THE SOUTHERN
PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW,

VOL. XXXVI.—NO. 2.

APRIL, MDCCCLXXXV.

ARTICLE I.

MODERN HOMILETICS.

The foremost literary man of a period not the most recent, marked a characteristic of his age in the words:

> "Of making many books there is no end,
> and much reading is a weariness to the flesh."

We wonder what would be his impression, could he stand on the banks and measure the volume of that stream which flows so steadily and increasingly from the printing presses of to-day. No branch of this great river—not all of it so pure and wholesome as it might be—is larger than that devoted to homiletics.

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1. Yale Lectures on Preaching. 8 Vols. 1872-3-4, Beecher; 1875, Hall; 1876, Taylor; 1877, Brooks; 1877, Dale; 1879, Simpson.
2. "*Homiletics*." 3 Vols. Vinet, 1854; Shedd, 8th ed.; Hoppin, 1883.
3. "*The Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*," 1871; "*A History of Preaching*," 1879, Broadus.
4. "*Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric*," 1881, Dabney.
5. "*Lectures to My Students.*" 2 Vols. *First Series*, 1875. *Second Series,* 1877, Spurgeon.
6. "*The Theory of Preaching*," 1881; "*English Style in Public Discourse,*" 1883, Phelps.
7. "*The Art of Extempore Speech,*" 1859, Bautain. "*Conditions of Success in Preaching without Notes,*" 1875, Storrs. "*Extempore Preaching,*" 1884, Wilder Smith.
8. "*The Principles of Written Discourse,*" 1884, Hunt.

Volume 36, Number 2 (April 1885) 179-217.

In few departments of thought has the quickening been greater or the life more prolific. Many have been the offspring; and while over some of these children of the study or lecture-desk our ancient preacher would doubtless utter his familiar refrain, yet it would be exaggeration indeed to add, *All* is vanity. Many of these works are admirable in spirit, matter, and method; so clear, simple, and forceful is the analysis of the elements of pulpit power, and so plain the guidance to its attainment, that preaching seems the easiest thing in the world and the low level of average sermonising a strange phenomenon; a strangeness much mitigated, however, by personal experience, which, alas! gives to this aforesaid phenomenon the familiar features of a humiliating intimacy.

This introduction suggests the propriety of some apology for willing even a trifle so light as this monograph to the already mighty mass; our apology shall be the reply of the little girl who, when asked in the impatience of rebuke why she talked so much, answered, "'Cause I've got something to say." A careful study of a score of recent works[1] on this topic has begotten the conviction that we have something to say, and we say it because of the modest opinion that it is worth hearing.

[1] The purpose of this paper does not allow space for criticism of these works in detail, though it is an inviting field. But we cannot pass Prof. Phelps's excellent *Theory of Preaching* without protest and warning against some of his positions; the more so as they have passed unchallenged in the many laudatory criticisms of the work. We take issue most decidedly with—

1. *His* "application of the philosophy of common sense to exegesis." Pp. 149-152.

2. The "materials of exposition as found in the facts of natural science." P. 153.

3. His view of Calvinism as not "workable" in the pulpit. Pp. 478-490.

The first two points we consider destructive *practically* of the Bible's authority as a guide, making it virtually inferior to mental and physical science and the lessons of an always dubious, and sometimes infidel, "Political Progress." After maintaining that Calvinism is not workable in the pulpit, he is driven to spend *ten* pages in accounting for the notorious fact that the preeminently and conspicuously working pulpits of the earth have been Calvinistic!

Preaching is the "double-tree" bolt of the minister's "gear"; it is just the point where the strength of the whole team connects with the load. It is the hook at the chain's end by which every link is made to draw, or hold; no chain however long and strong is stronger than its hook—many and multiform may be the links, yet all hinge on the hook at last; so whatever may be the minister's resources of knowledge, ability, or scholarship, his preaching is his hook, preaching in its narrowest sense. Ability, talents, scholarship, culture, *may all exist apart from good preaching*. The finest team on earth cannot pull the smallest load if the bolt is out of the double-tree; the strongest chain is weak with a weak hook. If this estimate of the importance of preaching is just, then the subject must ever enlist interest, arouse attention, and give voice to the views of men *engaged in the work*; and their views ought to be always welcome, for as a general thing the writer on homiletics is not a *preacher*; we need more frequent contributions to the theory from those engaged in the practice.

We wish on the very threshold to raise a radical issue, to challenge an unquestioned supremacy; we wish to start in the reader's mind the question whether there is, strictly speaking, any such distinct species as "Sacred Rhetoric."[1] Why this, any more than a legal rhetoric for the court-house, a legislative rhetoric for the state-house, a platform rhetoric for the lecture-desk? Distinguishing sharply homiletics front exegesis and hermeneutics, leaving out of view the ascertaining of the meaning of the text, and restricting homiletics strictly to the presentation of the truth when ascertained—"the science that teaches the fundamental principles of public discourse as applied to the proclamation and teaching of divine truth in regular assemblies gathered for the purpose of Christian worship"[2]—supposing then the material gathered, is there any distinctive difference between the laws governing its arrangement, argument, and illustration and those which govern the lawyer before a jury or the lecturer before a lyceum? The reader will please "docket" that question.

We were once struck with a remark of a ruling elder, a

[1] Vinet, p. 22. [2] Hoppin, p. 9.

man whose age, experience, acquaintance with men, conservatism, and influence, gave weight to his words. Said he:

"If our church were seeking a preacher, I wouldn't want a man whom the preachers recommended; *preaching that pleases preachers doesn't suit the people*."

Coming from the source it did, that remark startled us and set us to thinking; the reader will find it worthy of study. How much truth is there in the judgment? It suggests a question the answer to which is largely decisive of this whole matter of homiletics. The gist of the remark is that the preacher's ideal of preaching is not the true one. What is this ideal and whence comes it? The student enters homiletics abruptly, so to speak, with no preparation leading up to it; it is a new field, entirely new; he begins the study with mind unprejudiced and unbiassed by any introductory course; his ideal is, therefore, purely and exclusively the fruit of his training; his guide is the text-book, it is his *ipse dixit*, and he has no other *dixit* on the subject; in a preeminent sense, then, his ideal is the text-book's ideal. Returning now to the elder's remark, we see that in saying that the preaching which pleases preachers does not suit the people, he uttered a virtual, though unintentional, indictment against the homiletic standards.

The standard of the text-book is only a somewhat modernised form of the sermon as it has been known for ages; it took substantially the present shape about sixteen hundred years ago. Being so old there is strong presumption in its favor, *but it is not the oldest*.

"During the third and fourth centuries there were great changes wrought in the method of preaching—in fact, in its very theory. From its being of a very artless character, preaching began to be built upon an oratorical form. It took more and more the shape of the intellectual productions of the highest classical civilization of the day. It began to vie with the performances of the Greek rhetorician and orator, bringing in all the helps to be derived from learning and eloquence, . . . but it was, after all, a transition period, in which the former simpler and more biblical system of preaching culminated (perhaps in some respects we might say fossilized) into the regular sermon."[1]

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1 Hoppin, *Hist. Of Preaching,* pp. 61, 65, of "*Homiletics.*"

It was born, then, no earlier than the third century; the homiletic standard of to-day is substantially Aristotle's; Origen was its father, but Aristotle its grandfather. Pretty good family this, but not the best; it is after all, comparatively speaking, but a *novus homo* and when introduced was as complete and radical a change as is conceivable. It has been handed down to us, and even at this late day we question its authority. We mark the greatness of its innovation at the time it was introduced; we emphasise its complete contrast to the scriptural, the apostolic, and immediately post-apostolic style. There is no kinship between this child of Greek philosophy and rhetoric and the preaching in the Gospels and the Acts; it is modelled somewhat closely upon the words which man's wisdom teacheth and is suspiciously like that something (much disputed of late) which Paul expressly disowned. It may possibly account for some loss of power in the inevitable drift towards a practical ignoring of that supreme dependence upon the Spirit of God and him alone which stands out so prominently in the New Testament ideal; so prominently indeed as to dwarf every other qualification into such minute and mote-like insignificance that when we wish to find the foundations of our towering and splendid superstructure, we are driven to conduct the search through the medium of a microscopic criticism.

We remember hunting some years ago with some friends; one spied a squirrel away up in the forks of a tree, he fired but failed to bring it down; we then fired each several shots in rapid succession, but with no better effect. It turned out that we were peppering shot into a very squirrel-like looking knot.

