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The Author

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DR. GRIFFIN'S ORATION.

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ORATION

DELIVERED JUNE 21, 1809,

ON THE DAY

OF THE AUTHOR'S INDUCTION INTO THE OFFICE

OF

BARTLET PROFESSOR OF PULPIT ELOQUENCE,

IN THE

DIVINITY COLLEGE,

AT ANDOVER.

BY EDWARD D. GRIFFIN, D. D.

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ORATION.

ON this occasion, and before such an audience, I rise embarrassed: but I rise with a mind affected and animated by the interesting scene. Brought hither by the exertions of beneficence, of which the occasion forbids me to speak, I am come, to co-operate, as the feebleness of my powers will permit, in measures which originated in prayer, and were dictated, as I believe, by the Spirit of God. I am come, with what ability I have, to second exertions which, distinguished already with signal success, have the honour of preparing the way for whatever is yet to follow.

However I may tremble under a sense of incompetency to discharge the duties assigned

me, I know that the expression of my feelings would appear like affectation. I shall, therefore, only congratulate myself on the candour which I am sure to meet, the wisdom and talents around me to which I can resort, and the ability with which the concerns of this institution, independently of my aid, will be conducted.

The noble efforts which have been made to erect this *school of the prophets*,—to bring forth this child of prayer,—have formed a new era in the American Church, and turned the publick eye, with eagerness and hope, towards this place. Already are our brethren sending up prayers to heaven, from every part of our country, for the prosperity of this infant seminary. Already with tears they have blessed the men—but I must consider where I stand. I may, however, be permitted to say, that the distant churches of our country are animated with joyful expectation that this institution will prove a *fountain to make glad the city of God*.

I stand, this day, upon sacred ground ; on ground where the fathers of New-England have often prayed ; on ground which has been consecrated by faith, hope, and charity, to the living God ; which supports an institution designed to perpetuate the faith of our ancestors, and to bless an unborn offspring. What reverence becomes the place ! Shall I take off the shoes from my feet ! I bow before the majesty and sacredness of the object to which this ground is devoted ! The business to be conducted here is, in the highest degree, benevolent ; and will have incalculable influence on the present and future happiness of men. This is not the place to form generals for fame and for carnage ; but youthful Gideons, to lead “the sacramental host of God’s elect” to fight the battles of their King ;—to fight with tears, not with swords ; to wield the weapon of prayer, instead of spears ; and to carry to the assailed mercy, instead of death. This is not the place to form statesmen, to settle the little concerns of nations ; but ministers of Christ, to manage, under their king, the interests

of an immortal kingdom,—a kingdom which will shine with the splendours of heaven, when all the kingdoms of men shall be no more. This is not the place to elicit the sparks of forensick eloquence, or to raise up men to shine in national debate ; but to fit young evangelists to pour the strains of immortal truth, and to plead before a dying race the cause of God, and His anointed Son. Generals may conquer, and statesmen may rule ; but there is no work so great or so good, as that of a gospel minister. If the memory of a Howard is blessed, for visiting the prisons and lazarettos of Europe, to relieve temporal distress, surely *they* ought not to hold a *thankless* office, who spend their lives in efforts to deliver their brethren from the prison of endless despair, the lazaretto of eternal disease.

Here such men are to be formed :—not your fustian declaimers,—not your dull retailers of Seneca and Plato ; but men, we hope, of faith and of a sound mind, valiant champions for the truth, animated with the spirit of mar-

tyrs, and ready, in the name of the Lord, to meet a world in arms! Blessed institution, if it may prove the *alma mater* of such a generation of men! Happy visitors, happy trustees and professors, who are employed in rearing a seminary for a purpose so divine! But blessed beyond others are they whose hands have laid the foundation! But I forbear; their record is in heaven.

This day I have the honour to enter upon the duties of this highly responsible station, and the happiness to form an affectionate union with my reverend colleagues. We shall have but one heart, and one mind; and shall find mingled with our labours the comforts of mutual friendship: but, without higher support, we shall sink with the exclamation on our tongues, *Who is sufficient for these things!* If the office of a gospel minister is loaded with responsibility, which causes the firmest mind to tremble, what is the charge of preparing men for that sacred office! What am *I* to do! Am I to teach others how to preach the adored name of Jesus! I have scarcely learned to lisp that name

myself. May it please Him who separated me from my mother's womb, and made me what I am, to reveal His Son in me, to guide this stammering tongue, and touch these lips with a coal from His altar !

The gospel is committed to *earthen vessels* ; for a reason which gives delight to every pious heart,—*that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us*. It is not the object of divinity-schools to take this power out of the hands of God, nor to mould any other than *earthen vessels*. After all the pains which may be employed to shape and polish them, they are earthen vessels still ; and still the excellency of the power must be of God alone.

Preachers of the gospel can do no more than to set before their brethren *motives* to virtue and godliness. But the only motives which God has appointed, are those which His word contains : no others, therefore, are ministers commissioned to employ. That eloquence only is worthy of the pulpit, which consists in dis-

playing and enforcing, to the best advantage, the various truths contained in the sacred scriptures.

These truths, and these alone, are *the sword of the Spirit,—the fire and the hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces.* They are the grand weapons which God employs to subdue the world : and in proportion to the dexterity with which they are wielded by His servants, is ordinarily the extent of the conquest. Often, indeed, are these truths preached without any accompanying influence to give them effect ; and they are sometimes made more effectual in the hands of the weakest instruments, than, at other times, when illustrated and enforced by the most splendid talents. This is wisely ordered to abase the pride of man, and to show him his absolute dependance on sovereign grace. It is designed to utter a language which cannot be too often repeated : *Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.* I admit, also, that humble dependance on God, accompanied with earnest desires for the salvation of men, and fervent prayer, will

have more influence on the success of a minister, than the most persuasive eloquence. But after all these concessions, such is the manner of divine operation, that, *other things being equal, the success of the gospel is ordinarily in proportion to the clearness and force with which it is preached.* This is true, or why do ministers exert themselves to preach in a persuasive, or even an instructive manner? Why do they preach at all? If truth be *not* a divine instrument, preaching is in vain. If it *be*, its effect may be expected to bear some proportion to the skilfulness with which is it handled and applied. This important conclusion, while it affords ministers abundant encouragement to preach the gospel, *equally encourages them to study the best manner of exhibiting its sacred truths*; and encourages them as fully as though success depended on the mere power of *moral suasion.*

These, then, are the positions which lie at the foundation of all instruction in this department; that the power is of God, that God works by the instrumentality of His own truth, that He

applies no other instrument to the heart, and that the effect is ordinarily in proportion to the clearness and force with which that truth is preached.

It results from these positions, that the perfection of pulpit eloquence consists in displaying the most affecting gospel truths, in the most impressive manner. The highest efforts of eloquence can achieve no more than to bring these truths into contact with the consciousness of the mind, and the feeling of the heart,—to lodge them, as it were, among the sensibilities of the soul.

The great question is, How can this be done? It is evident that a preacher's *manner* may be such as to awaken attention, and draw his hearers to a nearer and more steady view of the truths which he wishes to exhibit. By the skilfulness of his address, he may also remove prejudices, and leave nothing to encounter but opposition to the truth itself, instead of forming an unnecessary combination against him.

But this is not all. He may avail himself of the aid of some of the secondary powers of our nature. That these powers were created for handmaids to religion, will be manifest to any one who will consider the purpose of divine wisdom in the institution of *sacred musick*; or who will trace those elevated flights of imagination, and those strong appeals to the passions, which are found in the poetick parts of scripture.

The *imagination* is a reflecting glass, which casts a fuller light on the objects that pass before the eye. By the aid of this faculty, a more vivid sense of divine objects is produced, and all the motives which the scriptures present are more deeply impressed on the mind.

The *natural affections*, also, may be pressed into the service of the preacher. Daily experience teaches us that these affections are avenues to the soul, through which divine truth is introduced. When a parent hangs over the bed of a dying child, he feels the worth of a

soul, as he never felt it when looking upon the children of the streets. The abstract truth, *that the soul is of immense value*, has found its way to his heart through the avenue of the natural affections. The impression respects not his child alone ; it brings with it an increased sense of the value of souls in general. It comes coupled with other truths,—the worth of the gospel, the unspeakable love of Him who died for our redemption. These, and other kindred truths, are felt as they would not be, were the parent standing by the dying bed of a *stranger*.

A child has disobeyed and grieved an affectionate mother. No remorse seizes him, till through some aperture he sees her tears falling in secret. The sight pierces him to the heart. At once the sin of disobedience to parents rises before him, and is felt as it never would have been, had she who bore him been less beloved.

In the same manner all the leading truths of

divine revelation may be introduced through the avenue of the natural affections. This avenue, then, will not be overlooked by a pious minister, anxious to find all the passes which lead to the hearts of his hearers.

Divine truth may enter through the medium, also, of *sympathy*. When the countenance, the tones, the action, of a preacher, all express a solemn sense of everlasting realities, those realities are more deeply felt by his hearers; for the same reason that the *example* of a virtuous and devout man is the most convincing and impressive preacher on earth.

But through whatever medium an impression is made on the mind, *it must be made by divine truth, or it is made in vain*. And it must be made by the *power of God*. We do not expect, nor desire to send forth preachers, with powers of persuasion competent of themselves to triumph over human ignorance and opposition. Paul may plant, and Apollos may water; but it is God who gives the increase.

Ministers may indeed convince the understanding, and affect the passions, without any special interposition of God. They may preach what the divine Spirit may effectually apply to the heart. But the success of the gospel is ensured, not by human eloquence, but by the interpositions of omnipotent grace. This is true in the fullest and most absolute sense. It is as true as that the sound of trumpets did not demolish the walls of Jericho ; as that the three hundred men, standing still in their place, did not destroy the hosts of Midian ; as that the God of the armies of Israel, and not the sling and the stone, prevailed against the champion of the Philistines.

These are some of the ways through which, with dependance on God, divine truth is to be introduced to the apprehension and feeling of men. But how to manage the different powers of the mind, in subserviency to this end, is one of the nicest points to be examined in the study of pulpit eloquence.

The *understanding*, as the leading faculty, must chiefly be addressed. But the labour of the preacher does not end here, as though the soul were nothing but intellect. There is a *conscience* to be affected. Men must not only possess speculative knowledge; they must feel the pungency of divine truth,—the conviction of obligation and ill desert. Their conscience must be assailed *by the solemn application of truth to themselves*. The *affections* must indeed be reached through the understanding and conscience; but not by a cold dissertation on abstract propositions,—they must be touched by objects placed in their most affecting attitudes, and by truth tenderly applied to the heart. No attempt to excite the affections ought to be made, except for some useful end. Addresses to the passions merely to melt the mass, without seizing the occasion to fix the stamp of truth, is an artifice infinitely beneath a preacher of the everlasting gospel. In a mind properly disciplined, the *imagination* will keep pace with the affections. It must never outstrip them. When the imagination of a

preacher gets unharnessed from the affections, and runs wild, it leaves an audience with no better emotion than wonder, mingled perhaps with contempt. The power of *sympathy* must also be brought into action ; but for this purpose *the preacher himself must feel*. No imitation of passion, no substitution of ardour for real feeling, will avail. He *must feel* ; and he must express his feelings in the language, tones, looks, and gestures of nature. No theatrical starts, no affectation or grimace, no pomp or turgidity, may be employed. Nature is not less the perfection of this art, than of painting, statuary, and descriptive poetry : and one of the essential attributes of nature is *simplicity*.

The basis of pulpit eloquence, then, is good sense and real feeling ;—good sense instructed by the *word* of God, and real feeling excited by His *Spirit*. Between the *eloquence of thought* and the *eloquence of words*, the difference is as great as between gold and dross. The eloquence of thought bears away the soul ; the eloquence of words may please the ear,

but it never reached the heart. It is a pitiful device to gain popularity, unworthy of any man of sense, and in a preacher of the gospel, utterly contemptible. It is nothing better than a detestable species of clerical foppery. How infinitely different are such effeminate effusions, from the dignity and solemnity of Christ's sermon on the mount! The disgust which has been often produced by this spurious eloquence, has excited prejudices, even in good men, against every attempt to improve the eloquence of the pulpit. But this is rushing to the other extreme. Was not Aaron eloquent? Was not Apollos eloquent? Was not Paul eloquent? Was not Jesus of Nazareth eloquent, who spake as never man spake?

The masterly specimens of Paul's eloquence, before the court of Areopagus, on the stairs of the castle Antonia, and before Agrippa, leave no ground to wonder at his being ranked, even by a heathen writer, among the three most distinguished orators of antiquity. But the eloquence of Paul was *the eloquence of*

thought. His preaching was not with the enticing words of man's wisdom ; but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power. He came not with the excellency of speech, not with the wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. He did not indeed deem it improper to seek out, like the royal preacher, acceptable words ; but the force of his eloquence lay in the greatness of his conceptions, poured from a heart warmed by the Holy Ghost.

Against such eloquence who will venture to object? And indeed on what principle can you exclude eloquence from the pulpit, while you admit it at the bar, and in deliberative assemblies? The preacher of everlasting truth has certainly the noblest *subjects* that ever elevated and enkindled the soul of man ;—not the intrigues of a Philip,—not the plots of a Cataline ;—but the rebellion of angels,—the creation of a world,—the incarnation and death of the Son of God,—the resurrection of men,—the dissolution of nature,—the general judgment,—

and the final confirmation of countless millions of men and angels in happiness or misery.—No subjects are so sublime ;—none so interesting to the feelings of a reflecting audience : no orator was himself ever so deeply interested in his subject, as a godly minister is in the truths which he presses upon his hearers. If on any topick he can become impassioned, and be carried beyond himself, it is on the theme of immortal love, and the everlasting destinies of men.

It must be admitted, however, that there is a material difference between the eloquence of the pulpit, and that of the bar, or popular assemblies. *Cicero*, set to manage concerns of a worldly nature, and having to address himself only to feelings natural to men, found the passions which he wished to move already existing : *Paul* went forth as an instrument to create new tastes, and to awaken feelings which nothing but a supernatural influence could create. *Cicero* could rouse the *selfish* passions,—could give private interest a tongue to plead his cause ; and never appealed to any thing in man superior to

the natural love of justice, or the love of country: Paul, commissioned to spread the triumphs of universal benevolence, aimed to excite none but holy feelings. Cicero sometimes found it his interest, by unlawful means, to enlist the prejudices of the judges. He would introduce the accused, with his wife and children, clad in habiliments of mourning, to awaken passions which had no connexion with the justice of his cause: Paul presented nothing but the truths of God. Cicero's object was to make men *act*: Paul's aim was lost unless they acted from *holy motives*. Cicero had nothing to do with the *dispositions* of men, further than *to carry a point*: Paul's *point* was the *disposition itself*. Cicero relied on his powers of persuasion, as he depended on any of the stated operations of nature; for there was a natural connexion between the motives which he urged, and the emotion or action which he wished to produce: Paul saw no such connexion between his preaching and the salvation of men; and he went from country to country with an eye of dependance immovably fixed on the throne of God. And

yet Paul was not the less eloquent. He knew that he had as good a *right*, and he found as much *encouragement*, as the Roman orator, to employ all the arts of persuasion ; only he confined himself to the exhibition of *divine truth*. And it was not in vain that he was more eloquent than other men. Not only did he charm the ear, and chain attention to his lips ; not only did he command the natural avenues to the soul ; but, by the flashes of his eloquence, he threw light upon the *understanding* and *conscience*, as another man could not have done.

These remarks are intended, in some measure, to illustrate the importance of pulpit eloquence ; and to show the utility of a course of instruction which may convey to our youth some just ideas of this sacred art. I could wish that more talents and piety, that more learning and taste, were combined in this department. But the small portion of these qualifications which has fallen to my lot, will, I hope, be steadily devoted to the object in view. If, by divine aid, I may be so happy as to give a

moderate degree of satisfaction to the friends of the institution, and render some service to the cause of Zion, my highest hopes will be answered, and my reward will be great.

But whatever may be the result of efforts in a particular department, I am persuaded that God has great designs to answer by this institution. On Him it is the duty and happiness of founders, visitors, trustees, and professors, to place their whole dependance, while they reverentially wait for His blessing. Without Him we all know that we can do nothing. Without Him, I trust, we do not desire to do any thing. From Him be all the strength, and to Him be all the glory! Encouraged, however, by the smiles with which He has already deigned to regard the institution,—encouraged, moreover, by the prayers which He is calling forth from the thousands of our Israel,—and, I may add, by the manifest accordance of our object with His revealed will, we venture to hope,—to hope with humble confidence, that He has great designs to answer by this seminary. We

trust that He will here cause to be taught a system of correct theology, and will here assist to develop the sound principles of sacred literature. Here our youth, we hope, will catch that spirit of prayer by which this infant seminary was conceived. I look down the descent of years, and see the blessed influence of these measures upon our churches. I see, in every place, a pious and learned minister, preaching the truth as it is in Jesus, exerting himself, with apostolick fervour, for the salvation of men, forming among his people associations for prayer, and weeping for joy to behold the triumphs of redeeming grace. I see aged Simeons, with every desire accomplished, ready to depart; and children climbing a father's knees to hear of Christ. I hear the loud hosanna, the shout, the praise, the joy, of thousands! My soul is borne away in fancied visions! May that Saviour who formed this whole design, and laid the corner stone of yonder edifice,—may that Saviour to whose honour those walls, and all that they enclose, are forever consecrated, make the vision real!

Spirits of our ancestors, hail ! I am come to the land of my fathers. I am come to the region which received the pilgrims, when they fled for the cause of Christ. I have gazed, as I have passed along, upon enclosures which, I supposed, might contain their venerable dust. I felt something like inspiration as I heard, or seemed to hear, the tones of their dying prayer : “ God of mercy, to whose arms we are coming, bless our offspring ! Preserve the churches which, by our means, thou hast planted in this new world ! ”——I arrived on this ground ; I looked upon yonder newly erected walls ; I saw the prayers of our fathers answered ; I saw their sons toiling to support the very truths for which the pilgrims suffered. I anticipated the glorious result. In the vale of future years, I saw our pious and venerable fathers living again in their posterity. I saw the resurrection of our Eliots, our Cottons, our Mathers, our Phillipses. The vision was transporting. Divine Saviour, whose honours men have taken from thee, make the vision real !

