

**HOW
NOT TO PREACH**

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

OF

NAPOLÉON ROUSSEL

LONDON

WARD & C^o 27, PATERNOSTER ROW.



INTRODUCTION.

“*How not to preach?* What a strange title! Why employ a negative form? Would it not be more to the purpose to enquire what should be done than what avoided?”

To this query I reply by another: how happens it, Reader, that your eye is now on this page? Is it not because your curiosity has been roused? Would you have opened the book had it been called: *Advice to preachers?* Probably not. Then you have yourself suggested to me a title which implies criticism. Yes, criticism is pleasant to us all; we all find it easy, not only because subjects abound, but because it soothes the vanity both of speaker and listener. Both congratulate themselves on their exemption from the fault criticised. But to the reader who has been drawn across my thresh-

replaced. I could not help remembering that if I pointed out the faults of preachers, I should inevitably be met with the saying ; “ Physician, heal thyself.” “ My own sermons,” I reflected, “ will be watched, and I shall be detected in the same offences with which I have charged others ; the reprovèd will reprove me ; some will be indignant that I permit the flock to perceive the weaknesses of their pastors ; others will take a shorter course and with that peculiar perspicacity which belongs to the esprit de corps will prejudge the case without having read my accusations.” Well, notwithstanding all this, I have made up my mind to publish ! I am willing to encounter these dangers, even though aware that I may quite fail in eradicating the prime cause of the evils I lament. For though the cause may remain, the effects may be lessened ; self-love unmasked, will be forced in its own behalf to avoid the absurdities here exposed.

Of criticism I may say in general that it is, so natural to us, as to be, I believe, unavoidable. To allege that I find it instinctively flowing from my pen would be but a poor excuse ; nor is any needed, for I observe this tendency more or less, in all writers. If with me it is more marked this, I am bold to say, proceeds less from a censorious spirit than from straight forward honesty of purpose.

Others perchance, are more careful as to the plan of attack; they may smile on the enemy they are about to overthrow, and strike so courteously that the right of complaint seems lost. In this sort of skill I acknowledge myself deficient, and I cannot say I am anxious to acquire it; so nearly, to my mind, does it border on cowardly hypocrisy.

Our Lord Himself, at the opening of his ministry, taught his disciples to beware of the faults of their contemporaries. Be not as the Scribes; beware of the Pharisees were amongst his most frequent sayings. Each of his admirable precepts he contrasts with the defective teaching of antiquity. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you that ye resist not evil. Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy, but I say unto you love your enemies." Is it not remarkable, that amongst all the holy persons named in the old Testament, Jesus did not find one to present to our imitation? His only examples are taken from the unconscious lilies of the field, or the irresponsible birds of the air. If man is sometimes compared with man, it is not to prove him innocent, but only comparatively less guilty. Sodom is better than Capernaum, and

Publicans rank before Pharisees, but neither Sodomites nor Publicans are proposed for imitation.

This last observation may have suggested to the reader a deficiency in my plan ; he may say, Christ truly named no man as our example ; but did he not silently present himself as such? Now as he often preached, could you not have offered him as a perfect illustration of your subject? The remark is just, and to show I appreciate it, I have added to the injunctions *How not to preach*, a sketch of Christ Jesus as an example to all preachers.

DEDICATION

TO THE REV^D NAPOLEON ROUSSEL.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You have the best claim to my lucubrations on how one ought not to preach. In truth, to whom could I more suitably dedicate these pages? Will you not judge more leniently than any one, my thoughts, intentions and criticisms? On the other hand, is it not from you that I have chiefly obtained my ideas? Are not the faults I describe, the reflection of what I saw in you? In the secret recesses of your heart, I perceived the defects which I have now embodied in fictitious personages. It is then an act of simple justice to return you the book inspired by yourself. To you at least, I may speak freely without fear of offence, and if others choose to complain, you will reprove

them by your virtuous resignation. You will have the sense to say to them : you see that the rod falls most heavily on me, but it is held by a friendly hand, and we may all escape its strokes by amending our ways. Yet my friend, I must confess that when my work was completed, I hesitated as to publishing it. I said : “ This Napoléon Roussel whose likeness I have been taking, will perhaps not choose to acknowledge the resemblance. And if he does admit it, will he not be so thoroughly enraged as to throw the picture at my head ? ” Very possibly ; nevertheless the recollection of the portrait will follow him every where, even into the pulpit, and when about to adopt a manner which has been here represented as ridiculous, he will be checked by the thought that though he may be pleased to slight or forget my criticisms, his hearers may bear them in mind, and unfliningly apply them to himself. So that with or without his concurrence, my object will be gained. He will be constrained to behave better in order that his resemblance to his present portrait may be quickly forgotten. Thus, my obliging and valued model, I am finally induced to send you the daguerreotype of your appearance in the pulpit, and beg you to believe that I am.

Your truly attached friend,

NAPOLÉON ROUSSEL.

EUSEBIUS.

The great ambition of Eusebius is to pass for a good preacher; therefore such, he will never be. Eloquence springs from conviction; but Eusebius cares little about being convinced himself, so as others acknowledge the power of his arguments. In preparing a sermon, his object is not to discover truth, but to find material for an effective discourse. He can thoroughly enough master his subject, but his subject does not master him. Thoughts and feelings are to him what colours are to a painter. He grinds them, spreads them out, unites or opposes them for the sole purpose of producing effect. As he is to preach on Sunday, let us see how he passes the previous week.

There he is, earnestly seeking not a text, not a subject, but what may be called picture frames to set off pathetic or alarming representations; these selected as the ground work of his discourse, he shapes and arranges them with most artistic care.

I think I see him now, pacing up and down the room, his arms crossed, his head bent. A thought arises; he seizes a pen, and the first sentence is committed to paper. He thinks again, he ransacks his brain for a striking idea, then hastily writes it down, and so on till the manuscript is sufficiently long. At last the Amen is permissible; Eusebius gathers the scattered pages, reads and corrects them and persuades himself he is satisfied. The whole is fairly copied out and learned by heart with much labour down to Saturday evening.

