ON THE USE

AND

Functions of Preaching,

AND THE

ADVANTAGES OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY TO A PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL;

BEING A

SERMON

DELIVERED AS A VALEDICTORY ADDRESS TO THE ADELPHO THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY, MARCH 16, 1833.

BY JAMES M'COSH.

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MEETING XVII.

LADY GLENORCHY'S CHAPEL,
16th March 1833.

" A very excellent valedictory discourse was delivered by Mr M'Cosh, from Acts xx. 20, first clause, ' And how I kept ' back nothing that was profitable unto you,'—for which the warmest thanks of the Society were expressed to him from the Chair. It was unanimously agreed that Fifty copies of said Discourse be printed at the expence of the Society, and that a copy be given to each member gratis."

ROBERT MENZIES, *Secretary.*

SERMON, &c.

I HAVE KEPT BACK NOTHING THAT IS PROFITABLE.—Acts xx. 20.

It is the impression of many a Christian, as well as unbeliever, that the Scriptures abound much in repetition, expressing the same sentiment with only perhaps a slight variation in language, in a great number of different passages. A little farther enquiry, we think, would bring men to see that this repetition is apparent, rather than real, and originates in a practice invariably adopted by the inspired writers, that of exhibiting to us the same truth in terms more or less universal, or, in other words, under the form of propositions varying in point of generality.—Thus, for instance, in one place they tell an individual man that his heart is depraved, in another, that a certain class of men have gone astray from God's commandment; still rising in generality, in a third they declare, the whole Jews or Gentiles perhaps to be at enmity against God; and in a fourth, in terms still more general, they include all men under sin. It is evident that the last of these propositions includes the three preceding, and so in forming out of the Bible a systematic view of human depravity, it would behove us to place it at the head, arranging the other three beneath. Instances of this expression of the same truth in terms more or less universal, are so numerous in the sacred volume, that there are perhaps very few propositions in it which

could not be placed under such a class, or themselves be made to stand at its head. Thus our Saviour classifies the first four commandments under this single one, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind;" and the last six under the still shorter one, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," (Luke x. 27.) The Apostle Paul makes a still bolder classification, and brings these two classes of duties, and indeed the whole ten commandments, under one where he says "that love is the fulfilling of the law," (Rom. xiii. 10.) It is this rich diversity in the sacred volume, coupled with the circumstance that the maxims are not arranged in system, or under heads of doctrine as in books of divinity, that imparts to it that air of rich and varied, though not confused irregularity, which so much resembles the inexhaustible and apparently superfluous variety in which nature rejoices. And just as God in his works has adapted external nature to the moral man, by disposing animals, vegetables, and minerals in sportive disorder, and not under classes as in museums of natural history, so in his word he has suited his communications to the diversified tastes of the spiritual man, by giving them a discursive appearance.

The reasons, or at least some of the reasons, why the same truth so frequently recurs stated in propositions more or less universal, may easily be found out, and a statement of them may lead us to discover one of the most important offices intended to be served by preaching. On the one hand, to expand the understanding and to keep the mind from taking partial views of things, it is necessary that man should be instructed in the unity and sublime connexions of what lies scattered over a wide surface, or in some respects is apparently self-contradictory; and this can best be done by giving here and there epitomes of the whole Christian doctrine, the more general the better. But on the other hand, for practical purposes, which is the thing the Bible chiefly aims at, it behoved

the inspired writers to present their communications in a great variety of lights, in order that each man might discover something suited to his own individual character and situation; but taken as a whole, the more particular and pointed the given maxim, or in other words, the more removed it is from generality, the more likely is it to come home to the heart and conscience of the individual sinner or believer.

But there is a farther reason rendering it necessary that the particular maxims should be stated, as well as the more general ones or the epitomes in which they are included. It is not so simple a thing as is sometimes imagined to derive the particular from the general in which they are enveloped. For all reasoning, even the most abstruse and ingenious, and that which requires the highest exercises of intellect, is said by logicians to consist in nothing else but in such an evolution. Thus the most abstract and complicated properties of the circle are no doubt inclosed as it were in the very definition of it, that "it is a line every where equidistant from a point." It is evident from this, how it came to be especially necessary in a subject of so much practical importance as religion, that the more particular maxims be specifically stated—for without this there was a danger that they might never be discovered by such prejudiced and short-sighted creatures as men.

