

*The Hon. W. L. Marcy
with great regard from his obligia friend*

W. B. S.

A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED SEPTEMBER 3, 1850,

BEFORE THE

PORTER RHETORICAL SOCIETY,

IN THE

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

AT ANDOVER,

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.,

ALBANY.

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DISCOURSE.

It was a happy thought in the founders of this society to associate with it the name of a man, who was at once so fine a model of pulpit eloquence, and so admirable an example of the Christian graces. It was like administering to it a baptism of fire and love in its infancy. It was like committing it to the care of some good angel, under whose sheltering wing it might repose with alacrity and honour through successive generations. It was never my lot to enjoy the benefit of Doctor Porter's instructions; and yet such is my reverence for his character, that I would hardly yield to his own pupils in the desire to do him honour. To my mind there is a scene of moral sublimity, a treasury of hallowed associations, here, corresponding well to the riches and beauty, which the God of nature has spread around you,—to which that venerable man has contributed largely as well by his death as by his life. His character, his example, whatever pertains to his memory, is part of your legiti-

mate inheritance. Cherish it, revere it, embalm it, and you cannot fail to find in it an enduring element of strength and glory.

I confess, Gentlemen, that I have felt much at a loss what to say to you on this occasion,—chiefly, however, because I understood the liberty was so large that I might say any thing;—that I might range through the whole garden of theological literature at least, without finding one interdicted tree. But I have finally relieved myself of indecision, by resolving to adhere in my remarks to the original design of your association in its very letter; and if, in doing so, I should chance to lead you over a path that either your own reflections or the efforts of others have rendered familiar to you, I am sure that I shall need no other justification than is found in the fact that I am called to address the Porter *Rhetorical Society*. The particular thought to which I shall direct your attention, is *the aids which pulpit eloquence derives from models and from occasions*.

By a *model*, you will understand me to mean a pattern, or an example, that is, or is supposed to be, worthy of study and imitation. Not only is it desirable that we should have models, as an important means of improvement in every thing that we pursue, but there seems to be a demand for them in the very constitution of our nature.

Man is an imitative being; and in his aspirations for high attainments or noble achievements, he instinctively looks out for some acknowledged standard to which he may conform his efforts, and by which he may correct his errors and ascertain his progress. It is not enough that he receives good instruction; he wants, besides, some embodied or embalmed conception, some enduring and accessible production of genius, which he may hold to his mind as a study, and through which he may have communion with another mind, more gifted or more cultivated than his own. Whenever an individual attains to the dignity of a model in any department of useful knowledge or beneficent activity, he has the best pledge of being a perpetual benefactor to his race.

Now from this general position there is no exception to be made in respect to the pulpit. No matter how rich or varied or copious may be the instruction that the student of sacred eloquence receives, he is not satisfied without seeing the system that he learns, take on a practical and living form: he would find some one who actually is what he himself ought to be and aspires to be; and perhaps it is not too much to say that, where this branch of study is cultivated most, it is pursued, often insensibly to the student himself, more

through the medium of high examples than in any other way.

When I speak of models of pulpit eloquence, I use the phrase in its largest sense; as comprehending the character of the discourse, the manner of delivery, or both. In respect to the discourse itself, a man may become a model, either from the pulpit or through the press; but chiefly the latter,—because it is far easier to estimate the merits of any composition, when read, than when heard; and a great sermon needs to be carefully studied, in order that its minuter excellences may make their legitimate impression. As heard from the pulpit, the impression will be general and often comparatively evanescent; let it take a readable form, and whosoever will, even to a remote generation, may avail himself of the benefit which it is fitted to impart. As to whatever pertains to the manner of a preacher, it becomes an example chiefly to those who are, or have been, his actual hearers; for it is not easy for one person to represent another, as another would represent himself; and no one would care to take a model at second hand. The venerable Jotham Sewall, one of the patriarchs of the American pulpit, who is now passing the last decade of a hundred years,* once heard the great Whitefield; and he talks of

*Deceased since this discourse was delivered.

him, to this day, in a manner that shows that he has something in his mind that he can never bring out; and as you listen with delight to his eloquent descriptions, you cannot help asking ‘What must it have been to have heard the man himself?’ I have heard my revered instructor, Dr. Alexander, describe the eloquence of James Waddel, the celebrated blind preacher of Virginia; and though his descriptions were as vivid as life, I felt, after all, that there was a veil drawn between me and the great original. Indeed, in every case in which an individual, however gifted, attempts to communicate to you his impressions of any great pulpit orator, he scarcely ever accomplishes much more than to make you regret that you had lived too late, or too distant, to have heard him yourself.

It may seem perhaps a superfluous remark, that there is no necessary connection between a good sermon and a good delivery, other than that where an earnest and glowing spirit, which is one of the essentials of pulpit eloquence, has inspired and guided the pen, it is fair to presume that the same spirit will kindle a sacred fire upon the lips. Many a discourse that has seemed wretchedly tame and powerless, when addressed to the ear, has, when subsequently presented to the eye, well nigh put criticism at defiance. I

have heard sermons which ought to have rendered the names of their writers immortal, so badly delivered, that the audience were bowed, as if under the influence of a soporific; and I have heard other sermons so destitute of thought that they might have been designed to establish the doctrine of a perfect vacuum, yet so well delivered, that the audience were bowed, as if under the power of some magic spell. Let every student then bear in mind that the highest success in pulpit eloquence cannot be reached, without his giving heed to both what he says and how he says it; that he may not safely repose in a conscious superiority in respect to the one, while he pays little or no attention to the other; and that, though both pertain to the same general subject, each is worthy of a distinct and appropriate culture.