Of course a minister's preaching will be determined by his idea of a sermon. What, then, *is* a sermon? Is it a formal treatise, an elaborate oration, all exhaustive discussion of a theme perfectly mastered; original, logical, profound; presented in rhetoric so polished and form so finished as to justify Horace's famous phrase, *perfectum ad unguem*? such a production as commends itself in all respects to the favor of a critical, cultivated, scholarly taste? such a sermon, *e.g.*, as Robert Hall's celebrated discourse on Modern Infidelity[1]? Is this the goal towards which the

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' Works, Vol. I., p. 23. N. Y., 1857.

preacher's efforts aim[1]? This is doubtless his ideal of a "fine sermon," a *chef d'oeuvre*. Now, it is notorious that a fine sermon is usually a flat failure, and, generally speaking, a minister's *chef d'oeuvre* rarely accomplishes any practical effect. He seldom selects it for a protracted meeting; "it is not suited, you know, to that sort of work." Therefore whatever he is aiming at, it matters little whether he hits it or not; *he is only shooting at a knot*. These fine sermons are mere target-practice, they are mainly displays of marksmanship; therefore it is that they are not used in seasons of religions interest, they are reserved for Synod.

We hold that a sermon is intended for practical, personal, present effect; a specific result upon the men and women sitting then and there before the pulpit. We hold, further, that in preaching, *so far as the rhetoric and formal character of the sermon is concerned, the end justifies the means*. We would rather go hunting with a bull-dog and a sack of brick-bats and kill birds than to use a $150 breech-loader and a $500 setter and bag no game. We consider that preaching best which is most effective, though it should contravene every dictum of homiletic authority.

Some one interjects here, "Of course; but the most effective preaching is just that which does not contravene the dictum of the text-book."

This is a very simple and satisfactory answer. The only difficulty about it is that it is not true, that is all.

We shall soon see that these *dicta* are constantly contravened, and that, too, by some of the most effective preachers.

How common it is to read criticism of the sermons of famous preachers, in which admiration of their power blends with apology for their violation of established rules and departure from recognised authority; as, for instance, the following from an editorial headed, "*A Great Preacher*," and appearing in staid landmark of conservative Presbyterianism:

"The homiletes must forgive us for dissenting from the opinions that some of them have expressed respecting the volume of sermons entitled

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[1] See Phillips Brooks, "*Lectures on Preaching,*" pp. 109ff. N.Y., 1877.

. . . . . It is true that these sermons are in open defiance of homiletical rules . . . .And with all respect to the critics, we confess that our conception of a sermon is different from that which is sometimes found in the books. There is all the difference in the world between a sermon that is a growth and one that has been built according to plans and specifications. And important, moreover, as the rules of homiletics are, there are times when the highest order of preaching transcends them."

We may mention Moody here. He gives no evidence of ever having heard of the existence of this modern holy ghost; and we hear it said that he is no preacher, knows nothing about sermonising. The criticism is just, according to the standards. If the text-books are right, he never preached a sermon or anything like one in his life; and yet hundreds of scholarly "divines" flock to his feet to learn (not how to preach, for he knows nothing about that; why, he even uses bad grammar!), but to learn how to "reach men," as they call it, *i.e., how to save souls*.

The criticisms of Moody's preaching remind us of the generals who contended with Napoleon; after some overwhelming; defeat they would pace their tents and grind their teeth and heap abuse and contempt upon Bonaparte, declaring that he was ignorant of the moat elementary principles of warfare, and never fought according to established tactics and strategy.

Some see in Moody a divine providence for our day and time, an incarnate rebuke to a sermonolatry which palsies preaching, to a system of training which tends naturally to produce profound theologians, cultivated scholars, classic writers, rather than effective "popular" speakers.

It is a significant spectacle to see numbers of "thoroughly educated" preachers, learned scholars, theologians, writers, sitting on the platform with this man to study his ways; riding hundreds of miles with the avowed purpose of learning from a man who does not even "use good grammar." We wish the reader to pause here and dwell on this spectacle until he appreciates its fu11 force and implication; exalted learning sitting at the feet of despised ignorance; conspicuous leaders, in the very ministry of the Southern Presbyterian Church itself, taking lessons from a man whom they could not ask into their ecclesiastical home by

the front door. This is a straw in the wind, a wind that does not blow from the stately heights of a lofty standard; rather that wind which bloweth where it listeth.

No, you will not find Moody's counterpart in the text-books; there is something, however, that sounds a little like it in another book; a paragraph that reads somewhat after this fashion:

> "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God bath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence."

We mark another sign of the times, that may by some perhaps be considered more steady and stable, by asking is there not plainly a practical historical drift from the text-book models, traceable in the progress of sermonising? Compare any volume of sermons published in 1884 with one from South, Barrow, Edwards, Davies, or Owen. The difference is manifest and it is great.[1] The change is significant of much; the more so from the fact that the text-book remains the same. The pulpit training is substantially unchanged, and yet despite the training, the preacher bows to this progress. Does this not bear upon our question docketed some pages back? Is not the drift one that makes from the text-book towards a less artificial and professional, a more natural style? Is it not a characteristic of the most prominent pulpits that the preacher is speaking more like the lawyer, the legislator, the lecturer, than his predecessor of seventy-five years ago?

This drift seems to be in some sort a historical verification of the riding elder's remark that the homiletic standard does not suit the people.

The model form of the homiletic standards is stereotyped,

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[1] This change is forcibly illustrated in the ordinary Homiletic Crutch (which may be warranted to help a man if he is lame, or to make him lame if he is not).

Compare such a volume as "*The Pulpit Cyclopedia,*" N.Y., 1847, with "*Outlines,*" Vols. I., II., *"Clerical Library*," N.Y., 1883.

common to all the text-books. It finds the constituent elements of the sermon in five formal divisions; every real true sermon must have them all more or less developed: introduction, exposition, proposition, argument, conclusion; all "are to be present in the complete type, and this is the model toward which every sermon, even the most informal, must tend."[1] Some one unifying thought running through the whole like the thread through a necklace; the unfolding of a definite, distinct, logical or subject proposition, deduced from a single text or a context; the whole passage, whatever its character or extent, boiled down to this proposition, the entire discussion a development of this, and the whole sermon capable of reduction back again to this one statement which formed the proposition.

Is this the correct model? We are helped to an answer by inquiring of what class it is the type. Evidently the argumentative. It gravitates constantly towards the logical in fact and in form; formal if possible, if not, then as formal as possible. It is essentially the argumentative style, and its highest expression is the strictly logical.

Now that this is a vicious model we maintain for three reasons, which, if just, are conclusive.

1. *It suits the fewest texts*.

The Bible is not an argumentative book; excepting the Epistles of Paul, there is little argument in it from beginning to end. It is mainly narrative, poetical, historical, hortatory. Examine the specimen sermons given: the Sermon on the Mount; our Saviour's parables, with his own exposition of them; the sermons in the Acts. It will be seen that none of the inspired illustrations of preaching are cast into this distinctively argumentative form or partake of the argumentative character. It requires great ingenuity to trace even the rudiments of the model form in the inspired examples.

While it is true that a number of texts this treatment does suit best, yet a greater number it suits not at all, and in no small proportion of those to which it is fairly applicable it is not the most effective.[2]

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[1] *Dabney*, p. 140.

[2] The reader will please bear in mind that throughout this discussion

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight," is doubtless best treated in logical form; but try it with the temptation, the night in Gethsemane, the Svrophœnirian woman, the parables, the miracles. Of course, it is possible to give an outline sketch, as brief as possible, of the whole scene, incident, or context; then seize upon some one thought as the most prominent, throw this into a proposition and argue or discuss it; and this is just what the standards call for; but we believe it will often be done at the loss of both interest and effect.

Even for texts to which it is fairly applicable, and which seem to invite it, it is sometimes nevertheless not the best. For example, in the text, "By grace are ye saved," we have in the very words of Scripture a complete logical proposition, a unit, formed to hand, ready for the process; and yet we venture the opinion that an illustrative, expository treatment will be found more effective than an argument; a, discussion somewhat after this sort, *e.g.*:

1. What is meant by being "*lost*"? "*saved*"?
2. What is meant by "*grace*"? 2
3. What is it to be "*saved by grace*"?
4. Illustrations of it.

Such an outline is anything but original, striking, or profound, and some of our readers will in all probability sneer at it; but we think the average hearer will be more benefited by it than by the profoundest, most conclusive proof of the truth declared in the text.

As another instance, consider Heb. iv. 16, the logical proposition of which is, "The believer's approach to the mercy seat grounded on the Saviour's high-priesthood."