That this is not an imaginary danger we know from this, that even as the case at present stands, there are many who grant the truth of Bible doctrines when stated in their utmost generality, who begin to withdraw their implicit confidence when these same doctrines are applied to particular instances. Thus there are not a few who are willing to believe that God is just in the general, who yet think it to be improper that this justice should be put forth in the way that it is stated to be done in the Bible, namely, in pouring out the phials of his wrath upon every sinner who does not repent, or in other words, upon every sinner who has not an interest in the peace speaking blood of the Saviour. There are again

multitudes, who though well enough satisfied that this may hold true of man in general, yet somehow or other feel reluctant to grant the propriety of its application to the circle of their own immediate acquaintances, and more especially perhaps to themselves. Hence it comes to be that many of our soundest systematic theologians have no love for the real spirit of Christianity, and hence too comes the truth of the common observation, that dogmatic theology is not the whole of our religion; that there is a warmth, power, and application in the one, which is not in the other; and that though we know that the same doctrines are contained in both, yet, while the one manifests itself to the conscience and influences the practice of every unprejudiced man, the other often appears a cold and sometimes a disagreeable collection of mere abstract or speculative truths.

It is a necessary consequence of this view of things, that it must be the wide and general maxims of the Bible that tell most extensively upon mankind, and reach the farthest in point of time, while again it must be the more particular maxims that tell most effectively upon individual minds. The former, therefore, remain as strong and useful as at their first promulgation; but must it not be granted by every candid enquirer, that not a few of the latter have lost somewhat of that point and force which they must have had as originally applied, seeing it is of the very nature of things, that the more exquisite and particular their adaptation to the individuals primarily addressed, the less likely is it in the lottery of human nature, that another individual start up, to whose circumstances they are equally exquisitely adapted? I need not point out instances of this, for the Bible is so thickly strewn with them that they must occur to every one. How many are there of the lessons of the Old Testament addressed to characters so peculiar, or placed in so peculiar circumstances, that we can never expect that they can come home so appropriately to any other individual who may rise up in the history

of the world? Not that we would mean to say, that there is any maxim in the Bible that is not "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,"—and that too to the men of every generation, for this is attested alike by Scripture and Christian experience. But observe how it is, that these lessons primarily addressed to peculiarities, speak to men not placed in the same peculiarities;—they only do so after they have undergone an examination, and the principle upon which they proceed has been extracted. Before they can be applied to any case in modern times, we must first enquire into the motive which God had in giving them, and ascertain that it is of so general a nature as to include a great many other cases, in addition to the one primarily aimed at. But in undergoing this process it is obvious, that the lessons must lose much of their freshness. The individual primarily addressed must have felt their power instantaneously; but other men do so by a train of reasoning, which must detract much from their power. In short, they are now removed from the class of particular maxims suited in every respect to the individual, and placed in the class of more general principles, that speak to the essential principles of our nature. The statement of them has now no advantage over the statement of the general principles upon which they proceed, except perhaps that it is a little more lively and contains a particular exemplification.

But has our religion nothing which recompenses this loss? Is there no standing power left in the church fitted to meet this deficiency? We conceive that there is, and that it consists in the preaching of the word under the guidance of that Comforter whom Christ left behind him, when he left this world. Our religion in this respect reminds us of the ocean which, though it may seem self-sufficient in its own immensity, does yet nevertheless not despise those numerous contributions, which, to balance those exhalations that it is continually giving forth, come from every quarter under heaven, only to lose

themselves to be sure, and appear insignificant, when contrasted with its boundless magnificence.

The ministry which Christ sent forth to preach the gospel to all nations, were commissioned to multiply their more particular maxims above referred to, to appropriate after the example of the inspired Apostles, the general truths of the Bible to individual men, and to bring forth into prominent view their applicability to every creature under heaven.—Under each of the great leading epitomes of Scripture truth placed at the head of the pyramid, we may conceive an indefinite and continually widening number of particular maxims to be arranged, descending through all grades of individuality, till at length they became applicable only to particular congregations, families, or persons, or even to particular moods of a given man. Scripture has supplied a number of these more particular maxims, which are intended however to serve as models to the preacher, rather than a full and exhausted statement of all that are possible or profitable. Indeed it is impossible that the Bible, even though its bulk were increased a hundred fold, could give such a complete list of the particular maxims—nor though it were possible could it be at all desirable. For besides that in this way, there would not be held out so strong a motive to activity on the part of the preacher, it is to be borne in mind as a farther consideration, that the truths of the Bible come in some respects most effectually from the lips of living men, whose souls have been imbued with the spirit of their Master. The pure light of the gospel when it comes to us from off the heart and affections of the Christian preacher, often acquires a deep richness and diversity of hue, which it did not otherwise possess, just as we have seen the light of the sun by refraction and reflexion from the clouds of heaven, turned into the rich variety of the colours of the rainbow.