If it were not that it would lead me into too wide a range, I should be glad to trace somewhat extensively in the models of successive periods, the progress of pulpit eloquence, the various changes which it has undergone, and the causes to which these changes are to be referred. But the utmost that I can do, in consistency with being tolerably lenient towards my audience, is to throw together in groups a few illustrious names which have shed lustre upon the pulpit in modern times. I shall select them without distinc-

tion of sect, and without regard to their varieties of opinion; as my object is to produce specimens of high excellence in each of the different qualities which go to form the perfect master of the pulpit. In respect to a considerable portion of the examples which I shall adduce, we are but very imperfectly informed of their style of elocution; but as for those of a later period, especially of the last and the present generations, we are able to combine, in our conception of their efforts, the speaker with the writer; every thing that pertains to the delivery with every thing that pertains to the composition.

If we look for the greatest display of talent in the English pulpit, I suppose we shall find it in the constellation of illustrious names that appeared about the middle of the seventeenth century. First in the order of time, and I will venture to say, first, in some respects, in the order of excellence, was Jeremy Taylor; whose sermons, while they are strongly marked by the peculiarities of his age, are yet clothed with such superlative attractions, that it is not an open question whether they are to be immortal. His almost matchless power of invention, his intimate knowledge of the human heart, his ability to draw at pleasure upon the riches of the universe, together with a spirit kept constantly in contact with the powers

of the world to come, render his sermons breathing, living things; and though your taste may sometimes halt at his extreme amplitude of illustration and exuberance of splendid imagery, to say nothing of his occasional offences against dignity in the use of quaint expressions and Latin quotations, you easily lose sight of these minor blemishes, in the blaze of his superior excellence. Next came John Howe, whose intellect was as bold as it was comprehensive; whose imagination was as grand as it was prolific; who treated the most common subjects in a most uncommon way; and who never regarded a sermon as finished, till the stamp of the evangelical was deeply impressed upon it. Tillotson, born the same year with Howe, though greatly inferior to him in originality and compass of thought, as well as in devout fervour, was yet decidedly his superior in perspicuity and simplicity. If you discover in him an occasional negligence of style, yet, in general, he is a fair model of classic purity: if he does not paint many pictures for your imagination to revel upon, he never puts you off with any thing short of vigorous, well digested thought. South, whose birth was only three years later than that of Tillotson, combines the profound and the imaginative, the bold and the insinuating, the serious and the sarcastic, in such a de-

gree as to render him one of the wonders of his time. It is but just to say, however, that his churchmanship, which was of the most vigorous kind, sometimes seemed to get the better of his Christianity; and for those who lived outside the barrier he had hardly so much as a hopeful look. Barrow was born the year after South; and though he was fully a match for him in power of intellect, he could not be compared with him in richness of fancy. His style, it must be acknowledged, is often redundant and incorrect; but it is always the vehicle of strong thought, and abounds in striking expressions, that are likely to make a permanent lodgement in the memory. He was a profound scholar as well as a great preacher; and without much of the appearance of pedantry, has contrived to find a handmaid to the pulpit in every department of his universal knowledge. Atterbury, who followed Barrow at the distance of about a quarter of a century, is rather distinguished for a correct and animated style, for lucid arrangement and general fitness and justness of thought, than for any of those startling or transcendent qualities, that are supposed to mark the highest style of pulpit eloquence. Doctor Samuel Clarke, who was a few years later, has produced sermons remarkable for felicitous arrangement, and the copious and appropriate use

of Scripture language but utterly destitute of any thing that approaches unction or pathos. And finally, there was Bishop Sherlock, a little later still, whose majestic intellect and well disciplined imagination and exact taste, and I may add, profound views of many important parts of the Christian scheme, have rendered his discourses an invaluable legacy to posterity. It is scarcely too much to say that his celebrated comparison of Jesus with Mohammed, is as much a gem in the eloquence of the English pulpit, as Massillon's famous passage on "the small number of the elect," is in that of the French.

Passing from the English pulpit to the Scotch, the precedence, during the first half of the eighteenth century, would seem to belong to the two Erskines and the celebrated Maclaurin. The Erskines were among the boldest and most earnest preachers of their time. They were perhaps equally distinguished for their well defined, I may say, intense, views of the Gospel scheme; particularly of its abounding grace, and the connection between grace and holiness; but Ralph Erskine had more of poetry than his brother, and sometimes he allows his imagination to gambol and luxuriate at the expense of good taste. Maclaurin, if we may judge from the few discourses of his that remain, was alike brilliant and pene-

trating, argumentative and pathetic, rational and scriptural; and the single sermon on "Glorying in the cross" is enough to secure to him an imperishable memory. In the latter part of the same century flourished Robert Walker, Blair and Finlayson. Walker is the man concerning whom Blair is said to have told his students in rhetoric—"You must look to *him* for an exemplification of *my* rules." I cannot describe his discourses better than by saying that they seem always to put forth the best thing in the best manner. They are simple without being tame, methodical without undue formality, perspicuous without any tendency to common place, graceful without sacrificing strength, thoroughly practical without sinking the value of Christian doctrine, and deeply evangelical without compromising any of the interests of morality. Blair and Finlayson belonged to a different school; they were both among the most thorough *moderates* of the Church of Scotland; both were professors in the University of Edinburgh; and the sermons of both are certainly remarkable for the graces of composition. Finlayson's are in the more elevated style, but Blair's have the greater simplicity; while each would be vastly improved by a more liberal infusion of the Christian doctrine and the Christian spirit.

During the latter half of the eighteenth century, the British pulpit, including both English and Scotch, owing to a variety of causes, greatly declined as well in power as in splendour; though it should not be forgotten that it was partly, if not chiefly, during this period, that Whitefield and Wesley had their brilliant career. The first half of the present century has kindled up several great lights; but there are two which, I suppose, it will generally be admitted, have moved in a higher orbit, and shone with a brighter lustre, than any of the rest. You will anticipate me when I say that I refer to Robert Hall and Doctor Chalmers.