This offers fair and fine field for argument; but most congregations will appreciate more thoroughly some such treatment as follows:

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we use such words as "best," "most effective," in a limited sense. We are discussing the sermon as a spoken address designed for, and delivered to, such an audience as compses the average congregation in the pews before an ordinary pulpit on an ordinary Sabbath occasion.

The believer's approach:

1. Its *grounds*: "Therefore."

2. Its *manner*: "Boldly"—what? and why ?

3. Its *purpose*: "Mercy" and "Grace for seasonable aid."

We venture the assertion that in nine texts out of ten the model form is not the best.

In criticising the argumentative model, we wish not to be un-. derstood as depreciating the importance of *unity* in discourse; we set great store by it; but we believe not so much in the unity of a logical conclusion as in that of a practical impression, and we by no means consider the two constant in their relation or interchangeable terms.

2. *It suits the fewest hearers*.

Logical discussion is closely connected, concatenated; the parts strictly interdependent. This is its excellence; all failure in this respect is serious fault. The nearer it comes to a growth, an evolution of point from point, a development step by step, the more perfect it is. Now, we fear that the more perfect it is, the worse for its ostensible purpose. Consider the character of the general congregation; what training or qualification has the average hearer for following the argurnent? Few men have any culture or practice in abstract thought. Process the most simple to a trained student is very complex to a mind whose chief anxiety is to keep the children satisfied indoors on a rainy day, or to persuade a customer to lay out $10 in his coat instead of $8.50. A logical discussion necessitates sustained attention. It is like knit work; a cut, however small, ravels the whole. Let a hearer lose a link, and the chain is broken; let him fail to understand or retain one head of the argument, and he is like a child trying to work long division having forgotten subtraction. The reader may say: "Oh, yes; but few sermons are so faithful to unity as all this."

Very true; but in that they err from the standard; and we are not criticising the sermons, but their standard. It is small support to an *ideal* to plead in its favor the weakness of' its influence, and to find its justifying safeguard in the fact that it will not be realised.

Some persons are qualified by taste and habit to enjoy and improve a logical discussion; but where there is one man more edified by this than by another style, there are twenty who will be more profited by some other.

3. *It suits the fewest preachers*.

"The proof of the pudding is chewing the bag." How many preachers follow the text-book? The writer does not know of one who even attempts to carry into practice the homiletic model of sermonising. Indeed, you can tell a licentiate's trial sermon by this very feature, that it is so ship-shape according to the text-book; all the "constituent members" present, clearly and proportionately worked out: introduction; exposition; proposition; argument, i., ii., iii., iv., v.; application (1) "To you, fellow-followers of the Master"; (2) "To you, my dear unconverted hearer."

A sermon above criticism in the Seminary! And that night a large congregation will gather to hear the most popular and effective preacher in the Presbytery; a man with twenty or thirty years of study, growth, and successful work behind him; a man whose name will crowd the church; and this man will preach a sermon already blessed perhaps to the salvation of a score of precious souls, or to the comfort of hundreds, and yet a sermon which would be most unmercifully mangled by the faculty of any theological seminary, and very possibly declared to be "no sermon at all"; and tried by the standards, the criticism would be just. In drawing this contrast, we are innocent of any purpose to impose on a reader's unguardedness an amusing caricature under guise of a sober portrait; we are utterly unconscious of exaggeration, so much so that we challenge on the part of our brethren an examination of the contrast alleged as existing between the licentiate's sermon and that of the eminent, successfull working pastor; not that the latter is more mature and perfect a specimen of the same species, but that it is a *different species*, entirely different. Moreover, we note this not as an occasional exceptional occurrence, but as a customary habitual practice, viz., that preachers as a general thing very soon drift away from the traditions of the class-room and the rules of the text-book,

and regularly, knowingly, and purposely ignore them; and this not from ignorance or sloth, but because experience teaches them that they can work better out of this mediæval, scholastic harness than in it.

Examine the methods of the most popular preachers, as exhibited in their published works: William Archer Butler, Phillips Brooks, Beecher, Talmage, Spurgeon, Robertson, etc. Matthew Henry's Commentary is evidently his pulpit work; perhaps no uninspired preaching has ever been of greater service to mankind, and yet it is enough to make a dead homilete "turn over in his grave." What an amusing abandon of charming irrelevancy pervades many of his most quaint and sensible epigrams!

If it is true that the standard model suits the fewest texts, the fewest hearers, the fewest preachers, we might "rest our case here and go to the jury"; but we prefer to add yet another count to the indictment.

4. *Another objection to the model is that it makes no provision for a class of sermons that will be found very instructive and effective*.

This class it completely outlaws. As illustration of what we mean, let us mention a sermon that takes a scriptural epithet, phrase, or idea, and *tracks* it through the Bible.

"Be not deceived" (μὴ πλανᾶσθε) occurs several times as preface to warning, seeming to indicate thus that the subject of the warning is one about which we are specially liable to deception; and upon examination, we find that observation justifies the presumption. We are thus guarded against any deception as to the following important practical truths:

1. The contaminating influence of evil associations.—1 Cor. xv. 33.

2. The personal responsibility of each for his own sin.—Jas. i. 16.

3. Entrance into heaven conditioned on character.—1 Cor. vi. 9.

4. Human destiny, once settled, irreversible.—Gal. vi.

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[1] Μὴ πλανᾶσθε translated "Do not err" in our Version.

The Apostle Peter uses the word "precious" with noticeable frequency. There are five things which the Holy Ghost through him calls precious; what are they?

In the Revelation we have a seven-fold promise made "to him that overcometh."

Again, the words "I have sinned" occur often, but under very varied circumstances and with very different meaning, intent, and effect.

The Scriptures use many terms for "sin." The literal meaning of the words, and its development into the figurative, will throw great light upon the Bible idea of sin, and give a hearer vivid impression of its character, its power, its heinousness in God's sight.

These are but specimens; the reader can add to the list indefinitely. Some of the best sermons we have ever heard have belonged to a class for which the text-books make no provision at all; discourses which the standard idea or definition of a sermon would rule out of the right of existence.

By this time, we imagine the readers impatience ready to ask, Well, what model have you to suggest?

We answer very simply, none; and maintain that to ask the best plan for sermons is like asking the best plan for houses. The best plan for a sermon is to be determined by four things: the passage, the purpose, the people, the preacher; just what the text teaches, just what application of that truth he wishes to impress most upon his people, just *that* treatment by which *he* can best impress *that special* truth upon *that particular* congregation. Given those four points and the plan is decided; any one of them altered may very properly change the plan.

We believe the text-book models are serviceable. We study works on homiletics with great pleasure and unflagging interest, and we hope not without profit. They are eminently useful; they are necessary for exercise and training. So we believe in the gymnasium. But still we think it unreasonable to condemn all exercise and exhibition of strength that does not play the muscles in the exact order and system of the parallel bars, the Indian club, or the dumb-bells.

The contents of the Bible present inexhaustible variety, and its style a rich versatility. We have narrative, history, biography, miracle, parable, precept, prophecy, poetry; we have it in type, in symbol, figurative, literal, allegorical; it is severe and tender; it contains pathos, rebuke, scorn, and, sarcasm. We believe that the form, character, style, method, etc., of sermonising ought to partake of this variety, ought to imitate this versatility. To attempt to cast sermons into any stereotyped form is to distort the living truth upon the bed of Procrustes; it is to sacrifice the divine setting in which the jewel is put by inspired wisdom. It is not the dictate of reason, and it is not justified by experience; for, as we have remarked, preachers do not, will not, and we maintain ought not, follow the model.

Any discussion of homiletics is incomplete without some reference to the comparative merits of extempore and written discourse, though such comparison is much like arbitration between the conflicting claims of bread and soap. Everything depends on the man.

Let us premise here that by, "extempore" we do not mean impromptu, nor by "written discourse" do we refer to a style of preaching in which fear of losing the place glues face to paper like the eye of bird to that of charming snake.

Each has its advantages and its disadvantages. In favor of extempore it is to be said that it brings the speaker into closer contact with the hearer; it always seems more direct, more personal, more practical; it allows opportunity for seizing unforeseen pointy, illustrations, applications, etc.; the general custom of public speakers sustains it, and the prejudices of people prefer it.

These advantages are obvious, and have had due consideration at the hands of teachers and text-hooks.

Its disadvantages are not so obvious, though none the less real; and as they are not so thoroughly treated, we give more space to them.

1. *The danger of a fatal fluidity*.

