

LORENZO.

Eusebius colleague Lorenzo, adopts quite another style of preaching; with him, both substance and form are extempore. Yet not exactly that either. The fact is he is happy in considering as his own a limited number of ideas, and these ideas are cast into a few moulds, in one or other of which his sermon is sure to appear. When then he says he extemporizes, he only means that he does not study, and that his three or four ideas are disposed alternately in three or four different ways. Last Sunday it was A, B, C; to day it is C, B, A; and next Sunday it will be B, C, A. As six different arrangements can be made with three letters, his sermons have a certain measure of variety.

The form of the discourse is treated in the same way as the substance. Lorenzo runs his scanty stock of ideas into a different mould, and imagines he has made a new sermon. Let any subject

whatsoever be given, and it is sure to be laid on the bed of Procruste. An indefatigable algebraist, he his always eliminating unknown quantities to bring you inevitably to the conclusion that A is equal to B.

Submit the world to his analysis, and quadrupling the chemical skill of Aristotle, he will resolve all into one element. His hearers characterize his preaching very simply and emphatically as “always the same thing,” and are more wearied than profited by his discourses.

But what are the three or four ideas which appear and re-appear in four or five shapes? It is impossible to say, for Lorenzos are numerous; and though there is a general family resemblance between them, each has features which the others have not. As a rule, they affect orthodoxy but how little do they appreciate it! They profess a sovereign contempt for all that is external, and thus have a good pretext for not changing the clothing of their sermons. As to the body of the discourse they never vary that, satisfied with the supposition that they preach the gospel. Oh how that holy word is made to cover ignorance and sloth! A zealous minister once said, “I determined to know nothing but Jesus-Christ, and Him crucified,” and indolent followers assume this profession of princi-

ple as equally suitable to them. How sad it is to see this done by those who call themselves evangelical, and who cloak their want of earnestness with the paradox, "my most feeble sermons have been the most blessed." It is not true, Lorenzo; the sermons which have been most blessed are those in which you were humble, not feeble; those in which you expected least from yourself, not those which were the least prepared. These are very different things. When a christian mistrusts himself, he has recourse to prayer, and prayer kindles energy. The more a workman feels his want of skill, the more carefully watchful will he be in the performance of his task. Were it distrust of himself and confidence in God which induced Lorenzo to omit preparation, he would pass on his knees the hours which others give to study. But no; he neither meditates nor prays. He trusts to some passing emotion, or to the influence of a large audience. Yes, a large audience; how often is inspiration found in this! Some, who are cold and lifeless with a few hearers, kindle into ardour before a crowd. The presence of a stranger is felt as a spur, an appearance of emotion acts as a stimulus, so entirely is this inspiration of earth, not of heaven.

I know that the essence of the gospel may be expressed in very few words; it inculcates chiefly

the corruption of man, redemption by Christ, sanctification by the Spirit. But I know too, that the Bible, which also preaches the Gospel and nothing but the gospel, is nevertheless an extensive and varied book. If the preaching of Lorenzo reflected anything of this variety, there would be no cause of complaint. In the Bible we find history, legislation, prophecy, poetry, allegory, profound expositions of doctrine, familiar, friendly letters, thoughts on past and future ages time and eternity, heaven and hell, God, angels, men! Religious subjects exceed all others not only in importance, but in extent. There is not a science, an art, a thought, a feeling, which is not in some way connected with religion, and yet we hear complaints of the narrow circle of evangelical ideas! Let us rather say Lorenzo, (for I accuse myself with you), that it is we who have narrowed the circle to the measure of our own slight knowledge. If instead of diminishing the radii till the circumference was within easy reach of our own hand, we had left its noble proportions untouched, and earnestly endeavoured to expand our own powers of apprehension, our preaching, be assured would oftener resemble the soaring flight of the eagle in the sky than the dull round of the drudging mill-horse.

I do not mean to assert that a preacher should be acquainted with all the sciences, though were this possible, it would be all the better for him; but I do say emphatically that if such ministers as Lorenzo deeply searched merely the Scriptures and their own hearts they would find treasures whose existence they do not now dream of.

The Bible is a mine, and must be worked as such. We must strive to penetrate into the divine thought, and bring to light the precious truths not lying on the surface; studying deeply rather than widely; attentively considering text and context in all their bearings, so as to discover what cannot be seen at a glance. Such labour as this brings its own reward; the mind is cleared, the heart warmed, and the freshness both of substance and form which is thus obtained, interests alike preacher and hearer. But Lorenzo will rather add ideas to Bible than derive them from it; his system is made, all he seeks in the Gospel is what a lawyer looks for in codes and authorities. He consults his concordance as an advocate does a list of cases. He forces references, as ingenious pleaders do precedents. He selects what he thinks useful, and rejects the rest. It is hardly needful to say that with him the useful portion is what coincides with his theories; every thing that is opposed to them he

omits. This substitution of the mind of Lorenzo for the mind of God, is the cause of his blank, unmeaning discourses. He devastates a world to adorn a garden plot; he has a little enclosure which he is proud to call his own, and the spoils of a universe are culled to embellish it. Well Lorenzo, I admit that your ideas are decidedly your own property; but your property is very small; it tires one going often over it. Your garden is in admirable order, but wearies from its monotony; a wild landscape broken by hill and dale is far preferable. Let us come out for a while, I beg of you. A walk beyond the precincts of your own domain will do you good. There we shall breathe freely, and that wide land moreover, if you come and see, you conquer. For in traversing and cultivating the rich field of Scripture, as yet virgin soil to you, it becomes our own; wonderful to say, we have but to till it to obtain possession. But you must look for what is really there, for what God has seen fit to plant, not for the two or three shrubs which have grown to such undue dimensions in the hot house of your brain.

The first step then in getting rid of monotony is to accept the ideas and forms of the Bible, and not to subject then to the ideas and forms of your own mind. This system, — but too common — is not

only a sign of idleness, but of presumption and lack of faith. If we realized more fully that it is God who speaks in Scripture, we should listen with unreserved reverence, and not interrupt his words with any explanations of ours. The second treasure which Lorenzo neglects, is the study of himself. There are in us such depths ! The heart of man is folded and folded within itself. If we knew ourselves better, we should learn to understand our fellows ; and we should interest and subdue our hearers, by exhibiting our knowledge of their secret thoughts.

Nor is this all. Our moral being varies from hour to hour ; thoughts and feelings pass swiftly over the mind, and produce a constant succession of shadows. Were we really to speak under the impression of the moment, we need never fear to repeat ourselves ; and what we said thus, we should feel. But Lorenzo's desire for effect makes him scorn the simplicity of truth, whether in nature or the Bible. He neglects his living soul, and consults a lifeless memory. A certain sentiment or anecdote has been prepared, and a thousand manœuvres are employed to introduce it. It is but a school-boy's recital ; he is uneasy himself, and he makes others so. Sometimes he recollects that on a previous day, preaching on the same

subject, he had a well timed moment of enthusiasm; he endeavours to recall it, and the effort annihilates feeling. He may summon up a few words, even a phrase or two, but the passing breath of inspiration,—never!

Oh Lorenzo, be yourself; not what you were yesterday, but what you are at this moment. Be real and you will be interesting.