Hall seems to have been about an equal compound of Grecian vigour and Roman grace. If he had lived at Athens in the time of Demosthenes, or at Rome in the time of Cicero, he would have ranked among the colossal spirits of the day. In speaking of his discourses, however, it is proper to recognize a distinction between those which received his own finishing touch, together with the very small number to which stenography has done tolerable justice, and those which may be considered as the joint product of the memory and imagination of some of his hearers; many of which I am sure he would have indignantly disowned, and some of which I can regard as noth-

ing better than an offence to his memory. But those upon which his genius had opportunity to perform its perfect work, are, for classic beauty, for vigorous and profound thought, for a graceful, harmonious and yet majestic flow, unsurpassed,—I had almost said,—unapproachable. It is well known that he had great eccentricities; but it is remarkable that he laid them all aside when he entered the pulpit; and you would have been amazed at the complete transition from the most extravagant and laughable sallies of wit with which his conversation continually teemed, to a calm dignity, a stern regard to decorum, out of which nothing could ever, for a moment, surprise him. His appearance in the pulpit was imposing, even majestic, but it was perfectly modest; not a look or an attitude that told of conscious superiority. His voice was feeble, and needed the aid of some excitement to fill a church of ordinary dimensions. His exordium (I speak now of the only sermon which it was ever my privilege to hear from him,) was in no wise promising; but, after a few minutes, it seemed as if he was transfigured before us; his spirit was evidently stirred from its lowest depths; and with a richness and power of thought, a beauty and grace of expression, and a rapidity and glow of utterance, of which I can give you no adequate conception, he held his au-

dience, as if entranced, till, finally, by an abrupt conclusion, he let us down from the mount; and I own that I felt it a relief when I could breathe again with freedom. Lest you should suspect me of exaggeration, I ought to say that the discourse to which I refer, was acknowledged to be one of Hall's most extraordinary efforts; and I found that even his stated hearers were speaking of it as a sort of bright land mark in his ministry.

Chalmers was a man of another stamp;—I will not say, less gifted, but gifted in a different way. He possessed the reasoning faculty in great strength, and at one time devoted himself with enthusiastic ardour to the mathematics; but his imagination, after all, was his most prominent characteristic. Both faculties had full play in his discourses; for he reasoned while he painted, and his pictures were accepted as proofs. He had the power and more than the splendour of Demosthenes; while he lacked his pure and classic diction. He was too diffuse, too much given to extended amplification, to satisfy a correct taste; but he was so splendidly diffuse, he amplified with such incomparable dexterity, that the most scrupulous found it easy to forgive him. In some parts of his discourse he moves in the majesty of a storm; and then dashes along with the fury of a cataract; and then travels through fields of

supernal beauty ; but is always illustrating some cardinal, glorious truth, fresh from the blessed Gospel. His manner was a perfect contempt of all rule,—an unreserved obedience to present impulse ; but you felt no more disposed to criticise it, than you would to criticise the rainbow that spans the heavens, or the mountain billows of the ocean. In his peculiar conformation of mind, his peculiar style of eloquence, he may be said to have stood alone ; and when he ascended, though he left behind him many humble imitators, no younger prophet, so far as I know, caught his mantle.

The British pulpit, with a few signal exceptions, most of which I have already noticed, has been distinguished rather for cool reasoning and vigorous, well digested thought, than for great earnestness of appeal or the gorgeous creations of fancy. But we have only to cross the channel, to find ourselves breathing a far more intense atmosphere,—I had almost said, transported to a different world. The style of French eloquence agrees well to the character of the French people ; it is the eloquence of the imagination and the passions ; it is impulsive and glaring, abounding with abrupt and splendid apostrophes, interspersed with expressions of obsequious flattery ; often presenting divine truth with great power, but almost always

throwing it into a flood of brilliant corruscations. It is worthy of remark that the palmy days of the French pulpit and of the English, were the same: while Taylor and Howe, South and Barrow, were doing their great work in England, Bossuet and Flechiere, Bourdaloue and Massillon, were shedding the lustre of their genius upon France. Bossuet and Flechiere, though the former has the greater strength, and the latter the more elegance, are nevertheless of nearly a common type. Both immortalized themselves in commemorating the illustrious dead; both breathed most freely in the very torrid zone of the imagination; both were capital offenders against correct taste; and both occasionally prostituted the pulpit to the unworthy purpose of offering incense to the vanity of the great. Bourdaloue, a far greater man than either, who arose about the same time, had a mind immensely exuberant and original. His discourses evince the widest range of observation and an admirable facility of argument. His style, though not always highly elaborated, and sometimes rough, is yet remarkable for pointed and felicitous expression; and though, in reading him, you cannot forget that you are in contact with the mind of a Frenchman, yet he furnishes higher employment for your faculties than mere admiration of his

productions. Massillon had not the vigour or power of Bourdaloue, but he had far more grace and sentiment; and it was no light compliment that D'Alembert paid to both, when he said that "it was the greatest glory of Bourdaloue to have left Massillon's supremacy in dispute." Saurin, who flourished at a somewhat later period, was unquestionably the prince of the French *Protestant* pulpit. His grand and frequently original conceptions, his copious diction, his comprehensive and conclusive reasonings, his freedom from the vagaries and puerilities that marred the eloquence of the most illustrious orators of his nation, who had preceded him, together with a high tone of evangelical thought and feeling, must render his sermons the admiration of all posterity; though it must be acknowledged that they occasionally evince an ostentatious air, which is, by no means, worthy of imitation. I must add the name of one French preacher who has but just passed off the stage,—I mean the lamented Vinet; for with the ease and grace that belong to his nation, he combined a depth and sublimity of intellect, a power to distinguish between truth and error, a fervour and elevation of spirit, that made him, to an intelligent Christian hearer, quite irresistible. It is to be hoped that he may prove the founder of a new school of French eloquence.

