LIFE FOR GOD

# Lectures to My Students

Charles H. Spurgeon

THE ART OF PREACHING

Complete English text

1875




2026

# LIFE FOR GOD

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# About this edition

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The historical English text is in the public domain in the United States. Third-party modern forewords, commentaries and existing Russian translations are not included.

The theological judgments and historical examples are the author's. Editorial notes are identified separately. Paragraph numbers are provided for reference and language alignment.

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## Sources

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# Introduction and Apology

[1] In reply to many requests from those ministers who in their student days listened to my lectures, I submit a selection to the press. This, however, I cannot do without an apology, for these addresses were not originally prepared for the public eye, and are scarcely presentable for criticism.

[2] My College lectures are colloquial, familiar, full of anecdote, and often humorous: they are purposely made so, to suit the occasion. At the end of the week I meet the students, and find them weary with sterner studies, and I judge it best to be as lively and interesting in my prelections as I well can be. They have had their fill of classics, mathematics, and divinity, and are only in a condition to receive something which will attract and secure their attention, and fire their hearts. Our reverend tutor, Mr. Rogers, compares my Friday work to the sharpening of the pin: the fashioning of the head, the straightening, the laying on of the metal and the polishing have been done during the week, and then the process concludes with an effort to give point and sharpness. To succeed in this the lecturer must not be dull himself, nor demand any great effort from his audience.

[3] I am as much at home with my young brethren as in the bosom of my family, and therefore speak without restraint. Generous minds will take this into account in reading these lectures, and I shall hope that all who favor me with their criticisms will be of that noble order.

[4] Possibly caustic remarks may be made upon my frequent references to myself, my own methods of procedure, and personal reminiscences. These also were intentional. I have

purposely given an almost autobiographical tinge to the whole, because my own experience, such as it is, is the most original contribution which I can offer, and, *with my own students,* quite as weighty as any other within my reach. It would have been impossible for me to quote the experiences of other men if they had not been bold enough to record them, and I make an honest attempt to acknowledge my debt to my greater predecessors by writing down my own. Whether this arises from egotism or not, each reader shall decide according to the sweetness or acidity of his own disposition. A father is excused when he tells his sons his own life-story and finds it the readiest way to enforce his maxims; the old soldier is forgiven when he “shoulders his crutch, and shows how fields were won;” I beg that the license which tolerates these may, on this occasion, be extended to me.

[5] It would have saved me much labor had I reserved these lectures for re-delivery to new companies of freshmen, and I am conscious of no motive in printing them but that of desiring to keep my counsels alive in the memories of those who heard them years ago, and impressing them upon others who dwell beyond the precincts of our classroom. The age has become intensely practical, and needs a ministry not only orthodox and spiritual, but also natural in utterance, and practically shrewd. Officialism is sick unto death; life is the true heir to success, and is coming to its heritage. Mannerisms, pomposities, and proprieties, once so potent in the religious world, are becoming as obsolete in the reverence of men as those gods of high Olympus for whom in past ages poets tuned their lyres, and sculptors quickened marble into beauty. Truth and life must conquer, and their victory is nearest when they cease to be encumbered with the grave clothes of conventionalism and pretense. It is delicious to put one’s foot through the lath and plaster of old

affectations, to make room for the granite walls of reality. This has been a main design with me, and may God send success to the effort.

6 The solemn work with which the Christian ministry concerns itself demands a man’s all, and that all at its best. To engage in it half-heartedly is an insult to God and man. Slumber must forsake our eyelids sooner than men shall be allowed to perish. Yet we, are all prone to sleep as do others, and students, among the rest, are apt to act the part of the foolish virgins; therefore have I sought to speak out my whole soul, in the hope that I might not create or foster dullness in others. May He in whose hand are the churches and their pastors bless these words to younger brethren in the ministry, and if so I shall count it more than a full reward, and shall gratefully praise the Lord.

7 Should this publication succeed, I hope very soon to issue in similar form a work upon Commenting, containing a full catalogue of Commentaries, and also a second set of lectures. I shall be obliged by any assistance rendered to the sale, for the price is unremunerative, and persons interested in our subjects are not numerous enough to secure a very large circulation; hence it is only by the kind aid of all appreciating friends that I shall be able to publish the rest of the contemplated series.

# The Pastors’ College

[1] The Pastors’ College was commenced upon a very small scale in the year 1856. Since that date it has educated and sent forth into the ministry not less than three hundred and fifty men, of whom, after deductions by death and other causes, about three hundred remain in the Baptist denomination, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. In addition to this, a far larger number of men receive gratuitous education in the evening, such as may fit them to be city missionaries, colporteurs, or useful private Christians.