A danger no speaker is superior to. In stealthy approach, like that insidious disease which saps the citadel of life under the

treacherous colors of health, deceiving none but the hapless, hopeless victim; so this disease cheats its victim with the counterfeit semblance of vigor. We call it fatal, and when once it has seized upon a man there is no cure. He confounds the very nature of things, and mistakes sound for sense; a millionaire in language, but a pauper in ideas; lavish in the inflated wealth of words: utterly, pitiably ignorant of the fact, patent to all others, that there is no capital behind this show of riches, that they are but the worthless notes of a bankrupt brain; sonorous verbosity makes musical resonance in the empty skull: long swelling sentences, *vox et preterea nil*, are rolled forth with a majesty worthy of the profoundest thought, and irredeemable commonplace uttered with all the intensity of thrilling originality.

It is a fearful habit, stealing on one unawares, and growing with the rapidity of Jack's fairy bean-stalk.

2. *The tendency to disproportion*.

The subject and its treatment is announced, the plan plainly advertised; then the first two or three heads developed until the speaker is startled to find the time consumed and two-thirds of his contract unfulfilled; the last and most important part of the sermon must be crowded into "a few feeble remarks."

This is what we call the *tadpole* type of sermon.

We once heard a preacher of long practice and reputed scholarship, begin by announcing very carefully an elaborate plan. Before finishing his introduction, he announced a second and somewhat different one; and finally proceeded to pursue still a third; the body of his sermon being devoted to the first head, the remaining points were passed with mere mention.

Extempore speaking exacts absorption in the subject, and the inevitable tendency of this is towards obliviousness to the passage of time. Here is the danger, and to obviate the difficulty requires unusual and constant care.

3. *The chilling effect of unpropitious circumstances*.

The extempore speaker is very dependent on circumstances. An unfavorable day, a mere handful sprinkling the magnificent distances of pews, chilling him at the very time when he would wish to reward the self denial of the few who have braved the

weather with a better sermon than usual. On the preacher's part, a torpid liver, dyspepsia, headache, a fit of depression. Some annoyance or distraction in the congregation; a fidgety child, a remonstrating baby with a sublimely unconscious mother, a pair of sportive or hostile dogs, a whispering beau or a giggling miss.

Any of this variegated disturbance will interfere with the working of the mind and clog its creative power. They are always among the possible, foresight cannot anticipate them nor wisdom remedy; the minister cannot control them, he cannot prevent them, he cannot defer to them; when the hour arrives he must preach then and there, regardless of his own condition or of circumstances.

We remember once preaching to a large congregation in a country where the people came *by families*. Three babies (from native depravity or that instinctive craving for a more varied and *responsive* service, recommended in some quarters) disputed pre-eminence with the preacher at the very start. Think of it, reader, *three*! Despite their Episcopal learnings, they were sound Presbyterians on some points, *e.g.*, the "final perseverance." They began with the beginning and continued without recreation or relaxation until after the sermon commenced. How much longer they would have held out remains unsettled; for at that point it suddenly flashed into the mothers' heads that possibly the concert might make a disturbance if continued *too* long, and so the innocents were "processionated" out. We were relieved, however, from an absolute and dreary monotony by a little toddler's using the space immediately before the pulpit as exercise ground, walking with a most engaging uncertainty from admiring relative on one side of the church to expectant relative on the other. The babies *had the floor* that day, we had the pulpit, grinding out an extempore sermon. Work? Why, cutting cord-wood would have been restful!

4. *The impossibility of repetition.*

An extempore sermon can never be repeated. The elements which compose it are to be found in the preacher's thought and feeling while preparing it, his condition of head, heart, and body

while delivering it, the character and situation and circumstances of the congregation hearing it. All these have direct part in the extempore sermon, and this combination can never be exactly reproduced. The writer was once one of a number who petitioned earnestly for the repetition of a most magnificent discourse. The request was granted, but all agreed that we were far from hearing the same sermon. Experience since has given the explanation—the thing is impossible.

We remember vividly and painfully a somewhat similar instance. We had preached a sermon which, through the preceding week, had been filling brain and soul until both were full. On Sabbath everything was propitious and the sermon flowed and overflowed. One in whose judgment we had confidence, whispered on leaving the church, "The next time you preach in a brother's pulpit give them that sermon." Some months afterward when selecting briefs to use on such an occasion, the remark was recalled, and very naturally that sermon was included. We entered the brother's pulpit with the memory of that overflowing fulness abiding; but the fulness did not abide, it was gone. The whole subject was there, every division and subdivision clearly articulated; but when we entered fairly into the sermon we found to our dismay there was nothing but the heads—as beautiful and perfect a skeleton as ever hung in a doctor's office; but the *meat* was all gone, nothing left but the bones!

5. *The uncertainty of the sermon*.

The extempore preacher can never tell exactly what the sermon will be until it has been. He knows not what the load is until he shoots, and sometimes, alas! the gun kicks about as hard as it shoots.

This species of preaching is something like fishing; you get a bite, and are all *qui vive* until at last the cork dives and you pull for a whale, only to see the shimmering sides of a very small minnow go sailing over the bushes.

The subject in the prospect looms up before the mind immense as a great cloud, but the cloud form of thought is often bigger in promise than performance, and when condensed and "precipitated" on the congregation, these immense clouds sometimes afford

a very small sprinkle. Every such speaker knows how bitter his disappointment has been at the outcome of some sermon which, in the nebulous state, filled the whole horizon of his thought, and his heart beats responsive to ours as he softly says, *quorum pars fui* (rendered freely, "I've been there myself").

6. *The unevenness of the preaching*.

The disadvantages already noted result necessarily in great variation of excellence in the sermons as compared one with another. An extempore preacher cannot be an *even* preacher, because he cannot command the circumstances necessary to his best preaching. Owing to this obvious fact, he who sometimes reaches a very high grade will at others sink to a very low one. Some of the very best, and some of the very poorest sermons we have ever heard have come from one and the same man. Sometimes he preached as if almost inspired, sometimes as if every sentense were an effort and a torture. And this, to some extent, is inevitable (particularly the latter).

7. *The good extempore sermon costs more nerve force*.

It is a most exhaustive process; the brain works at high pressure, every power of the man is tense. His whole force comes into violent exercise, and when he leaves the pulpit his head is in a whirl, abnormally excited and abnormally active. This condition lasts for hours; it affects appetite and sleep, and when the reaction comes the depression and exhaustion are extreme. This cost is, to a certain extent, regulated by the character of the work, rising with its excellence and falling with its failure. The best, extempore preaching is likely to make the minister feel on Monday somewhat as drunkards are described as feeling after a spree.

Such are some of the disadvantages of this style of preaching. In behalf of the manuscript it is to be said, and it is much, that it escapes these difficulties just enumerated. It is more carefully prepared, better proportioned, more uniform in merit and in length; the Preacher is thoroughly master of his matter, and has it in condition for preservation. He knows just what, and how much, he has. And the nervous energy and brain activity has been distributed through six days instead of two hours. During

this period, moreover, he can consult the *mollia tempora*; he is not obliged to lay the burden on heart and brain just when, perhaps, both happen to shrink most from bearing it; he can put the sermon aside temporarily ands resume it when better fitted for it. The written discourse secures greater precision in statement and guardedness of expression. It serves as a breakwater against the tide of colloquial slovenliness that sets constantly from every quarter towards the speaker of the present day.

There is another difference between the two which gives to the written style a most important advantage.

Poor extempore preaching necessitates less study than poor manuscript, while good extempore requires *greater* than the same grade of the other. It demands a full mind, an active brain, a fluent tongue, and ready command of fine language. A fluent tongue without a full mind is an unmitigated, an aggravated, curse to any speaker, and an unalleviated affliction to any congregation. Here is an explanation of a noticeable fact, viz., as a general thing manuscript preachers *wear* better than extempore. The latter begins with ten years of study behind him; the hopper is comparatively full when he first turns on the water and the grist gives good promise; but he neglects to *keep* the hopper full and soon breaks the promise of his beginning. The newspapers some months ago were discussing the "ministerial dead-line," placing it at various ages; the dead-line is just whenever and wherever the hopper begins to get empty, be it at thirty years of age or sixty.

A candidate for licensure being asked, What is original sin? is reported as answering: "I don't know what other folks' is, but mine is laziness."

