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ART. I.—THE DIFFERENT SPECIES OF SERMONS, AND THE  
CHOICE OF A TEXT.

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IN classifying sermons, it is well to follow the example of the scientific man, and employ as generic distinctions as possible. It is never desirable to distinguish a great many particulars, and elevate them into an undue prominence by converting them into generals. That classification, therefore, which would regard the “applicatory” sermon, the “observational” sermon, and such like, as distinct classes, only contributes to the confusion and embarrassment of the inquirer. The three most generic species of sermons, are the *topical*, the *textual*, and the *expository*.

The Topical Sermon is one in which there is but a single leading idea. This idea sometimes finds a formal expression in a proposition, and sometimes it pervades the discourse as a whole, without being distinctly pre-announced. Topical sermons are occupied with one definite subject or topic, which can be accurately and fully stated in a brief title. South preaches a discourse of this kind from Numbers, xxxii. 23 :

"Be sure your sin will find you out." The proposition of the sermon is this: "Concealment of sin is no security to the sinner." The leading idea of the discourse is, the *concealment* of sin; and the particular idea in the hearer to which this idea in the sermon is referred is, the idea of *happiness*.\* The concealment of sin is incompatible with the soul's peace and enjoyment; and the positions by which the idea or proposition of the sermon is led back to this fundamental idea in the moral condition of the hearer are these: 1. The sinner's very confidence of secrecy is the cause of his detection. 2. There is sometimes a providential concurrence of unexpected events which leads to his detection. 3. One sin is sometimes the means of discovering another. 4. The sinner may unwittingly discover himself through frenzy and distraction. 5. The sinner may be forced to discover himself by his own conscience. 6. The sinner may be suddenly smitten by some notable judgment that discloses his guilt, or, 7. His guilt will follow him into another world, if he should chance to escape in this.

The topical sermon is more properly an oration than either of the other species. It is occupied with a single definite theme that can be completely enunciated in a brief proposition. All of its parts are subservient to the theoretical establishment of but one idea or proposition in the mind of the hearer, and to the practical realization of it in his conduct. In the case of the textual sermon, as we shall see when we come to examine it, there is less certainty of unity in the subject, and consequently less in the structure of the discourse. And the expository sermon partakes still less of the characteristics of oratory and eloquence.

Inasmuch as the topical sermon approaches nearest to the unity, and symmetry, and conveyance to a single point, of the oration proper, it is the model species for the preacher. By this is meant that the sermon, ideally, should contain one leading thought, rather than several. It should be the embodiment of a single proposition, rather than a collection of sev-

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\* THEREMIN: Rhetoric. pp. 72-75.

eral propositions. It should announce but one single doctrine in its isolation and independence, instead of exhibiting several doctrines in their interconnection and mutual dependence. The sermon should preserve an oratorical character. It should never allow the philosophical or the poetical element to predominate over the rhetorical. The sermon should be eloquence and not poetry or philosophy. It should be a discourse that exhibits singleness of aim, and a converging progress towards an outward practical end.

It is for this reason, therefore, that we lay down the position, that the topical sermon is the model species for the sermonizer. If he constructs a textual sermon, he should endeavor to render it as topical as is possible.\* He should aim to pervade it with but one leading idea, to embody in it but one doctrine, and to make it teach but one lesson. In constructing an expository sermon, also, the preacher should make the same endeavor; and although he must in this instance be less successful, he may facilitate his aim, by selecting for exposition only such a passage of Scripture as has but one general drift, and conveys but one general sentiment.

The importance of this maxim may be best seen, by considering the fact, that sermons are more defective in respect to unity of structure, and a constant progress towards a single end, than in any other respect. But these are strictly oratorical qualities, and can be secured only by attending to the nature and laws of eloquence,—to the rhetorical as distinguished from the philosophical presentation of truth. Too many sermons contain matter enough for two or three orations, and consequently are not themselves orations. This is true of the elder English sermonizers, in whom the matter is generally superior to the form. Take the following plan of a sermon of South (in oratorical respects, the best of the earlier English

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\* This is not to be attained by making the plan a mixture of topical and textual,—by stating a proposition, and following with a purely textual division. The plan should be textual, but the style and movement of the discourse should be distinguished, so far as possible, by unity, simplicity, and progressiveness,—that is, by oratorical or topical qualities.