I must glance now at a few of the many names which have contributed to elevate the character of the *American* pulpit; though delicacy will require that I should still limit myself to those which death has already rendered legitimate subjects for history. There were many eloquent men in New England in her earliest days. The Cottons and the Mathers and the Eliots were highly effective preachers; and to this it was owing, in no small degree, that they left such an enduring impress on the institutions of their country. But I pass over all down to the time of Edwards; and I recognize him as standing in solitary grandeur, among the men of not his own generation only, but of all the generations that have succeeded him. His style was unpolished and clumsy; his delivery was simple, dogged reading, without moving the hand or lifting the eye. But his thoughts were like barbed arrows; he searched the hearts of his hearers with candles, revealing to them hitherto unknown chambers of imagery. He was the profoundest metaphysician of his age,—perhaps of any age; but he had no metaphysics for the pulpit: his business there was to play the practical anatomist on the human heart; to ring peals of terror on the slumbering conscience, till he saw it begin to stir and writhe; to demonstrate the littleness of

the world by putting it in the balance against the dread realities of futurity. I would not venture to recommend him without qualification, as a model at the present day ; but I may say with confidence that you cannot find sermons in the English or any other language, in which the sword of the Spirit looks more naked and glittering and terrible than in his. Davies, during the whole of his brief career, was Edwards' contemporary ; but they lived in different parts of the country, and I know not that they ever met : certainly they differed greatly in their peculiar characteristics. Davies cultivated the graces of literature ; his style is smooth and elevated and copious almost to verbosity ; he grasps his subject as if it were a play thing, and, with little apparent effort, throws it into the light of a clear and vigorous illustration ; and to crown the whole, there is an explicitness of doctrinal statement, and a solemnity and pungency of application, that render his discourses adapted alike to the intellect, the conscience and the heart. The venerable Dr. Livingston told me that he once heard him preach in the College Hall at Princeton, and that of all the pulpit orators to whom he had ever listened, he gave him the decided preference. Next comes Witherspoon, whom I mention among the Americans, because America wit-

nessed to the most brilliant part of his career, and finally had the honour of giving him his grave. His sermons are distinguished for strong and manly thought, for a chaste and perfectly luminous style, for a rich vein of evangelical sentiment, and for a remarkable absence of technical phraseology. When a lady, who was walking with him in his garden, remarked that it did not contain any flowers, he replied,—“No, Madam, I have no room for flowers, either in my garden or in my sermons.” My venerable friends, Dr. Green and Dr. Miller, both of whom knew Witherspoon well, seem to me, in the construction of their sermons, to have made him a model; and in doing so, they have themselves become models of evangelical fulness and admirable simplicity and transparency. President Dwight, whose writings have given him a world wide reputation, was at once a reasoner and a rhetorician. He was at home in different departments of writing, and had great facility at accommodating his style to his subject. When he wrote upon “the decrees,” it seemed as if the mantle of his grandfather was resting upon him; and when he wrote upon “the angels,” it seemed as if he used a quill that had been plucked from an angel’s wing. I speak to more than one to whom I doubt not that his commanding presence, his expressive counten-

ance, his simple but earnest and effective elocution, return, as they do to myself, like some glorious vision resting over the tomb. President Appleton, who died a year or two later than Dr. Dwight, was characterized by definite and profound views of truth, strong logic, cautious statements, and a style so exact and perspicuous as to convey the minutest shade of thought, while yet it leaves you to the full influence of the thought which, it is designed to convey; and in reading his sermons, though you cannot escape from the impression that it is a master mind that is going before you, you hardly know which to admire most, the power that moves and sways, or the simplicity and humility with which it is exerted. Then there was Kollock, in whom were reproduced most of the essential qualities of the great Massillon; who delighted by his copious and splendid diction, not less than he subdued and melted by his bland and resistless appeals; who, though he moved on a uniform level, moved with such majestic air and in so luminous a track, as to prevent the tedium which uniformity commonly induces. There was Payson, in whose sermons the fire of genius and the fire of devotion burned together; who knew how to make nature pay tribute to grace, by pressing her grandest and loveliest scenes into the service of

the Christian's sanctification ; who always spoke impressively, because he spoke out of the depths of a spirit which the Holy Ghost inhabited. There was Mason, of kingly air and mien, who stood in the pulpit, like some son of Hercules, and always appeared in armour ; who could, with one breath, deal a heavy blow upon an adversary, and, with the next, melt you down with some overwhelmingly tender view of the love of Christ. There was Griffin, another giant of the tribe of Levi, who had such power of imagination that he could make "the lightnings play and the thunders roll" around you ; who knew just where and how to strike in order most effectually to reach the conscience ; and who sometimes saw a large part of his audience bowed under the awful power of the truth which he proclaimed. There was Emmons, who knew not how to utter a dark saying ; whose positions you might question indeed, but could not mistake ; whose discourses were made up not merely of thoughts, but of admirably constructed chains of thought ; and though it might be at your option whether to start with him or not, yet, when once on the way, he would inevitably take you on to the end of the journey. There was Larned, a bright star that disappeared from our hemisphere, almost as soon as risen : his oratory was perhaps an equal

compound of grace and majesty : he was alike resistless to the most intelligent and the least cultivated ; though, as his friend, I would protest against his being judged as a pulpit orator by his published discourses. There was Nevins, whose quick invention and glowing fancy and evangelical unction, and even keen wit, were all put in requisition in aid of the effect of his public services ; for though he was never otherwise than serious in the pulpit, yet he would occasionally, in dealing with different forms of evil, take on an air of sarcasm that would sting like an adder. There was Channing, holding opinions indeed from which most of us would earnestly dissent, but yet among the very finest specimens of chaste and glowing eloquence. And there was Buckminster,—another kindred intellect of the same school :—he was an orator by inheritance, for his father was such before him ; and his sermons, as tasteful and beautiful compositions, would do honour to any age or country. And what shall I say more ? Time would fail me to tell of the distinctive qualities of Bellamy, Backus, Smalley, Strong and Worcester ; of Tappan, Lathrop and Osgood ; of Mayhew, Clarke and the younger Ware ; of Linn, Stanhope Smith, Inglis, Romeyn, Hogue, Richards and McLeod ; of Seabury, Dehon, Hobart and Bedell ; of Stillman, Maxcy and Brantley,

and many others, whom we are able to contemplate in volumes of printed discourses, besides perhaps a still greater number, who shone with a bright light while they lived, and whose memory is fragrant still, but of whom unhappily little or nothing remains to us, except in recollection or tradition.* How much would this honoured list be enlarged and brightened, if I could add to it the names which the grave has not yet claimed, that fairly deserve a place on such a record. May God, in his great goodness, spare them long, to do a glorious work, as living examples, before there shall be occasion to put forth an effort in aid of their posthumous influence!

Having thus taken a rapid survey of some of the more prominent models of pulpit eloquence, at different periods and in different countries, let me now suggest a few hints illustrative of the right use of them. It is to no purpose that they exist, unless they are studied; and it is possible that they may be studied in such a manner as to become hindrances rather than helps; as to cramp and distort the faculties which they are designed to develope and improve.

Let me say then, in the first place, if you would avail yourselves of the legitimate benefit to be derived from models, you must study them

*A large number of this latter class have resided at the South, particularly in Virginia

chiefly in the spirit, rather than the letter. You must not be satisfied with the most careful observation of a preacher's manner, nor yet with the most rigid analysis of his discourse; but you must endeavour to pierce the outer veil of attitude and gesture, of words and even thoughts, and put yourself in communion with that spirit within, of which all that is external is merely the product. In the one case, it is a very superficial work that you take upon yourself; in the other, it is a work of deep and earnest contemplation; it is the study of the passions, as they exist and operate in another's bosom; it is tracing the external act to the inward feeling, and accounting for the one by analyzing the other; and the end to be accomplished is nothing less than re-casting, if I may be allowed the expression, some of the original elements of one's own character. And this effect is produced through the mysterious power of sympathy. You know how this principle operates in other cases. You put yourself in communion, for instance, with the mind of a great philanthropist, through the medium of his benevolent achievements; you feel that you are in contact with his pure and lofty spirit; and while you study and admire his character, as it comes out in his deeds, you insensibly become more or less conformed to it; and though you do not be-

come a literal imitator of him, so as to reproduce exactly his benefactions, or as the case may be, even to enter the same particular field of philanthropy in which he has been most conspicuous, you still have received a fresh baptism of charity at his hands; your heart has been warmed and enlarged through the influence of his example. And thus it is in the case which I am illustrating. In studying the mind of an eminent preacher, as it comes out in his productions, you come gradually to live in his life; the qualities which attract and enchain you, become transfused, in a degree, into your own intellectual and moral constitution; and thus your mind acts with increased power and receives a nobler direction, while yet its movements are in strict conformity to the particular laws which the Creator has impressed upon it. A model studied in this way, instead of hanging about you as a garment, becomes, by a natural process of assimilation, a part of yourself. It modifies the character of your eloquence, not through the humiliating process of a servile imitation, but by reaching back to those deep fountains of thought and feeling, in which all true eloquence has its origin.

I remark, again, that the benefit to be derived from models depends much on their being selected and studied with due discrimination. It is a

great error, and yet not an uncommon one, to suppose that little good is to be expected, except from some one particular mode of preaching, which happens, for the time, to stand high in public favour. I remember once to have heard an excellent young minister, who has since gone to his reward, remark that he had little interest in any kind of preaching except one, of which he named a specimen; and that, unfortunately for himself, was so entirely opposed to his own mental constitution and habits, that, whoever else might attain to it, he never could. The truth is, it was not the Creator's intention that all should preach alike, any more than that all should look alike; for had it been so, every mind would have been cast in the same mould, and there would have been no foundation, in the diversity of gifts, for a diversity of operation. What God requires of each one is, that he should cultivate his own faculties to the utmost; endeavouring indeed to remedy the defects of nature, but always having reference to the original hue of his own mind. One style of pulpit eloquence may be more congenial with my own taste than another; and yet let me see a man whose intellectual constitution and bodily temperament are directly opposed to my own, bringing out God's truth clearly and earnestly, in his own way, and I have no hesitation in pro-

nouncing that the best way for him. I may not make my particular taste a standard for another, any more than another may make his a standard for me; and I recognize in the variety of gifts bestowed, and the consequent variety of ministrations secured, a beautiful illustration of the divine wisdom and goodness.

But, notwithstanding there may be a great variety of models, each of which is excellent of its kind, it sometimes requires no small reflection and judgment for an individual to decide which are best fitted to aid in the development of his own powers. The general rule to be observed no doubt is this,—to select those which are most in harmony with one's own particular constitution; unless indeed he may occasionally direct his attention to others, with a view to remedy constitutional defects. Those of you who remember the peculiarities of Dr. Mason's preaching, will, I doubt not, remember also to have encountered more than one miniature edition of them, got up in defiance of nature, among his less gifted and differently constituted admirers. It should be borne in mind, however, that this is not always, on the part of the imitator, a voluntary matter: it often happens that men unintentionally, even unconsciously, contract the peculiarities of those whom they admire; and this is a reason why

those of you who are habitually brought in contact with fine models, and especially who imitate with facility, should be on your guard against all encroachments on your own individuality. And it is not more needful that you should discriminate in the choice of your models, than in the study of them. You may not expect to find any one entirely faultless, and combining every form of excellence in the highest degree; and therefore you are to let your minds fasten especially upon those qualities in each, which are most worthy to be admired and studied; while you as cautiously avoid those of a different character, which may accidentally be associated with them. Where men set up to be downright imitators, they as often copy the faults as the excellences of their model; and even those qualities which are excellences in the original, sometimes become revolting blemishes in the copy. You feel it an offence against all decency to have a dwarf constantly reminding you of a giant; to see noble qualities of matter or manner, debased and absolutely spoiled by being, not transplanted, but loosely and awkwardly worn, where they do not belong.

And this leads me to remark that you should beware of eccentric models. Eccentricity in a pulpit orator is generally of questionable utility, even where it evidently forms a part of his origi-

nal constitution. Though it may be associated with much real excellence, and may sometimes, of itself, be instrumental of good, yet it is, after all, an offence against nature; and we oftener smile or marvel at its achievements, than honour them in our sober judgment. What then shall we say of eccentricity, when it is the mere creature of affectation; when it is taken on by some tame and common place mind, in its vain aspirings after originality? The most remarkable instance of eccentricity in the pulpit, that it has ever been my lot to witness, was Edward Irving. I heard him just before his last dispensation,—the dispensation of tongues, opened upon him; and I can never think of him, as he stood before me then, but as a sort of splendid madman. His face seemed like pure, beaming intellect; his dark and heavily shaded eye one moment indicated serene repose, and the next, shot forth a stream of fire; his hair hung carelessly down far below his shoulders, as if some hermit had cultivated it; his voice would sometimes harmonize with the gentlest zephyr, and then wax loud as the sound of many waters, and then explode in the fury of a hurricane. If you will imagine all the contortions of which the human face is susceptible, and all the positions into which the human frame can work itself, you may form some idea of his

expression and attitude. His sermon was to me like an occasional flash of lightning, on the bosom of a dark cloud; there was here and there a glorious or a profound thought, but there were long intervals of dreamy mysticism, in which I felt that it was my privilege to gaze and wonder, rather than to think. At the same time, there was a deep-toned earnestness breathing through the whole, that told unequivocally of the man of God; and I could not doubt that, amidst all that wildness and splendour that seemed to me to form an absolute *lusus naturæ*, the Spirit of God had erected his gracious kingdom. And I must say that there was this redeeming quality in his manner,—that it seemed to be the effect of instinctive impulse; and even when he stood before you, like a raging tempest, you felt that he was acting in obedience to the laws of his own constitution. I know not whether any one ever attempted to reproduce his manner in the pulpit; but I am sure that no one ever attempted it twice before the same audience. And it were proportionably, if not equally, absurd to imitate the eccentricities of great men in any case; it were like cultivating a wart upon your face, because such an excrescence is said to have marred the visage of the great Roman orator.

There is danger also from studying obscure

models. A discourse may be either relatively or absolutely obscure. By relative obscurity, I mean that which arises either from the nature of the subject, or the intelligently profound views that are taken of it. I may mention, as an example of this, the sermons of Bishop Butler, which are dark only because they are deep: as specimens of philosophical argumentation, they are worthy of the author of "the Analogy;" but as discourses to be addressed to a popular assembly, most of them are about on a par with Edwards on "the Will." Now I would be far from discouraging attention to such writings as these, for the general purpose of intellectual discipline; but if I were to see them assuming to mould the character of the pulpit, I should say that they were out of their place; that, though they had a mission to perform, it was not in the pulpit, but in the study. Not that I would plead for, or even justify, a superficial mode of preaching; and it were well, no doubt, that the reflecting powers of an audience should sometimes be tasked to the utmost; but they should never be *over*-tasked; they should never have burdens laid upon them beyond their capacity of endurance. There is indeed a great variety of intelligence in different congregations, and even in the same congregation; and what might easily be

apprehended by one, might be quite beyond the reach of another; and this diversity is of course to be considered: but, as a general rule, we are to bear in mind that, in the pulpit, as well as every where else, if we will speak to purpose, we must speak so as to be understood; and that if we fail to do this,—no matter how correct or ingenious may be our reasonings, the blame of a powerless ministry lies at our door.

But it is possible that a discourse may be absolutely obscure;—that is, it may be misty in conception, or ambiguous in expression, or both. I know of no printed sermons of this kind that you would be likely to take as a model; for as soon as such sermons *are* printed, the common sense of the world consigns them to oblivion. But there is perhaps here and there a living preacher of this character, by whom you may be in danger of being misled; chiefly, however, on account of some really attractive qualities, that occasionally gild the darkness in which he habitually moves. Believe me, you can scarcely do a greater disservice to the pulpit, than by falling in with this unworthy, and I fear growing, humour of the day. I can tell you, in a word, all that you can hope from such ministrations. You may, for a little while, cheat the vulgar into a conviction of your superiority; but your mysticism will quickly pall

even upon *them*: men like a reward for listening, as well as any other kind of labour; and if they do not find it, you cannot expect to detain them long. I think I have known hearers who, at the commencement of a discourse, were rapt with profound admiration of what they did not understand, who, before its close, were wrapped in a profound slumber, *because* they did not understand it. And with the discerning and intelligent you will accomplish still less. In the first place, they will set it down as indicating a state of moral feeling altogether unworthy of a Christian minister. And then they will weigh what you say in the balance of a sound judgment; and you will stand chargeable, in their estimation, either with having uttered unmeaning words, or having attempted to disguise common thoughts. To make an obscure thing plain, were indeed a noble triumph; but to make a plain thing obscure, were a triumph worthy only of a stupid and depraved ambition. Let Carlyle and the whole tribe of mystics corrupt our literature, if they must; but Heaven forbid that they should be suffered to pervert the design, mar the dignity, and paralyze the energies, of the pulpit.

I must not omit to say that it is of special importance that you should be familiar with those models in which there dwells most of the vital

influence of Christianity. The peculiar truths of the Gospel constitute the sword of the Spirit; they are the depository of the divine power; they are adapted to the constitution, the needs, the longings of the soul; and no man ever delivered them in their naked simplicity and with befitting earnestness, who was not eloquent. You may be deficient in some other things, and still be powerful and effective preachers; but a deficiency here strikes at the root of all hopes of a really successful ministry. I submit it to you, partly as a subject of inquiry and partly as a matter of caution, whether the American pulpit has not latterly lost somewhat of its power, by having its resources too much apart from the Bible; and whether a more earnest regard for Christian truth and a more elevated tone of Christian feeling, would not be likely to secure to the pulpit a more fervent and vigorous eloquence. Happily, you have many models at hand, in which this most important quality is finely blended with others not unworthy of your attention, so that, in studying them, you may be taking lessons at once in the graces of rhetoric and the truths of Revelation; you may be learning what to preach as well as how to preach; you may be sitting at the feet of Paul or of Jesus, while you have some uninspired book in your hand; and thus the

training of your intellect and the training of your heart for the high vocation to which you aspire, may be carried forward at the same time and by the same instrumentality.

Allow me to add, before taking leave of this part of my subject, that one powerful argument for your making a prudent selection of models, as well as a right use of them, is, that you may become models yourselves. The man who stands up before his generation an example of an eloquent and effective preacher, or he who bequeaths to posterity discourses of an admirable evangelical texture, and of otherwise commanding qualities, does more than work directly upon the minds of men in aid of their own salvation: he assists in training others to perform the same honourable and sacred service; and thus his influence in the sanctuary becomes indefinitely multiplied and perpetuated. It were not indeed an object worthy of your aspirations to have it said of you, after you are gone, that you were admired for your splendid oratory, and were sometimes greeted with shouts of applause; but to have it said that you had really elevated the standard of preaching, that you had given to some minds a fresh impulse for the successful discharge of the duties of the pulpit, and especially that your influence in this department is embalmed in the works that

survive you,—this would be a matter both of legitimate desire and of reasonable pursuit. Blessed are the dead, who have thus attained to the honour of being permanent, if not universal, instructors! Blessed are ye who are walking in their footsteps, and are destined to share with them an honourable and useful posthumous existence!

It is to be presumed that no inconsiderable part of the benefit to be derived from models has been realized by the student in the course of his theological training, and that, when he enters upon the sacred office, his style of eloquence is, in some good degree, formed. Then comes another powerful influence in aid of the development and exercise of his powers,—I mean the influence of *occasions*,—in other words, of striking events which are fitted to act upon the feelings with uncommon power. These events may be more or less public; they may affect an entire nation or only a single neighbourhood; but the voice of God's providence is in them, and its monitory teachings are not to be disregarded. Analogous to this class of subjects for the pulpit, are the events of Scripture,—such as the Deluge, the Egress from Egypt, the Entrance into Canaan, the Destruction of Jerusalem, and a thousand other kindred topics suggested by the inspired

history. These events, it must be acknowledged, occurring as they did under a miraculous dispensation, are more grand and impressive than those which we witness in connection with the passing developments of providence; but there is this difference in favour of the latter,—that they are matter of experience and observation, whereas we contemplate the former, only in the records of the past. But in the one case as truly as in the other, there are lessons inculcated which it is worthy of the pulpit to expound; and in expounding which, the pulpit becomes a direct interpreter of the works and ways of God.

I am aware that this form of public instruction has sometimes been objected to, as being hardly consistent with the dignity of God's house; and I have known even of its being placed in opposition to the preaching of the *gospel*. That it is capable of being perverted, and sometimes actually is perverted, so as to be liable to both these objections, I cannot doubt; but who does not perceive that any other class of subjects may be perverted to the same or equally unworthy purposes? There is a demand for much consideration and good judgment in deciding not only what events are worthy of being thus publicly noticed, but what kind of notice is likely to leave the most salutary and enduring impression. Be

sure, in the first place, that you have not laid hold of something that will belittle the pulpit, and then be sure that you do not treat it in such a manner as to offend either a cultivated taste or a devout spirit. If no other effect is produced by such preaching than merely to excite the imagination, or gratify a passion for novelty, or peradventure to provoke a smile by a quaint text or a half humorous illustration, you may rest assured that you have erred either in the selection of your subject, or in your mode of treating it. It is only when the very truths which the Bible teaches are fairly deduced, and earnestly and solemnly illustrated, that you have reason to be satisfied with the character of your effort.

The advantage of the kind of preaching of which I now speak, is shared perhaps equally by the preacher and the hearers. If you sit down to produce an occasional discourse, you are thrown, for the time being, into a new mental attitude; you are brought in contact with an assemblage of circumstances which possibly you never before contemplated,—at least never in the same aspect. The truth which you set yourself to illustrate, however familiar it may be to your thoughts, comes up before you now in a brighter light; your imagination wakes and kindles under an unaccustomed impulse; and you feel that

your position is doubly fortified, when, to a "Thus saith the Lord" in his word, you can add a "Thus saith the Lord" in his providence. And then in the delivery of your discourse, you have the advantage of the sympathy of your audience; for the occasion which excites you, excites them also; and while the state of mind into which you have been wrought, has probably been the occasion of your putting forth an extraordinary effort, it would not be strange if the corresponding emotions which have been awakened in them, should not only predispose them to hear with earnest attention, but lead them to estimate what they hear even above its actual merits. It is in accordance, therefore, with the established laws of the human mind, that discourses designed to commemorate the hand of God, or illustrate the truth of God, in passing events, should prove at once the most attractive and the most effective.

I am the more confident in making this statement, because I know there is so large an experience to bear me out in it. I might refer you to the history of forensic eloquence, and show you that, from Demosthenes down to Daniel Webster, there has never been a great orator, who was not largely indebted for the power of his efforts to the occasion which prompted them. But I need not stray out of the domain of sacred eloquence to

find ample illustration of my position. May I not say that He who spake as never man spake, delivered a large part of his discourses, (and if we have a right to distinguish between them, those which we cherish with the deepest interest,) on special occasions. Witness his discourse at the grave of Lazarus, his farewell to his disciples, and innumerable other instances, in which He rendered passing events tributary to the great object of his mission. Paul too,—when was he ever so eloquent, as when he was standing before Agrippa, or before Felix, with his spirit roused to an indignant sense of injury, and pouring itself out in scathing yet courteous rebuke? But not to linger upon examples from Scripture, or even from antiquity, let me refer you to two or three from the generation just passed, as they happen to occur to me. Robert Hall's great discourses were his occasional discourses: his sermon on "Modern Infidelity," which I suppose is regarded his master piece, was a Fast sermon, and had reference to a peculiar state of things which had come up amidst the convulsions of society. His sermon on the death of the Princess Charlotte, laid under contribution not only his exalted genius but his melting sympathy; and each of them found full scope in the sublimely affecting occasion. Dr. Dwight never rose to a nobler pitch of eloquence than in

his Fast sermons, during the war of 1812. Well do I remember how his eye kindled, and his form seemed to dilate, and his soul to burst forth in flame, as he dwelt on the harvest of blood and wo, which had been reaped from French Atheism. Perhaps the most beautiful of Dr. Griffin's productions is that which celebrated the birth of this very institution; or if that should be questioned, it will still be admitted that we are to look for his noblest efforts in connection with special occasions. The late Dr. Osgood of Medford, whose eloquence at times is said to have been rarely exceeded, probably never rose so high as in his famous Election sermon: he appears in it as an honest, fearless, indomitable champion of old fashioned Federalism; and if the artillery of heaven had been at his command, he could scarcely have made himself more terrible to his political adversaries. I do not speak of that celebrated production as a model on the whole; for it belonged to a period in the history of the pulpit, which I am more than willing to reckon with the past; but I refer to it as a great effort of a great mind, called forth by an exciting occasion. But the most remarkable example of this kind, which, so far as I know, our country has produced, is the late Dr. Lathrop of West Springfield. Not a small part of his preaching consisted in tracing

the movements of the Divine hand in the extraordinary experiences of men; and he did it with such admirable taste and judgment, he contrived so successfully to infuse the evangelical element into his notices of passing events, and to communicate sound instruction through the channel of an awakened curiosity, that he was perhaps never serving his Master to better purpose, or doing more in aid of the spiritual improvement of his hearers, than when engaged in these occasional services. I can think of many other examples, some of which are too nearly associated with the place where I stand, to justify me in adducing them; and it cannot be necessary that I should enlarge, as your own recollection can hardly fail to be fruitful of such illustrations.

It is a rare thing that the providence of God furnishes, in a brief period, more to awaken the energies of the pulpit, than has been supplied by two recent events, one of which has taken the form of a great national calamity, the other the form of a great personal crime. But a few weeks ago, the Head of this nation was busily, yet quietly, engaged in his appropriate work; and nothing fell within the range of human observation, but what gave promise that he would live to accomplish the whole term of honourable service which his country had assigned to him.

But in the midst of apparent security, of high responsibilities, of patriotic aspirations, death stole into his dwelling, and achieved a triumph that has covered the whole nation with mourning. And think you that there was no influence here to reach the pulpit? Believe me, there *was* an influence that the pulpit could not resist; and though it may have given forth no new lessons of instruction or warning, it has imparted to familiar truths an unwonted impressiveness; it has succeeded, as it could not ordinarily have done, in demonstrating the worthlessness of worldly glory by weighing and analyzing it at the gate of the tomb; it has brought into a stronger light our dependance, as a people, on the Ruler of nations, and the necessity of our honouring Him, as we would enjoy his favour. And the other event,—I can hardly bring myself to speak of it; for who has not felt it for weeks, like some frightful spectre, haunting his imagination; and the terrible consummation is now so fresh, that it well nigh absorbs the thoughts, the feelings, the conversation, of the whole community*. If your minds have been upon it, while you have been hearing this address, I cannot blame you; for I acknowledge that it hung as an incubus upon mine, while I was writing it. Do you say that

* This discourse was delivered but four days after Professor Webster's execution.

this event is too horrible in its details, to be brought forward as a topic of public religious discourse? I answer, the pulpit, at least in this community, may afford to be dumb in respect to the terrible transaction, and yet it may effectually fall in with the design of Providence in permitting it; nay, it may receive from it an impulse that shall render the word of God yet more quick and powerful. Preach concerning the treachery of the human heart and the strength of human passion; preach upon the fearful wages of sin and the terrors of avenging justice; preach upon the blasting of human hopes and the fruitless wail of conjugal or filial love; nay, preach the old fashioned doctrine of the visitation of the iniquities of the fathers upon the children; and you need not say a word about the medical college, or the jail, or the jail-yard, or the desolate dwelling;—the sad recollections of your hearers will supply it all. If it were not so much easier for men to gaze than to think, to read newspaper paragraphs than to hear God's warning voice, to yield to amazement and even consternation than to serious reflection, it would seem as if such an event as this might safely be left to find its own way to the heart and conscience of the community, without any aid from the pulpit; but it is really one of those events by which God intends

that the pulpit shall be roused to its boldest and most effective efforts. If Providence seems, in such cases, to take the work of warning the world into his own hands, He nevertheless accomplishes it partly by enlisting the awakened energies of the ministry to echo and enforce his solemn inculcations.

The amount of all that I would venture to suggest to you upon this topic is, that your ministrations should be in harmony with the truth of God, not only as revealed in his word, but as declared in his providence. Remember that while the great end of preaching is to convince and convert sinners, and to edify and comfort saints, and while the Bible, in connection with the Spirit that dictated it, is to be recognized as the fountain of all evangelical illumination, yet you may reasonably expect the best results from your labours, when they are seconded by God's voice, speaking through the movements of the outer world. The truth is that, as the best sermon loses much of its power from the want of adaptation, so *any* sermon becomes far more effective, when it is felt to be in accordance with not only the general but the particular circumstances of those to whom it is addressed. I would say then, study adaptation as an element both of power and of success.

But it is time, Gentlemen, that I should relieve your patience. I have spoken to you with undissembled diffidence; for I could not forget that there are voices of instruction on these and kindred topics, constantly heard here, to which I might well think it a privilege to listen. I have felt that it was a labour of love to which you have called me; for though I am not *in* New England, I am *of* New England; and it is my birth-right as truly as it is yours, to revere, and if I can in a humble way, to help forward, any of her noble institutions. I honour this Seminary as the child of an earnest piety, not less than the monument of a princely munificence. I honour the great lights that have shone in it, whether they are already quenched in death, or are still dispensing their genial beams, as they are serenely approaching the horizon. I honour all the power of intellect and the vigour of faith, the depth of thought and the fervour of devotion, of which it ever has been, or is now, the privileged theatre. May it stand as long as the world stands, not only a nursery of sacred eloquence, but a witness for evangelical truth, and a vigorous auxiliary to all the great and holy interests of Christ's Kingdom!