

THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

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REVIEW SECTION.

I.—“BEYOND REASONABLE DOUBT”—A PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE.

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No question is of more importance at the present time than that relating to the standards of evidence which it is proper to set up as the basis of religious belief and activity. So much is said about the necessity of securing “scientific” proof for everything, and there is such a general misconception of what scientific proof is, that widespread errors concerning most important subjects are manifesting themselves. In many quarters it is coming to be difficult to establish a firm belief either in any historical fact or in any principle of action, because they lie outside the realm of experiment and immediate observation. Hyper-criticism is everywhere the mother of skepticism.

A little well-directed attention, however, will show that in all the practical affairs of life we are compelled to walk by faith, and not by sight, and to accept probability, rather than certainty, as our guide. The one thing certain respecting all our plans is, that we must accept the best light we have as an imperative command to action. It is suicidal for any one to insist upon the removal of all difficulties from the pathway of action, and upon the elimination of all hazard from the battle of life. The demand of duty is that we follow the clearest light, that we listen to the voice which is most distinct, and place implicit confidence in that providential ordering of the world which makes it impossible for us to be wholly inactive.

This principle is recognized in most emphatic manner in the oft-

NOTE.—This periodical adopts the Orthography of the following Rule, recommended by the joint action of the American Philological Association and the Philological Society of England:—Change *d* or *ed* final to *t* when so pronounced, except when the *e* affects a preceding sound. —PUBLISHERS.

upon it have not found it to fail. Its statements have been challenged and scrutinized from the first. It possesses all the authority of an official document. There is no prospect that criticism can materially change the character of its teachings. He who apprehends its plain message may speak with the authority of the prophets and apostles, who received the messages from the Holy Ghost. He is literally an "ambassador of God." God is beseeching men through him. It is not Paul who is beside himself when he boldly proclaims the resurrection of Christ. It is rather the unbeliever who is beside himself when he denies a fact so well accredited as this has been in the history and experience of the Christian world.

II.—THE HOMILETIC USE OF OTHER MEN'S SERMONS.

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A DISTINGUISHED divine of this country is represented as saying that he never permits a volume of sermons to have a place in his library, that he never reads any other man's sermons, and that he thinks the world would be better off if all literature of this kind were to catch fire and burn up. Could anything be more absurd? What would be thought of a sculptor who should boast that he never permitted himself to look at any other man's statuary? or of a painter who never studied any other artist's pictures? or of a poet who never read any other man's poetry? or of an orator who never read any of the great masterpieces of classic and modern oratory? And yet the sermon is as truly a work of art as the statue, the painting, the poem, or the oration. Indeed, as all writers upon homiletics agree, the sermon is a species of oration, differing from the secular oration as to the sources from which its materials are drawn, the authority with which its teachings are enforced, the motives to which it appeals, and the ends to which it would arouse; but governed by the same laws in its approach to the will through the emotions, and to the emotions through the understanding. The fact that a special influence of the Holy Spirit is presumed to rest upon the sacred orator, and that the same influence is sought to rest upon the minds and hearts of the hearers, does not in the least dispense with the necessity of making use of all those advantages of structure and style, of all those aids of illustration, argument, persuasion, of which the secular orator avails himself.

It would therefore seem to go without the saying that the preacher should make careful analytical study of specimens of successful oratory in all its departments, and especially in that of preaching, to which his own life is devoted. He should not be afraid or ashamed to make the freest and fullest use of other men's sermons; to keep them in his

library, to read them, to study them, to master them, to make every principle of oratory that they illustrate, and every valuable thought that they contain, his own.

In estimating the value of the homiletic study of other men's sermons, this study may be viewed in its relations to three things: the structure, the style, and the materials entering into the composition. The order of statement is not strictly logical, but it suits our purpose best. Let us look first at structure.

There are a great many men who eschew all homiletical rules for the structure of sermons as tending to intellectual and spiritual thralldom. They point us to conspicuous instances of men of great native wit and genius, who eschew all these rules, and yet carry the people captive on the hustings and in the pulpit. On the upper Kentucky River you will find boatmen with square-headed, flat-bottomed boats, which, in their rude construction, subject themselves to the utmost force of the current; yet, such is the sinewy strength and practist art of these men, that they will push one of these rude scows up a rapid, and so, in their expressive vernacular, "make the riffle," where with a skiff built upon the very best lines you probably would be unable to follow. Would that imply that you ought to give up your skiff, and try the great fellow's scow? or that he would not carry vastly more tonnage, and do it more expeditiously and with more ease, if his boat was built right? These "home-bred orators" are great in spite of the illogical structure of their speeches, not because of it. Great as they are, they would be greater still if they used simple laws of association of thought as God has imprest them upon the human mind. As for yourself, not being one of these, it would be best for you to study and observe the very best rules of shipbuilding, lest your sermon should be like that steamboat of which a brother spoke a few days since, that had barely steam enough to keep it moving, so that the pilot had to stop the wheels whenever he wisht to blow the whistle. As in shipbuilding, so in sermon-building; it is a great thing to have some good models of structure. If you have any doubt on this point, get a volume of Alexander McLaren's sermons. Open to the index. Take his first text, and without turning to see anything of his treatment, or that of any other, make the best outline you can, and then compare it with his. If you are an inexperienced sermonizer you will be ready to burn yours in disgust. But do not be discouraged; after studying his method well in that sermon, take his second text and go through the same process; and so on to the end of the book. I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet if, by the time you are through that process, faithfully carried through the whole volume, you are not a far better homilist than when you began. Invaluable homiletic use therefore may be made of other men's sermons as models for improving the structure of our own. Nothing in this respect can take their place.