In estimating then the modern strength of our religion, there must be taken into account both the perpetuity of the general maxims of the Bible, and the pre-ordained multiplica-

tion of the individual maxims by that ministry which is under the superintendence of the Spirit. For, on the one hand, it is not the least curious proof of the divine origin of the Christian religion, that while during the period that has elapsed since the days of the Apostles, every thing contingent to human nature has been altered or reversed; thus leaving unchanged only the broad and leading features of humanity, that the Scriptures yet retain their power over the human mind and character, and have not yet become antiquated writings which the curious may look into, as containing something which once speeded on the improvement of the human mind, and gave consolation to our forefathers, but which is now left behind by the manners and philosophy of the times. They shew themselves to speak to the essential principles of our nature by outliving all contingencies, all accidental, temporary or national peculiarities, by expanding with man's intellect and knowledge, and being ever before the age of greatest virtue and benevolenee. The general maxims of the word thus grow in strength as they grow in years, for they gather trophies from each generation of prejudiced and selfish men that they conquer. But on the other hand, it is not less a peculiarity of our religion, and not less one that bespeaks the infinite wisdom and foresight of its Founder, that he has established a ministry whose office is to apply these maxims which speak to the essential principles of man's constitution, to the fleeting and accidental forms of vice, ruling passion and prejudice. Hence it comes to be that all the essential parts of our religion are actually a cementing closer together by years, and lest men should imagine that it may have lost something very important, in losing that fresh and novel appearance, which it must have had when it rose up suddenly before the eye of a world deeply sunk in heathenism and superstition, it was ordained that a certain class of men should be continually employed around it, not in adding to its strength, or in removing superfluities, but in decking its exterior, so as that it may un-

ite youthful beauty with the dignity of mature age—just as we have seen many an ancient fabric, stronger than when it came from the hand of the architect, beautified and made fresher by the ivy that covers it. It is this double circumstance, this power and immortality of our religion on the one hand, and this application of it in the preaching of the word on the other, that makes it as fresh and vigorous for conquest as eighteen centuries ago in the days of its youth, when it advanced with such strength and such triumph from the obscure land of Judæa, to the most distant corners of the earth.

But besides the class of particular maxims addressed to individual men, there is another, which has also and for the same reason lost somewhat of its point and applicability. They are those not adapted so much to individual men, as to particular times and stages of human society. The number of these in the Bible is very great, for to this class belong all the commands of the ceremonial law, several of the institutions of the Jews of later date, and not a few of those advices given by the Apostle Paul to the church of Corinth, (see 1 Cor. xi.) From the very nature of things, these must lose their freshness and point with the changes of fashion and circumstances, and are of use to the modern only when generalized, and the principle upon which they proceed is discovered. Thus it would be improper in modern times to enforce to the very letter all the injunctions given by Paul in the place referred to; but it is not improper to discover the principle upon which these proceeded, the desire of preserving order, and an attention to decency during public worship, and to this extent may they be enforced at all stages of human society. But observe how much the lessons of the apostle lose when thus modified; originally both the principle and the application of it came from the inspired apostle; but now the application is left to fallible preachers.

We shall now make a short enquiry into the history of preaching, and see if the principle above developed does not discover a wonderful adaptation, or congruity, in the time of its original establishment, and in some of its subsequent phenomena.

It may perhaps have struck every one with astonishment, that so powerful an engine as this for working on the minds of men, was not employed by God in the earlier period of the history of the Israelites. We wonder why the worship of the synagogue, which was the thing in the Jewish church that corresponded to preaching in the Christian, was not established till the time of Ezra, after the return from the Babylonish captivity. According to the above principle may not this phenomenon be easily explained? In the times earlier than the Babylonish captivity the number of inspired men was so great, and they came in so thick a succession, that the particular maxims never became antiquated,—but were always suited freshly to the peculiarities and leading habits of the times. Might not preaching as consisting in the multiplication of these, be less necessary seeing that they were abundantly supplied by the schools of the prophets and holy men inspired by God? It was only then when God withdrew the stronger manifestations of himself, or his sunlight, that it became necessary to hang out in the firmament lesser lights for the accommodation of travellers thrown in this darker period of the history of the church. It thus came to be, that God established preaching as soon as he removed his inspired prophets and holy men, lest, in the half millenium that transpired from the time of Malachi to that of Christ, and in the new circumstances in which the Jewish Church was placed, the older Scriptures might be thought to want that freshness and adaptation, which they had when they came forth directly from the mouths of those holy men, who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Some curious deductions of a similar nature may also, we conceive, be obtained from the history of preaching in the early Christian church, as compared with the modern history of preaching. First, it is very worthy of remark, that the particular maxims above described, were inculcated in the early church both by inspired men in the word, and by uninspired men in preaching. The early church had in this way a double advantage; it had the particular maxims of the word, retaining yet all their power and application, and all their exquisite adaptation to the state of society, and it had a number of preachers multiplying yet more their individual maxims, and suiting them not only to the times but to individuals. It had the Apostles and holy men of God as the brighter constellations of the firmament, and it possessed along with these, an innumerable company of little lights, in themselves scarcely visible, but yet by their clustering and collection forming a bright arch or *milky way*, if we may so speak, which as it is common to all periods of the history of the church, may be said to connect by its expansive circle, one part of God's economy with another, and compass and bind together as by a cestus heaven and earth, the farther and the nearer, God's communications and the preaching of man, in one exquisite whole of perfect beauty. This double circumstance, to be found at no other point in the history of the Church, was no doubt one of the means in the hands of providence, which spread our religion so rapidly in its earlier stages.