It requires more grace than most persons possess to resist the temptation, so strong under some circumstances, to go occasionally into the pulpit without sufficient preparation and, so to speak, just *sort o'* float around on the sublimity of the occasion. There are so many plausible pretexts for delaying the preparation for Sabbath; but you *cannot* crowd a written sermon into an hour after tea Saturday night. The extempore preacher will defer this way a few times with gratifying success, and then he is on

the high road to ruin. The manuscript sermon *necessitates* both time and study; the man who preaches extempore ought to study his sermons thoroughly and he may do it, the one who writes must and will. This is the important difference we noted a few lines back; the prevalence of the candidate's "original sin" emphasises its importance. The highest type of sermon we believe to be the extempore, yet we believe that as a class the manuscript preachers are better than their brethren. Where one man can make a first-class extempore preacher, ten can reach the same grade of the other style;[1] and the fact that the method which requires most thought and greatest care, is the very one that offers most temptation to native laziness, ought to make every one conscientiously watchful over himself while pursuing it. Moreover, all agree that much writing is essential to good extempore preaching. The finest specimens of this use the pen diligently. Bossuet is said to have been very unwilling to preach without such preparation, we are told that some of his sermons were written and rewritten with great care.[2] And if the extempore preacher must write, why not write sermons? And if sermons, why not the very sermons intended for the occasion? Disuse of the pen begets distaste, a distaste which if indulged strengthens into inveteracy; so that ordinarily a minister who does not write sermons will write nothing with any regularity.

We feel like uttering a *cave* to the modern craze after extemporaneous preaching. Under its influence many a man is striving *natura invita* to attain it, with fine promise of spoiling a good manuscript preacher to make a very poor off-hand talker. A recent writer goes so far as to advise all beginners to pursue it; to persist in it to the close of their ministry; despite discouragement and failure, in the face of criticism, objection, or advice from hearers; to continue it resolutely until they do succeed.[3]

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[1] "There are not above half a score of men in a century who can rise to the foremost places for usefulness and eminence through extempore speech." Taylor, "*Ministry of the Word*." p. 150.

[2] Broadus, "*History of Preaching*." See Brougham, quoted in Taylor, "*Ministry of the Word*," p. 121, foot note.

[3] Shedd, "*Homiletics*," 8th ed., pp. 240, *ff.* *Per contra*, Taylor, "*Ministry of the Word*," pp. 113, *ff.*

Such advice we consider unwise and such a course wrong. What right has any man to use a pulpit thus as a school for personal training and inflict on a protesting congregation the friction of getting rid of him or the endurance of a long series of awkward and painful failures as precedent to ultimate success?

When so much is said about reading sermons being no preaching, it is time to remember that some of the greatest preachers the world has ever seen have been readers, even close readers, of manuscript.

The best course to pursue, is to be master of all methods and slave to none. If in a matter in which so much depends on the tastes and gifts of the preacher, we may venture to recommend a method or express a preference, it would be that the pen be used in preparation; the sermons written with laborious painstaking care, and then the manuscript left behind in the study and without attempt to recall the language, the sermon delivered in the best language the preacher can command at the moment of delivery. If, however, after fair trial he is unable to do this, let hint take his manuscript with him and having familiarised himself perfectly with it, read it as freely as he can.

If he writes to read, let him be careful to write a *spoken* language; avoiding long or complicated sentences, sustained periods, parentheses, qualifying clauses,[1] etc; use short, sharp incisive sentences, familiar words, in familiar collocations, with familiar meaning. Borrow as far as possible the extempore method: write with the flow and deliver with the feeling and freedom of the extempore style. Whether extempore or written eschew the essay style: never allow a reader to get anxious as to the fate of a subject and predicate or the relationship between parenthesis and main sentence. And this gives opportunity to say some-

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[1] E.g., "These lectures of Dr. —— show that to the singular richness and force of mind which we have known so well he has now added in full measure what, to a nature so fraught and even overfraught with intellectual and spiritual wealth, could hardly come except at the suit of years, that final repose and poise which should give the fullest effect to the large wisdom of his teaching." *Andover Review*, Feb., 1885, p. 190.

Such a sentence as that, however forcible and clear to a *reader,* ought never to be inflicted on a *hearer.*

thing about style. The main thing to be avoided in pulpit style is a pulpit style. Sidney Smith calls the dignity of the pulpit a holy paralysis, and the dignity he criticised inheres in the style rather than in anything else. We protest against any definite fixed species as peculiar to preaching. It ought to be free, easy, natural, living. Many a man will discuss or argue in plain, forceful language in conversation, and then enter the pulpit and speak as in another tongue, presenting thus the same contrast that is so marked between Dr. Sam. Johnson in the club and in his writings.

The style is the dress of the thought, let it be becoming; here is the whole matter in a nutshell. As the thought varies, so let the style; the thought ought to take its character from the text, the style from the thought and so the style will be greatly influenced by the text. A sermon on "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" ought to be very different in style from one on "Cast thy burden on the Lord."

No minister, then, ought to fall into any set, stereotyped style; let it rather be flexible, varying according to the character of the subject discussed.

We spoke some pages back of "laborious writing," but beware of *epicurism* of style. There is such a thing as becoming martyr to the tyranny of a fastidious taste; a refining and polishing; until like the painter in the familiar illustration, the one touch too many spoils the picture. A brother once told the writer that his rule was to write his sermons over every word twice carefully, and he was an extraordinarily fine—writer! A more extraordinary thing, however, was, how he found time to coddle this weakness.

Some men become the slaves of their own language. As a musician dreams over the keys of an instrniuent, absorbed in the reverie that breathes through its chords, so some writers are mastered by the magic of their fancy and revel in a scene conjured by the mystic *open sesame* of a painter's pen; they lay the colors on the page with all the patience and labor and love and self-abandonment of an artist. Such writing is worth the effort; it serves its purpose in the world, and a right noble one, too, *but*

that purpose is not preaching. Baxter's description of his style meets our ideal better; he spoke "pertinently, plainly, piercingly, and somewhat properly."

Study to use Bunyan's "picked and packed" words. Pith, plainness, directness, and force, are the main elements; and let it be the language of living men, not the dead dialect of past ages or of books. Bear always in mind that it is to be spoken and heard, not read and studied. There is a great difference; this difference explains a mystery often noticed, and which puzzles some, viz., that the sermons of some of the finest preachers do not read well. Discourses listened to with delight by thousands seem insufferably dull in print, and set us to wondering how the hearers could be so enthusiastic in their praise. Ordinarily the better a sermon reads, the worse it speaks; and the better it speaks, the worse it reads. The written and the spoken language are almost two different dialects; with the very dipping of the pen into ink the ideas don court dress, the sentences expand into stateliness, the idiom changes. To check this tendency it is necessary to bear in mind that *in sermon-writing the pen is only a substitute for the tongue*—the manuscript sermon is the tongue "shooting from a rest"—a very incongruous metaphor, but gunners will understand our meaning. Let the *load* be exactly the same as if "shot off-hand."

The dapper dandy, the exquisite, is not often an athlete; so when beauty is very prominent, people are prone to suspect absence of strength. Therefore, beware of having too much rhetoric ruffling on the garment of your thought. Never allow the dress of your discourse to suggest the elaborately adorned figures seen in front of millinery and tailoring establishments; see to it always that there be a living, palpitating body and soul underneath fully worthy of the fine array. Then beauty will be a power not to be despised. But beauty is very simple, *e.g.*:

"I know thou hast gone to the home of the blest,
Then why should my soul be so sad?
I know thou hast gone where the weary do rest
And the mourner looks up and is glad!
Where love has put off in the land of its birth
The stains it had gathered in this,

And Hope, the sweet singer that gladdened the earth,
Lies asleep on the bosom of bliss."

Almost every word in that stanza, taken separately, is plain even to homeliness, and yet into what beauty they are blended!

Discourse is often likened to a river: it may flow through the sublimity of ruggedness naked and bare, or the beauty of meadow star-eyed with daisies; it may reflect the blue sky, the emerald tint of bank and hue of flowers, all without impeding its flow or lessening its strength. So, with the flow of your thought; be it bordered by beauty if you will, but never let its current be hindered by the foliage on its banks. Or to change the figure: weave as many golden threads into the warp and woof of your discourse as you please, provided only there be solid *wear* in them.[1]

One of the latest works[2] gives the following guide to a course of reading: Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Des Cartes, Leibnitz, Lord Bacon, Locke, Kant, Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Bernard, Calvin, Turrettin, Owen, Howe, Baxter, Edwards!