Consider next the use of sermons in the cultivation of homiletic style. Writers upon rhetoric all assure us that one of the best means to the development of a chaste, energetic, ornate style is the assiduous reading of the best English authors; and as the pulpit has, from the gravity of its themes, and the exalted character of its ends, a style to some extent peculiar to itself, it follows that whilst general literature, and particularly secular oratory, should not be neglected, special attention should be given to the reading of those masters of pulpit style, by whose influence our own style may be unconsciously molded. The young preacher can not afford to miss the influence of men like Robert South, Robert Hall, J. H. Newman, Canon Liddon, and others in England, or the Alexanders, Henry Ward Beecher, and Phillips Brooks in this country.

When we come to study the materials that make up the staple of the sermon, the woof that is to be woven into the web of structure to which we have already alluded, there is in some respects no storehouse equal to that of published sermons. Take as an instance—one of many that might be adduced—the preacher's supply of illustrations. We have no end of encyclopedias and commonplace-books of illustrations. And for the most part they are not worth to the preacher the paper they are printed on, simply because the illustration has been taken out of its natural associations in the body of discourse. It is literally "cut and dried," like a flower severed from the branch on which it grew and the foliage that was about it. What we need is not to decorate with this poor cut-flower, but to learn how to grow the flowers for ourselves; and how are we to do this except as we go into the gardens of these homiletic florists and see how they grew theirs? As that great master of the principles of sacred rhetoric, Dr. Dabney (at whose feet, alas! we shall sit no more in this world), has said: one flower that grows naturally out of a theme is worth a hundred that are artificially tacked on.

All that has thus far been said bears upon the matter of what Dr. Broadus calls "general preparation," as distinguished from that particular study of a text which a man makes in the immediate preparation of a sermon upon it. The question therefore presents itself: To what extent, if at all, should a man make use of another man's sermon on the specific text on which he is preparing a sermon at the time? This is a very important question; let us view it first negatively, and then positively.

Negatively, he can not honestly make any such use as will relieve him of the necessity and responsibility of making for himself, under the prayerful guidance of the Spirit, and in the light of the best exegetical helps, a close, thorough analytical study of the text, with the view of ascertaining just what message God will have him deliver from it. It is for the time being, in an especial sense, God's message to him, and through him to God's people. He must seek to know for

himself, and on his own responsibility, what the teaching of the text is.

Nor can he honestly excuse himself from first making his own independent outline, suggested to him by the impression which, under the guidance of the Spirit, as he has reason to hope, the truth of the text has made upon his own mind and heart, and by the impressions which, in his prayerful judgment, it ought to make upon the minds and hearts of his hearers. The sermon is to be God's Word through him, not through Dr. South or Robert Hall. He must, therefore, by the most vigorous and independent thought, let the word speak through him—through his personality, through his individual methods of thought and expression, under the glow of his own spiritual experience and the fervor of his own emotion.

He ought not, therefore, to read either sermon or outline, to consult either homiletical commentary or commonplace-book, until he has made the very best analysis of the text and the very best sermon-outline that he can. It is just at this point that sheer laziness comes in and drives so many men to become unscrupulous plagiarists. In the sweat of his brow man must eat bread here as elsewhere if he will not be a thief.

But, positively, when a man has, with the best critical and exegetical helps, and as the result of thoughtful and persistent study, constructed the very best outline he can, then let him throw open his volumes of sermons, his commonplace-books, his homiletical commentaries, his outlines of sermons—the more the better. Let him invite and accept suggestions of amendment, insertion, omission—all changes that may be made without sacrificing the main features of his outline, or forfeiting its independence in these respects as his own. Let him improve it, but not surrender it. Let him remember that a good sling of his own, with three smooth stones from the brook, is a better weapon in his hands than the spear and sword of some great homiletical King Saul. Even a proper fatherly affection for the offspring of his brain should make him unwilling to trade it off for some other man's literary progeny. Every principle of Christian manhood utters its protest against the indolent appropriation of the product of some other man's industry and research instead of his own.