Sunday morning Eusebius is unusually solemn; he speaks little, and sees no one. You think he is concerned for the salvation of souls? Not at all; but he is not sure that he knows his sermon.

The time of service draws near; Eusebius walks to church and goes into the vestry. He puts on his gown and bands, prolonging his preparations so as to delay the fatal moment. If he could but find an excuse for not entering the pulpit! For to say the truth; he is full of fears. Perhaps his memory may fail him; perhaps he may bring in a paragraph in the wrong place; perhaps his most telling passage will be badly delivered; perhaps even he may be obliged to have recourse to his manuscript. He shudders at the thought of failure, he is agitated with fear, yet in this state of actual

suffering, it never occurs to him to pray ! He ascends the steps of the pulpit but he does not pray ; he enters it, but he does not pray ; he bends his head, but he praying not is ; he is only appearing to do so for the sake of effect.

The reading of the liturgy is a happy respite for him ; then comes the giving out of a hymn, and the utterance of a prayer, supposed to be extempore, but which the congregation know by heart. By degrees his confidence is restored ; no very difficult matter !

He rises, and silently passes his hand over his forehead as if seeking ideas ; whereas ideas, sentences and words are all minutely and irrevocably arranged beforehand. At last he begins speaking slowly and solemnly, as if all worldly thoughts were far from him.

At first the hearers are most favourably disposed. They have come to be moved and edified, and wish the preacher to be successful. It is their own cause which is in court, and they are quite ready to be convinced. The pulpit is indulgently judged even by those who are critical else where. Eusebius knows this ; he relies on it, and uses or abuses the privilege as a means of enhancing his own importance. He drops his words one by one, on his listeners, as if by so doing, he increased their va-

lue; he spins out an idea, in order to make it last as long as possible. He has been talking for a quarter of an hour, but has said nothing yet. The congregation get impatient, and ejaculate mentally, but as they cannot speak out, Eusebius chooses to take their approbation for granted, and majestically closes a preamble full of pretension, but utterly devoid of connection with his subject.

But kings cannot live on thrones; they must needs descend sometimes to the level of their court. Thus Eusebius without very well knowing why, perhaps simply because it is difficult to walk continuously on stilts, proceeds with the first head of his discourse in a much more familiar tone. He has no wish to be simple (would that he had)! but it is pleasant to show the facility with which he modulates his voice. Besides, one who means to reach the top of the scale must economize his strength.

Eusebius then, announces the subject he means to develop. What it is I know not: all I know is that it has little connection with the Bible, the words of which are borrowed, while its truths are slighted. Probably you will find in his discourse a little of every thing except the Gospel.

Our friend soon perceives that his audience is unmoved. He, cannot change any thing in the dis-

course, already written and learned by heart, so he attempts to produce emotion in himself and his hearers in another way. He swells his voice, gesticulates energetically and strikes the desk in his endeavors to excite warmth. This method is perfectly successful when the body only is concerned, but unhappily, it has little influence on the mind. Eusebius utterly fails in his object, and his astonished audience merely ask themselves what he is about. As the outward sound and movement increase, all trace of real feeling is lost. Then a change comes over the congregation. Hearers are transformed into spectators. They came to hear the Gospel, and are obliged to witness a pantomime. Preacher and audience have alike abandoned their original position, the one appears on the scene without quitting the pulpit, the other may be said to be in the pit without quitting the pews. Sad perversion of sacred things!

I abstain from fully describing the oratorical display; the trembling voice, the false intonations; the fictitious emotion which imposes on no one, the simulated unction which revolts one's better feelings; the majestic tone which only produces wonder, the attempt at authority and menace which almost provoke a smile. The exact description of these would be like an act in a comedy,

which I am unwilling to mingle with so serious a subject. If the preacher is ridiculous, it is not my fault.

It is vexatious to think that Eusebius may contemplate this picture without recognizing it. Some lines perhaps do not exactly fit the contour of his face; he thence concludes it was not meant for him, but thinks it wonderfully like his neighbour. Not impossible, for I had both in view! Yes Eusebius, not the other only, but you also. If you think this an insult I will add, I have been speaking from experience. Are you satisfied?

I must acknowledge that this subject perplexes and irritates me. I know so well the vanity of preachers, I am so convinced that they will be unmoved by the voice of criticism, that I am impatient at the weakness of my pen. I long for courage to go and take each Eusebius by the arm and shout in his ear, this is you, you, you! It may be Edward or John, or Thomas or Henry, but most positively it is you also, whatever your name may be!

Oh if I could get Eusebius into a corner, and my words could reach his heart encased in conceit, I would say to him: "You must think your congregation very blind, if you suppose they do not see through your ridiculous pretensions, or very foolish, not to be aware of the wide difference between your

feelings and your words. Do you not know that there is in the human voice a chord which inevitably betrays the secret thought? By this, the most unlearned can judge between affectation and true feeling. Do you not know that people who seem to listen with deference, revenge themselves for a tedious discourse the moment they quit the church? Oh yes, you know all this, for you have remarked it with regard to other ministers. You have quite pitied preachers to whom you listened without emotion, in spite of their elaborate harangues; here and there a phrase or simile may have pleased you, but on the whole you were thoroughly wearied, though you did not dare to say so. Well, my poor friend, this is exactly your own case. You also excite compassion, you also declaim without convincing. Your hearers, like yourself, lack courage to declare they are weary, but be assured, they feel it none the less. If they attend again, it is not to listen to you, but because it is Sunday”.

Not venturing to speak thus to my colleagues individually, I may at least tell them collectively, what I have heard and noticed.

I have often heard people speak of preachers, almost always pointing out their defects, very rarely their good qualities. I have remarked that

the mass discriminate real from false piety, sincerity from mere eloquence, as skilfully as our most cultivated men, and I have thence concluded that the Creator has endowed the human mind with a tact for the discovery of what is real and true, which acts instinctively, even amongst the uneducated. You may, by argument, easily shut the mouth of a peasant, but you cannot open his heart. He is the master of it, and will remain so in spite of rhetoric. He will judge you whether you will or no, and judge you to be just what you are. Even if you succeeded in moving him for a moment, he would afterwards attribute his emotion to the goodness of his own heart, and esteem himself a little more, and you a little less.

