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THE

A M E R I C A N

PRESBYTERIAN AND THEOLOGICAL

REVIEW.

NEW SERIES. No. XIII.—JANUARY, 1866.

ART. I.—MAXIMS FOR SERMONIZING.

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MAXIMS for the composition of sermons are of two classes, *general* and *special*,—those, namely, which relate to the fundamental discipline that prepares for the construction of a sermon, and those which are to be followed in the act of composition itself.

I. Before particular precepts can be given with profit, it is necessary to call attention to some *general* rules, the observance of which greatly facilitates the process of writing a discourse. The sermonizer often loses much time and labor in the season of immediate preparation for the pulpit, because he has made little *general* preparation for the work. As in mechanics the workman always seeks to increase the efficiency of a force by applying it under all the advantages possible; so the intellectual workman should avail himself of all that can render his direct and immediate efforts more effective and successful. A dead lift should be avoided by the mind, as well as by the body. Power in both the material and mental worlds should be aided by a *purchase*. If the sermonizer goes to the construction of a sermon after he has made preparation of a more general nature, he will be far more successful than if he

begins abruptly, and by a violent or perhaps spasmodic application of his powers.

1. The first of these general maxims is this : *Cultivate a homiletic mental habit.* By this is meant such an habitual training of the mind as will impart a sermonizing tendency to it. The human mind by discipline and practice may be made to work in any given direction, provided it is a legitimate one, with something of the uniformity and precision and rapidity of a machine. It can be so habituated to certain processes that it shall go through them with very little effort, and yet with very great force. We shall, of course, not be understood as advocating a material philosophy, or as affirming that the operations of the mind are really mechanical. We are only directing attention to the fact acknowledged by all philosophers, that certain mental operations,—such as the logical, the imaginative, *e. g.*,—may be so *fixed* by exercise and habit, that the mind may perform them with an ease and a readiness that resembles the operations of an instinct, or a machine. Compare the activity of a mind that has been habituated to the processes of logic, with one that has had little or no exercise in this direction. With what rapidity, and precision, does the former speed through the process ; and how slowly and uncertainly does the latter drag along. The former has acquired a logical tendency, and needs only to fasten its grasp upon a subject that possesses a logical structure, that has logic in it, to untie it immediately, and untwist it entirely.

Now, in relation to the purposes of his profession and calling, the preacher ought to acquire and cultivate a homiletical habitude. Preaching is his business. For this he has educated himself, and to this he has consecrated his whole life. It ought therefore to obtain undisputed possession of his mind and his culture. He ought not to pursue any other intellectual calling than that of sermonizing. He may, therefore, properly allow this species of authorship to monopolize all his discipline and acquisitions. It is as proper that the preacher should be characterized by a homiletical tendency, as that the poet should be characterized by a poetical tendency. If it is proper that

the poet should transmute everything that he touches into poetry, it is proper that the preacher should transmute everything that he touches into sermon.

This homiletic habit will appear in a disposition to skeletonize, to construct plans, to examine and criticise discourses with respect to their logical structure. The preacher's mind becomes habitually organic. It is inclined to build. Whenever leading thoughts are brought into the mind, they are straightway disposed and arranged into the unity of a plan, instead of being allowed to lie here and there like scattered boulders on a field of drift. This homiletic habit will appear, again, in a disposition to render all the argumentative, and illustrative materials which pour in upon the educated mind from the various fields of science, literature, and art, subservient to the purposes of preaching. The sermonizer is, or should be, a student, and an industrious one,—a reader, and a thoughtful one. He will, consequently, in the course of his studies meet with a great variety of information that may be advantageously employed in sermonizing, either as proof or illustration, provided he possesses the proper power to elaborate it, and work it up. Now, if he has acquired this homiletic mental habit, this tendency to sermonize, all this material which would pass through another mind without assimilation, will be instantaneously and constantly taken up by it, and be wrought into the substance and form of his sermons.*

The possession of such an intellectual habitude as this greatly facilitates immediate preparation for the pulpit. It is, virtually, a primary preparation, from which the secondary and more direct preparation derives its precision, thoroughness, rapidity, and effectiveness. Without it, the mind of the preacher must be continually forced up to an unwelcome and ungenial task in the preparation of discourses, instead of finding in this process of composition a grateful vent for the outflow and overflow of its resources.

* These materials will readily overflow, in the form of skeletons, metaphors, illustrations, etc., into the preacher's Common Place Book.

2. The second general maxim for the sermonizer is this : *Form a high ideal of a sermon, and constantly aim at its realization.* There is little danger of setting a standard too high, provided the mind is kept actively at work in attempts to reach it. The influence of a very perfect conception of a thing is sometimes injurious upon a mind whose processes are somewhat morbid and unhealthy. An artist whose *beau idéal* is high, but who has little productive energy and vigor, will dream away his life over his ideal, and accomplish nothing ; or else fill up his career, as an artist, with a series of disappointed, baffled efforts. Such a mind should content itself, in the outset at least, with a somewhat lower idea of perfection, and rouse itself up to more vigor and energy of execution. In this way, it would take courage, and would gradually elevate its standard and carry its power of performance up along with its ideal. But if there be a vigorous willingness to work, and a sincere and good motive at the bottom of mental efforts, there is no danger of aiming too high. Though the perfect idea in the mind will never be realized,—for a man's ideal, like his horizon, is constantly receding from him as he advances towards it,—yet the grade of excellence actually attained will be far higher, than if but an inferior, or even a moderate, standard is assumed in the outset.

The preacher's idea of a sermon should, therefore, be as full and perfect as possible. He should not be content with an inferior grade of sermonizing, but should aim to make his discourses as excellent in matter and in manner as his powers, natural and acquired, will possibly allow. And especially should he subject his efforts at sermonizing to the criticism and the discipline of a high ideal, while he is in the *preparatory course* of professional education. It is probably safe to say, that in all theological seminaries too many sermons are written, because the conception of a sermon is too inadequate. A higher standard would diminish the quantity, and improve the quality in this department of authorship. We are well aware of the frequent demands made by the churches upon the theological student before he has entered the pastoral

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office. These demands ought to be met, so far as is possible, in view of the lack of preachers in this great and growing country. And yet this very demand calls for great resolution, and great carefulness, on the part of the professional student. He ought not to court, but to discourage this premature draft upon his resources, so far as he can consistently with a wise regard to circumstances. He ought to insist upon the full time in which to prepare for a life-long work,—a work that will task the best discipline and the ripest culture to the utmost. He ought to keep his ideal of a sermon high and bright before his eye, and not allow his mind, by the frequency and insufficiency of its preparations, to become accustomed to inferior performances, because this is the next step to becoming satisfied with them.

It is possible, as we have already remarked, that a high model may, in some instances, discourage efforts, and freeze the genial currents of the soul. But in this age of intense mental action, when all men are thinking, and speaking, and writing, there is little danger in recommending a high standard to the professional man. Where one mind will be injured by it, a thousand will be benefitted. Moreover, if there only be a vigorous and healthy state of mind,—a disposition to act, to think, and to write,—on the part of the clergyman, there is little danger of his becoming unduly fastidious, or morbidly nice. Add to this the fact, that as soon as the clergyman has once entered upon the active duties of his profession, necessity is laid upon him and he *must* compose, *nolens volens*, and we have still another reason why a high ideal is not liable, as it is sometimes in the case of the artist or poet, to hamper and suppress his activity. All disposition to brood morbidly over performances, because they are not close up to the perfect model in the mind, will be broken up and driven to the four winds, by the consideration that on next Lord's day two sermons must be preached at the call of the bell, to that expecting and expectant congregation.

We are also aware that it is possible to expend too much time and labor upon an individual sermon. Some preachers,

and some very celebrated in their day, have had their "favorite sermons," as they are styled,—sermons upon which an undue amount of pains was expended, to the neglect and serious injury of the rest of their sermonizing. A distinguished American preacher is said to have re-written one particular discourse more than ninety times! But this is not the true use of a high ideal. A high conception ought to show its work and its power in *every* sermon. The discourses of a preacher ought uniformly to bear the marks of a lofty aim. Not that one sermon will be as excellent as another; any more than one subject will be as fertile as another. But the course of sermonizing, year after year, ought to show that the preacher is satisfied with no hasty, perfunctory performance of his duties,—that there is constantly floating before him, and beckoning him on, a noble and high idea of what a sermon always should be.

There is little danger, however, of excessive elaboration during the course of professional study. The theological student is more likely to under-estimate the close study of his plans, and the elaborate cultivation of his style and diction, than to overestimate them. He is apt to shrink from that persistent self-denial of the intellect which confines it to long and laborious efforts upon a single discourse, instead of allowing it to expatiate amid a greater variety of themes. The student, in his best estate, is too little disposed to that thorough elaboration to which the ancient orators accustomed themselves in the production of their master pieces, and which exhibits itself equally in the compactness and completeness of the organization, and in the hard finish of the style. "The prose of Demosthenes," says an excellent critic, "is in its kind as perfect and finished as metrical composition. For example, the greatest attention is bestowed by Demosthenes, upon the sequence of long and short syllables, not in order to produce a regularly recurring metre, but in order to express the most diverse emotions of the mind by a suitable and ever varying rhythm, or movement. And as this prose rhythm never passes over into a poetical metre, so the language, as to its elements,

never loses itself in the sphere of poetry, but remains, as the language of oratory ever should, that of ordinary life and cultivated society. And the uncommon charm of this rhetorical prose lies precisely in this,—that these simple elements of speech are treated with the same care which usually only the poet is wont to devote to words. Demosthenes himself was well aware of this study which he bestowed upon his style, and he required it in the orator. It is not enough, said he, that the orator, in order to prepare for delivery in public, write down his thoughts,—he must, as it were, sculpture them in brass [i. e., he must not content himself with that loose use of language which characterizes a thoughtless fluency, but his words must have a precise and exact look, like newly minted coin, with sharply-cut edges and devices.] This comparison of prose composition with sculpture appears to have been a favorite one with the ancient rhetoricians; as Dionysius also says of Demosthenes, Plato, and Socrates, ‘their productions were not so much works of writing as of carving and embossing.’”*

This high ideal both of matter and style should, therefore, float constantly before the eye of the student, during his whole preparatory course. In this way, he will habituate himself to intense and careful efforts in composition, so that when he goes out into active professional life he may, when compelled to do so by the stress of circumstances, even relax something of this strain and tension of intellect, and yet throw off with rapidity sermons that will be highly methodical, and highly finished, because this style of sermonizing has become natural to him. By this severe discipline of himself in the beginning, he will have acquired the right to be daring, and careless, when compelled to be, by the stress of circumstances; and what is more, he will have acquired the ability to be so, without disgrace to his calling, and with success in it.

3. A third general maxim for the sermonizer is this: *In immediate preparation for the pulpit, make no use of the immediate*

* THEOREM: Demosthenes und Massillon.

preparation of other minds, but rely solely upon personal resources. This maxim forbids the use of the skeletons and sermons of other sermonizers, in the process of composition. Such a general preparation as has been described,—such a homiletic mental habit conjoined with a high ideal in the mind,—renders such help unnecessary. Such a sermonizer is strong in himself, and needs no supports or crutches; such a preacher is rich in himself, and does not need to borrow. He prefers to follow the leadings of his own well disciplined and well informed mind, rather than to adjust himself to the movements of another mind, however firm and consecutive they may be.

In this day, when so many aids to sermonizing are being furnished to the preacher, it is well to form a correct estimate of their real value. These collections of skeletons and plans, more or less filled up, which seem to be multiplying along with the general multiplication of books, ought to be entirely neglected and rejected by both the theological student and preacher. As matter of fact, they are neglected by all vigorous and effective sermonizers. They are the resort of the indolent and unfaithful alone.

The only plausible reason that can be urged for using them is, that they furnish material for the study of plans,—that they are necessary to the acquisition of the art of skeletonizing. But a good collection of sermons is of far more worth for this purpose. There is very little discipline in looking over a plan that has been eliminated from a sermon by another mind. But there is very great discipline in taking the sermon itself, and eliminating the plan for ourselves. In the first instance, the mind is passive, in the second it is active. The plan of a truly excellent discourse is so identified with the discourse, is so thoroughly organic and one with the filling up, that it requires great judgment and close examination to dissect it, and separate it from the mass of thought, in which it is lightly, yet strongly imbedded. Why then lose all the benefits of this examination and exertion of judgment, by employing the collector of skeletons to do this work for us? Why not take the living structure to pieces ourselves, and derive the same

knowledge and skill thereby, which the anatomist acquires from a personal dissection of a subject? It is only by actual analysis, that actual synthesis becomes possible. It is only by actual examination of the parts of an oration, and an actual disentanglement of them from the matter of the discourse, that we can acquire the ability of putting parts together, and building up a methodical structure ourselves. Instead, therefore, of buying a collection of skeletons, the student and preacher should buy a collection of sermons, and obtain the discipline which he needs from a close and careful study of their logical structure and rhetorical properties. For in this way he will acquire both a logical and rhetorical discipline. If he studies a skeleton merely, logical discipline is the most he can obtain; and this too, as we have seen, in only an inferior degree. If, on the other hand, he studies a sermon, while the effort to detect and take out the plan that is in it will go to impart a fine logical talent, a fine constructive ability, the attention which will at the same time be given to the style, illustration, and diction of the discourse as a whole will go to impart a fine rhetorical talent also. The method of criticism will correspond to the method of production. As the sermon came into existence in a growth-like way—plan and filling up, skeleton and flesh, all together,—so it will be examined in the same natural method. The skeleton will not be contemplated alone and isolated from the thoughts which it supports; neither will the thoughts be examined in a state of separation from the plan of the whole fabric. The method of criticism, like the method of authorship, will be the method of nature.*

But when these collections of plans are seriously offered to the preacher, as sources from which to derive the foundations of his sermons, nothing can be said in their recommendation either on the score of literature or morality. An English treatise upon the art of sermonizing, which is filled up with very full plans of sermons by various distinguished preachers, con-

* The careful analysis of such sermons as those of South, Barrow, and Saurin, would be a discipline for the young preacher more valuable than to read a hundred treatises upon rhetoric, without it.

tains such remarks as the following : "An immense number of examples, in which passages are laid out in logical order, are to be found in Burkitt on the N. T., and more especially in Henry, and these may often be turned to good account. Some ministers are very cautious of using any of these plans, because the volumes of Burkitt and Henry are possessed by many families ; but surely some new casting might easily be devised that would give the air of novelty, and please the fastidious, if they be thought worth the pleasing." Again he says : "I do not wish to draw you from your independent study, and the resources of your own minds ; but if at any time you feel indisposed towards mental labor, or time will not allow you to enter upon it, regard it as perfectly lawful to avail yourselves of the materials furnished by such an author as Henry." Again he observes : "As to Burkitt, he is full of both long and short skeletons, that is, skeletons upon long and short passages, which a little pains would so modernize that when our knowing people saw their old friend with a new face, they certainly would not recognize him again. This is, I suppose, what we wish, when we find ourselves out of condition for close study, or have not time for it." The author then goes on to say, with an innocent simplicity that is quite charming, that "it is necessary to obtain a knowledge of Burkitt's keywords, his 'Observe,' his 'Note,' his 'Learn.' When he says 'Observe,' he is about to give you a head or division of the passage in an expository view." &c., &c., &c.*

* STURTEVANT : Manual. pp. 57, 58, 59.—The views in the English Church are very indulgent in relation to preparations for the pulpit. Archdeacon Paley, in a sermon to the young clergy of Carlisle, addresses them as follows : "There is another resource by which your time may be occupied, which you have forgot, in urging that your time will hang heavy upon you. I mean the composition of sermons. I am far from refusing you the benefit of other mens' labors ; I only require that they be called in, not to flatter laziness, but to assist industry. You find yourself unable to furnish a sermon every week ; try to compose one every month."

The English Churchman contains the following announcement :—"A clergyman of experience and moderate views, who distinguished himself during his University course in Divinity and English composition, will furnish original sermons in strict accordance with the Church of England, in a legible hand, at 5s. 6d. each. Only one copy will be given in any diocese. A specimen will be sent if wished for. Sermons made to order on any required subject, on reasonable terms. For further particulars apply," &c.

Now such recommendations as these are both illiterate, and immoral. No scholar,—no preacher who has even a becoming regard for the literary character, to say nothing of the edifying character, of his sermonizing,—could possibly subject his intellect to such copying. A proper estimate of the sermon as a piece of authorship, if nothing more, would lead the sacred orator to despise such servile artifices, from which nothing but an artificial product could result. Upon such a method as this, the whole department of Sacred Eloquence would lose all its freshness and originality, and would die out. “Dull as a sermon” would be a phrase more true and more significant than it is now.

But upon the score of morality, this act of stealing sermons, is utterly indefensible. A preacher ought to be an honest man throughout. Sincerity, godly sincerity, ought to characterize him intellectually, as well as morally. His plans ought to be the genuine work of his own brain. Not that he may not at times present a plan and train of thought similar to those of other minds; but he ought not to know of it at the time. Such coincidences ought to be undesigned; the result of two minds, each working upon a similar or the same subject, in an independent way, and with no inter-communication. Then the product belongs to both alike, and the coincidence results from the common nature of truth, and the common structure of the human mind; and not from a servile copying of one mind by another.

Beside this critical study of the best sermonizers in the several languages with which the preacher may be acquainted, he should be a diligent student of the standard theological treatises in them. There are, in each of the leading literatures of the modern world, and also in the patristic Greek and Latin, a few treatises which are so thoroughly scriptural in their matter, and so systematic in their structure, that they can not be outgrown by either the theologian or the sermonizer. Upon these, in connection with a faithful study of the Scriptures themselves, the preacher ought to bestow his time. This method of preparing for the process of composition, unlike

that indolent method of having recourse to the plans and sermons of others, strengthens and enriches the intellect. The preacher daily becomes a more discriminating exegete, a more profound theologian, a more natural rhetorician; and the end of his ministerial career finds him as thoughtful and as rich a sermonizer as ever.

The union of a close critical study of the Scriptures themselves, with a thorough and continuous study of those sterling theological treatises which, because they have grown up out of the Scriptures, partake most of their root and fatness, can not be too earnestly recommended to the sermonizer as the best general preparation for direct and particular preparation for the pulpit. The time and ability of the preacher in this age of innumerable small books, upon innumerable small subjects, is too often expended upon inferior productions. Let him dare to be ignorant of this transitory literature, whether sacred or secular, that he may become acquainted with the Bible itself, and those master-works of master-minds which contain the methodized substance of the Bible, and breathe its warmest, deepest inspiration.

Intimately connected with this study of the Bible, and of theological systems and treatises, is the study of philosophy. This point merits a fuller treatment than is possible within our limits. We would only briefly remark, that the study of philosophy, *rightly pursued*, is a great aid to the theologian and the preacher. If the department of philosophy be employed rather as a means of disciplining the mind, and of furnishing a good *method* of developing and presenting truth, than as a source whence the truth itself is to be taken, it becomes the hand-maid of theology and religion. If, on the contrary, it is regarded as the *source* of truth, and the theologian and preacher seeks his subject-matter from the finite reason of man, instead of from the Supreme Reason as it has revealed itself in the Scriptures, then the influence of philosophical studies is most injurious. But this is not the true idea of philosophy. Bacon called his philosophical system the "*novum organum*"—the new organ, or instrument, by means of which truth was

to be developed, established, and applied. He did not call it a new *revelation* of truth, but a new *medium* of truth.

If, now, the theologian and preacher adopts this true and rational view of the nature of philosophy; if he regards it as a means whereby his mind obtains the best method of developing, and not of originating truth; if he regards it as a simple key to unlock the casket which contains the treasure, and not as the treasure itself, or even the casket; if the theologian and preacher adopts this sober and rational view of the nature and uses of philosophy, he will find it of great assistance. All that part of rhetoric which treats of plan and invention, all the *organizing* part of rhetoric, is most intimately connected with philosophy. Moreover, a correct knowledge of the laws of the human mind, a correct idea of the relation of truth to the human mind, and a correct method of enucleating and establishing truth, can not be acquired without the discipline that results from philosophical studies; and without such knowledge, the preacher can neither think profoundly and consecutively, nor discourse clearly and forcibly.*

4. The fourth general direction for the sermonizer is this: *Maintain a spiritual mind.* This direction is a practical one, and while it includes all that is implied in the general direction to all Christians to cultivate personal piety, it is more specific in reference to the necessities of the preacher. By a spiritual mind, in this connection, is meant that solemn and serious mental frame which is naturally and constantly occupied with eternal realities. Some Christians seem to be much more at home in the invisible realm of religion than others. They are characterized by a uniformly earnest and unearthly temper, as if their eye were fixed upon something beyond the horizon of this world,—as if they saw more, and saw further, than thoughtless and unspiritual men about them. Their eye

* Says Dr. John Edwards in his work on Preaching: "As for Metaphysics, it can not be denied that they are useful to the helping us to a clear and distinct apprehension of things, and to the enlarging of our minds, and the cultivating of our thoughts. Whence it is, that unthinking persons, and those that never study for accuracy of conceptions, hate this sort of learning as much as a Deist doth Creeds and Catechisms."—Preface to Pt. I.

is fixed upon something beyond time and sense, and they *do* see more, far more, of "the things unseen and eternal," than even the average of Christians.

Now this temper of mind is of great worth to the preacher. Aside from the fact that one who possesses it is always *in the vein* for writing or speaking upon religious themes, such a one discourses with an earnest sincerity that is always impressive and effectual. He speaks seriously, because he understands the nature of his subject. He speaks clearly and distinctly, because this spiritual-mindedness makes him substantially an eye-witness of eternal realities. He speaks convincingly, because he knows what he says, and whereof he affirms.

Let the preacher, then, maintain a spiritual mind,—a mind that is not dazzled with the glare of earth, that is too solemn to be impressed by the vanities of time,—a mind that is made habitually serious by seeing Him who is invisible. Dwelling among the things that are unseen and eternal, such a preacher, when he comes forth to address volatile and worldly men, will speak with a depth and seriousness of view, and an energy and pungency of statement, that will send them away thoughtful and anxious. Without this abiding sense of the reality and awfulness of eternal things, though the preacher may send men away entertained and dazzled, he can not send them away thinking upon themselves and upon their prospects for eternity. And of what worth is a sermon that does not do this? The principal lack in the current preaching is not so much in matter as in *manner*. There is truth sufficient to save the soul in most of the sermons that are delivered; but it is not so fused with the speaker's personal convictions, and presented in such living contact with the hearer's fears, hopes, and needs, as to make the impression of sober reality. The pulpit must become more intense in manner, or the "form of sound words" will lose all its power.

II. Having thus laid down some rules for the general preparation for sermonizing, we proceed to give some rules for the *immediate* preparation of sermons. If the preacher has fitted

himself for the direct composition of discourses, by acquiring a homiletic mental habit, by forming a high ideal of a sermon, by training himself to self-reliance, and by uniformly maintaining a serious and spiritual mind, he is ready to compose sermons always and everywhere. He is a workman that has learned his craft, and is in possession of a constructive talent which he can use whenever he is called upon. But these general maxims need to be supplemented by some particular rules relating to the process of composition itself, and these we now proceed to specify.

1. *Before beginning the composition of a sermon, bring both the intellect and the heart into a fervid and awakened condition.* Although this general preparation for sermonizing, of which we have spoken, will naturally keep the mind and heart more or less active, still there will be need of more than this ordinary wakefulness, in order that the preacher may do his best work. Such a general preparation, it is true, will prevent the sermonizer from being a dull and lethargic man, but he will need some more immediate stimulation than this, in order that he may compose with the utmost energy and vigor possible. As in the chemical process of crystalization, a smart stroke upon the vessel in which the solution has been slowly preparing for the magical change from a dull fluid to a bright and sparkling solid will accelerate the movement, and render the process seemingly an instantaneous one, so a sort of shock given to the mind, filled as it is with rich stores, and possessed as it is by a homiletic habit, will contribute greatly to the rapid and vigorous construction of a sermon.

Some agitation and concussion is requisite in order to the most efficient exercise of the understanding. The mental powers need to be in an aroused condition,—so to speak, in a state of exaltation,—in order to work with thoroughness, and energy. Hence some very distinguished literary men have been wont to resort to the stimulus of drugs or of alcohol, to produce that inward excitement which is needed in order to the original and powerful action of the intellect. Poets and orators, in particular, feel the need of this intellectual ferment-

tation, and hence the instances of such artificial stimulation of the intellectual powers are most common among these. The preacher is precluded by Christian principle from the use of such means of rousing and kindling his mind, even if the lower prudential motives should not prevail with him. For the mind, like the body, is fearfully injured by artificial and unnatural stimulation. Minds that have been accustomed to it,—that have been forced up in this unnatural way to unnatural efforts,—show the effects of such treatment in premature debility, and commonly in final insanity or idiocy.

The true and proper stimulant for the intellect is *truth*. There is no sin in being excited by truth. There is no mental injury in such excitement. The more thoroughly the intellect is stimulated and kindled by a living verity, the more intensely it is affected and energized by it, the better is it for the mind, and the man. In order, therefore, that the sermonizer may produce within his mind that excitement which is needed in order to original and vigorous composition, let him possess his mind with some single truth adapted to this purpose. And this, from the nature of the case, should be that leading idea which he proposes to embody in his discourse. Every sermon ought to be characterized by unity,—a unity arising from the presence and the presidency within it of some one leading thought. The *theme*, or *proposition* of the sermon should therefore be that particular truth by which the sacred orator should excite his intellect, and awaken his powers to an intenser activity. If the preacher is not able to set his mind into a glow and fervor by his subject, let him not seek other means of excitement, but let him ponder the fact of his apathy, until he is filled with shame and sorrow. Let him remember that if he is not interested in the truth,—if divine truth has no power to quicken and rouse his intellectual powers,—he lacks the first qualification for sermonizing.

But the sermonizer who has made that great general preparation for his work of which we have spoken will find all the stimulation he needs, in his theme. It will be taken from the circle of truths in which he has become most interested both

by the habits of his mind, and by his general culture. It will be suggested to him by his own spiritual wants, and those of his audience. It will have direct reference to the supply of these wants. Let the preacher, then, so far as intellectual excitement is concerned, so fill his mind with the particular idea of the discourse which he is about to prepare, that all inaction and lethargy of intellect shall be banished at once. Let him, before beginning the construction of a sermon, set all his mental powers into a living play, by the single leading truth he would embody in it.

But besides this intellectual awakening, some more than ordinary enlivenment of the *feelings* and *affections* is needed in order to vigorous and eloquent composition. And this is especially true of the composition of sermons,—one main purpose of which is to reach the affections and feelings of the human soul. Without that warm glow which comes from a warm heart, the purely intellectual excitement, of which we have spoken, will fail to influence the hearer, in the way of emotion and action. A purely intellectual force and energy may arrest and interest an audience, but taken by itself it can not persuade their wills, or melt their hearts. The best sermons of a preacher are generally composed under the impulse of a lively state of religious feeling. If preachers should be called to testify, they would state that those discourses which were written when they were in their best mood as Christians constitute the best portion of their authorship.

The sermonizer, therefore, should seek for a more than ordinary quickening of his emotions and affections, as he begins the work of immediate preparation for the pulpit. It is difficult to lay down rules for the attainment of this state of feeling, that will be suited to every one. Each individual Christian is apt to know the best means of rousing his own mind and heart, and hence it is better to leave the person himself to make a choice out of the variety that are at his command. Generally speaking, however, anything that contributes to awaken in the soul a livelier sense of the excellence of divine things, anything that tends to stir and quicken the Christian

affections, will furnish the preacher what he needs in order to vigorous composition. Probably, therefore, no better advice can be given to the sacred orator, in the respect of which we are speaking, than that very same advice which he gives to the common Christian, when he asks for the best means and methods of quickening his religious affections. It has been said by one of the most profound and devout minds in English literature, that "an hour of solitude passed in sincere and earnest prayer, or the conflict with, and conquest over, a single passion or subtle bosom sin, will teach us more of thought, will more effectually awaken the faculty and form the habit of reflection, than a year's study in the schools without them." If prayer and Christian self-discipline do this for the habits of thought, most certainly will they do the same for the habits of feeling. If an hour of serious self-examination and self-mortification,—if an hour of devout meditation and earnest prayer,—does not set the affections of the preacher into a glow, probably nothing in the way of means can. The greatest preachers have, consequently, been in the habit of preparing for composition by a season of prayer and meditation. The maxim of Luther, *bene orasse est bene studuisse*, is familiar to all. Augustine says: "Let our Christian orator who would be understood and heard with pleasure, pray before he speak. Let him lift up his thirsty soul to God, before he pronounce anything." Erasmus,—a man in whom the intellectual was more prominent than the spiritual and devotional,—yet observes, that "it is incredible how much light, how much vigor, how much force and vitality, is imparted to the clergyman by deep earnest supplication." And the pagan Pericles, according to Plutarch, "was accustomed, whenever he was to speak in public, previously to entreat the gods, that he might not utter against his will, any word that should not belong to his subject."

By filling his mind with his theme, and by awakening his religious affections by a season of prayer and devout meditation, the sacred orator will bring his whole inner being into that awakened and exalted condition which prepares for di-

rect and rapid composition. He will become a *roused* man, and will find all his faculties of cognition and feeling, in free and living action.

2. And this brings us to the second maxim for facilitating the process of composition, which is: *Compose continuously.* When the preacher has made all the preparation, general and particular, of which we have spoken, and his mind and heart are ready to work, he should proceed in the composition of a sermon without intermission. The mind works with far the greatest intensity and energy, when it works continuously. It acquires strength by motion, and hence a stop in its action diminishes its force. The mind, especially when a full preparation for its agency has been made, ought to be allowed, or if need be, compelled, to work as hard and as long as is compatible with the physical structure of the individual. Some men are capable of much more protracted mental efforts than others; though in this case the mental processes themselves are apt to be much slower. When the mind moves with rapidity, it is unable to continue in motion so long as when its movements are more dull and heavy. Each man should know himself in these respects, and understand how much his mind and body can endure without injury. Having this knowledge, he ought then to subject himself to as intense and as long continued composition as is possible. Having seated himself at his writing-desk, he ought not to lay down his pen until he has tired himself by the process of original composition. Then let him unbend in good earnest, and allow his mind and his body a real genuine relaxation.

Too many sermons are composed during an intermittent activity of the mind which does not draw upon its deepest resources, and its best power. The sermon is the product of a series of isolated efforts, instead of one long, strong application. It wears, consequently, a fragmentary character and appearance, as if it were written one sentence at a time, or each paragraph by itself. Even if there is a connection of the parts, there is no *fusion* of them. Even if the discourse has method, it has no glow.

"Write with fury, and correct with phlegm" is admirable advice for the sermonizer. But it is impossible to rouse this fury of the mind, except by a continuous application of its energies. If the composer stops for a season, his mind begins to cool again, and much of the energy of his succeeding effort is absorbed in bringing his mind up to the same degree of ardor at which it stood at the close of the preceding effort. It is as if the smith should every moment withdraw his iron from the fire, instead of letting it stay until it has acquired a white heat. The same amount of mental application condensed into a single continuous effort will accomplish far more than if it is scattered in portions over a long space of time. "Divide up the thunder," says Schiller, "into separate notes, and it becomes a lullaby for children, but pour it forth in one continuous peal, and its royal sound shall shake the heavens."

One principal reason why the pulpit ministrations of the clergy do not, as they should, exhibit their utmost possibility of effort, lies in the fact that too many sermons are composed scatteringly all along through the week. They are the products of the desultory efforts of the clergyman. He allows himself to be interrupted during the season of composition, or else he has no fixed and stated season. The consequence is, that the sermon, instead of being produced by one uninterrupted gush of soul, or at least by a few gushes and outpourings that form a true connection with each other, and so are virtually a single continuous effort, is the patched and fragmentary collection of odd hours, and of ungenial moods. The discourse, in this way, drags its slow length along through the whole week, and the entire mental labor expended upon it, though apparently so much, is not equal in true productive force, in real originant and influential power, to three hours of continuous glowing composition.

Let the sermonizer, then, proceed upon the maxim of writing continuously, when he writes at all. Let him have his set season for composition. Let him fix the time of writing, and the length of effort, in accordance with his physical strength, and then let him go through with the process of com-

position with all the abstraction, absorption, and devotedness of prayer itself. In this way, the very best power of the man, the theologian, and the Christian, will be evolved, and will appear in a discourse that will be fresh, energetic, and impressive. In this way, the sermon would become a more uniformly vivid production, and a more generally vital species of authorship, than it now is.

It must be remembered, however, that this injunction to write continuously and furiously is a maxim only for one who has obeyed the other maxims, general and special, that have been laid down for sermonizing. It is no maxim for one who has not. It is one of a series, and pre-supposes obedience to what precedes, and also to what succeeds. If the preacher has formed a homiletic habit of mind, if his ideal of a sermon is high, if he has trained himself to self-reliance, if he has acquired a spiritual way of thinking, and if he has roused his mind by his subject and his heart by prayer,—if he has done all this, then what he does in the hour of composition, let him do quickly, and continuously.

3. The third maxim to be followed by the sermonizer in actual composition is this: *Avoid prolixity*. By prolixity, is meant a tiresome length which arises from an excessive treatment of a subject,—as excessive explanation, or excessive illustration, or excessive argumentation. Theremin, in his treatise upon Rhetoric,* enunciates the important distinction between the philosophical and the rhetorical presentation of truth. The former is that exhaustive and detailed development of a subject which is proper in the scientific treatise. The latter is that rapid and condensed, yet methodical, exhibition of thought which is required of the orator by the circumstances in which he is placed. Recurring to this distinction, the maxim: *Avoid prolixity*, is equivalent to the rule: *Exhibit truth rhetorically*, in distinction from exhibiting it philosophically or poetically.

The orator, of all men, should know when he is through, and

* Book I. chap. x, xi; Book II. chap. iv.

should stop when he is through. The preacher should perceive when he has subjected a subject, or a portion of a subject, to a treatment that is sufficient for the purposes of oratory, and should act accordingly. As soon as his presentation has reached the due limits of rhetoric, he should bring it to an end, instantaneously, lest it pass over into a mode of representation that is foreign to the orator, and is inimical to all the aims of an orator. Prolixity, or excessive treatment, arises when the sermonizer continues to dwell upon any part of his discourse, after he has already sufficiently developed it. A plan is prolix, when it is filled up with sub-divisions which are so evidently contained in the principal divisions that the mind of the auditor feels itself undervalued by their formal enunciation. An argument is prolix, when, from the employment of the philosophical instead of the rhetorical mode of demonstration, it is made tedious by syllogisms instead of enthymemes, and by trains of ratiocination instead of bold and direct appeals to consciousness. An illustration is prolix, when the short and rapid metaphor is converted into the long and detailed simile, or allegory.

Without, however, entering upon these particulars of plan, proof, and illustration, we would briefly call attention to that prolixity, or excessive and tedious treatment of a subject, which arises from an imperfect mastery of it. Suppose the sermonizer has not made that general and special preparation for composition which we have described, and yet attempts the production of a sermon. In the first place, his manner of presentation will inevitably be confused; in the second place, it will inevitably be prolix, because it is confused; and in the third place, it will inevitably be tedious, because it is prolix and confused. Instead of handling his theme with that strong yet easy grasp which is natural to a mind that is master of itself and of the truth, he handles it irresolutely, hesitatingly, and awkwardly. Instead of a clear downright statement, because he *knows* whereof he affirms, he expresses himself obscurely and doubtfully, because he does not certainly and positively know. Statement follows statement, and

yet there is little or no progress towards a final statement. Conscious that he has not done justice to the topic, he dares not let it drop, and take up another. Conscious that he has not lodged the truth fairly and surely in the mind of the auditor, he does not leave it, but continues to hover about it, and work at it, in hope of better success in the end. The result is, that instead of crowding the greatest possible amount of matter into the smallest possible form, the preacher spreads the least possible amount of truth over the widest possible surface. He hammers out his lead very thin. For in this process the truth itself suffers. Instead of appearing in the sermon, as it is in its own nature, bright, dense, and gem-like, under the manipulations of such a workman, it becomes dull, and porous. The sacred oration instead of being a swift, brief, and strong movement of thought, becomes a slow, long, and feeble one.

But prolixity may arise, also, from another cause besides ignorance of the subject. There may be prolixity from too much information. The preacher may have stored his memory with a multifarious knowledge, and not having acquired that thoroughly organizing habit of mind which, like life in nature, sloughs off all that is not needed, this knowledge inundates the sermon. It comes pouring in upon him by a merely passive effort of the memory, while the judgment is unawakened and unemployed, and borne along upon this general deluge of materials, the preacher becomes the most prolix and tedious of mortals. Long after the topic under consideration has been sufficiently explained to the understanding, he continues to explain. Long after the topic has been sufficiently illustrated to the imagination, he continues to illustrate. Copiousness of information, unless it is under the regulation and guidance of a strongly methodizing ability, and true rhetorical talent, leads to prolixity as inevitably as sheer ignorance.

While the preacher is on his guard against this fault, he is at the same time to remember that he is dealing with the common mind, and must not be so brief as to be obscure. A cer-

tain degree of repetition, even, is required in the sermon, especially if it is highly doctrinal, in order to convey the truth completely. This trait should be managed with great care, however; for even the common mind is less offended at a nakedness of statement which leaves it something to do, even if it is in the way of supplying ellipses and deficiencies, than it is at an excessive repetition, which tires and tantalizes it. It is impossible to lay down a general rule for the length of a sermon. It will not do to say that it should be thirty minutes in length, or forty-five minutes, or one hour. The length of a discourse will vary with the nature of the subject, and the peculiarities of time and place. And no stiff rule is needed, provided the sermonizer possesses that good judgment, that tact, which discerns when the subject, as a whole, or in its parts, has received a sufficient treatment. It is, in reality, a sort of instinctive feeling which comes in the course of a good rhetorical training and practice, rather than any outward rule, that must decide when the development of truth has reached that point where it must stop. Hence the remark so often made in praise of a skillful orator: "He knows when he is done." In fact, it is not the item of length, but the item of prolixity, which wearies an audience. An auditory will listen with increasing interest to a sermon of an hour's length, provided their attention is kept upon the stretch by a sermonizer who says just enough, and no more, upon each point, and who passes from topic to topic with rapidity, and yet with a due treatment and exhaustion of each, while they will go to sleep under a sermon of a half-hour's length, in which there is none of the excitement that comes from a skillful management of the heads, and none of the exhilaration of a forward motion. There is less fatigue and weariness in shooting through two hundred miles of space in a rail-car, than in lumbering over ten miles of space in a slow coach.

The importance of avoiding prolixity is very apparent when we consider the relation of the sermon to the feelings and affections of the hearer. The feelings of the human soul are often very shy, and apparently capricious. The preacher some-

times succeeds in awakening a very deep feeling,—say that of conviction of sin,—but he is not satisfied with having said just enough, or perhaps he is destitute of that tact of which we have spoken, and does not *know* that he has, and continues to enlarge and amplify. The feeling of conviction in the hearer, which ought to have been left to itself, begins to be weakened by the unnecessary repetition or prolixity of the discourse, and perhaps is ultimately dissipated by it. If the preacher had stopped when he was really through, and had left the mind of the hearer to its own workings and those of the Holy Spirit in it, a work would have been done in the soul which all this labor of supererogation on his part only serves to hinder and suppress.

Let the preacher acquire this nice discernment, by acquiring a good rhetorical discipline, by making all the general and special preparation for sermonizing, and by studying the capacities of his congregation, and then he will, instinctively and inevitably, avoid all polixity in the discussion of truth. Then his sermons, whether they are longer or shorter, will all of them exhibit that just proportion,—that roundness of form, and that absence of all superfluity,—which we see in the works of nature, and which appears in the productions of every wise and cunning workman who imitates nature.

ART. II.—RELATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT TO THE NEW.

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THE essential nature of the Old Testament dispensation—how it fundamentally differs from the Christian dispensation, and the substantial relation of Judaism to Christianity—is a subject which may be denominated a living one in theological inquiry, and one which only the more earnestly asks for better settlement as the study of the essential nature of Christianity be-