The plagiarist is not usually the man who gathers together various outlines, and compares them, and culls from them such suggestions as are helpful to his own, but one who, in his intellectual beggary and vagabondism, fastens upon the first good outline that falls under his eye, and "joins himself" to it, as the prodigal did to the citizen of the far country.

The sermon-maker who begins by making for himself a careful and independent study of the text, and who aims conscientiously to present as the theme of his sermon the specific thought of the text, will not, unfortunately, be able to make use of other men's outlines in many

cases, because the text has not received specific treatment. Take, for instance, the text, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God," etc., and more than half of the sermons on it have as their theme the doctrine of justification by faith, altho the specific thought of the text is the peace which flows from justification. Or, as another familiar illustration, take the text, "Ye must be born again," and see the number of sermons on it that discuss the nature of regeneration; whilst the specific thought is the necessity, which is surely enough for one sermon. The best safeguard against the temptation to make unfair use of other men's outlines is to begin with a thorough critical and exegetical study of the text. The man who has made this, and who has any manliness and independence, not to say sense of responsibility to God, will not allow himself slavishly to walk in the path which any other man has marked out for him. He will be in no danger of plagiarism.

It remains that we indicate what kind of sermons the minister should choose for homiletic use. Ordinarily, he should read only such sermons as are models in structure and in style. In this, as in everything else, is illustrated the truth of the adage of the heathen poet, confirmed by the testimony of the inspired Apostle, that "evil company doth corrupt good manners." Occasionally a man may read the sermons of a pulpit mountebank, like Sam Jones, whose chief implements are slouch and slang; but his chief reading should be in those writers who have respect enough for our mother-tongue to keep them from wantonly outraging it, and respect enough for the house of God to keep them from making of it a booth for the exhibition of harlequinade.

The library of every young minister should be supplied with three classes of homiletical material: First, sermons, like those to which I have already alluded, which are models both as to structure and as to style. He should give time to a careful and sympathetic reading of these sermons. If his means will not allow him to do more, let him by all means possess himself of those two works for which the church will long be under obligation to Professor Fish—his "Masterpieces of Pulpit Eloquence," and his "Pulpit Eloquence of the Nineteenth Century." Second, the young minister should possess himself every year of some fresh volume of sermons, just from the press. Let him choose some writer who is known to be a popular and successful preacher, and make a study of his sermons with a view of getting any new light that may have come to this man as to the best mode of reaching the minds and hearts of men in our own day. Preaching, while in its main staple the same for all generations, becomes like Paul, its great exponent, all things to all men. See what changes of method, if any, changed times require. Third, subscribe for and read some good homiletical magazine, and provide yourself with some good homiletical commentary, that you may learn to cultivate what Dr. Shedd calls the "homiletic habit." "The Pulpit Commentary," now just coming

from the American Press, has great advantages over almost every other work of the kind, inasmuch as the critical and exegetical sections are entirely distinct from the homiletical, as in Lange and others; whilst the homiletical sections, which should not be consulted at all until the outline of the sermon has been fixed, contain a great wealth of material in the form of sermons, sermon-outlines, etc., that should enable the conscientious sermonizer to improve and enrich his outline, so as to make it the very best of which he is capable. Whatever masters a man may study, and of whatever homiletical helps he may avail himself, let him realize that there is no royal road to preaching; that nothing can take the place of the beaten oil of laborious study of both text and theme; and that he is the only true preacher who gets his mind and heart so full of a theme that as he opens his lips his thoughts spontaneously leap forth, suffused with the glow of his own emotion, and pervaded with an energy that is the exact measure of the extent to which the thoughts have become dominant principles in his own character and life.

III.—THE ACCREDITED PRINCIPLES OF THE HIGHER CRITICISM.

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THE term Higher Criticism, tho invented by a German scholar, is almost exclusively used by English and American critics. It is not to be found in the treatises of the Dutch critic Kuenen, and but rarely in the works of German specialists. Instead of this familiar phrase, these authorities use the plain terms Criticism, Critical, and Critic. This simple fact may serve as an index of the difficulty of defining the accredited principles of the Higher Criticism, and warn us to proceed cautiously with our subject. But the first thing required by caution would appear to be to define our terms, beginning with the phrase Higher Criticism. Until a better one can be produced, we shall do well to adopt the definition given elsewhere by the writer, which is: "The discovery and verification of the facts regarding the origin, form, and value of literary productions upon the basis of their internal characteristics and contents."* It may be well also to premise, for the sake of clearness, that we are concerned with the Higher Criticism in this paper only so far as it is applied to the Bible.

How Are Principles Accredited?

If this conception of the Higher Criticism is the correct one, the next step in our inquiry will be, What is meant by accredited principles?

* Zenos, "The Elements of the Higher Criticism," p. 9.