[2] The institution receives no man in order to make him a preacher, but it is established to help in the further education of brethren who have been preaching with some measure of success for two years at the least. Many men of earnest spirit and established Christian character are hindered in their efforts to do good by the slenderness of their knowledge. Conscious of their own defects, they endeavor to improve themselves, but the absence of a guide, their need of books, and their scanty time, all prevent their making progress. These are the men whom the Pastors’ College welcomes. Men in whom piety, zeal, and the indwelling Spirit are to be found, need not fear refusal at our doors on account of poverty, if they possess those gifts of utterance which are essential to the preacher.

[3] The College aims at training preachers rather than scholars. To develop the faculty of ready speech, to help them to understand the word of God, and to foster the spirit of consecration, courage, and confidence in God, are objects so important that we put all other matters into a secondary position. If a student should learn a thousand things, and yet fail to preach the gospel acceptably, his College course will

have missed its true design. Should the pursuit of literary prizes and the ambition for classical honors so occupy his mind as to divert his attention from his life work, they are perilous rather than beneficial. To be wise to win souls is the wisdom ministers should possess.

4 In the Pastors' College definite doctrines are held and taught. We hold the doctrines of grace and the old orthodox faith, and have no sympathy with the countless theological novelties of the present day, which are novelties only in outward form: in substance they are repetitions of errors exploded long ago. Our standing in doctrinal matters is well known, and we make no profession of latitudinarian charity, yet we find no failure in the number of earnest spirits who rally to our standard, believing that in truth alone can true freedom be found.

5 The support of the College is derived from the free-will offerings of the Lord's people. We have no roll of subscribers, although many friends send us aid at regular intervals. Our confidence is that God will supply all our needs, and he has always done so hitherto. The President has never derived a farthing from the work for himself in any shape, but on the contrary delights to give to the work all that he can, both of money and gratis service; and therefore he more confidently appeals to others to assist him in maintaining the Institution. No work can possibly confer a greater benefit upon mankind than the training of ministers whom God has chosen, for around them spring up churches, schools, and all the agencies of religion and philanthropy. As we are commanded to pray for laborers in the Lord's harvest, so are we bound to prove the honesty of our prayers by our actions.

6 At least £100 is required every week to carry on the work.

[7] C. H. Spurgeon. Nightingale Lane, Clapham, Surrey.

# Lecture 1. The Minister’s Self-Watch

1 “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine.” — 1 Timothy 4:16.

2 EVERY workman knows the necessity of keeping his tools in a good state of repair, for “if the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength.” If the workman lose the edge from his axe, he knows that there will be a greater draught upon his energies, or his work will be badly done. Michael Angelo, the elect of the fine arts, understood so well the importance of his tools, that he always made his own brushes with his own hands, and in this he gives us an illustration of the God of grace, who with special care fashions for himself all true ministers. It is true that the Lord, like Quintin Matsys in the story of the Antwerp well-cover, can work with the faultiest kind of instrumentality, as he does when he occasionally makes very foolish preaching to be useful in conversion; and he can even work without agents, as he does when he saves men without a preacher at all, applying the word directly by his Holy Spirit; but we cannot regard God’s absolutely sovereign acts as a rule for our action. He may, in his own absoluteness, do as pleases him best, but we must act as his plainer dispensations instruct us; and one of the facts which is clear enough is this, that the Lord usually adapts means to ends, from which the plain lesson is, that we shall be likely to accomplish most when we are in the best spiritual condition; or in other words, we shall usually do our Lord’s work best when our gifts and graces are in good order, and we shall do worst when they are most out of trim. This is a practical truth

for our guidance, when the Lord makes exceptions, they do but prove the rule.

3 We are, in a certain sense, our own tools, and therefore must keep ourselves in order. If I want to preach the gospel, I can only use my own voice; therefore I must train my vocal powers. I can only think with my own brains, and feel with my own heart, and therefore I must educate my intellectual and emotional faculties. I can only weep and agonize for souls in my own renewed nature, therefore must I watchfully maintain the tenderness which was in Christ Jesus. It will be in vain for me to stock my library, or organize societies, or project schemes, if I neglect the culture of myself; for books, and agencies, and systems, are only remotely the instruments of my holy calling; my own spirit, soul, and body, are my nearest machinery for sacred service; my spiritual faculties, and my inner life, are my battle ax and weapons of war. M'Cheyne, writing to a ministerial friend, who was travelling with a view to perfecting himself in the German tongue, used language identical with our own: — "I know you will apply hard to German, but do not forget the culture of the inner man — I mean of the heart. How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his saber clean and sharp; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God's sword, his instrument — I trust, a chosen vessel unto him to bear his name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfection of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God."