An admirable course for a man whose ambition is to make a profound theologian, an exhaustive scholar, a classic writer, a learned professor; but the *preacher* to the common crowd of living, struggling, sinning, suffering, commonplace men and women around him needs little from this list of departed worthies, giants though they undoubtedly were. The more his thought and style are modelled on theirs, the worse for his purpose. Let him study English,[3] especially the vernacular in the Bible, Bunyan, Shakespeare. For a man who aspires to be a finished writer there is no substitute for the classics, if he is thoroughly qualified to appreciate and improve their advantages; but in the majority of instances we are fully persuaded that the time and labor spent in torturing even the most stammering articulateness out of their silence will yield better return if invested in our mother tongue. We are not surprised that the classic models in literature should

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[1] See "*Macaulay*" (J. Cotter Morison), pp. 46 *ff*. [2] "*Homiletics*" (Shedd), 8th ed.

[3] Hoppin has some excellent observations on this. *Homiletics,* pp. 592, *ff*.

be above the appreciation of the average reader, and yet we strain every nerve to make our Sabbath sermons as much like these models as possible, and feel surprised that they fail to draw and hold these very people! Is not this true?.

We close our criticism by mentioning some of the elements we consider desirable in all preaching and essential to any decided degree of excellence.

(1) *Variety*.

This is a matter to which the text-books generally give little heed. Few of them emphasise it particularly, and yet it is of prime importance. There is every liabilty to monotony in the preacher's work. Substantially the same theme is presented to the same audience with far greater frequency than taxes the versatility of any other speaker. Therefore great care is needed to avoid monotony.

Freshness is force. This is the distinguishing characteristic of Talmage's preaching, the source of his power, the secret of his attractiveness as a mere speaker; by it he has been able to hold an audience of thousands continuously to the same pulpit. His ideas are as old as the hills, his way of putting them is as fresh as the morning dew on those hills. The same is true, to a more limited extent, of Spurgeon's power. Such men re-mint the oldest ideas into a newness which gives them unwonted force; trite truths become fresh and living on their lips.

We have already mentioned the variety with which we are presented in the Scriptures. Let the preaching partake of this variety. Beecher goes so far as to advise against preaching two sermons alike if you can help it.[1] Chrysostom says: "The table of the gospel feast should be covered with various dishes, and the banquet should be like the divine generosity of the Giver."[2]

Study to have variety. One of the surest ways to secure this is to let the sermon grow out of the text, making the introduction, development, and treatment accord with the surroundings of the text as found in the Bible. There is an individuality con-

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[1] "*Yale Lects*.," Vol. 1, p. 27. [2] "*Homiletics*" (Hoppin), p. 98.

See also, some forcible remarks in Phelps, "*English Style in Public Discourse*," pp. 307-314.

nected with every text. Respect it strictly and let it determine the character, the style, the plan of the discourse. Let the sermon, like the chameleon, take its color from what it lies on. The discourse ought not only to grow, but grow *naturally*, out of the text. Do not imitate the Dutch gardeners who torture nature into mathematical figures by square and compass. Vary in theme, vary in style, vary in plan; let doctrinal and practical, topical and expository, argumentative and narrative, historical and biographical, logical and hortatory, all have their proper share in turn.

Keep out of ruts. No road is good if travelled continuously enough to wear it into ruts. This very thing makes a road bad, however good it may have been before. No one wishes even his favorite dish at *every* meal.

Among aids to monotony in the pulpit may be mentioned—

(1) *Preaching a series or system*.

An effective series is the most effective of all preaching. But only about one man in fifty can preach a series effectively. Be sure you are that one before you make it a custom. The little girl's criticism of a sermon she heard will apply to most series "It had a good beginning and a mighty good ending, but it had too much middle."

People are restive under a series. The very idea is scary. The gift of continuousness is not an attractive one. Watch the pews; you will be fortunate if you do not discover about the ninth sermon in the course that your series affords more relief to the ushers than interest to the congregation. The same is true, to some extent, of preaching pre-arranged system, like a course on the Catechism or Confession, or continuous exposition of some book in the Bible. These are all blood-relatives of the series family, and people will be quick to imagine a family likeness.

(2) *Preaching for personal culture.*

This is not what the minister himself would call it. He would give it some less objectionable name; but the thing is the same. The man desires to make a first-rate preacher, to grow symmetrically into comprehensive excellence in his work; and so he

preaches in the line of his own development; not what he thinks he preaches best, but what he fears he preaches worst. This class of sermons, whatever may be their character, he practises with frequency proportionate to his sense of need or deficiency.

(3) *Preaching along the line of current work in the study*.

Whatever happens to engage his attention in his study determines the tone of his Sabbath sermons.

If he is reading a course of Church History, his preaching will have a historical cast; if theological study occupies him, then his sermons will have a far-away resemblance to a course in divinity; the critical study of some book in the Bible may be suspected from the drift of his preaching while pursuing it; a review of psychology will be reflected in the metaphysical character of his discourses; in a word, whatever he is studying leaves unmistakable impress upon his preaching.

This is blending "general study" with "special preparation" and making one do the work of both. It is a mistake; the two ought to be kept separate. Divide the time. Broadus says give one-third to general study; Shedd, two fifths. We think that a man who will cultivate the homiletic instinct and keep his mind alert and open, *and a note book handy for suggestions when they occur*, may afford to give half his time to general study. But however the apportionment be settled, keep the two currents distinct at any, at all, cost. If one must control the other, then let the special preparation give direction to the general study.

(4) *Preaching according to one's own taste*.

"It takes many people to make a world," and the congregation is a little world. Remember that you are not preaching to yourself, and *avoid hobbies in the pulpit as you would sin*. There is a great variety of tastes before you, and in it you will probably find fewer counterparts of your palate than of any other kind; a sermon that most pleases you will perhaps please the fewest in the congregation. There are possibly a half-dozen who will greatly enjoy an abstract, metaphysical presentation of some deep doctrine; a dozen who will appreciate heartily a well articulated, strong, logical development of some theological system; a hundred who will listen with delight to a narrative or biographi-

cal sermon; and then there are others who crave rhetorical beauty, who revel in the gorgeous and the glowing, and grow warm under the hortatory. Do not disdain any level of your people's needs; be a wise and faithful householder, and give each his portion of food in due season, even though *his* food may be very weak diet to the stronger stomach of your sense.

(5) *Preaching according to some judgment, perhaps fanciful, of one's peculiar gifts*.

One imagines his gift is for theological preaching and his people have a surfeit of sermons on such topics as free-will and free-agency, election, reprobation, God's sovereignty, the Trinity, the divine attributes, etc., etc.

We remember seeing in the daily papers for a season, a regular announcement of the topics of a certain minister's discourses; they were almost invariably of a theological character and generally of a decided metaphysical cast. We were not greatly surprised at learning that they were profoundly admired—but thinly attended.

Another seems to think he is a divinely ordained polemic. His natural attitude is "squared for a fight," fists closed, he approaches every subject aggressively and is so faithful "to declare the whole counsel of God," that members of sister Churches have a wholesome dread of his ministry.

A third fancies his forte lies in illustrations: he prepares his sermons with his scissors and preaches like a scrap-book; has little slips of newspaper in the pulpit Bible, and may be seen arranging and re-arranging them like assorted cards.

Another considers himself a "biblical preacher;" the body of his sermon consists of scripture quotation, and his discourses are pocket editions of *Hitchcock's Analysis*. He cannot announce any point, however universally admitted, without citing from three to five texts to prove it; and he sets people to wondering how long a concordance lasts him. We heard it said of one of these "biblical" preachers, that though his hearers heard large quantities of Scripture quoted, yet they might listen to him for years without having any clearer understanding of a single passage. This type of preacher reminds us of the wicked boy who holds bread in a teasing way just above his dog's nose.

All of these things are valuable aids to monotony and, taken in connexion with the character of the preacher's work, may be safely depended upon, if indulged in, to produce it.

2. A second very desirable element in preaching is *simplicity, clearness, perspicuity*.

The first requisite of any teaching is that it be understood; and a sermon ought to be *easily* understood. Remember that preaching, like partridges, must be "taken on the wing." Anything, therefore, that interferes with immediate apprehension is a serious vice in public discourse. Paul says, "We use great plainness;" every successor of Paul ought to be willing to stoop, or able to rise, to *great* plainness. It is difficult to be too plain, easy to be obscure; obscurity is sometimes cover for laziness of thought. Cut the underbrush thoroughly out of the track you wish the hearer to follow; make the way straight, cast up a highway so plain that "the wayfaring men though fools shall not err therein;" let your hearers follow you without conscious effort.

The enemy to simplicity, clearness, and perspicuity is hydra-headed.

(1) *There is solidity of matter*.