I think I hear Eusebius say with a smile :
“ In truth, such common place men do attempt....
With me... me... of course it is different... but
hush, that will do!” No, Eusebius, it will not do.
Your case is worse than that of your common
place imitators. That you have certain powers of
mind, I admit; that your coterie admires you, I
know; but because you receive applause, do you
think esteem necessarily follows? It most assuredly
does not. At ordinary times, your parishioners
come to you; on special occasions they go else-
where; in health they listen to you; in sickness

they seek another. You may join their festive gatherings, but you have no part in family meetings, nor in deathbed scenes. You please your friends, but you do not gain their confidence; they admire the grace of your attitudes, and the melody of your voice, but they think you an actor nevertheless, and the worst of it is that they are not far wrong!

I have sometimes been tempted to speak thus from the pulpit. “ My friends, I am as tired of sermons as you are; henceforth I will lay aside all pretension to style, and speak to you as I do to a friend on the street. I will try to be simple, honest, true; telling you just what I think, and as I think it. I hope you will listen with attention and interest, as it is for your benefit, not my own, that I speak. ” But on consideration, I saw it was better to make no such declaration, but to endeavour to act up to it. I have attempted it, but with how little success! The force of habit overcomes my best intentions; after a few of minutes of simplicity, I fall again into declamation. But I do declare that when I have been fortunate enough— let me speak more correctly and say—when I have been so far sustained from above as to remain simple and true, I have invariably enjoyed an unusual measure of peace of mind. I may add, that when I have suddenly

checked myself in an affected delivery, and resumed a natural tone, I have seen drooping heads raised, and wandering eyes fixed; my auditors thus taught me which was the right course.

Try it Eusebius! Try it, and you will find the benefit of the change. You may fail the first time, but succeed the second. And you will succeed if you are in earnest, have real faith in the gospel, and love to souls. If the ministry is to you merely a profession, you will never be simple, because you are in a false position. Imitation of simplicity is as bad as imitation of dignity; both are disguises and there can be no success in the pulpit without truth in principle and in practice.

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.

CYRIL.

Struck with the monotony of Lorenzo, Cyril determines to be varied in style. He aims at originality, and to accomplish this he has an infallible receipt,—that of spiritualizing the Bible. I do not mean that he draws out the spiritual sense which really exists but that he spiritualizes facts and words. For instance he explains that the clay which our Lord took in his hands, represents the sinful state of man; Jesus being in a boat while the people stood on the shore shows the distance between the divine and human nature, and so on. Under this treatment, the Bible soon disappears.

History, psalms, prophecy, epistles, all are thrown into one mass, and from this chaos Cyril draws at hasard, at if he were dealing with the pieces of a puzzle which, by dexterous manipulation, will finally fit in. Under pretence of spiritualizing, which to small minds is very easy and very amusing, he nulifies the word of God, and

turns it into a kaleidoscope, which at every revolution, presents a new picture. Yes, Cyril, look at it well, and describe what you see; if any one doubts, tell him you are spiritualizing the passage; taken literally, it would have meant just the contrary.

I must confess I am very suspicious of such spiritualizers. It is true that Paul say's "the letter killeth, and the spirit giveth life," and Jesus declares that "his words are spirit and life;" but honestly Cyril, does Master or Apostle use the word in the sense you do? I think not. We will investigate their meaning and compare it with yours, but permit me first a brief digression.

Figures of speech are necessary to all human language; this marks at once its poverty and its richness. Its poverty, for an exact word is wanting to express the new idea; its richness, for the images and colouring borrowed from nature, give to abstract ideas a fixity and brillance they would otherwise lack : thus the artifice of imagination turns weakness into strength.

Every word formerly contained a figure; unnoticed now, but quite perceptible at the time it first came into use. This is true even of words which express immaterial things; *attention*, *reflection*, referred to bodies before being applied to mind.

But though language be but an accumulation of images, no one is misled by it; every body understand the same phrase in the same sense : or if not, it is owing, not to the imperfections of language, but to obscurity in the writer, or want of intelligence in the reader. Let the reader then be instructed or the phrase amended, for the latter can only be said to be correct when it presents the same sense to all reasonable people. We must however bear in mind that while a perfect phrase is one in meaning, and devoid of all ambiguity, it is yet composed of figurative expressions.

A good writer is one who employs a style of imagery which is perfectly comprehensible, and presents but one meaning to the mind. This is generally admitted, and Cyril himself would be very sorry to deny it in other matters. If his correspondents, his debtors or his lawyer informed him that the letters, bills or deeds which he had received in good faith from them, were not to be understood literally but figuratively, be assured Cyril would be as much amazed as displeased. As a general rule then, we are agreed that all language, however full of imagery, must be understood in its primary or most evident, in a word, in its natural sense.

Now Cyril, in pity tell me why men speaking as

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from God himself, should specially select language which would be considered defective if they spoke for themselves? Why do you suppose that God in dealing with men should do precisely what men seek to avoid? Is it because there is a difference between his sayings and ours? But then would he not adapt the words to the new ideas, and not perplex us by using the same words in different senses? In denying what we affirm, surely, He would use a simple no, and not a spiritual yes, which was to be understood as no?

But Cyril still tells me that the language of the Bible being divine, and that of all other books human, there must necessarily exist between them an immense difference, and he thence concludes that a natural sense is suited to an earthly writer, and a spiritual sense to a heavenly one.

Gently, my friend; you are putting me off with empty words. Any language whatever, is employed, not with reference to the speaker, but the hearer. Were an angel sent to this world with words of warning, do you suppose he would speak other than the language of earth? We may fairly expect that any book destined for man, were it traced by the finger of God himself, would necessarily speak our language.

This distinction is very simple, but most essen-

tial; by overlooking it, men make the Bible contradict itself, seeming to express exactly the contrary of what it means. And the plea, forsooth, is, that it is the word of God! Truly yes; God speaks in the Bible, but it is to His creature that he speaks. It is plain that the images employed in scripture are introduced, as in all other books, for the purpose of elucidation not mystification; and that the true sense of the Bible is that which presents itself most readily to the mind.

My imaginative friend is not convinced; he comes however half way, and says, “I grant you that the Bible has a literal meaning, but you must admit the spiritual one also, for you know there is a double meaning in scripture which.....” Stop, Cyril; I cannot suffer you to proceed. I told you I mistrusted your spiritualizing system; but your double meaning I most solemnly repudiate. To admit it would be to doubt the truth of God, to play with his word, and by vainly attempting to enhance the value of divine truth to render it absolutely null and void.

If the Bible has two meanings, why not three, four, fifty, or a hundred? Where are we to stop? If the first supposed ten do not suit me, why should I not seek an eleventh, that is why should I not give my own?

This alas, is no impossibility, as the records of history tell. We know of mystics who have given ten or fifteen different interpretations to the Bible, admiring their dexterity in proportion to the difficulty of the task. If a barrister or magistrate dealt thus with human laws, would not so dangerous a legislator be sent to a Lunatic Asylum? Preachers have indeed the privilege of saying what they please without interruption; but Cyril, you must not abuse this privilege, consider that God will call you to account for what your hearers are obliged to let pass unquestioned, and one day you may tremble at being reminded by Him of these words of his Apostle, that his yea was yea and his nay was nay. It is true that the old Testament is sometimes quoted in the new, in a manner which seems to imply the double accomplishment of a prediction. This is not the place for a theological discussion on the subject; I will only say that the supposed second accomplishments are more applications of old words to new events. We do this constantly ourselves, when we borrow the words of old authors to illustrate modern facts; but we never pretend that these authors wrote in a double sense, nor have we any excuse for so doing.

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.

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!

JUSTUS.

Justus has adopted a very simple style; he proves nothing, refutes nothing, explains nothing; he appeals to neither understanding nor affections, troubles himself neither about believers nor unbelievers; his line is that of simple affirmation. Things are so; *he* says it, and there is no need to reply. If you express doubt, he answers by a fresh assertion that he is right and you are wrong. If he reposed on the authority of Scripture, this might be justifiable; but what is wonderful is, that he supposes his simple affirmation possesses power to establish, refute or convince, though at every statement his hearers are ready to say; "How do you prove that?"

As in private conversation, Justus pursues exactly the same system as in the pulpit, I have yielded to the temptation, and said to him: "Very well, you say so, but give me your reasons." And he, utterly unmoved, without complaint, without

surprise, in order to satisfy me, recommenced his eternal affirmations. Wearied out, I let him proceed, and from my silence, he doubtless thought me convinced.

Do not suppose **Justus** acts thus without motive. Far from it; his system if not reasonable, is at least reasoned upon. He declares he but follows the example of Christ who “spoke with authority.”

My dear **Justus**, I might remind you that you are not quite so sure of your ground as was our Lord; and moreover that **Jesus** continually appealed both to the word of God, and to the consciences of his hearers : but perhaps I may say what is even more to the purpose.

When we are told that **Jesus** spoke with authority, does it mean that he uttered dogmatically a series of moral and doctrinal aphorisms? No; rather I believe there was innate in him, in his person, in his life, and consequently in his discourses, a divine nobility and power which won involuntary homage. Authority was less claimed by Christ than spontaneously yielded by his hearers; it sprung from their conviction of his holiness.

We too can only look for respect from our congregation, according as we lead a holy and christian life. But the more our daily walk becomes sanctified, the more humble we shall be, and the

less disposed to bring ourselves forward. Our discourses will then be intuitively effective. To advertise a right to command is the act of an usurper, and to affect authority is only to secure ridicule.

Do you tell me, Justus, that syllogisms do not convince; that man has not only a head, but a heart? Most true, nor do I at all pretend that you should have recourse to syllogistic reasonings. There are reasons, if not arguments, which are as conclusive to the heart and conscience, as syllogisms to the mind. It is such moral evidences as these that I ask you for. Instead of silencing me by your imperious affirmations, I wish you would condescend to depict something of your inner life, to let us understand your moral being, in a word, to manifest what is passing within. As our christian pastor, we should like to feel that you too long for pardon, for righteousness, for life, for eternity. You see I am not asking for propositions major or minor, but simply the account of what you, our fellow being have known and felt. You may call these, affirmations if you will; but how different from yours! Statements of what passes in your mind, can be verified by what we, who share your nature, find in ourselves. We are always happy to feel ourselves in unison with the preacher, we then sympathize with him because we sympathize with ourselves.

When my mind is in harmony with yours, I am ready to be drawn towards your conclusions. A chord touched in your heart will then vibrate in mine. All men, thank God, have at least one note in common, a moral A, which may be made the key note of concord. Why will you not try to sound it in yourself, and rouse a universal echo around? Is it beneath your dignity? You do not think so, at least, that is not your reason; but to speak thus, one must feel strongly what is expressed, and feel it at the moment of expression. Every thing must be lost sight of but the absorbing interests of the hour.

Let me say here what I might well have written at the foot of each one of these sketches.

What preachers generally most lack, is life; not animation of voice, gesture or style, but that electric fluid which ought to penetrate every word of our discourse, and make it, as it were, a living thing. This agent is invisible to the eye, but consciously felt by the soul; it has a warmth which is contagious, and which oratorical art can no more imitate, than the most perfect automaton can pass for a human being. If need be, this life can make up for every other deficiency, but no skill whatever, can supply its place. Warm with this life, the feeblest discourse has been ac-

cepted with sympathy by the audience; while without it, a fine sermon is a beautiful statue, a bad one, a corpse.

Whence proceeds this want of life in the pulpit? From want of piety out of it; it is best in keeping with our habitual lukewarmness. Strange indeed would it be if putting on a gown clothed us with fresh feelings, or if mounting some steps raised our spiritual frame? No; as is the man, so is the preacher. If the divine life within, be feeble during the week, it will certainly not spring into strength on the Sabbath.

Cicero's orator was to be an honest man; the preacher of the Gospel must be a converted man. I do not simply say he must be orthodox, I say he must be converted. It is not sufficient that he admit the necessity of conversion; he must himself know the transforming power of the Spirit. He must not only renounce open worldliness, but he must strenuously cultivate inward sanctification, communion with God, and love to the brethren. Like Peter, like John, like Paul, in the most complete and full sense of the word, he must be *converted*.

Without this, preaching is mockery, the pastorate, a mere official post. The distinction between the gown and the coat, the week day life, and the

Sunday life, is felt by pastor as well as people, but the deductions they draw are very different. The pastor readily supposes that his official character shields his natural one; the people on the contrary see the natural character even in the pulpit. They allow him to fulfil his task like any other functionary; indeed, they have a vague idea that somehow, his services are useful to the mass, but each one individually, refuses to yield the guidance of his soul to one, who has different measures for himself and for others. We may be quite sure our hearers will not appropriate more of the sermon than we do ourselves. If the subject is of no moment to us, it will be of none to them. They will listen to us just as they have listened to the prayers and hymns; it is part of a whole which they go through as a matter of duty. The service ended, all is over. We take off our gown, they leave their seats, and pastor and people are again in the world. Must we then wait for an advanced state of piety, before we again enter the pulpit, and postpone preaching for, possibly, several years?

Perhaps not. But it may be more decidedly affirmed that while religious feeling is yet feeble within, we should, in the pulpit as elsewhere, be perfectly sincere, not affecting more knowledge or experience than we have, but sincerely stating our

convictions as far as they go, and the channel by which we have arrived at them. Let us be sincere, both within, and without, even to tones and attitudes. This recommendation is not so superfluous as it might seem.

HORACE.

A preacher is generally above the mass of hearers in intelligence and information. He too often thinks himself, if not actually entitled, still in a position to treat them as inferiors, as children. He gives them evidences he would scorn to accept himself; he presents as his habitual thoughts, what he has only discovered with great difficulty in his study, and makes a lever of what would utterly fail to move him, were it applied to himself. He presents a series of little pictures, sometimes pedantic, sometimes merely pretty, and expects them to be received seriously by every body but himself. He means them to be edified by his sermon, though had he heard it from another, it would have been sharply criticised. In dealing with his congregation, he employs a coin he would not receive himself; in a word, he lacks *sincerity*.

The truth of the principal proposition, is not the only thing to be considered in a sermon; we must also see that the arguments we employ in

proof, are sound; artificial forms must be avoided, sophistry held in horror, and true eloquence attained by abandoning all pretension to it. One rule will suffice; let us only give to others what we have received ourselves, and let us give it in the form which has satisfied our own minds. Beginning with earnestly seeking truth for ourselves, we can, when it is apprehended, transmit it to others as proved and tested.

Sincerity, which the youngest christian can give, will do much more than the false expression of beautiful sentiments. I know it requires courage, if not skill, to depict oneself truly. But this courage is attainable, the more especially as the felt confession of weakness is an elementary part of christianity both for pastor and people. Each minister without lowering his office, without desecrating the pulpit, without startling his audience, may say, "I am a miserable sinner." This weakness is his strength, instead of repelling, it attracts, especially in an opening ministry.

This precept easy to give is I know, difficult to follow; with a little more conceit I should say it was impossible to do so, for I have been attempting it myself the last twenty years, and have not yet succeeded?

The creases of habit will not yield to the hot

iron of criticism; it is impossible to make them disappear. I work the instrument vigorously, but the mark remains; the truth is, it has got, into the stuff, and the material itself must be changed. For the defect here is really within, though the manifestation of it is without. I swell my voice to cover the want of substance in my discourse; I make magnificent gestures, in the hope of imparting grandeur to trifling thoughts. "How very wrong," did you say Horace? Certainly, but you do just the same. You use brilliant words to cloak puerile ideas. Our animation is neither from the Spirit of God, nor even our own soul; it is the carnal man which excites our vanity, and will not let us leave the pulpit without an effort to produce emotion. Alas, how unsuccessfully? You do not touch the heart, Horace, you only irritate the nerves. Again I say, it is when conscience tells of inability, that vanity prompts the false covering of gesture and style.

Horace finds it impossible to be simple, so he affects to be philosophical, I mean metaphysical; and as his hearers have not the right, and probably not the power, to detect inaccuracies, he enjoys his reputation in safety.

A medical student once said to me: "I am sure I shall pass my medical examination, but I

dread the surgical one." I asked why. "Because," he replied, "in surgery I must cite facts, name bones, arteries and muscles which have been counted and classified by science. In medicine there is nothing of the kind; I may say the contrary of what my professor and every one else thinks, no one can prove I am wrong, and if opposed, I have a sure word for settling the business."

"What is it?"

"Oh, I have only to say, after some splendid blunder, That is my opinion, and the matter passes. It even gives me the appearance, if not of knowing more than others, at least of being an independent thinker. It does not convince, of course, but it produces a good effect."

This young student would have made a first rate metaphysical preacher. He would have divided, distinguished, confounded, talked of the objective and the subjective, the self and not self, with the chance of persuading his hearers that he was too deep for them, and at any rate leaving himself at liberty to say to objectors, that is my opinion. It is so decidedly your's Horace, that you are left in undisturbed possession of it. To avoid disputing it with you, your hearers says: "Mr Horace is very profound, he is a great me-

taphysician; still we like plain John Smith better. We always understand him, and sometimes he convinces us.”

But I stop. My picture gallery must not degenerate into an exhibition of caricatures. I have said enough of what should be avoided, let me endeavour to point out briefly what should be done.



JESUS-CHRIST,

THE PREACHER'S EXEMPLAR.

It is not the matter, but the manner of the instructions of the Christ, which I propose to consider. What first strikes me is the absence of any thing approaching to oratorical art. Jesus did not make sermons, he talked; I am almost tempted to add, his discourses were actions. There were no formal divisions, no premeditated arrangement, no preamble or peroration.

If then we are to take Christ as a pattern, we must talk in the pulpit, not dogmatize. This precept, so simple in theory, is extremely difficult in practice; because it requires a total forgetfulness of self, a setting aside of personal reputation and the absence of all pretension to effect. A truly regenerate heart will alone consent to this; and even !...

But I have no wish to judge others; I merely notice the fact, that Jesus did not *preach* in the

ordinary sense of the word. He spoke, sometimes to his disciples, sometimes to the multitude, occasionally to a single hearer, and his words are just as free and unconstrained on the one occasion as on the other.

The crowd, the apostles, and the Samaritan woman, are all spoken to familiarly and pointedly. The thoughts are not deeper, nor the style less simple in the parable of the sower, than in the conversation with Simon Peter.

If the absence of oratorical art is the prominent characteristic of the preaching of Christ, we are necessarily reduced, in studying his style, to observations of detail; but these are far from unimportant. I will class them under three heads: the preacher; the audience; and the subjects treated of.

I commence with the last, and cannot help remarking how our Lord instead of treating of subjects, treats of persons. He speaks less of salvation than of a saviour; he discourses, not of humility, but to the humble; he does not say that forgiveness of injury is a virtue, but rather "Love your enemies." In a word, he confronts, not ideas, but living beings. Notice for instance the sermon on the mount. Does Jesus enlarge on mercy, purity, humility, etc. ? Not at all; he at once refers to persons and exclaims. "Blessed are the poor in Spirit, the meek, the afflicted, the merciful."

This distinction appears to me fundamental, whether we consider the nature of the things themselves, or the object of preaching.

In truth, virtue and vice, doctrines and precepts cannot exist abstractedly. Take away saints and sinners, God and Satan, and all the rest is nought. There is nothing which is in itself redemption, but there is a Redeemer. The thief on the cross was saved by faith, though probably he had never heard nor uttered the word itself. These dogmatical expressions are the algebraic formula of language; they may give ideas, but not feeling; the knowledge of a system may be thus imparted, no salvation itself, and moreover the hearer is sometimes exposed to the temptation of thinking himself a christian, because he understands christianity.

If I am told that Paul has freely used such expressions in his epistles, I reply that I am speaking of sermons, not epistles, and moreover, that I would rather imitate the master than the servant. I might say more; often abstract expressions do not really convey ideas any more than sentiments. People listen to such, with cold indifference, whereas when we speak of persons, interest is immediately roused. The majority of men feel so strongly the necessity of dealing with living beings, that it

becomes requisite to imagine these beings, in order to communicate ideas. Jesus did so; witness his parables, where fictitious beings give life to doctrines.

Many modern preachers do just the contrary; they eliminate persons and facts from the Bible, leaving only principles and theories. To be convinced of this, you have just to take up a volume of modern popular sermons, and compare the table of contents with the headings of chapters in the gospels; you will be struck with the wide difference; on the one hand, ideas, on the other, facts. I take an example from one of our best writers. I open the volume, and I find these titles :

“ The look. ”

“ Minding the things of the Spirit. ”

“ The believer accomplishing the suffering of Christ. ”

“ Philosophy and Tradition. ”

“ The precautions of faith. ”

“ Imaginary perfection. ”

“ The stones of the Temple. ”

“ A People and Humanity. ”

“ Christian utilitarianism. ”

“ Jesus invisible. ”

“ Grace and faith. ”

“ Anger and prayer. ”

Now take the Gospel of St John, and looking for the discourses of Christ, you will perceive that he spoke, not of the new birth, but of the man born again; not of spiritual worship, but of those who should offer it; not of spiritual blindness, but of the spiritually blind; not of false doctrine, but of false prophets, and so on. When an abstract thought meets Jesus, he connects with it a living image : “ I am the door : I am the resurrection : I am the life. ” Instead of metaphysical disquisitions there is constant action, and illustration from life. Such I esteem to be the salient point in the ministry of our Lord. I need not dwell on it further; I write for intelligent readers.

From the subjects treated of, let us pass to the hearers. Though Jesus teaches invariably the same truth, he finds means indefinitely to vary the mode of imparting it; and his starting point is always the nature of his audience. He deals with them according to their measure of intelligence and morality; he considers their station and their prejudices, and by starting from their level, he induces them to walk with him; he does not carry, but lead them. Far from reproaching them with their ignorance and weakness, he lowers himself to them, looks at things from their point of view, and by following their own reasoning, gradually brings

them to the acknowledgment of error, and the discovery of truths which he has not yet declared. The Pharisees Jesus does indeed reproach, and condemn, but it is because he sees them irrevocably incased in hypocrisy.

One or two examples will illustrate my meaning. A young lord, strong in his own righteousness, comes to Jesus to ask what finishing work he shall perform to become perfect, and merit eternal life. Jesus well knows that every man is a sinner, and can only obtain eternal life as a free gift from God. Does he then say to this young man, “ You are deceiving yourself, you have never done really well, your motives were stained with selfishness and vanity, your good deeds have been performed only within the limits of your own convenience. You know nothing of love as a principle of self-denial, of self sacrifice; your best deeds need pardon, and the free grace of God alone can save you. ” I ask, was this the language of Christ? Far from it. Though the simple truth, it would not have been understood by the young man; it would have repelled by wounding his pride, and it would have left in darkness one whom Jesus wished to enlighten.

Our Lord then, takes his stand on the young man’s own principle that salvation is of works, and

requires that he should fulfil the law. To make him fully understand the difficulty, the commandments are enumerated; and to make him feel the weakness of human nature, Jesus refuses for himself — here considered only as a Teacher or Prophet — the title of good. All this fails to open the eyes of the presumptuous youth, who supposes he has kept the law unbroken. At this point of the conversation how would one of our ministers have acted? He would probably have said, “Proud man, know that all men are sinners etc.” Not so Jesus. So completely does he enter into the feeling of the spiritually blind man, that it is said he loved him! Yes doubtless, he loved him as one loves and pities a man who is honestly mistaken. While keeping the right goal in view, Jesus still follows the wanderer on the wrong path, in order to shut him up to a duty, his shrinking from which must inevitably bring conviction home. “One thing thou lackest; sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor.” Now the object of our Lord is gained. He has made the young man feel powerless before the claims of divine right; he cannot fulfil this condition; either he must now seek the exercise of free grace, or he will carry away in his conscience a sting which may one day bring him back to the feet of Jesus, sorrowful and penitent.

Jesus sometimes goes beyond this, and replies to thoughts instead of words. He fathoms the hearts of those around, and brings to light things they would fain hide, perhaps even things of which they themselves were ignorant. He never seeks an acknowledgment of victory, but endeavours to prevail in reality; he silences, not by using authority, but by convincing.

More than once we are told that guessing the secret thoughts of the Pharisees, he made an answer quite unexpected by them : for instance in Mark, where the scribes asked *among themselves* why this man forgave sins; in Luke, where Simon the Pharisee doubts *within himself* whether Jesus were a prophet; in John, where Jesus knows that the disciples *desired* to ask the meaning of the expression, “In a little while ye shall not see me.”

I attach all the more importance to this observation, as too many of our modern preachers follow a very different course. They are much more anxious to confound than to convince; they reply much more to words than thoughts, even taking advantage of an inadvertent expression to gain the victory. And if they win applause, they are quite satisfied. Such conduct I do not hesitate to call dishonourable; moreover it shows an utter want of

love to souls; humiliation, not salvation is what the speaker aims at.

To this consideration for the mental position of his hearers, Jesus joined a manifestation of wisdom, I might almost say of skill, which I shall only point out in two circumstances.

The first in his meeting with Peter after the resurrection, near the lake of Gennesaret. Our Lord wished to reprove Peter for his threefold denial; not for the purpose of degrading him, but of deepening his repentance. To speak of the fault openly, would only be to silence the culprit, Jesus does not even name it, on the contrary, he turns at once to the love of the disciple and the charge about to be committed to him. “Simon, lovest thou me?” is the question asked. By repeating it a second time, Jesus implies he has some reason to doubt the affection of Peter; by repeating it a third time, he recalls unmistakably the three sad denials. Thus without a word of rebuke, our Lord awakens in Simon’s breast the recollection of sin, obliges him inwardly to accuse himself, and by this humbling remembrance provokes him to greater watchfulness for the future. How wonderful is the union here of tenderness and severity! How different is our mode of proceeding in the pulpit or out of it! In similar circumstances, how we

should have apostrophised our hearers! How readily we should have put ourselves into the place of masters and judges, we, professing servants of him who uttered not a word of a reproach to his faithless disciple!

Here is another instance. The Pharisees bring to the Temple a woman taken in adultery, and address to Jesus a question so insidiously worded, that answered in the negative, it will furnish ground for accusation before the High Priest, answered in the affirmative, it will bring him in guilty before the civil governor. Jesus discerns their intention. He might declare it to the assembled people, and bring his provokers to shame. But no; he succeeds in confounding them without replying to the question at all, and sends them away with wounded consciences, perhaps the germ of future repentance. He appeals to “the one that is without sin,” and as he had foreseen, reproved by the inward monitor, all left, convicted, not by the preacher, but by themselves.

Were I obliged to condense these observations on the preaching of Christ, into one phrase, I should borrow his own words, and say its general tone was, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine.” According to this profound saying, advance in the knowledge of truth

is in proportion to a man's love of holiness.

I say love, not life of holiness. Our Lord does not say, "Whoever *does*," but "Whoever *will* do." The desire must be there. The thief on the cross, blaming his companion, recalling and censuring their common misdeeds, showed his hatred of sin, and appreciation of holiness; consistently with this, we find him ready to acknowledge Jesus as the coming King.

We must then, in preaching, consider how far our auditors have this desire after holiness. To meet gross, open sinners with the spiritual law which condemns motives; to quote to infidels the words of the Bible, is to send arrows flying over the heads of our hearers, who will only smile at the inaccuracy of our aim. They will tell us that, according to their view the words we are quoting are not taken from the word of God, but from a book we choose to decorate with that name.

I know the sacred word has a power peculiar to itself; but this power when brought to bear upon the soul of man, only acts when there is some harmony between that soul and itself. Were it otherwise, did the words possess a magic efficacy, preaching were needless; it would be sufficient to mix up the verses in an urn, and then present one at random to each of our hearers.

But we have not only the example of Jesus in this matter, we have his direct words. After instructing his apostles according to their state and necessities, and inquiring if they had understood rightly, he adds, "Every scribe that is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasures things new and old," that is instruction suited to the understanding and habits of his audience.

This rule is so obvious that it seems needless to insist upon it. Yes, but this rule would oblige preachers to break through routine, and though many may approve it in theory, few, very few, will practise it. It is so easy to fill a sermon with quotations and affirmations; it requires so little thought. It is true a skilful doctor applies a distinct remedy to every patient; but it is much more convenient to treat them all exactly alike; though a few may die in consequence.

In listening to some sermons, I have involuntarily asked myself what impression they would make on a stranger. I have endeavoured to put myself for a moment in his place, and forgetting my theological studies, imagined myself a worldly man seeking instruction. In this view, I positively declare I found nothing comprehensible,

nothing enjoyable; I have spoken to those who came for the first time to the house of God, and discovered that these were their feelings also. They had been arrested by some trifling detail which I had not even noticed; they had thoroughly misunderstood the speaker, and were leaving without the slightest idea of what the Gospel really was.

I may be asked; are we to neglect believers, and consider only the passing hearer? By no means; but there are certain subjects which interest all, and which might be treated with general profit. Each man possesses, more or less developed, heart, conscience and reasoning faculties. But if you take your arguments from the Levitical code, from the subtleties of logic, or the clouds of German philosophy, be assured you will be utterly unintelligible to the mass. And this, be it observed, is no reproach to them, it is your business to descend to their level, not theirs to rise to yours.

Here again how lovely is the example of Christ! How simple, how natural are his thoughts and words! After the lapse of eighteen centuries, is there a single reader who does not understand the parable of the Prodigal Son? Or the sermon on the mount? Did Jesus imitate, or even consult

the learned commentaries of the day? Never. The fields, the ties of families, the commonest usages of life, supply him with all the similes he needs. His sayings are deep enough to furnish sages with matter for endless meditation, yet simple enough to be comprehensible to the most unlettered. So simple in fact, that many modern preachers, Alas! would be ashamed not to go beyond them. Who preaches as simply as Jesus did? Which of us can say, there is not an individual in my congregation, whether peasant or servant, who cannot understand me? None. And why? Because none of us can forget ourselves, and throw our whole interest into our subject and its bearings on the people before us. This brings us to the third point we are to consider, *the Preacher*.

If ever it were permissible for a preacher to exalt his work and office, assuredly that right belonged to the Lord Jesus. It seems indeed almost indispensable that he should have done so, considering that he had to present himself not only as minister, but as Saviour. Yet in spite of his inherent greatness, in spite of the important part he plays — but what am I saying? important part? I mean in spite of the single glory which belongs to him as Redeemer of mankind, he always contrives,

when speaking of himself, rather to veil than exhibit himself. He speaks much of others, little of himself. He whom the Apostles call Son of God, styles himself Son of man; He declares that he does nothing of himself, and that if he would glorify himself, his glory would be nought; he speaks once of his own character, but it is to say « I am meek and lowly; » he bows his head to receive baptism from his forerunner; to Judas in the act of betraying him, he says « Friend, why camest thou? » to Satan himself, his replies are calm quotations of the word. Never does he even seem to say, see how well I think and speak! how devoted I am! On Calvary's cross, at the climax of self sacrifice how marked is the absence of all display! How different from us, who use our pulpits as pedestals for the exhibition of ourselves! Jesus has no need to dread a popular style; his discourses do not betray literary pretension. — If he colours and varies his instructions, or puts them into a narrative form, it is simply for the sake of his hearers, that he may be— not admired, but — understood by them.

On this subject, I should like to refer to the testimony of modern facts.

We have all admired the discourses either spoken or written, of a French preacher whom God has lately called to himself. But his last work, his

« Adieux » moved us more than all his others. Why so? Is it because they proceeded from a bed of suffering? This might influence those who saw him suffer, but not others. To what then are we to attribute the universal popularity of these last sermons? I can answer for myself, and perhaps for a good many others too; *Thé adieux of Adolphe Monod* edified me more than any other of his discourses because they were less elaborate and more simple.

In truth, when the interests of eternity are at stake we must be dealt with by men, not orators; we want to be instructed, not amused; we have come not to do homage to the preacher, but to give ourselves to God. And if unfortunately you make us think of your talent, the real aim of your office is lost : You make us advance your reputation, instead of your advancing our Salvation. And yet that christian pulpit was raised for the benefit not of you the preacher, but of us the hearers, and you are called our minister, our servant !

To resume : the three most remarkable points in the public ministry of Christ, are these :

1° He deals with living beings more than with abstract ideas;

2° He puts himself on a level with his audience;

3° He keeps himself in the background.

Of these, the last will be universally applauded; it is the one which will be the least followed — Here is my cause of dread; here is what may indeed render useless all I have written. Will preachers consent to relinquish the indulgence of petty vanity, in view of the welfare of immortal souls?

This important question may be addressed to two classes; those who have been regenerated by the Spirit of God, and those who have not. I shall conclude by a word to each, beginning with the last.

Under pretext of preaching Christ, you preach yourselves. You are anxious people should say, how well he speaks, how eloquent he is; this is the motive of your pulpit harangues. Let me tell you plainly you will never succeed. Your attempts will deceive no one. Even were you to adopt a simple, natural air, your auditors would immediately discern it was affected, and you would be none the less an actor to them. You are taking means to accomplish the very opposite of what you wish, you are inducing people, not to admire, but to criticise you, though possibly to you personally they may pretend an occasional compliment. Then what is to be done?

Simply yield yourselves up to God; you must

realize your sin and condemnation before him, and receive the free salvation of Christ; in a word, you must take to yourselves seriously the advice you have been long giving with too little seriousness to others, you must be *converted*.

But supposing you are already turned to God, do you ask for hints in exhorting your flock? I can give you none but those which I endeavour to follow myself.

The great secret of success is doubtless to forget ourselves entirely in the absorbing interest of instructing immortal beings. Could we but rightly feel the privilege of teaching for eternity, assuredly we should be simple and serious enough. But this disinterestedness is the gift of God, his grace may lead us through much conflict, to self sacrifice; but meanwhile, can we do any thing to avoid the failure which we dread from being simple? For this is the true cause of our affectation. We fear people would not be interested, were we to speak naturally instead of declaiming. If we thought we should be as effective without bombast, we should discard it. How can we be reassured on this point?

I believe in this way; by more full preparation for the pulpit—were our subject thoroughly elaborated, so that we possessed it, as it were, in all its component parts; if our plan were complete,

our ideas clear, our heart warmed by meditation, above all if the unction of the holy ghost was earnestly sought in prayer, we should enter the pulpit without fear; we should be under no apprehension of lacking matter or of failing to excite interest. The mind being calm and disengaged, we should keep our object strictly in view; our manner would be such as to ensure respect; and continually more master of ourselves, because as we advance more completely possessed by our subject, we should finally master the audience, and be led with mutual joy to the desired goal. If we succeeded we should be encouraged; if we failed we should try not to be discouraged. Happily a bad sermon last sunday does not prevent our attempting a better one next sunday. On the contrary; the fall stimulates to greater watchfulness and diligence. On the whole then, my advice is, let us be more fully prepared, we shall then be less exposed to be led astray by vanity, and more able to remain simple.

I have said much of the care to be exercised by the preacher; perhaps the reader may think I attach too much efficacy to study. If so, let me undeceive him. I believe real efficacy can only be obtained by fervent prayer for the Holy Spirit. If I have not dwelt on this, it is simply because

amongst Christians (and I write for such) this aid is understood as a matter of imperative necessity. However, to avoid all ambiguity, I wish in conclusion distinctly to express my conviction that without the direct intervention of the eternal Spirit all our efforts will be vain. and our best sermons but as tinkling cymbals.

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