But, secondly, it is also worthy of remark, that though this double circumstance, seen from one point of view and in one phasis, is continually waning, seen from another point and in another phasis, it is continually increasing. Many of the particular maxims as applicable to the times, no doubt lose their point with the change of the times; but then there sprang up as if by a curious foreordained connection, something which nearly counterbalanced this. The early preachers of Christianity were men, taken as a whole, whose minds had not been ex-

panded by extensive views of the philosophy of human nature. But it has always appeared to me, that the greatest and most marked point of inferiority in unlearned men is, that though they can take as strong and pointed glimpses of individual things as the learned, yet they somehow or other always mistake the accidental for the necessary, seeing that they cannot abstract nor generalize, cannot separate between the contingent and essential. That this is the case is clear, from the difficulty which philosophers or dogmatic theologians find, in making the illiterate comprehend the whole parts and sublime connexions of a general system. But then we have already seen, how when the fashions and vices, and tastes of a people shift, when men have tried by changing their whole drapery, to persuade us that they are not the same beings whom Scripture has described as so depraved, when they anew and anew whiten the sepulchres of their hearts to persuade us, that the rottenness and dead men's bones within have disappeared in the progress of ages; that then it behoves the preacher to generalize and find the root of the matter. All this made it necessary that learning should develope itself in the progress of ages, and that establishments should spring up to foster and encourage this learning. Learning in the clergy, so far from being a cause of corruption, is therefore intended to balance a necessary evil. It is intended to raise the ministry of the Church of Christ, above the narrow views which men acquire by viewing only the present, or some petty department of the history of the church, to lift them above the horizon of their own times, and enable them the higher they ascend, to take in at one view the greater number of those lights that gleam from afar, and render each some small tribute to the general sum and system of theological truths. It is this system of balances and checks, which makes our religion in so far as the dispensations of God's providence are concerned, to be nearly as powerful as in its first and earlier days. All of us, indeed, have wished at moments to be carried athwart the

gulph of seventeen centuries, that separates us from the time when the church was yet fresh with the waterings of the Apostles; we long to be present at, to behold, and mingle in, the worshippings of the primitive martyrs, and we wish to receive our instructions from those who have almost come in contact with the Son of God. But this feeling arises almost altogether from unfounded enthusiasm. For we are inferior to the primitive church in little else but in their primitive simplicity. In so far as dispensations are concerned, they and we are nearly upon an equal footing, and so we want only their zeal and piety and godly sincerity. We have all that is necessary to make us as great as they, except the will to be so. God, therefore, in his providence, throws the blame on our shoulders, and removes it from himself.

From the tenor of these remarks it must be obvious, that we ascribe to preaching a very high office in the Christian church. It has to apply the general doctrines of Scripture to individual cases, and develope fully their half latent adaptation to all ages and states of society. It is only when religion is attended by this its necessary accompaniment, that it appears in those full and graceful proportions that are proper to it, or that it is capable of producing its intended effects upon the world.

Preaching, when thus understood, is not a mere bare and naked exposition of Scripture. It is intended to occupy a higher and more responsible place in the church of Christ, and it is only when it takes this its proper station, that the blessing of the Spirit is so peculiarly promised to it. Many a christian perhaps has wondered, why there are grounds for thinking, that the Spirit is poured out more abundantly on the preaching than on the reading of the word, why it should have been that the oratory of man is made an instrument for producing greater good, than even the inspired word of God. And we could have found nothing that has the least tendency to account for this, had preaching consisted in mere explanation, in an explanation of what taken as a whole is so clear, that it declares of itself, that he who runs may read. But the thing does not at all appear wonderful, when it is recollected, that it is the preacher's office to adapt the general doctrines of the Bible, to the shifting forms under which human depravity shews itself; suiting them to the peculiar tastes, fashionable vices, modes of thinking, speculative and practical difficulties of men in different ages. For all these change with the progress of civilization, the education and general spirit of a people, and even though they return now and then the same in their broad and prominent features, yet they return like the leading groups in a kaleidoscope, often after long intervals, and always with great differences in the details. All this makes it incumbent on the ministers of the gospel, in obedience to the maxim of appearing all things to all men, so to represent the Scripture consolations and threatenings as that they may be adapted to all the felt wants and appetencies of our nature, as they spring up in the progress of ages.