preachers) on Jer. vi. 15: "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the Lord." It is a topical discourse. The theme or proposition is: "Shamelessness in sin is the certain forerunner of destruction." The sermon contains sixteen pages, of which only four and a half are filled with matter that, upon strictly rhetorical principles, goes to establish the proposition. The first three quarters of the sermon are occupied with an analysis of the *nature* of "shamelessness in sin." The discourse is shaped too disproportionately by the category of truth,—a category that is subordinate, and should not be allowed so much influence in the structure and moulding of an oration.\* The consequence is, that this sermon possesses far less of that oratorical fire and force so generally characteristic of South. It is not throughout pervaded by its own fundamental proposition. It does not gather momentum as it proceeds. There is no greater energy of style and diction at the end than at the beginning. It is clear; it is instructive; it has many and great excellencies; but it lacks the excellence of being a true oration,—a rounded and symmetrical discourse, pervaded by one idea, breathing but one spirit, rushing forward with a uniformly accelerating motion, and ending with an overpowering impression and influence upon the will. This discourse would be more truly topical, and thus more truly oratorical, if the proportions had been just the reverse of what they now are; if but one fourth of it had been moulded by the metaphysical category of truth, and the remaining three-fourths by the practical idea of happiness; if the discussion of the nature of shamelessness in sin had filled four pages, and the *reasons why* it brings down destruction, or unhappiness, upon the sinner, had filled the remaining twelve.

The Textual Sermon is one in which the passage of Scrip-

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\* THEREMIN: Rhetoric, Book I. Chap. X.

ture is broken up, and either its leading words or its leading clauses become the heads of the discourse. For example, Rom. xiv. 12: "So then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God," might be the foundation of a discourse upon human accountability. The divisions are formed by emphasizing the leading words, and thereby converting them into the divisions of the sermons as follows: 1. *An account* is to be rendered. 2. This account is to be rendered to *God*. 3. *Every one* is to render this account,—mankind generally. 4. Every one of *us* is to render this account,—men as individuals. 5. Every one of us is to render an account of *himself*.

It is not necessary that the words of the text should be employed, as in the example given above. The substance of the separate clauses may be made the divisions, and the sermon still be textual. Barrows has a sermon founded on Eph. v. 20: "Giving thanks always for all things unto God." The plan is as follows: 1. The duty itself,—giving thanks. 2. The object to whom thanks are to be directed,—to God. 3. The time of performing the duty,—always. 4. The matter and extent of the duty,—for all things.

What are sometimes termed "observational" sermons, are also textual. The following taken from a plan of a sermon by Beddome upon Acts ix. 4: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me," will illustrate this. The observations upon this text are suggested either by the text as a whole, or by some of its parts. 1. It is the general character of unconverted men to be of a persecuting spirit. This character is suggested by the text as a whole. 2. Christ has his eye upon persecutors. This observation is also suggested by the text as a whole. 3. The injury done to Christ's people, Christ considers as done to himself. This observation is suggested by a part of the text,—by an emphasized word in it, "why persecutest thou *me*." 4. The calls of Christ are particular. This observation is suggested by a part of the text,—"*Saul, Saul.*"

There are two things requisite to the production of a good textual sermon, viz: a significant text, and a talent to discover its significance. The text must contain distinct and

emphatic conceptions to serve as the parts of the division. In the text given above, Rom. xiv. 12, "So then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God," there are these distinct and emphatic ideas : (a) An account. (b) A Judge. (c) Humanity generally. (d) The individual in particular. (e) Personal confession. These fertile conceptions are full of matter, and the skill of the sermonizer is seen in the thoroughness and brevity with which he exhausts them and their contents. Upon the number, variety, and richness of such distinct and emphatic ideas in a text depends its fitness for textual discourse.

Again, the text, in case it does not contain a number of such conceptions, needs contain a number of distinct positions, or affirmations, to serve as parts of the division. There may be no single conceptions in a text suitable to constitute the plan of a sermon, while there are several statements in it, direct or implied. Take, for example, Ps. xc. 10: "The days of our years are threescore years and ten : and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow : for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." The single conceptions in this text are not weighty enough to constitute heads in a discourse, but the affirmations, the positions, the statements implied in it, are. This text, treated in this way, would furnish the following divisions of a textual sermon ; 1. Human life, however lengthened out, must come to an end. 2. Human life, at longest, is very short. 3. That which is added to the ordinary duration of human life is, after all, but little to be desired.

