

ANTONIO.

Antonio is considered an evangelical preacher. His discourses are said to be scriptural and edifying; how is it that I find them neither the one nor the other?

By evangelical, we ought to understand that which is imbued with the spirit of the Gospel; that which speaks of lost humanity and a merciful God; which inculcates clear doctrines and holy deeds; in short which recalls the teaching of Christ, who humbled man under the conviction of sin, raised him by a free pardon, and sanctified him by the power of the Spirit. But it is evident Antonio has views of his own on this subject.

He affects utterly to despise human wisdom; he appears to dread even thought and meditation. Of course he never dreams of studying the meaning of Scripture, contenting himself with quoting its words with desperate exactness. His sermons are mere tissues of texts; verses form

warp and woof; the connection between them being mechanical, without any reference to the sense. It is a chain of threads of every hue and length, fastened end to end, and then unrolled during half an hour; threads of silk and gold, doubtless, but rendered almost valueless by such treatment. One passage expels another from the mind, and the only one you remember is the last. It is worth while illustrating this system.

Let us suppose then, that Antonio has chosen not a subject, he never takes one, but a text. The closing word of this verse recalls the commencement of another; the end of this one suggests a third, and so on to the end. Antonio starts from heaven to arrive on earth; he begins at the north, and finds himself suddenly in the south; a new word then acts as a magnet, and draws the needle aside to east or west in a moment. You weary yourself in following him, and finally arrive nowhere. Here is a condensed specimen of his sudden transitions. Supposing the text to be "I have called my son out of Egypt, he would continue," *Egypt* is the world, *Babylon* as it is called in Revelation, the city which is spiritually Sodom or *Egypt*, where *our Lord* was crucified, for, as St Paul say's to the Corinthians, *our Lord* was delivered for our offences and raised again for our

justification, and you know the same Apostle has said elsewhere, no man shall be *justified* by the works of the *law*. In truth the *law* gives the knowledge of *sin*, and the wages of sin is *death*, eternal death, which is in contrast to eternal *life*. Some shall have eternal life, some everlasting punishment, where the fire is not quenched and the *worm* dieth not. The *worm* is the same as the *serpent*, which is *Satan*; *Satan* signifies adversary, liar, and he is probably so called because he *lied* to Eve when he said, ye shall not surely die.

Thus unconsciously does Antonio start from Egypt, traverse Sodom and arrive in paradise. In this style he is inexhaustible, and when he stops, it is not because he has said what he wished, but because the hour is up.

If at least there were some connection in his rotations! But there is none. Antonio is not a Bible, but a concordance; evangelical in words, but unconnected in substance; he may be consulted for a text, but we cannot listen to him continuously. He gives us the sound, not the sense, of the Gospel.

But putting aside the substance, is the style really scriptural? Let us enquire.

What do you understand by the expression, Antonio? You doubtless mean a style modelled on

that of the prophets and apostles. Now from whence do the sacred writers derive, not their thoughts, but their similes, images, expressions, in a word, their style? from a celestial vocabulary? from the learned men and books of the day? no, but from the customs, manners and sayings most common at the time, thus seeking to be generally understood by their contemporaries. Paul for instance, draws comparisons from the popular athletic games, known and witnessed by every one. The prophets take from rural scenes, images suited to the agricultural people for whom they wrote. Our Lord speaks of living water to a woman at a well; of living bread to those who hungered; that is, the Lord and his servants spoke alike of things palpable and familiar to the people around. According to the same rule, it is not unreasonable to suppose that were they called to address a multitude of modern Chinese or Frenchmen there would be some allusions to the things most current amongst them, some mention of opium and railroads. Evidently the sacred writers adapted their language to the people and age for which they wrote. In the true spirit of imitation, the preachers of the nineteenth century ought to adapt themselves to the people and age in which we live. To let our sermons be composed entirely of the words

and images of centuries past, derived though they be from the Bible, is to act — as we have just shown — exactly in opposition to the conduct of prophets and apostles; it is to preserve the dead letter, and annihilate the Spirit; it is to add the difficulty of seizing the unknown figure, to the difficulty of apprehending the object figured. The result can only be, either that our hearers receive false impressions, or that they are altogether repelled.

To the advanced believer, one thoroughly versed in Scripture, I know that the expressions there found, are often more clear and pregnant than any others. But might it not be well to make a less frequent use of these, and thus leave them the freshness of novelty, rather than to wear away the keenness of their edge—even for the christian—by too constant handling? Besides, is there not a risk of twisting the meaning of passages, by applying them to things and circumstances with which they have no original connection? Would it not be preferable to state truths in modern and popular terms, and then bring in the Scripture passage to shed its divine light on the dawning intelligence of the hearer?

Whatever may be said in favor of constant quotations in a sermon, all must admit that unless

suitably introduced, they lose their value in direct proportion to their frequency. It is a weapon which is readily blunted, because the hearer hardens himself against its arbitrary use. Were the quotations rightly placed and connected by the preacher, assuredly no one would weary of them; on the contrary this would be most useful as leading to the study of Scripture itself. But what I protest against, is the method of quoting, or rather the want of method altogether. Those who fill up their discourses in the way I have described, only do so, to avoid the trouble of thinking. It is so easy to tack together ready made phrases; it is a mere act of memory, employing neither mind nor heart. It is pleasant too, to pass for learned with those who are not familiar with this borrowed language, and for pious, with christians who may be deceived by the mere sound of the holy words they love so well. Moreover a little of the respect which surrounds the sacred text, is thus reflected on one's own discourse. Ah yes, Antonio, all this is so easy and pleasant, that I cannot be surprised you have yielded to the temptation. But believe me, your hearers are not so obtuse as you are willing to suppose. They distinguish between you and the Bible. After service, I often hear such a remark as this; "He said good things because he

constantly quoted the word of God, but he himself is so tiresome ! ”

Would that this were all ! But there is the world behind. Some of your hearers are, as you know, not well disposed ; but you do not know, or at any rate do not consider, what is the effect of your so called Biblical style on them. I will tell you what it is ; their natural distaste to your style extends to the subjects you treat of.

Wearied by you, they suppose the Gospel itself is wearisome. Surely it is enough that the wisdom of God must needs appear foolishness to the natural man, without your lending it an unfamiliar aspect ; certainly as a minister of Christ you are bound to be at some pains to clothe it in that same plain simple style which you are wont to employ in ordinary life.