Many years ago the writer had occasion to take a dose of spirits of camphor and tiptoed around the room for some seconds afterwards reaching up after breath. It was good strong camphor, and for that very reason took away the breath. Many subjects need to be *diluted* for the general hearer. We do not refer here to hard words but deep ideas. There is a minister we have often heard, decidedly the most interesting preacher of all our acquaintance, but after listening to him for three quarters of an hour we are as wearied as if we had been in intensest study all the time; and yet he rarely uses a word that would puzzle a schoolboy. Such a preacher would steadily empty the pews of any ordinary congregation. These massive sermons remind us of the description of a plow exhibited in the Vienna World's Fair of 1873, and bought by the Grand-Duke Albrecht of Austria; plow-carriage twenty-one feet long, engine fifteen feet, whole in motion forty-six feet, weight of engine six tons, price of the plow $25,000.00! A great agricultural irnplement doubtless, a tri-

umph of mechanical skill and inventive ingenuity, but only suited to the Grand-Duke species of farmer.

We give a specimen brief[1] of one of these somewhat too massive solid sermons:

JOHN i. l3. "Which were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh," etc.

Introduct.—Christ's reception when corning on such a mission is astounding, vs. 10, 11. Solution is man's carnality. Preface to John's Gospel (1-18) asserts Christ's mission and nature as God, rnan, Creator, Redeemer. But the race at large (v. 10), and his own people (v. 11), reject him.

Exposit.—Yet his gift was ἐξουσία (expound). Still the mission was not futile, John vi. 31; they whom God quickens do receive him, or believe on him (same act). And even these, not ἐξ αἱμάτων. Jews rely on line: nor (*b*) ἐκ θελήματος σαρκός, free will; nor (*c*) ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρός, moral suasion; but (*d*) by regeneration, John iii. 5; Eph. i. 19. Regeneration not merely change of religious purpose, but revolution of fundamental principles.

Preposit.—Believers are regenerated by the immediate power of God.

Argument by the process of exclusion

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[1] The writer's class-mates will at once recognise Goliath's spear in this weapon.

We will justify to the reader our use of it in such connexion, by recalling an incident to the memory of the class. When X.'s turn came to officiate in the chapel-clinic, he selected this very brief (which was one of the Homiletic Professor's models put on the blackboard for the class) and preached *it*. After X. had preached it, the class were of course *qui vive* to hear the criticisms of the Faculty. The Professor of Homiletics was in the chair that week, and of course would be the last to give his criticism. As soon as we had gathered to the front, he called on the professors for criticism. The first two had little to say: the third, in blissful ignorance of the fact that it was his colleagues brief, said in that soft way of his:

"Bro. X.'s sermon recalls an anecdote of Dr. A. of Princeton, who, hearing a young man preach asked him if he ever intended to preach again. The young man, much surprised, asked why he should ask such a question. Oh!, said the Dr., I thought you had put all you knew in that sermon.

Bro. X. has preached to-night everything he has learned since he's been in the Seminary."

And then came the turn of the author of the unfortunate brief: he gave his beard that familiar twitch with his right hand and said simply,

"I have nothing further to add."

Argt.—i. *The new nature not by lineage.*

(1) The whole race by nature corrupt, Gen. v. 3; Job xlv. 4; Ezek. xvi. 3–5 ; John iii. 6.

(2) The church covenant with Abraham bound to faith in order to adoption, Rom. ii. 2:i; ix. 32.

(3) Hence unbelieving Jews not, but believing Gentiles, included, Matt. iii. 9; John viii. 33, 34; Rom. ii. 28.

ii. *Nor by power of free will*.

(1) All are radically and totally alienated from God. Proved, (*a*) by experience; (*b*) by Scripture (as above). Man is a free-agent? Yes; but self-will the regular law of his free-agency; for—

(2) The Scripture represents him as *blind*, Isa. xiii. 15; *bound*, Acts viii. 33; *dead,* Eph. ii. 1. The change is: illumination, Ps. cxix. 18; loosing, John viii. 36; quickening, Eph. ii. 5; birth, John iii. 5; re-creation, Eph. ii: 10.

iii. *Nor by human suasion*.

For,

(1) Man's moral influence is scanty.

(2) His inducements tell oppositely when grace comes.

(3) Sinner's disposition to decide *a priori* whether a given object be an inducement or the contrary.

Hence the only remaining inference is:

iv. *It is of God*.

Conclus.—Behold now thy dependence! Do not vex the Spirit of God.

(2) *A second foe to clearness is quantity of matter*.

A sermon that exhausts a subject will exhaust a congregation too. French poulterers in fattening fowls feed them all they will eat, and then cram the feed into their craws by force. In feeding the word, regard the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread;" do not try to feed too much at a time. Studious thoughtful men are far more likely to put too much than too little in a sermon. We generally begin with the effort to say everything that has any particular point or connexion with the subject, and with the effect often of saying much that has neither; at first we try to say all that can be pertinently said, practice teaches us the rather to say nothing that can be left out. As successful preachers get older and gain experience, they abridge and simplify. They learn to choose fewer points and develop them more thoroughly; to seize only the salient sides, the strategic points of a subject; limiting themselves to two or three prominent ideas they expend all their strength to drive *them* home; making the

charge more and more like a bullet, less and less like a load of shot. Dr. Candlish's advice to a young preacher was: "Less meat and more cooking. It is much better for a hearer to carry away three points clearly fixed, or two, or even one, than a whole mass in confusion.

3. *Another, and a fatal, foe to simplicity is too much division*.

We believe in making, and in announcing, heads; it aids the hearer to follow the progress of the discussion and helps him to recall the train of thought afterwards. But it has been well said, Divide, but don't pulverise.

Frederick W. Robertson's arrangement is admirable and will repay study. He generally breaks the subject into two major divisions with about three minor under each. When the sermon is thus divided, his number of subdivisions will not be found too many; but we would rarely give a hearer as many as six points in succession, four are better than six, and three than four.

Some of the old Puritan discourses are amusing in their multitude of divisions; but what will be thought of a modern sermon of which the following is a diagram.[1]

1. (1) (2) (3) (4)—2. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)—3—4—5.

i.	l. a. b. c.	2. a. b. c.	3. a. b. c. d. e.	4. a. b. c.
ii.	1. a. b. c. d.	2. a. b.	3. a. b. c. d.	4. a. b. c. d.
iii.	l	2.	3. a. b. c. d. c.	4. a. b. c. 5.
iv.	1. a.	2.	3. a. b. c. d.	4.
v.	1.	2.	3.	4.

1. (1) (2) a. b. c. d. (3) 2. a. b. e. 3. a. b. c. d. e. 4. a. b. c. 5. a. b. c. d.

And we have another[2] with *five* main divisions and *nineteen* subdivisions; the former appearing as a brief, the latter as a sermon in full; both published in homiletic magazines, the two leadiug monthlies in the United States; the first specimen from a president of a Northern university, the second from a D.D., LL.D., connected with a Southern university! What clear impression could an ordimary hearer carry away from such discourses as these?

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[1] Homiletic Monthly, Nov. 1884, p. 799.
[2] Pulpit Treasury, Dec., 1884, p. 468.

Another very common hindrance to clearness and simplicity is (4) *Technical terminology.*

Words very familiar to the preacher are often strange to the congregation. Terms he meets with incessantly in his reading they possibly never hear except from his lips; *e.,g.*, subjective and objective, syllogism, premise, and conclusion; the commonplaces of theology, like "vicarious sacrifice," "economy of grace"; many a hearer would understand by the latter some method of saving expenses in salvation, avoiding all waste of grace. Moreover, words very familiar to the ear are often foreign to the understanding. Sin, righteousness, holiness, grace, works, faith, justification, adoption, sanctification, atonement, substitution, etc., etc., are all very current coin; but the image and superscription are worn off; they jingle familiarly, but the receiver is oftentimes very ignorant of their exact value. Each one represents a technical concept, is somewhat like an algebraic sign, and the minister so uses it in his sermons; it is a thoroughly known quantity to *him*, but it is often the algebraic *x* to many hearers. It is well sometimes to translate this phraseology into common speech, into the terms of every-day talk.

3. *Discourse is greatly helped by movement, dash, climax.* Cicero asks, *Quid aliud est eloquentia, nisi motus animæ continuus?*[1]

We are inclined to the opinion that lack of movement is one of the most common defects in preaching. Much of effect depends upon the mere arrangement of thought.

Sometimes a sermon may be rendered a great deal more forcible by a slight change in the order of the points. It may be studied long and patiently, and then lose one-half of its proper power for the lack of only a few moments spent in revising and perfecting its arrangement. Many preachers stop just short of this; not from any inability, not from sloth, but from mere inadvertence. After having labored firithfully and successfully over the matter of the sermon, it does not occur to them to ask, Have I this train of thought arranged in the most effective order?