In preaching, taken in this its highest sense, there is evidently room for the exercise of all the higher faculties of the soul. In multiplying properly the individual maxims above described, the imagination may find all that is great and magnificent, the judgment all that is sound and practical. Every event in nature may be taken advantage of, for bringing home the doctrines of the Bible; illustrations may be drawn from any source, and difficulties solved by any analogies. The preachers may bring motives from all quarters, from all times and from all beings, from nature and from the word, from heaven and from hell, from the past and from the future, from time and from eternity. All possible things existing or not existing, may be of service in pressing home the doctrines of the word, in awakening men to a sense of their danger, and shewing them the necessity that there is for taking shelter in the Rock of Ages, if they would escape the wrath to come.

But we have yet to mention higher attainments, and a higher knowledge, which may be pressed into the service of the preacher. For there is another education besides that which is taught at schools and colleges, we mean the education of circumstances—we refer to the lessons that are taught us in the school of God's dispensations, it may be, in the school of affliction. This is an education which does not cease with other learning, it is one that grows and accumulates with the age of the individual, so that there is not a more ardent enquirer after truth than the aged Christian inquiring after the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Every temptation that has been withstood, every difficulty that has been overcome, every affliction that has been endured, nay, every temporary falling away which may have cast a cloud over the man's prospects, and made him fear that he has not yet crossed the line that separates the unregenerate from the regenerate man, adds to his Christian knowledge, adds to that stock of experience from which he can draw, to warn, instruct, and encourage. All of us have not talents, or eloquence, or splendid attainments, but this is a path of knowledge in which all of us may shine, if only we have the will to do so, and if with the spirit of prayer, humility, and believing faith, we supplicate the blessing of God upon our endeavours.—This is a source of power from which all of us may draw, if only we shall be at the pains to acquire the requisite personal preparation. This is a kind of experience which meets with a sympathy in every bosom, and by a kind of spell finds its way to the heart alike of the believer and most obdurate sinner. But alas! how few are there willing to make this preparation, how few are willing to be instructed by so severe a teacher, for how few are willing to regard all other things as lost that they may win Christ? Hence it is "that we have so many worldlings to preach the invisible felecity, and so many carnal men to declare the mysteries of the Spirit, and I would, I might not say, so many infidels to preach Christ, and so many Atheists to preach the living God."*

* Baxter's Reformed Pastor.

It is from not discovering the width that is allowable and proper in preaching, that so many evangelical preachers have fallen into the error of thinking, that, in dwelling exclusively on a few abstract truths of Scripture, or epitomes of sacred truth, they are declaring the whole word and keeping back nothing that is profitable. Thus it is imagined, for instance, that divines fully obey the Scripture maxim of knowing nothing but Christ and him crucified, if only they declare in its fullest generality, the doctrine that all men must be saved by faith alone. It is thought that nothing more is required in order to confute each individual of sin, and leave him without excuse, but a fair exposure of the total depravity of the whole race. To make every man bend to the afflictive dispensations of God's providence, it is thought to be enough to shew that all things both in heaven and earth are decreed by God. Now what we have to complain of is, not that these wide generalities are preached, but that they are often dwelt upon too exclusively, and are not followed by what appears to me to be more important, a heart searching multiplication of more particular maxims.

But to illustrate our meaning, and to shew the advantage of the Scripture mode of dwelling on the particular more than on the general, we shall take a particular instance, one of those alluded to in the beginning of the discourse. When the preacher takes for his text "love is the fulfilling of the law," and treats the subject in a style of generality suited to the text, he is no doubt able to lay the axe at the root of all sin, and to bring forward considerations fitted to produce an effect on all minds, and that whatever be the time or occasion. But does not this generality, from the very nature of things, fail in producing a very marked effect on any given individual, or in meeting in a pointed manner any given sin, prejudice, or failing? To gain this object it is necessary to take a more confined text, as "love thy neighbour as thyself," in the treatment, of which the preacher is obliged to direct his remarks to a

more narrow class of duties or sins. Even when thus confined, the probability is that though the considerations brought forward may tell upon a whole congregation, that they do not yet tell sufficiently upon certain given sins of which many individuals are guilty:—Thus, for example, they may not tell sufficiently upon those who honour not their father and mother. To meet this class of transgressions, it is obvious that the text chosen should be the fifth commandment, and the duty should be recommended from proper and Christian motives. Even in handling this subject, the advices given should be more particular than the text itself, and come as nearly as possible up to the particular situation of each family. Our Saviour has made a particular application of the fifth commandment in Mark vii. 11, where in allusion to a sinful custom of the Jews, he says, "But ye say, if a man shall say to his father or mother, it is corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me, he shall be free, and ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother." This is a very characteristic instance of those maxims, the point of which has been lost by the change of circumstances, but which the ministers of the gospel are expected to multiply at their discretion, and according as circumstances require.

From these remarks we may now be able to see how it comes to be of importance, not merely to prove in the general, that men must be saved by faith through grace, but farther, to shew each individual man that his own evil heart renders this the only way of escape from the wrath to come. We may now see how it is of less consequence, to prove the whole human race to be depraved by a vivid picture of the atrocities committed by masses of men, than to make each man in the congregation feel, by a searching appeal to his own experience and consciousness, by a picture of his own domestic and private sins, that he himself is a great sinner.—We may see moreover, how it will give greater consolation to the man who is labouring under grief to shew that this his particular affliction has been

ordered by God, and that for his good, if only he will profit by it, than to give a clear demonstration of the doctrine of the predestination of all things. It is for this reason that the abtract and generalized doctrines of Divinity, though every where implied (because some particular maxims under them is given) in the Bible, are yet comparatively rarely stated in so many words. And hence it is, that there are many Scriptural sermons, which make the truths of the Bible tell practically upon a whole congregation, but in the whole of which there is not to be found a single epitomized doctrine. If these circumstances had been attended to as they ought, there would never have been the possibility of distinguishing between doctrinal and practical preaching, for it would have been seen of all doctrine, when thus treated, that it has a tendency to qualify to God a "peculiar people zealous of good works."

It may easily be gathered from these remarks, that we do not regard systematic theology, as the proper subject of pulpit discourses.—As consisting in a frigid collection of abstract truths, it can never drop as the rain, and distil as the dew, so as to water the parched souls of men, and make them bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness. But though systematic Divinity has certainly no warmth or heat in its nature, it may yet like the lunar beams give light. Though never intended to serve all the purposes of Scripture, nor requiring its unfeeling dogmata to be substituted in the room of the earnest statements of the word, it may yet be of great importance in the Church. For though it does not attempt to influence immediately the practice, the motives and feelings of men, it may yet be of great service in opening the understanding, and in enabling the preacher in a clearer and more confident manner, to expound or defend the lessons of our religion. Though never expected to promote to any great extent, the salvation of the humble and illiterate Christian, it may yet be of great service to the Divine or Minister of the Gospel.—To him it is of advantage on many accounts, to have

the truths that lie scattered over so wide a surface, collected under some heads or general chapters.—It is of importance to have a concordance of the doctrines of the Bible, as well as of its words, in order that he may discover, what is the doctrine of Scripture on every important topic of theology. System serves to him all the purposes of a classification in natural history, it arranges all the truths of Scripture under a few heads, and expresses them in a few short sentences, which can easily be retained on the memory. Systematic theology is the *analysis* that discovers the general principles, preaching is the *synothesis* that developes, illustrates, and expands them.

It follows from this view, that unless the ministers of the gospel, are acquainted with the truths of the word, in their most general form; unless they can state its doctrines in propositions so universal, that they include all the other propositions of the record, upon the topic to which they refer, that they cannot proceed to multiply with the full freedom allowed, the less general appeals and applications. For in doing this they must always (however unconscious of it) proceed on the dictum of Aristotle, that whatever is true of a class, must be true of each individual included in that class; and so it follows that the more extensive, the class having the sanction of God, that he forms, or the more he systematiszes the doctrines of Scripture, the more is he allowed to predicate of each individual. His particular maxims, should all be capable of being arranged under some head, or more general truth sanctioned in Scripture, and so, if for practical effect the maxim is so much the better the more pointed and individual it is, in systematic theology it is the reverse, for the more wide and universal the maxim, the greater is the licence of application that is allowed by it: the more the room for convincing, and the greater the space for eloquence. Indeed, it is only when divines possess that pure *white light* of system, which contains every other colour within its beams, that their lessons can be branched out in passing through the objects that they meet with in the

world, into that rich variety of hue and appearance, which the diversified tastes of human nature require. If it be true then, that the preaching of the word is often trammeled by system, improperly so called, it more frequently happens that it is trammeled by a want of system, for men, stopping too soon in their ascent upwards to the generalities of Scripture, imagining that they have met with an ultimate principle, when they have only met with a secondary one, have not preached the whole word, have not declared its whole doctrines, have not known their full range and extent, and power over the human mind and character. Contented to reach some lesser eminence, from which they obtain a partial view of the sacred territory, they have not been ambitious to ascend that mount Nebo, from which they may descry the whole land. Systematic theology therefore is not, as it has been often represented, a tyrannical power, the most marked effect of which is to enslave and curb the growth of the human mind. It is a great overshadowing principle, which encourages rather than stints the growth of all that is noble—it is broad as the canopy, and like it too widening as we seem to approach its verge; beneath it, and watered by its fostering power, may spring the most gorgeous and beautiful forms of earthly magnificence.

APPENDIX.

In the Discourse there is a department of systematic theology to which we have not alluded, but on which we here propose to offer some remarks. This is what might perhaps be called the *inferential* part of Divinity, for one of its principal objects is to infer new truths not stated in so many words in the sacred volume. If the other part resembles the classifications of natural history, this is more allied to the deductions of natural philosophy. It derives, from the comparison of Scripture with Scripture and Scripture with nature, new truths, and especially new truths of wider generality, which may unite all the different stated doctrines of the word in one harmonious whole, and remove all appearance of inconsistency. As being less conversant with the word, and more with philosophy, this department of Divinity is not of so much use to the preacher as the one above treated of, though it may still be of great service to him in expanding and liberalizing his understanding. Considered indeed as a branch of learning, it might be shewn to be to him the most interesting of all the sciences, but we shall rather point out its advantages to him in a more professional point of view.

Against those who would deny the propriety of *inferential* theology altogether, we could adduce several of what are re-

garded as very essential doctrines of Christianity, but which are not stated any where in the Bible. We shall content ourselves with enumerating two of these, but these very important ones. The first is the change of the Sabbath from the *last* to the *first* day of the week, a change which has not any where the positive sanction of Scripture in so many words; for those passages in which the early Christians are said to have met together on the Lord's day for the breaking of bread, do not shew that the Lord's day had taken up the place of the Jewish Sabbath. The second is the baptism of infants, of which we have not a single example, nor a positive sanctioning in the Bible, and the propriety of which therefore we can only infer from this, that the promises are not only to parents but to their children; that children have in all ages been admitted into the visible church; that they were so by circumcision under the law; and that *therefore* it is unreasonable to think that they must be excluded under the more liberal system of Christianity.

It may be farther urged, that there is scarcely a divine, even the most Scriptural and evangelical, who has not taken advantage of logic and philosophy in the defence, statement, or explanation of the doctrines of the Bible. For of the very sacred phrases of our language, those that are regarded as peculiarly fitted to give full expression to the truths of the Bible, and come home with peculiar force upon every Christian, how many are there which are not to be found in the sacred volume? It will be sufficient to name Trinity, Substance and Person, Sacraments, Common and Efficacious Grace, Federal Head, Original Sin, Imputation of Adam's guilt, and Satisfaction as applied to the atoning death of the Saviour. The greater number of these, it may be observed, express some doctrine in terms more general than those employed in the Scriptures.

The jealousy of this department of divinity, that exists in some minds, arises from the circumstance that philosophy in

affecting to lend its feeble aid to prop, defend, or systematize the doctrines of the Scripture, has often eventually succeeded in polluting the purity of the faith. It is thought to be improper to make Christianity lean even the least upon the ever-changing doctrines of philosophy, lest in their fall our religion be thought by the undiscerning to have fallen along with them. But is it not possible to derive all the advantages that arise from the application of philosophy to religion, and at the same time avoid the disadvantages? Can we discover no rules which might keep philosophy employed in the service of the faith, and yet disarm it of all its dangerous powers? The truth of the philosophic system or speculation itself, it is evident, cannot afford such a test; for all those who would introduce it into theology are confident of its truth, and its erroneousness is often not pointed out, till it has got entwined with religion.

It appears to us that no speculation could possibly do harm to religion if it was restrained by one or other of the two following rules:—

First, That these speculations never be employed except in answering objections brought from the same quarter. If confined within these bounds, no inconvenience can possibly arise from them, for no one would ever think of identifying their truth or falsehood with the truth or falsehood of the word.

Or, Secondly, That the speculations be separated, and acknowledged to be different from the affirmations of Scripture, and be stated as having less strong evidence in their favour; the one being shewn to have the authority of reason, and the other of the word of God. The improper effects of reason have generally originated in its winning power in influencing interpretation, a process which should be ended before dogmatic theology begins; all which might be avoided by stating the full extent of the tenets of Scripture in one place, and the inferences derived from these in another.

We would have this separation between Scripture and philosophy, to be much the same as that between *mathematics* and *physical observation*, in what is styled *mixed science*. In this mixed science there is not the certainty that there is in pure science; but the *uncertainty* comes altogether from the *one element*, from the observation. So it is in those inferences that are derived from Scripture by a process of argumentation, there is not so much certainty as there is in the Word; but the uncertainty proceeds from the applied principles of reason. The analogy indeed is in many respects a correct one, and serves clearly to shew what we mean, by keeping the simple affirmations of Scripture apart from those doctrines that are derived from them in systematic divinity. In either case, it is only by such a separation, that the two elements that enter into the composition of the *mixed science* can be distinguished, and that the less certain element, can be kept back from reflecting dishonour upon the certain one. We do not mean to say, that the interpretation, and the applied philosophic principles should always literally and rigidly be kept apart, or have actually a different place allotted them, for this might have too much the appearance of that formality, which, with all its pretensions to certainty, has been always found to contain the greatest quantity of error. They are to be kept apart in the writer's thoughts, and to be so distinguished in their writings, as that the reader may perceive the difference. As to the degree, moreover, to which this separation is to be observed, there is perhaps a difference to be made according to to the nature and certainty of the philosophic principles applied, according as they happen to be universally recognised by all men, or peculiar to a particular system of philosophy. We can conceive principles of reasoning to have equal authority with the doctrines of the Bible, for they may have equal authority with those arguments on which our religion is founded, or by which it is shewn to proceed from God. In such cases

it might be alike difficult and unnecessary to distinguish between the two elements. But the case alters as the chains of reasoning become more complicated, and consequently more liable to error, or when they belong to some peculiar and recondite system of philosophy.

If these restrictions could have the effect of disarming philosophy of all its prejudicial tendencies, it is obvious, that many advantages would result from keeping it engaged as a pioneer in the service of religion. Not the least pleasing of these would be its effect upon philosophers themselves, who as finding no means of employment in the mean time in the service of the faith, often engage themselves even for no other reason, in the service of its enemies. For there are many literary men in the present day who set out in their career of fame with no fixed hatred to Christianity, who are indeed influenced by no other motive than the desire of renown, and who would be as willing to win this in fighting for the cause of religion as in fighting for any other: but imagining that there is no room for this in theology, they set out in a dirction where the doctrines of the faith never cross their path, or succeed in arresting their attention. If once, however, they could be impressed with the idea, that there is a splendid field for gaining renown in defending the religion of their country, they would necessarily acquire a respect, if not for spiritual faith, at least for the abstract doctrines of our religion. Nay might we not hope that their eye fixed habitually upon Christianity, would come to see its real adaptation to human nature, and make them desire to accord themselves in practice to what they admire in speculation. Theology would no longer be regarded as the exclusive property of the divine, but the philosopher also would see, that in it there is much room for investigation. In short, the union of philosophy and faith, found in the theologians of the seventeenth century, might again be realized in our land, with all its blessed effects

upon our literature. Our native language, which acquired a littleness when engaged with the trivial matters that occupied the attention of the British Essayists, by returning to nobler themes, to the discussion of all that is sublime in what concerns heaven and God, and of all that is practical in what concerns the immortal destinies of man, might exhibit all the width of power and eloquence of the seventeenth century,—while yet retaining the ease, elegance, and refinement of the last.

It is by engaging themselves in systematic theology, rather than in interpretation, that the divines of this country have outstripped those of Germany, in all that is truly noble and elevated. As conversant with magnificent ideas, more than the simple phraseology of the word, their minds have been enlarged into a greatness which has more sympathy with the Bible doctrines, and has made them more capable of being delighted with the magnificence of the Bible schemes. True it is, that the words of Scripture are more elevated and sublime than those of mere human composition; but still they are taken from a language originally fabricated by man, and partaking of some of the defects of even the most perfect of human works. But the ideas have the appearance of descending fresh from the sanctuary above; and he that is continually employed around them, cannot fail to catch part of their spirit; they have all the sublimity of heaven, or if they are shorn of part of their heavenly radiance, it is only to suit them still more exquisitely to the wants and powers of human nature.

When reason is employed in dogmatic theology, it mounts up into regions allied to, but still higher perhaps than, those in which the man of science moves when he is examining and classifying the more sublime portions of God's works in nature. If the philosopher contemplates magnificent masses of materialism which fill our mind with awe, cycles that run far back into a past eternity, and a space which requires our imaginations to stretch to the very uttermost in order to conceive it, the theologian contemplates the Spirit which spoke these masses into existence, which existed for an eternity before the first of these cycles began, and fills and vivifies that space, which, without his presence, would be dull, lifeless, and inert.