, dolendum est primum ipsi tibi.*’—Hence all laboured declamation and affected ornaments of style, which show the mind to be cool and unmoved, are so inconsistent with persuasive eloquence. Hence all studied prettinesses in gesture or pronunciation detract so greatly from the weight of a speaker.—Hence to call a man cold is the same thing as to say that he is not eloquent.” *Lect. xxv.*

upon it it will leave it a pure white. All truths seen in proper combinations, though they may elevate and astonish, will produce no phrensy. There was no phrensy in "the unenthusiastic Jesus," with all the amazing truths of heaven beaming upon his soul. There is no phrensy in the Eternal Mind.

Two things we see. David, with all his elevated views and devotions, has nothing excessive, nothing disproportionate. In all his excursions among the wonders of the divine perfections and government, he never loses his balance, is always self-possessed, always calm enough to express with propriety and dignity the amazing views which open on his soul; while others are carried away in a phrensy of religious zeal whose ignorance, excesses, and uncharitableness show them to be strangers to sanctified affections. How then shall we distinguish "the precious from the vile"? By the word of God, by reason, and by the Holy Ghost. In particular let the question be decided by what the Spirit of God teaches when he descends,—by that kind of feeling and preaching which he dictates in revivals of religion. What does the Spirit do? He does not enlarge the understanding; he only impresses divine truth upon the heart and awakens those affections which are suited to the truths impressed. Two things then are evinced by revivals of religion; that the Holy Ghost approves of strong affections, and that the truths of the Gospel are calculated to excite them. It is a good rule to make the generality of your sermons such as would most please and affect an audience in a revival of religion. Razeed

down by this rule, how many sermons, even of a practical form, would have little left.

Would you successfully reach the soul, select the most proper ideas, open your eyes to view them, work up your mind to feel them, and then express them just as you view and feel them yourself. Select words best adapted to this, and let no flowers interrupt or disturb this precise expression. Let your style be such that the hearers will attend only to the thought, without considering that you have any style. For this your style must be simple, easy, and natural. Let your manner be just such as nature puts on when she feels, and such that the serious hearer will not consider that you have any manner, but only feel the effect. Let your tones be solemn and affecting; not indifferent as though you were talking on a subject of no importance. The attitude, the eyes, the whole man should speak. No matter how pleasing a preacher is, if it is not the man nor the writer nor the speaker that is admired, but the truths expressed,—if behind his subject he hides not only himself but the ornaments of his style and the gracefulness of his action. All must appear so natural, so artless, so right from the heart, that nothing shall be thought of or felt or give pleasure or pain but the subject itself; just as in the case of a man who, in all the commotion of grief, is eloquently describing in private the stroke which has swept his children into the grave. Let your tones and action vary in different parts of your discourse, passing lightly over lighter matters and reserving your strength for those of more impor-

tance. Let this rule be carried from paragraphs to sentences and from sentences to clauses. Avoid every thing violent and strongly dramatic.

—————"Avaunt all attitude and stare
And start theatric practis'd at the glass."

Too much thought about elegance of action will impress a studied manner that cannot fail to be cold and uninteresting. Yet do not cramp yourself with too much restraint. Fear no gestures which impassioned nature dictates under the solemnity and weight of divine truth. I will only add that your sermon, unless merely didactic, (which perhaps it may sometimes be,) should rise in interest and warmth to the end.

If there is a subject in the universe which does not befit a cold, sleepy, monotonous tone and manner, it is that which a preacher brings into the pulpit. Sleep over such truths and such concerns! Why will he not sleep at the day of judgment? You say, because amazing things will then be *seen*: and what prevents him from seeing them now but unbelief?

III. I am to point out some faults to be avoided.

I have three faulty forms in my eye; the *declamatory*, the *artificial*, and the *mere didactic*.

(1.) The declamatory. This consists in running through a loud and rapid course under the impulse of mere volubility, without aiming at any definite impression; dealing in generals, in glowing words unnaturally selected and combined because undictated by feeling; with much semblance of earnestness, but without any real warmth or the power of exci-

ting it in others. Where ignorance and hardness combine, it dashes forward sticking at no difficulties and feeling none. Sometimes it rises up into a counterfeit passion at first, and blusters through a whole discourse with one monotonous and unmeaning vociferation. Now this is as powerless as it is disgusting. Never, in writing or speaking, affect a warmth that you do not feel. Begin low at first. Keep down till your subject forces you up, and then you will rise naturally and carry your hearers with you. Take care not to rise so early that you cannot sustain yourself to the end. It is easy to get higher, but difficult and dangerous to descend. Sometimes the declamatory swells into the turgid, and even in this form attempts to move the passions. But here it utterly fails. If ever there is need of simplicity it is when you attempt the pathetic.

There is another species of preaching of a far more popular cast which I think may be ranked under this head. I mean that which in the view of the fashionable world entitles the preacher to the highest rank among pulpit orators; that which is full of warm and elegant declamation or fanciful descriptions,—of tasteful addresses or beautiful pictures; which takes divine truth for its text and its heads, but instantly leaves it and runs out among human relations and events for its sparkling or its splendid illustrations. If it ever awakens the passions, (as sometimes it powerfully does,) it is the natural passions only. It delights worldly men because it pleases their fancy, without paining their conscience, and it may surround the preacher with

glory, but it will never do any good. God Almighty preserve our churches from preachers like these.

There is a wide difference between the eloquence of words and the eloquence of thought. One soothes and delights and leaves you unimpressed; the other opens the universe to your view, overwhelms you with a sight of God and Christ and heaven and hell, transports you to any part of the universe the speaker pleases, sets you down at the judgment seat, brings you back to tremble over your dying children and your own sins, and controls your conscience and passions at his will. Every stroke reaches the heart.

To know who are the best preachers on the whole, look at the effects. Compare the state of religion in France during the splendid reign of Lewis XIV. under those eloquent declaimers, Massillon, Bossuet, and Bourdaloue, with the state of religion in England at the same period, under the warm and faithful preaching of Howe, Bates, Baxter, Flavel, Owen, Calamy, and Tillotson.

(2.) The artificial. There are two grades of this fault which I wish to notice. The first consists simply in a style and manner befitting, not an address to a popular assembly, but an essay read from a book. The sentences are constructed and put together in a cool and studied manner, with too much deliberation for warmth and too much labour for vivacity or ease. The subject is treated in an abstract way, as though one was discussing it in his study and not addressing it to an audience, and of

course is apt to be delivered in a reading tone. Generally the movement is much slower than the minds of the hearers, by means of a minute specification of circumstances which their imagination might better have supplied. As it is impossible in this way to awaken any other powers of the mind, this preaching must be considered as addressed solely to the understanding. There are occasions, (perhaps the present may be one,) on which a calm discussion of a subject is the most proper manner of treating it. But what I object to is the application to all Gospel subjects of a studied and abstract manner. This, to those who are doomed to endure it, must be soporific and intolerable. It may in some measure supply the place of books, but can never answer the purpose intended by the appointment of the living preacher. The style is not that of nature nor of the Bible. It is an artificial one introduced by an abuse of the practice of *writing* sermons. The natural manner in which man addresses man is that which prevails in conversation and in more animated forms of speech without writing. Notes should be only auxiliary to that mode of speaking which would be employed without them. They only help our infirmity but ought not to introduce a new manner. A good way to guard against this injurious influence of notes, is to extemporize in all your sermons out of season. This will give a natural air both to the style and delivery of your written discourses, while your habit of writing will impart more accuracy to your extemporaneous efforts. But the fault in question has another

origin. It has been imposed upon us by system and design, by men who feared nothing so much as warmth in religion; whose care in all their preaching has been to keep out emotion and to lead the people to nothing but calm contemplation and polished morality. The tasteful specimens which they have given of such preaching and the high encomiums heaped upon it by the better sort, have rendered it fashionable, and led others to adopt it who have something more to preach than mere moral sentiments. We are all aware of the calamity brought upon the churches by the introduction of heresy; but this chain which the author of heresy has attempted to throw around us seems not to have been discovered. And yet it is the masterpiece of his art. You may refute his heresies, but if you leave this accompaniment in the Church you yield him the victory at last.

In this very abstraction lies much of the difference between uninteresting and impressive preachers. The former treat of moral qualities, the latter of persons, and point every man's eye to himself. They say to the wicked, This morning you went into the world without going to your closet or your family altar. This is an important matter. It is good to place the Christian or the sinner before you and talk *to* him as Cicero did to Cataline.

The second grade of this fault is only the first rendered still more intense. Both involve the cold, abstract, essay style. Both consist in exclusive addresses to the understanding. But the peculiarity of this lies in the involution of its style and the in-

version of its arrangement. So much more care is bestowed on adjusting and balancing the clauses than on expressing the thought with conciseness and force, that though the sentences appear at first well formed, they discover, upon a closer inspection, many clauses which only round the period without adding any thing to the sense, and a still greater number which express minute circumstances which the imagination of the hearers might better have supplied: so that the sentences, though wrought with great precision and far from appearing redundant, are really encumbered with much dead matter, and are slow and heavy and dull. This style is a bad imitation of Johnson; and is more offensive than the other as it betrays more labour, and is more obtrusive in its claims, and more likely to decoy others to imitation. There are few things more insupportable than when you enter the house of God to worship or to hear some thing to quicken your spirit, to be obliged to listen to a cold essay; and it becomes the more intolerable the greater the pains that appear to have been taken to give it this form, for this looks like going out of the way to torment you. Such a style generally betrays a great want of originality. Men not overcharged with that subtle property called genius, and still less gifted with taste, labour hard to express common things in an uncommon way, to twist their mother tongue into stiff and stately forms, and to be "correctly dull." If they would take half the pains to cultivate the language of nature which they do to spoil their style, they might be impressive preachers.

These same men are perhaps interesting in conversation, where they have not tortured their thoughts into inverted shapes and broken them to a new order of march. This is not the order in which they think themselves; it is not the order in which the multitude think; it is not the order in which any one thinks; and therefore it cannot affect a popular assembly and is not adapted to the pulpit. It may serve as a vehicle of instruction, but can never interest the affections. Try the experiment upon your neighbour. Tell him of a scene of suffering in your family; and instead of pouring out your feelings in the language and tones of nature and thereby awakening his sympathy, tell the story in an artificial and complicated style, and you might as well hint it to him in an enigma. To make him feel with you you must show him that you feel yourself; and this can be done only by uttering the language and tones by which such feelings are ordinarily expressed by men. He will not understand any other dialect. They who affect the other have set up a wrong standard. The highest perfection in the style of a public speaker is connected with ease and nature. Towards this point every effort ought to tend, every step of improvement ought to be directed. But these men are struggling right the other way. Some giant of a Johnson, with all the cumbrance of artificial structure, has protruded his unwieldy form through the world, and Samson like has poised the pillars of the house notwithstanding his fetters of brass; and his humble imitators, without his might, are trying what they can do with

both hands bound. They are placing perfection in sonorous words, in a stateliness of movement, in an antithetical balance of clauses, and are running from nature as fast as they can.

“I seek divine simplicity in him
Who handles things divine.”

It may be relied on as an everlasting maxim, that the eloquence best fitted to thrill the heart of a philosopher, is that which melts a child.

This artificial style was born and brought up in colleges, and is the effect of too exclusive a use of the pen. It is the rightful property of book-worms. It never found its way into the drawing room, among men accustomed to conversation more than to writing. It never showed itself in the forum or the senate. The best cure for it is to betake oneself to the labours of a pastor, particularly to extemporaneous preaching, and especially in revivals of religion.

(3.) The mere didactic. The fault here lies not in the style but the matter,—in a confinement to doctrinal preaching to the exclusion of all warm and pointed appeals to the conscience and heart. I do not object to the occasional introduction of close reasoning, and even of metaphysical reasoning, into the pulpit; though I think the latter ought to be sparingly done, and the former not too often. I care not how closely you distinguish and reason in your study; but in the pulpit it were better in general to present the results than the processes which led to them. The doctrines of the Gospel must be preached; and now and then the proofs

may be pretty fully exhibited ; but they ought to be thrown upon the view more frequently than these heavy reasonings would be welcome. Sometimes the proof of a particular truth may be flashed upon the mind in a moment,—as of the divine decrees or the instantaneousness of regeneration : sometimes the dependance of a number of doctrines on each other and the truth of the whole may be set forth in a few masterly strokes : and sometimes several doctrines may be very profitably pointed at the conscience in a passing and pungent manner,—as the total enmity of the heart, supported by facts which the sinner's experience attests, and followed by a lucid charge that he has forced upon God the alternative of changing his heart or leaving him to perish, and the necessity of determining which ; thus making the sinner accountable in a sense for the doctrines of regeneration and election. But an everlasting dwelling on doctrines in a way of heavy and abstract reasonings, to the exclusion of every warm and pungent appeal, is a gross mistake respecting the nature of man and the operations of the human mind ; respecting the nature of truth also, which is an object not of speculation merely but of powerful and everlasting feeling. This course, pursued with dull monotonous tones, is calculated to fix the impression that we do not believe or that we attach no importance to what we preach, and thus to spread stupidity and infidelity among our hearers and children.

The plan of bringing a whole body of divinity into a single sermon on a public occasion before a

collection of ministers, is only the same system carried to perfection. Had not a mind been shut up to the idea that preaching is only an exhibition of abstract truth to the understanding, it seems impossible that such a project of a sermon should ever have been conceived. For besides its intolerable heaviness and prolixity, of what earthly use can it be to run over a whole system of doctrines, when there is time only to enumerate their names with a few common place remarks, without adding a proof or an illustration of the least importance? What light can this cast on a body of ministers? or what entertainment can it afford them? or what particle of good can it do to any human being on earth?

My dear brethren, why are we not more impressive? Theology affords the best field for tender, solemn, and sublime eloquence. The most august objects are presented, the most important interests are discussed, the most tender motives are urged. God and angels, the treason of Satan, the creation, ruin, and recovery of a world, the incarnation, death, resurrection, and reign of the Son of God, the day of judgment, a burning universe, an eternity, a heaven and a hell, all pass before the eye. What are the petty dissensions in the states of Greece or the ambition of Philip? What are the plots and rivalries of Rome or the treason of Cataline, compared with this? If ministers were sufficiently qualified by education, study, and the Holy Ghost; if they felt their subject as much as Demosthenes and Cicero did, they would be the most

eloquent men on earth, and would be so esteemed wherever congenial minds were found.

My dear brethren, I have allowed myself to speak with freedom for I know to whom I am speaking. I have confidence in you. My spirit is joined to your spirit. Probably in the world there is not a more enlightened body of divines than in New England. I see in you the sons of those wonderful men who first preached the Gospel to these churches. Their sepulchres are with us, their institutions are with us, and their doctrines are with us to this day. O may their mantles rest upon us, and may we emulate the faithfulness and zeal with which they preached the Gospel. They are gone to their last account and we are rapidly following. The time is short. Whatever we do we must do quickly.

Dear brethren, our office is no ordinary one. We are ambassadors from the King of kings and Lord of lords to a revolted world. Never had men committed to them an embassy of such deep and everlasting moment. No work ever undertaken by mortals was so important, so solemn, or connected with such amazing consequences. Among all the thousands to whom we preach, not one but will take an impression from us that will never wear out. The fate of millions through succeeding generations depends on our faithfulness. Heaven and hell will forever ring with recited memorials of our ministry. And O our own responsibility. There is for us no middle destiny. Our stake is for a higher throne of glory or for a deeper hell. For to say nothing of the souls committed to our care, our work leads to

the altar. Our home is by the side of the Shekinah. We have daily to go where Nadab and Abihu went, and to transact with him who darted his lightning upon them. It is a solemn thing to stand so near that holy Lord God. Let us beware how by unhal- lowed fervours we bring false fire before the Lord. Let us not fail to devote to our work our best pow- ers, our unceasing application, consecrated by unre- mitting prayer. Any thing rather than careless preparations for the pulpit and a sleepy performance in it. Forget your father, forget your mother, but forget not this infinite work of God.

Soon we shall appear with our respective charges before the judgment seat of Christ. What a scene will then open between a pastor and his flock ; when all his official conduct towards them shall be scruti- nized, and all their treatment of him and his Gospel shall be laid open ; when it shall appear that an omniscient eye followed him into his study every time he sat down to write a sermon, and traced every line upon his paper and every motion of his heart ; and followed him into the pulpit, and watch- ed every kindling desire, every drowsy feeling, every wandering thought, every reach after fame. Ah my dear brethren, when you hear on the right hand the songs of bursting praise that you ever had existence, and on the left behold a company of wretched spirits sending forth their loud lament that you had not warned them with a stronger voice, will you not regret that all your sermons were not more impas- sioned and all your prayers more agonizing ? But what is that I see ? A horrid shape more deeply

scarred with thunder than the rest, around which a thousand dreadful beings, with furious eyes and threatening gestures, are venting their raging curses. It is an unfaithful pastor, who went down to hell with most of his congregation; and these around him are the wretched beings whom he decoyed to death. My soul turns away and cries, Give me poverty, give me the curses of a wicked world, give me the martyr's stake; but O my God, save me from unfaithfulness to thee and the souls of men.