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[1] *Dabney*, p. 121. See *Vinet*, pp. 287, *ff*., N.Y., 1854.

There ought always to be movement and progress, climax if possible. If an argument, make it cumulative; if expository, let it grow in vividness towards the close; *never let the sermon come to a* "*lingering death*."

Be careful of digression. A great and common danger of digression lurks in the temptation to elaborate a beautiful illustration; such often defeats its ostensible purpose, and the hearers, instead of looking at the truth, have their attention diverted to admire the beauty of the lamp whose proper office is the humble one of lighting their way.

Curiosity led us once to time a brother addicted to this failing, and he spent *ten minutes* elaborating one illustration; it was a gorgeous lamp, a sort of electric cluster of thousand-candle power, but we fear its brilliancy and beauty dazzled the hearers into blindness to the point it was intended to illustrate.

Remember that any and all digression that does not debouch into the main current with increased volume is serious loss; *and the more interesting and striking the digression, the worse its effect*. Preserve movement in discourse; progress from point to point accelerated and exhilarating alike to speaker and hearer; an hour in an ox-cart seems as long as a day in a palace-car; ten minutes on a siding waiting for a train to pass is as long as hours of travel. Keep on the main track in your sermon and avoid "switches." In order to this, grouping is as important as grasping. Dr. Dabney gives a very useful illustration of this process.[1]

4. The last essential we mention is the most important, viz., *point, impact, penetration*.

There is a type of sermon, none too rare, of which the only fault is that it has no effect. It would be exceedingly difficult to state just what the defect is. It is faithful to text; in matter excellent and abundant; well developed, admirably proportioned, well arranged, of excellent style; the only defect, and the fatal

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[1] *Rhetoric*, p. 226, foot note. AIso the whole of Lect. VIIL., pp. 121-136. Consult also Broadus, "*Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*," p. 206; Taylor, "*Ministry of the Word*," pp. 121, ff.; Phelps, "*Theory of Preaching*," pp. 416, *ff*.

defect, is that it fails utterly. The preacher has great powers of expression, apparently none of impression; he builds the fort elaborately, carefully, thoroughly, but he does no execution from its walls; it is a fine bow, well drawn, but the arrow falls short of the mark. Some of the best sermonisers prove the poorest preachers. This sounds paradoxical, but it is true. Why is it?

The reason may be obscure. Of course, if any of the elements we have mentioned be missing, that defect may be partly cause. One reason why many a sermon, as a performance superior to criticism, is utterly ineffective, is simply because it *is* a performance, however masterly and perfect; indeed, so perfect as to have become an end instead of a means, so masterly as to have become its author's master.

This is a danger to which any ministry is liable that emphasises, as much as Presbyterians do, the standard of the pulpit. The drift is to make the sermon the master of the man; the preacher, the people, the occasion, everything, exists for the sermon. It then degenerates into a mere performance; the preacher is absorbed in the preparation of the sermon as a work of art, and his main aspiration is to grow in sermon-making; to raise his standard higher and higher, and approximate more and more his ideal of a thorough, able, exhaustive, intellectual, original, finished—what? Why a sermon-machine, with all the latest and most extensive improvements and fixtures; this is his ideal of a preacher, an ideal that has been the unconscious effect of years of training, culture, and criticism; this is the aspiration that a thousand influences, in themselves pure and often sacred, have steadily and unguardedly drilled into it him; under its sway he loses sight—unintentionally, even unconsciously—of the congregation except as a means of practice; his pulpit becomes his intellectual gymnasium; he is so absorbed in the sowing of the seed that he forgets the harvest, and sows for the sake of sowing.

Of course, preaching so dedicated to, and dominated by, art, however innocently or unconsciously, will not prove regularly fruitful. There must be, first of all, the purpose, the desire, the expectation, to penetrate.

The lamp that does not give light is a failure, however ornate

and handsome it be; the physic that does not cure is worthless, whatever the expense or magnificence of its manufacture; the doctor that does not heal is useless; he may have drugs complete, instruments most marvellous, every means and appliance of most improved pattern, but if he cures no patient, *cui bono*? So with the preacher: however able, scholarly, brilliant he is; if his sermons do not produce fruit, he is but an able, scholarly, brilliant failure. The first requisite for point, impact, penetration, is that the minister *feel this fact*. He ought, in the preparation of every discourse, to be as fully possessed with the *object* as the subject, and to ask himself in each instance, What am I aiming at in this sermon? What specific, direct, immediate effect am I striving to produce upon the men and women and children to whom I shall deliver this message? In order to this, he must individualise and make his hearers feel that they are personally, individually addressed.

Beecher says: "Every man's heart is open at one door to the truth." Let him find that door and enter. A higher than Beecher says: He that winneth souls is wise.

Christ made his disciples fishers of men. Successful fishermen often *stand in the stream* and fish. This is one need of the pulpit to-day, and the failure to do it accounts often for lack of penetration in sermons. Some ministers know more about the persecutions under Diocletian than the trials of living Christians, aml are better armed against Gnosticism than against the inconsistencies and errors of their own congregation. Preachers need to stand in the stream. Live not too much in dead men's thoughts; let those of the living share your attention and care. Keep your feet firm on the facts of human nature and experience around you, and address your ministrations to the needs and the sins, the wants and the woes, of your hearers. This is a striking characteristic of the preaching of the celebrated Phillips Brooks;[1] his hearers must be helped, strengthened, encouraged, comforted, inspired by his sermons.

However careful you are in the preparation of your discourses,

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1 "*The Candle of the Lord and Other Sermons,*" N.Y., 1881; "*Sermons*," N.Y., 1882.

never allow a hearer an occasion for suspecting that you think more about the sermon than the soul. The preacher must "mean business." He ought to be genuinely and thoroughly in earnest. Melanchthon said Luther's words were born not on his lips, but in his soul. Another old Reformer was described as being *vividus vultus, vividi oculi, vividæ manus, denique omnia vivida*. The pulpit, as has been said, ought to be charged with electricity without insulation.

Remember the inspired description of the word: a *sword, sharp, two-edged, piercing*.

Much preaching is like the flourish of fence; the weapon is fine, it is handled with dexterity and grace, but there is no *fight* in the performance.

The best thing to give point, impact, penetration to preaching is for the preacher to be filled with that longing that inspired Knox's famous prayer: "Lord, give me Scotland or I die."

Such are some of the elements of successful preaching. Our discussion ends here; but we cannot dismiss the subject without an effort to emphasise a vital truth, and yet one so trite that familiarity blunts the sensibility to its supreme importance. We have had much to say of the elements of efficient preaching. We wish, in closing, to remind the reader that, after all, preaching is a work in which no grade of talents nor degree of diligence can *command* success. Even when Paul preached, it was God who opened the heart to attend unto the things which were spoken of him.

We live in all age of intense external activity, of magnificent enterprise, of elaborate machinery; and the same features are reflected in our religion. Never was the Army of the Cross more efficiently officered, more perfectly armed and accoutred, more systematically drilled. Everything is conducted on a grand and growing scale. It is a day of palace churches; vast sums of money, and extensive schemes, for religions work; the perfection of red tape in ecclesiastical courts, church committees and causes, societies for congregational work; of richly endowed, ably manned, thoroughly equipped theological schools; of much emphasis laid on broad, deep, liberal culture. The push, the vim,

the ways and means of business, must be carried into religion and our Church kept "abreast of the times."

All this is well, if we guard constantly against the danger of depending too much upon these things for success. Just in proportion as a Church does this, such aids become hindrances, and her worldly good fortune may prove the lap of Delilah in which she sleeps to be shorn of her God-given strength. Religious work cannot be "run upon strictly business principles." The Spirit of God giveth the increase. This Spirit is personal, and he is sovereign. Only when loyally, humbly, and consciously dependent upon him, and him alone, for success, are we ever successful. Therefore it is that the pride of great gifts is so often rebuked by seeing "quintessential mediocrity" inherit the blessing. The "candlestick of the church," though of refined gold, has no light except as filled with the *unction* from on high. The beautiful symbol in the prophet's vision teaches our need of a perennial flow of this oil by placing a living olive tree on each side of the golden lamp-stand

"And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a lamp-stand all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps which are upon the top thereof:

"And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.

"So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord?

"Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord.

"Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zorubbabel, saying, NOT BY MIGHT, NOR BY POWER, BUT BY MY SPIRIT, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS."