

## CYPRIAN.

Furnished with a letter of introduction, I called one day at the house of a minister, whom I found just starting for a week day service. He glanced at my letter, smiled, held out his hand, and we were friends at once. As he could not wait, he begged me to accompany him to church. I readily agreed, and as we walked along, we conversed freely. Never did a companion please me better; simple, frank, full of intelligence and good humour, I could hardly realize he was a stranger, I seemed so fully to understand him. While admiring his flow of words, the easy modulations of his voice, his natural and animated looks, and above all his clear and correct sentiments, I congratulated myself on my unexpected good fortune in accompanying him to church. We arrived; he went into the vestry. I took my seat in a pew; after waiting for a quarter of an hour, I saw a black mass slowly moving up the pulpit steps; I distinguished a voluminous black

gown, surmounted with white bands. The bands bent over the desk, and the gown sat down. Again some moments of expectation; and then the gown rose and from above the bands issued a sonorous and majestic voice; the articulations, distinct and slow, seemed destined to beat seconds; just sixty a minute, neither more nor less. I concluded the eagle was stooping preparatory to a soaring flight; but I was soon convinced, to my sorrow, that I had no eagle before me, but a pendulum. Getting over the manner as well as I could, I waited for thoughts which should arouse reflection. Still I have to wait. My ear caught only the sound of hard and uncommon words, which suggested immediate reference to a dictionary. The sermon was evidently too deep for me, so after vain attempts to discover in it a meaning or an object, my eyes, which had hitherto been fixed on the preacher, wandered to the congregation; some were asleep, more, inattentive. I saw I was not the only one who did not understand, and I the more readily resigned myself to my own reflections. Suddenly a luminous idea flashed across me. Probably the preacher was not the friendly minister who had pleased me so much. My short sightedness prevented my being quite certain of this, but the slowness of his utterance, the forced

swell of his voice, and the positive lack of thought in the discourse, forbade my identifying the two. Considerably re-assured, I whispered to my neighbour; “What is the name of the preacher?”

“Cyprian.”

“Does he always preach in that style?”

“Always.”

“Never otherwise?”

“Never.”

Then I recollected that I had once heard the name of the minister, as that of one remarkable for his sustained dignity of manner in the pulpit!

And is it possible, I murmured to myself, that conventional rules, enforced examples, and lessons in rhetoric can so ruin a speaker! Why, if this man had spent in the study of human nature, as many hours as he has passed in the class room, he would have doubled the natural powers which are now all but useless. If he would be satisfied not to attempt the imitation of great orators, not to trouble himself about his own dignity or that of the pulpit; if he would only be himself as I saw him half an hour ago, he would be a delightful and effective preacher.

Poor dear Cyprian! how you are to be pitied! Your artistical pretensions spoil nature, weary

your hearers, and give them an involuntary distaste to sacred things. And what do you gain? You seek to gain credit for your dignity, and admiration for your voice, but you lose souls! Oh, if we could forget our formalist teachers, if we could recover our unsophisticated nature, what gainers should we be!

At least our audience would find us in earnest, and our earnestness would win confidence and sympathy. Our hearers might no longer admire our graceful attitudes, but they would be unconsciously attracted by an appearance of sincerity; they might not remark the modulations of the voice, but the inflections of feeling would reach their hearts. Following our subject, they would become warm with us, and receive the impression we wish; whereas declaiming before a congregation, is like beating cold iron—, worse than useless.

I am quite ready to admit that the externals of preaching — and by that I mean voice, movement and general manners — exercise a powerful influence on the congregation, and this influence is sometimes felt, when the discourse itself is extremely poor. I might even say, that were the discourse altogether valueless, a certain style of delivery would be sufficient to make it attractive.

May I more fully explain myself? I think that voice, animation, and dignity can of themselves move an audience, supposing even that those appealed to, do not fully comprehend the discourse; but then the outward action must be the faithful exponent of the inner feeling, and that feeling must be true piety. Method and logic may possibly be dispensed with in the pulpit, but vital, fervent piety is essential. There may be a lack of thoughts addressed to the mind, or sentiments to the heart, but then there must be, so to speak, a visible and audible manifestation of what is passing in the living soul of the preacher.

The heart now is touched, not by direct appeals, but by what may be called christian harmony; the hearer instinctively reflects the emotion of the speaker, and though the effect produced cannot be said to be owing to the words of the discourse, still the result is good.

But in speaking of this influence of man on man, I find myself on the verge of a precipice : let us glance down it a moment.

If the music of the human voice can thus attract and fascinate, we are exposed to fatal seduction when that wonderful organ is employed in the service of error; it is undoubted that a mistaken speaker may yet be thoroughly sincere, and if he

has not the accent of truth, he has, at least, that of honest conviction. Indeed in one sense this accent is true, because it proceeds from a true sentiment. Now the recognised power of, what I may be permitted to call, the music of oratory, does not necessarily belong to truth, but to sincerity. A hearer may then be misled by the perverted use of a means of persuasion bestowed by God himself.

More might be said; for this effect may be produced not only by a mistaken, but by a false speaker. The better feelings of our nature may, in some cases, not be developed into action; but the germ remains none the less deep in the heart, and seems at times suddenly to start into life, and to make us, for the moment, the moral being who is represented. While this lasts, our emotion is true, our tone is true; we think and feel thus, and our voice, influenced by this passing state, conveys an assurance of sincerity which carries our hearers along with us.

This is alarming enough for those who seek to discern truth; but even this is not all. One more step, and the depth is sounded.

While we are thus drawing from the secret treasure-house within, sentiments true in themselves, false as expressing our habitual state, our

shafts reach their mark; our hearers mourn and rejoice, feel and believe, with us; we persuade them of truth of which we are not persuaded ourselves, or, at best, of truth which our soul reflects for the moment, but reflects as a passing image, not as the impression of our whole life.

I conclude, and sum up thus :

Piety without talent,  
Conviction without truth,  
Truth without conviction,

May one and all produce conviction :

In the first case — piety without talent — the evil is not great; true, the impression is vague and brief, but it is in the right direction. It is based in truth and that must suffice.

In the second case — conviction without truth — a thing good in itself, is made to convey evil. God has given to the instrument destined to transmit thought, a power which may be abused. There is undoubtedly great danger in this; but it is the exception, not the rule; for truth clothed in persuasive accents will prevail over error similarly presented: We may remark too, that error in such matters is almost always the fruit of passion, whether in speaker or hearer; if then we suffer from its ready access, we must look within for the cause,

and not question the wisdom of the creator. If we had been so constituted as necessarily to reject error however plausibly advocated, we should be no longer free agents, therefore no longer responsible, the whole moral economy of man would be reversed.

And in the last case — that of truth without or with only a passing conviction — the preacher, even while eloquently persuading others, exposes his own inconsistency. His hypocrisy will entail a fearful punishment hereafter, as far as he is concerned, but his congregation do not suffer by believing his statements.

A minister without a full knowledge and belief of the truth, had far better keep silence and seek to enlighten his own mind; he can effect no good in this state; for the absence of conviction is doubt, and doubt can produce nothing. If, uncertain ourselves, we preach to others, we make a trade of preaching; worse than that, we lie to God, to man, to our own conscience; we dig a grave, into which must descend one after another every moral perception, till nothing survive to us here but our lower nature, and nothing await us beyond, but eternal condemnation!

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