The second requisite in order to the production of a good textual sermon is a talent to detect these emphatic conceptions, or these direct or indirect positions in a passage of Scripture. A preacher destitute of this talent will pass by many texts that really are full of the materials of textual sermonizing. He has no eye to discover the rich veins that lie concealed just under the dull and uninteresting surface. If a text is so plain that he needs only to call out the leading words,—if the formation of the plan is merely a *verbalizing*

process,—he can, perhaps, succeed in constructing a textual discourse that will probably be common-place, because its structure is so very evident and easy. But the number of such texts is small, and the range of such a sermonizer must be narrow. A tact is needed in the preacher to discover the hidden skeleton. This tact will be acquired gradually, and surely, by every one who carefully cultivates himself in all homiletic respects. Like all nice discernment, it comes imperceptibly in the course of training and discipline, and therefore no single and particular rule for its acquisition can be laid down. It must be acquired, however, or the fundamental talent for textual sermonizing will be wanting. Moreover, this tact should be judicious. It is possible to find more meaning in a text than it really contains. The Rabbinic notion, that mountains of sense are contained in every letter of the inspired volume, may be adopted to such an extent, at least, as to lead the preacher into a fanciful method that is destructive of all impressive and effective discourse. This talent for detecting the significance of Scripture must be confined to the gist of it,—to the evident and complete substance of it.

The Expository Sermon, as its name indicates, is an explanatory discourse. The purpose of it is, to unfold the meaning of a connected paragraph or section of Scripture, in a more detailed manner than is consistent with the structure, of either the topical or the textual sermon. Some writers upon Homiletics would deny it a place among sermons, and contend that it cannot legitimately contain enough of the oratorical structure and character to justify its being employed for purposes of persuasion. They affirm that the expository discourse is purely and entirely dialectic, and can no more be classified with the connected and symmetrical productions of oratory and eloquence, than the commentary or the paraphrase can be.

But while it is undoubtedly true that the expository sermon is the farthest removed from the oration, both in its structure and in its movement, it is not necessary that it should be as

totally unoratorical as a piece of commentary, or a paraphrase. An expository discourse should have a logical structure, and be pervaded by a leading sentiment, as really as a topical sermon. And it ought to be certainly free from the dilution of a mere paraphrase. It should have a beginning, middle, and end, and thus be more than a piece of commentary. In short, we lay down the same rule in relation to the expository sermon that we did in relation to the textual: viz, that it be assimilated to the topical model as closely as the nature of the species permits. But in order to this assimilation, it is necessary to select for exposition, a passage, or paragraph of Scripture that is somewhat complete in itself. The distinction between expository preaching and commentary, originates in the selection, in the former instance, of a rounded and self-included portion of inspiration, as the foundation of discourse, while in the latter instance, the mind is allowed to run on indefinitely, to the conclusion of the book or the epistle. The excellence of an expository sermon, consequently, depends primarily upon the choice of such a portion of Scripture as will not lead the preacher on and on, without allowing him to arrive at a proper termination. Unless a passage is taken that finally comes round in a full circle, containing one leading sentiment, and teaching one grand lesson,—like a parable of our Lord,—the expository sermon must either be commentary or paraphrase. And if it be either of these, it cannot be classed among sermons, because the utmost it can accomplish is information. Persuasion, the proper function and distinguishing characteristic of eloquence, forms no part of its effects upon an audience.

Even when a suitable passage has been selected the sermonizer will need to employ his strongest logical talents, and his best rhetorical ability, to impart sufficiently of the oratorical form and spirit to the expository sermon. He will need to watch his mind, and his plan, with great care, lest the discourse overflow its banks, and spread out in all directions, losing the current, and the deep strong volume of eloquence. This species of sermonizing is very liable to have a dilution of



divine truth, instead of an exposition. Perhaps, among modern preachers, Chalmers exhibits the best example of the expository sermon. The oratorical structure and spirit of his mind enabled him to create a current in almost every species of discourse which he undertook, and through his Lectures on Romans we find a strong unifying stream of eloquence constantly setting in, with an increasing and surging force, from the beginning to the end. The expository preaching of this distinguished sacred orator is well worth studying in the respect of which we are speaking.

Having thus briefly sketched characteristics of the three species of sermons, the question naturally arises: To what extent is each to be employed by the preacher?

The first general answer to this question is, that *all* the species should be employed by every sermonizer without exception. No matter what the turn or temper of his mind may be, he should build upon each and every one of these patterns. If he is highly oratorical in his heart and spirit, let him by no means neglect the expository sermon. If his mental temperament is phlegmatic, and his mental processes naturally cool and unimpassioned, let him by no means neglect the topical sermon.

It is too generally the case, that the preacher follows his tendency, and preaches uniformly one kind of sermons. A more severe dealing with his own powers, and a wiser regard for the wants of his audience, would lead to more variety in sermonizing. At times, the mind of the congregation needs the more stirring and impressive influence of a topical discourse, to urge it up to action. At others, it needs the instruction and indoctrination of the less rhetorical, and more didactic expositions of Scripture.

And this leads to the further remark, as a definite reply to the question above raised, that the preacher should employ all three of the species, in the order in which they have been discussed.

Speaking generally, it is safe to say that the plurality of

sermons should be topical,—pervaded by a single idea, or containing a single proposition, and converging by a constant progress to a single point. For this is the model species as we have seen. The textual and the expository sermon must be as closely assimilated to this species as is possible, by being founded upon a single portion of Scripture that is complete in itself, and by teaching one general lesson.

Moreover, textual and expository sermons will not be likely to possess this oratorical structure, and to breathe this eloquent spirit, unless the preacher is in the habit of constructing proper orations,—unless he understands the essential distinctions between eloquence and philosophy,—unless he feels the difference, and makes his audience feel the difference, between the sacred essay and the sacred oration.

Next in order, follows the textual sermon; and this species is next in value for the purposes of persuasion. Easy and natural in its structure,—its parts being either the repetition of Scripture phraseology, or else suggestions from it,—the textual sermon should be frequently employed by the preacher.

And, lastly, the expository sermon should be occasionally employed. There is somewhat less call for this variety, than there was before the establishment of Sabbath-schools and Bible-classes. Were it not that these have taken the exposition of Scripture into their own charge, one very considerable part of the modern preacher's duty—as it was of the Christian Fathers and the Reformers—would be to expound the Bible. Under the present arrangement of the Christian Church, however, the ministry is relieved from this duty to a considerable extent. But it is not wholly relieved from it. It is the duty of the preacher occasionally to lay out his best strength in the production of an elaborate expository sermon—which shall not only do the ordinary work of a sermon, which shall not only instruct, awaken and move, but which shall also serve as a sort of guide and model for the teacher of the Sabbath-school and the Bible-class. Such sermonizing becomes an aid to the instructor in getting at the substance of the Scripture, and in bringing it out before the

minds of the young. Probably the preacher can take no course so well adapted to raise the standard of Sabbath-school and Bible-class instruction in his congregation, as by occasionally delivering a well-constructed and carefully elaborated expository discourse.

By employing, in this manner, all three of the species, in their relation and proper proportions, the preacher will accomplish more for his people, and for his own mind, than by confining himself to one species only. As the years of his minority roll on, he will bring the whole Bible into contact with the hearts and consciences of his audience. Divine revelation will, in this way, become all that it is capable of becoming for the mind of man, because all its elements will be wrought into the mass of society. The preacher himself will perform all his functions, and not a portion only. He will instruct and awaken, he will indoctrinate and enkindle, he will inform and move, he will rebuke, reprove and exhort. In short, he will in this way minister to the greatest variety of wants, and build up the greatest variety and breadth of Christian character in the church.

After this analysis of the different varieties of sermons, we pass, next, to the consideration of their foundation. A sermon is built upon a passage of Scripture, which is denominated a *text*. This term is derived from the Latin *tex tum*, which signifies woven. The text, therefore, etymologically denotes, either a portion of inspiration that is woven into the whole web of holy writ, and which, therefore, must be interpreted in its connection and relations, or else a portion of inspiration that is woven into the whole fabric of the sermon. We need not confine ourselves to either meaning exclusively, but may combine both significations. A text, then, is a passage of inspiration which is woven primarily into the web of Holy Writ, and secondarily into the web of a discourse. By uniting both of the etymological meanings of the word, we are led to observe the two great facts, that the subject of a sermon is an organic part of Scripture, and therefore should not

be torn away alive and bleeding from the body of which it is a vital part; and, secondly, that the subject or text of a sermon should pervade the whole structure which it serves to originate and organize. If this definition of the text be kept in mind, and practically acted upon, it will prevent the sermonizer from treating it out of its connection with the context and the general tenor of revelation, and will lead him to regard it as the formative principle and power of his sermon, and to make it such. The text, then, will not be tortured to teach a doctrine contrary to the general teachings of inspiration, and it will be something more than a motto for a series of observations drawn from a merely human source, the preacher's own mind.

The custom of founding religious discourse upon a text has pervaded ever since there has been a body of inspiration from which to take a text. In the patriarchal age religious teachers spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, without a passage from the canon of inspiration, because the canon was not yet formed. Noah was a "*preacher of righteousness*," and probably reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, much as Paul did before Felix, without any formal proposition derived from a body of Holy Writ. As early as the time of Ezra, however, we find the Sacred Canon, which during the captivity had fallen into neglect, made the basis of religious instruction. Ezra, accompanied by Levites, in a public congregation "read in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."\* Our Saviour, as his custom was (conforming undoubtedly to the general Jewish custom), went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and "stood up for to read" the Old Testament. He selected the first and part of the second verse of the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah for his text, and preached a sermon upon it, which fastened the eyes of every man in the synagogue upon him in the very beginning, and which, notwithstanding its gracious words, finally developed their

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\* Nehemiah viii. 6-8.

latent malignity, filled them with wrath, so that they led him to the brow of the precipice on which their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong,\* The apostles also frequently discoursed from passages of Scripture. Peter, soon after the return of the disciples from the Mount of Ascension, preached a discourse from Psalm lxix. 25, the object of which was to induce the Church to choose an apostle in the place of Judas.† And again, on the day of Pentecost, this same apostle preached a discourse founded upon Joel ii. 28-32, which was instrumental in the conversion of three thousand souls.‡ Sometimes, again, the discourse, instead of being more properly homiletic, was an abstract of sacred history. The discourse of Stephen, when arraigned before the high priest, was of this kind.§ The dense and mighty discourse of Paul on Mars Hill, if examined, will be found to be made up, in no small degree, of statements and phrases that imply a thorough acquaintance with the Old Testament. They are all fused and amalgamated, it is true, with the thoughts that came fresh and new from Paul's own inspiration, and yet they are part and particle of the earlier inspiration under the Jewish economy.

The homilies of the early Christian Church, in the post-apostolic age, were imitations of these discourses in the Jewish Synagogue, and of these sermons of the apostles. They became more elaborate and rhetorical, in proportion, as audiences became more cultivated; and, on the other hand, they became less exultant, both in matter and in form, in proportion as the church became ignorant and superstitious. But during all the changes which the sermon underwent, it continued to be founded upon a passage of Scripture, and to contain more or less of Scripture matter and phraseology. Melancthon does indeed mention, as one of the inconsistencies and prodigious errors of Popery, that the Ethics of Aristotle were read in church, and that texts were taken from his writings. Still, as

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\* Luke iv. 16-28.

† Acts ii. 14-36.

‡ Acts i. 15, sq.

§ Acts vii. 2-53.

a general thing, the ministry, whether scriptural or unscriptural in its character, has in all ages since there has been a collected Sacred Canon, gone to it for the foundation of its public discourse. That, at this time, there is less likelihood than ever before of this custom becoming antiquated, is one of the strongest grounds for believing that Christianity is to prevail throughout the earth. We have now the strongest reason for believing that to the end of time, wherever there shall be the sermon, there will be the Bible ; and that wherever there shall be homiletic discourse, there will be a scriptural basis for it.

The following reasons may be assigned for selecting a passage of Scripture as the foundation of the sermon :

1. The selection puts honor upon Revelation. It is a tacit and very impressive acknowledgment that the Scriptures are the great source of religious knowledge. Every sermon that is preached, throughout Christendom, in its very beginning, and also through its whole structure, points significantly to the Divine Revelation, and in this way its paramount authority over all other literature is affirmed. No sermonizer could now take his text from a human production, even though it should contain the very substance, and breathe the very spirit of the Bible, without shocking the taste, and the religious sensibilities of his audience. This fact shows that the practice of which we are speaking, fosters reverence for the Word of God, and that it is consequently a good one.
2. The practice of selecting a text results in the extended exposition of the Scriptures to the general mind. Sermonizing, while it is truly oratorical, in this way becomes truly expository. The sermon is a regularly constructed discourse, and yet, when it is founded upon a text, and is pervaded by it, it contains more or less of commentary. In this way the general mind is made acquainted with the contents of Revelation.
3. The sermon, when based upon a text, is more likely to possess unity, and a methodical structure. If the preacher should give no one general direction to his mind by a passage of inspiration, the sermon would degenerate into a series of remarks which would

have little use, or apparent connection with each other. Like the observations of a person when called upon, without any premeditation, to make remarks in a public meeting, the sermon, though religious in its matter, would be more or less rambling in its manner. Without a text, the sermonizer would be likely to speak what came uppermost, provided only it had some reference to religion. And the ill effects of this course would not stop here. The sermon would become more and more rambling, and less and less religious in its character, until, owing to this neglect of the Scriptures, it would eventually become dissevered from them, and the sacred oration would thus become secular. 4. The selection of a text aids the memory of the hearer. It furnishes him with a brief statement which contains the whole substance of the sermon, and is a clue to lead him through its several parts. We all know that the hearer betakes himself to the text, first of all, when called upon to give an account of a discourse. If he remembers the text, he is generally able to mention the proposition, and more or less of the trains of thought. 5. The text gives authority to the preacher's words. The sermon, when it is really founded upon a passage of inspiration, and is truly pervaded by it, possesses a sort of semi-inspiration itself. It is more than a merely human and secular product. The Holy Spirit acknowledges it as such, by employing it for purposes of conviction and conversion. A merely and wholly human production, properly secular eloquence, is not one of those things which the Holy Ghost "takes and shows unto the soul." A truly Scriptural discourse, provided we do not strain the phraseology too far, has much of the authority of Scripture itself.

The following are some of the rules that should guide in the choice of a text : 1. A passage of Scripture should be selected towards which the mind at the time spontaneously moves. Choose a text that attracts and strikes the mind. The best sermons are written upon such passages, because the preacher enters into them with vigor and heartiness. Yet such texts are not always to be found. They do not present themselves

at the very moment they are wanted. Hence, the sermonizer should aid nature by art, should cultivate spontaneity by prudence and forethought. He should keep a book of texts, in which he habitually and carefully writes down *every* text that strikes him, *together with* all of the skeleton that presents itself to him at the time. Let him by no means omit this last particular. In this way the spontaneous movements of his mind will be on record. The fresh and genial texts that occur, together with the original and genial plans which they suggest, will all be within reach. A sermonizer who thus aids nature by art will never be at a loss for subjects. He will be embarrassed more by his riches than his poverty.

2. A text should be complete in itself. By this, it is not meant that it should be short. No rule can be given for the length of a text. The most that is required is, that the passage of Scripture selected as the foundation of the sacred oration, should, like the oration itself, be single, full, and unsuperfluous in its character. It should be single,—containing only one general theme. It should be full,—*i. e.* not a meagre and partial statement of this theme. It should be unsuperfluous,—*i. e.* not redundant in matter that would lead the sermonizer into trains of discussion and reflection, foreign to the one definite end of an oration.

Texts must vary in length from the necessity of the case. As a general rule, however, they should be as brief as is compatible with completeness. Short texts are more easily remembered. They are more likely to result in concise and effective sermons,—in sermons that are free from prolixity, and that converge constantly to a single ultimate end. Sermonizers, like Latimer and South, who are distinguished for a rapid, driving method, affect short pithy texts like the following: “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.” “He that walketh surely, walketh uprightly.” “The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.” “So that they are without excuse.” “Be sure your sin will find you out.” Again, preachers, like Alison and Blair, who are distinguished not very much for vigor and effectiveness, but for a clean, neat, and elegant



method, select brief texts like these: "Thou art the same: and thy years shall not fail." "In your patience possess ye your souls." "Can ye not discern the signs of the times?" "Thou hast made summer and winter." "What I would, that I do not." "Unstable as water thou shall not excel." It will be found to be true generally, that in proportion as a preacher's mind is awake and energetic, and the public mind is also awake and active, texts become brief, and sermons become direct and convergent. The texts of the sermons preached by the German and English reformers are short and frequent.

Besides being easily remembered, a short text allows of emphatic repetition. Some sermons become very effective by the reiteration of the inspired affirmation at the conclusion of each head. In this case, the text becomes a clincher. It fastens, like a nail in a sure place, all that has been said by the preacher. The affirmations of the preacher are *nailed*, to use a phrase of Burns, with Scripture.\*

3. A text should be chosen, from which the proposition of the sermon is derived plainly and naturally. Sometimes a preacher desires to present a certain subject, which he has revolved in his mind, and upon which his trains of thought are full and consecutive, and merely prefaces his sermon with a passage of Scripture which has only a remote connection with his theme. In this case, the relation of the sermon to the text is that of adjustment, rather than that of development. Having made selection of a passage from which his proposition and trains of thought do not naturally flow, he is compelled to torture the text into an apparent unity with the discourse. Rather than take this course, it would be better to make the text a mere motto, or title, and not pretend to an unfolding of a scriptural passage. But there is no need of this. The Bible is rich in texts for all legitimate sermons, for all propositions and trains of thought that properly arise with-

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\* And even ministers, they ha'e been kenned  
In holy rapture,  
A rousing which at times to vend,  
And nail 't wi' Scripture.

in the province of sacred as distinctive from secular eloquence. Let the preacher take pains, and find the very passage he needs, and not content himself with one that has only an apparent connection with his subject.

But when the passage selected is a true text,—*i. e.* a portion of Scripture out of which the proposition, trains of thought, and whole substance of the discourse are *woven*,—let the preacher see to it, that he derives from it nothing that is not in it. His business is not to involve into the text something that is extrinsic, but to evolve out of it, something that is intrinsic. Hence, a text should be of such a character as to *evidently* furnish one plain and significant proposition, and to allow of a straight-forward, easy, and actual development of it.

4. Oddity and eccentricity should be avoided in selecting a text. There is more need of this rule now, than formerly. The public mind is more ludicrous in its associations, and more fastidious in its taste, now, than two centuries ago. In the older sermonizers, applications of Scripture are very frequent, which involuntarily provoke a smile in a modern reader, but which in their day were listened to with the utmost gravity by sober-minded men and women. The doctrine of a double sense, together with a strong allegorizing tendency, in both preacher and hearer, contributed to this use of Scripture which seems to us fanciful and oftentimes ludicrous.

Illustrations of this trait are without number. Dr. Eachard, whose volume gives a very lively picture of the condition of the English clergy at the close of the seventeenth, and the beginning of the eighteenth century, furnishes some curious examples of this eccentric spirit, both in the choice of texts, and in drawing out doctrine from it. He tells us of a preacher who selected Acts xvi. 30 : "Sirs, what must I do to be saved," and preached upon the divine right of Episcopacy. "For Paul and Silas are called 'Sirs,' and 'Sirs' being in the Greek *κύριοι*, and this, in strict translation, meaning 'Lord,' it is perfectly plain, that at that time Episcopacy was not only the acknowledged government, but that bishops were peers of the realm, and so ought to sit in the House of Lords."

Another preacher, in the time of Charles II, he says, selected for his text the words: "Seek first the kingdom of God," and drew from them the proposition that kingly government is most in accordance with the will of God. "For it is not said, seek the *Parliament* of God, the *Army* of God, or the *Committee of Safety* of God; but it is, seek the *Kingdom* of God." Another preacher took Matthew i. 2: "Abraham begat Isaac," and argued against pluralists and non-residency in the ministry: "For had Abraham not resided with Sarah his wife, he could not have begot Isaac." Another sermonizer selected Isaiah xli. 14, 15: "Fear not thou worm Jacob, . . . thou shalt thresh mountains," and drew the inference that the worm Jacob was a threshing worm. In the same vein, another preacher takes for his text Isaiah lviii. 5: "Is it such a fast as I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush?" and deduces the proposition that "repentance for an hour, or a day, is not worth a bulrush." Still another preacher selected his text from Psalms xc. 19: "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul," and preached upon election and reprobation, deducing the proposition, "that amongst the multitude of thoughts, there was a great thought of election and reprobation."\* Similar examples of eccentricity in the choice and treatment of a text, have been handed down from other sources. An aged New England minister, during the colonial period, once preached before a very unpopular deputy governor from Job xx. 6, 7: "Though his *Excellency* mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds, yet he shall perish forever like his own dung." Another preached to the newly married couples of his congregation, upon a part of Psalm lxxii. 7: "And abundance of peace so long as the *moon* endureth." Dean Swift is reported to have preached the annual sermon to the Associated Tailors of Dublin, upon the text: "A *remnant* shall be saved." Among his printed sermons, there is one upon Acts xx. 9: "And there sat in the window a cer-

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\* EACHARD: Works, 66 et al.

tain young man named Eutychus, having fallen into a deep sleep: and while Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep: and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead," which thus begins: "I have chosen these words with design, if possible, to disturb some part in this audience of half an hour's sleep, for the convenience and exercise whereof this place, at this season of the day, is very much celebrated."\*

Such instances as these, however, are very different from that quaint humor of preachers like Hugh Latimer, and Matthew Henry, which is so mingled with devout and holy sentiment, as to lose all triviality, and to make only a serious impression. The following from the commentary of Henry, while it raises a smile, only deepens the sense of the truth conveyed. Commenting upon the requirement of the Mosaic law that the green ears of corn, offered as a meat offering, must be dried by the fire, so that the corn might be beaten out, Henry remarks, that "if those who are young do God's work as well as they can, they shall be accepted, though they cannot do it as well as those that are aged and experienced. God makes the best of green ears of corn, and so must we."†

A disputed text should not be selected as the basis of a discourse. This rule applies more particularly to doctrinal preaching, yet it has its value for sermonizing generally. The preacher should choose the very plainest, most significant and pointed passages of Scripture as the support of his doctrinal discourses. He is then relieved from the necessity of first proving that the doctrine in question is taught in the passage, and can devote his whole time and strength to its exposition and establishment. The less there is of polemics in sacred oratory, the better. The more there is of direct inculcation, without any regard to opposing theories and statements, the more efficient, energetic, and oratorical will be the sermon. The controversial tone is unfavorable to the bold, positive, unembarrassed tone of sacred eloquence. Disputed texts

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\* SWIFT: Works XIV. Sermon 10.

† HENRY: Com. on Leviticus iii. 14.

should, therefore, be left to the philologist and the theologian. When these have settled their true meaning, so far as it can be settled, such texts may be employed to corroborate, and to illustrate, but not to build upon from the foundation.

By this it is not meant that the preacher has no concern with such passages of inspiration. The preacher is, or should be, a philologist and a theologian, and in his study should examine such passages, and form a judgment in respect to them. But let him not do this work in the pulpit. The pulpit is the place for the delivery of eloquence, and not of philology, or philosophy, or technical theology. The rhetorical presentation of thought is the mode which the preacher is to employ, and nothing more interferes with this than the minute examinations of criticism, and the slow and cautious processes of pure science.

This maxim is also valuable, not only in reference to strictly doctrinal preaching, but to all preaching. The text is, or should be, the key-note to the whole sermon. The more bold, the more undoubted and undisputed its tone, the better. A text of this character is like a premonitory blast of a trumpet. It challenges attention, and gets it. It startles and impresses by its direct and authoritative announcement of a great and solemn proposition. Nothing remains then, but for the preacher to go out upon it with his whole weight; to unfold and apply its evident undoubted meaning, with all the moral confidence, and all the serious earnestness of which he is capable.

The inference to be drawn from these reasons for the selection of a passage of Scripture as the foundation of a sermon, and these rules for making the selection is, that the greatest possible labor and care should be expended upon the choice of a text. As in secular oratory, the selection for a subject is either vital or fatal to the whole performance; so in sacred oratory the success of the preacher depends fundamentally upon the fitness of his choice of a text. The text is his subject. It is the germ of his whole discourse. Provided, therefore, he has found an apt and excellent text, he has found his sermon substantially.

All labor, therefore, that is expended upon a text is wisely and economically expended. Every jot and tittle of painstaking, in fixing upon paper a congenial passage of Scripture, and in setting up all of the skeleton that presents itself at the time; every jot and tittle of painstaking in examining the passage in the original Hebrew or Greek, in studying, in these same languages, the context, and all the parallel passages; every particle of care in first obtaining an excellent text, and then getting at and getting out its real meaning and scope, goes to render the actual construction and composition of the sermon more easy and successful. Labor at this point saves labor at all after points.

The preacher should make careful and extensive preparation in respect to pulpit themes. His common-place book of texts should be a large volume in the outset, and, if he is faithful to himself and his calling, he will find the volumes increasing. Instead of buying the volumes of skeletons that are so frequently offered at the present day, the preacher should make them for himself. It was formerly the custom, in an age that was more theological than the present, for every preacher to draw up a "body of divinity" for himself,—the summing up and result of his studies and reflections. Every preacher knew what his theological system was, and could state it, and defend it. And, although at first sight, we might suppose that this custom would lead to great diversities of opinion among the clergy, it is yet a fact, that there never was more substantial and candid unity of belief, than among the Calvinistic clergy of England and the Continent, during those highly theological centuries, the sixteenth and seventeenth. There was no invention of new theories, but the old and established theory, the one orthodox faith of the Christian church, was made to pass through each individual mind, and so come forth with all the freshness and freedom of a new creation. "He who has been born," says Richter, "has been a first man, has had the old and common world lying about him as new and as fresh, as it lay before the eyes of Adam himself." So, too, he who, in the providence and by the grace of God, has

become a theologian and a preacher, has no other world of thought and of feeling to move in, than that old world of Divine Revelation, in which the glorious company of the apostles, and the goodly fellowship of the prophets and preachers thought and felt; but if he will open his eyes, and realize where he stands, and by what he is surrounded, he will see it as his predecessors saw it, in all the freshness of its real nature, and in all the magnificence of its actual infinitudes. Whether or not, the preacher imitates this example of an earlier day in regard to theologizing, he ought to in regard to sermonizing. Let him not rely at all upon the texts and skeletons of other preachers, but let him cultivate this field by himself, and for himself, as if it had never been tilled before. Let him pursue this business of selecting, examining, decomposing, and recombining textual materials, with all the isolation and independence of the first preachers, and of all the great original orators of the Christian church.

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#### ART. II.—JESUS CHRIST AND CRIMINAL LAW.

By PROF. E. BALLANTINE, of Lane Seminary.

DID our Lord, when brought into contact with the officers of the law and the courts of justice, ignore the principles and rules of criminal law, as they are generally received, or did he recognize and observe them?

The answer to this interesting question must be drawn from the combined histories of the evangelists. That we may not be drawn aside to incidental questions, we shall follow the arrangement of events as given in Robinson's Harmony. We notice only those passages which bear on the point before us, and discuss them only so far as they bear on that point; passing by, with a kind of violence to our feelings, the abundant and rich material which they furnish of a general character, in order that in the end their total significance may be the