4 For the herald of the gospel to be spiritually out of order in his own proper person is, both to himself and to his work, a most serious calamity; and yet, my brethren, how easily is such an evil produced, and with what watchfulness must it be

guarded against! Travelling one day by express from Perth to Edinburgh, on a sudden we came to a dead stop, because a very small screw in one of the engines — every railway locomotive consisting virtually of two engines — had been broken, and when we started again we were obliged to crawl along with one piston-rod at work instead of two. Only a small screw was gone, if that had been right the train would have rushed along its iron road, but the absence of that insignificant piece of iron disarranged the whole. A train is said to have been stopped on one of the United States' railways by flies in the grease-boxes of the carriage wheels. The analogy is perfect; a man in all other respects fitted to be useful, may by some small defect be exceedingly hindered, or even rendered utterly useless. Such a result is all the more grievous, because it is associated with the gospel, which in the highest sense is adapted to effect the grandest results. It is a terrible thing when the healing balm loses its efficacy through the blunderer who administers it. You all know the injurious effects frequently produced upon water through flowing along leaden pipes; even so the gospel itself, in flowing through men who are spiritually unhealthy, may be debased until it grows injurious to their hearers. It is to be feared that Calvinistic doctrine becomes most evil teaching when it is set forth by men of ungodly lives, and exhibited as if it were a cloak for licentiousness; and Arminianism, on the other hand, with its wide sweep of the offer of mercy, may do most serious damage to the souls of men, if the careless tone of the preacher leads his hearers to believe that they *can* repent whenever they please; and that, therefore, no urgency surrounds the gospel message. Moreover, when a preacher is poor in grace, any lasting good which may be the result of his ministry, will usually be feeble and utterly out of proportion with what might have been expected. Much sowing will be

followed by little reaping; the interest upon the talents will be inappreciably small. In two or three of the battles which were lost in the late American war, the result is said to have been due to the bad gunpowder which was served out by certain “shoddy” contractors to the army, so that the due effect of a cannonade was not produced. So it may be with us. We may miss our mark, lose our end and aim, and waste our time, through not possessing true vital force within ourselves, or not possessing it in such a degree that God could consistently bless us. Beware of being “shoddy” preachers.

## 5 IT SHOULD BE ONE OF OUR FIRST CARES THAT WE OURSELVES BE SAVED MEN.

6 That a teacher of the gospel should first be a partaker of it is a simple truth, but at the same time a rule of the most weighty importance. We are not among those who accept the apostolical succession of young men simply because they assume it; if their college experience has been rather vivacious than spiritual, if their honours have been connected rather with athletic exercises than with labours for Christ, we demand evidence of another kind than they are able to present to us. No amount of fees paid to learned doctors, and no amount of classics received in return, appear to us to be evidences of a call from above. True and genuine piety is necessary as the first indispensable requisite; whatever “call” a man may pretend to have, if he has not been called to holiness, he certainly has not been called to the ministry.

7 “First be trimmed thyself, and then adorn thy brother,” say the rabbins. “The hand,” saith Gregory, “that means to make another clean, must not itself be dirty.” If your salt be unsavory how can you season others? Conversion is a *sine qua non* in a minister. Ye aspirants to our pulpits, “ye must be

born again.” Nor is the possession of this first qualification a thing to be taken for granted by any man, for there is very great possibility of our being mistaken as to whether we are converted or not. Believe me, it is no child’s play to “make your calling and election sure.” The world is full of counterfeits, and swarms with panderers to carnal self-conceit, who gather around a minister as vultures around a carcass. Our own hearts are deceitful, so that truth lies not on the surface, but must be drawn up from the deepest well. We must search ourselves very anxiously and very thoroughly, lest by any means after having preached to others we ourselves should be castaways.

8 How horrible to be a preacher of the gospel and yet to be unconverted! Let each man here whisper to his own inmost soul, “What a dreadful thing it will be for me if I should be ignorant of the power of the truth which I am preparing to proclaim!” Unconverted ministry involves the most unnatural relationships. A graceless pastor is a blind man elected to a professorship of optics, philosophizing upon light and vision, discoursing upon and distinguishing to others the nice shades and delicate blendings of the prismatic colours, while he himself is absolutely in the dark! He is a dumb man elevated to the chair of music; a deaf man fluent upon symphonies and harmonies! He is a mole professing to educate eaglets; a limpet elected to preside over angels. To such a relationship one might apply the most absurd and grotesque metaphors, except that the subject is too solemn. It is a dreadful position for a man to stand in, for he has undertaken a work for which he is totally, wholly, and altogether unqualified, but from the responsibilities of which this unfitness will not screen him, because he willfully incurred them. Whatever his natural gifts, whatever his mental powers may be, he is utterly out of court for spiritual work if he has no spiritual life; and it is his

duty to cease the ministerial office till he has received this first and simplest of qualifications for it.

9 Unconverted ministry must be equally dreadful in another respect. If the man has no commission, what a very *unhappy* position for him to occupy! What can he see in the experience of his people to give him comfort? How must he feel when he hears the cries of penitents; or listens to their anxious doubts and solemn fears? He must be astonished to think that his words should be owned to that end! The word of an unconverted man may be blessed to the conversion of souls, since the Lord, while he disowns the man, will still honour his own truth. How perplexed such a man must be when he is consulted concerning the difficulties of mature Christians! In the pathway of experience, in which his own regenerate hearers are led, he must feel himself quite at a loss. How can he listen to their deathbed joys, or join in their rapturous fellowships around the table of their Lord?

10 In many instances of young men put to a trade which they cannot endure, they have run away to sea sooner than follow an irksome business; but where shall that man flee who is apprenticed for life to this holy calling, and yet is a total stranger to the power of godliness? How can he daily bid men come to Christ, while he himself is a stranger to his dying love? O sirs, surely this must be perpetual slavery. Such a man must hate the sight of a pulpit as much as a galley-slave hates the oar.

11 And *how unserviceable* such a man must be. He has to guide travellers along a road which he has never trodden, to navigate a vessel along a coast of which he knows none of the landmarks! He is called to instruct others, being himself a fool. What can he be but a cloud without rain, a tree with leaves only. As when the caravan in the wilderness, all athirst

and ready to die beneath the broiling sun, comes to the long desired well, and, horror of horrors! finds it without a drop of water; so when souls thirsting after God come to a graceless ministry, they are ready to perish because the water of life is not to be found. Better abolish pulpits than fill them with men who have no experimental knowledge of what they teach.

12 Alas! *the unregenerate pastor becomes terribly mischievous* too, for of all the causes which create infidelity, ungodly ministers must be ranked among the first. I read the other day, that no phase of evil presented so marvellous a power for destruction, as the unconverted minister of a parish, with a £1200 organ, a choir of ungodly singers, and an aristocratic congregation. It was the opinion of the writer, that there could be no greater instrument for damnation out of hell than that. People go to their place of worship and sit down comfortably, and think they must be Christians, when all the time all that their religion consists in, is listening to an orator, having their ears tickled with music, and perhaps their eyes amused with graceful action and fashionable manners; the whole being no better than what they hear and see at the opera — not so good, perhaps, in point of aesthetic beauty, and not an atom more spiritual. Thousands are congratulating themselves, and even blessing God that they are devout worshippers, when at the same time they are living in an unregenerate Christless state, having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. He who presides over a system which aims at nothing higher than formalism, is far more a servant of the devil than a minister of God.

13 A formal preacher is mischievous while he preserves his outward equilibrium, but as he is without the preserving balance of godliness, sooner or later he is almost, sure to

make a trip in his moral character, and what a position is he in then! How is God blasphemed, and the gospel abused!

14 Terrible is it to consider *what a death must await such a man! and what must be his after-condition!* The prophet pictures the king of Babylon going down to hell, and all the kings and princes whom he had destroyed, and whose capitals he had laid waste, rising up from their places in Pandemonium, and saluting the fallen tyrant with the cutting sarcasm, “Art thou become like unto us?” And cannot you suppose a man who has been a minister, but who has lived without Christ in his heart, going down to hell, and all the imprisoned spirits who used to hear him, and all the ungodly of his parish rising up and saying to him in bitter tones, “Art thou also become as we are? Physician, didst thou not heal thyself? Art thou who claimed to be a shining light cast down into the darkness forever?” Oh! if one must be lost, let it not be in this fashion! To be lost under the shadow of a pulpit is dreadful, but how much more so to perish from the pulpit itself

15 There is an awful passage in John Bunyan’s treatise, entitled “Sighs from Hell,” which full often rings in my ears: — “How many souls have blind priests been the means of destroying by their ignorance? Preaching that was no better for their souls than rats-bane to the body. Many of them, it is to be feared, have whole towns to answer for. Ah! friend, I tell thee, thou that hast taken in hand to preach to the people, it may be thou hast taken in hand thou canst not tell what. Will it not grieve thee to see thy whole parish come bellowing after thee into hell? crying out, ‘This we have to thank thee for, thou wast afraid to tell us of our sins, lest we should not put meat fast enough into thy mouth. O cursed wretch, who wast not content, blind guide as thou wast, to

fall into the ditch thyself, but hast also led us thither with thee.'"

[16] Richard Baxter, in his "Reformed Pastor," amid much other solemn matter, writes as follows: "Take heed to yourselves lest you should be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others, and be strangers to the effectual working of that gospel which you preach; and lest, while you proclaim the necessity of a Saviour to the world, your hearts should neglect him, and you should miss of an interest in him and his saving benefits. Take heed to yourselves, lest you perish while you call upon others to take heed of perishing, and lest you famish yourselves while you prepare their food. Though there be a promise of shining as stars to those that turn many to righteousness (Daniel 12:3), this is but on supposition that they be first turned to it themselves: such promises are made *caeteris paribus, et suppositis supponendis.* Their own sincerity in the faith is the condition of their glory simply considered, though their great ministerial labours may be a condition of the promise of their greater glory. Many men have warned others that they come not to that place of torment, which yet they hasted to themselves; many a preacher is now in hell, that hath an hundred times called upon his hearers to use the utmost care and diligence to escape it. Can any reasonable man imagine that God should save men for offering salvation to others, while they refused it themselves, and for telling others those truths which they themselves neglected and abused? Many a tailor goes in rags that maketh costly clothes for others; and many a cook scarce licks his fingers, when he hath dressed for others the most costly dishes. Believe it, brethren, God never saved any man for being a preacher, nor because he was an able preacher; but because he was a justified, sanctified man, and consequently faithful in his Master's

work. Take heed, therefore, to yourselves first, that you be that which you persuade others to be, and believe that which you persuade them daily to believe, and have heartily entertained that Christ and Spirit which you offer unto others. He that bade you love your neighbours as yourselves, did imply that you should love yourselves and not hate and destroy both yourselves and them."

17 My brethren, let these weighty sentences have due effect upon you. Surely there can be no need to add more; but let me pray you to examine yourselves, and so make good use of what has been addressed to you.

## [18] This first matter of true religion being settled, IT IS OF THE NEXT IMPORTANCE TO THE MINISTER THAT HIS PIETY BE VIGOROUS.

[19] He is not to be content with being equal to the rank and file of Christians, he must be a mature and advanced believer; for the ministry of Christ has been truly called “the choicest of his choice, the elect of his election, a church picked out of the church.” If he were called to an ordinary position, and to common work, common grace might perhaps satisfy him, though even then it would be an indolent satisfaction; but being elect to extraordinary labours, and called to a place of unusual peril, he should be anxious to possess that superior strength which alone is adequate to his station. His pulse of vital godliness must beat strongly and regularly; his eye of faith must be bright; his foot of resolution must be firm; his hand of activity must be quick; his whole inner man must be in the highest degree of sanity. It is said of the Egyptians that they chose their priests from the most learned of their philosophers, and then they esteemed their priests so highly, that they chose their kings from them. We require to have for God’s ministers the pick of all the Christian host; such men indeed, that if the nation wanted kings they could not do better than elevate them to the throne. Our weakest-minded, most timid, most carnal, and most ill-balanced men are not suitable candidates for the pulpit. There are some works which we should never allot to the invalid or deformed. A man may not be qualified for climbing lofty buildings, his brain may be too weak, and elevated work might place him in great danger; by all means let him keep on the ground and find useful occupation where a steady brain is less important: there are brethren who have

analogous spiritual deficiencies, they cannot be called to service which is conspicuous and elevated, because their heads are too weak. If they were permitted a little success they would be intoxicated with vanity — a vice all too common among ministers, and of all things the least becoming in them, and the most certain to secure them a fall. Should we as a nation be called to defend our hearths and homes, we should not send out our boys and girls with swords and guns to meet the foe, neither may the church send out every fluent novice or inexperienced zealot to plead for the faith. The fear of the Lord must teach the young man wisdom, or he is barred from the pastorate; the grace of God must mature his spirit, or he had better tarry till power be given him from on high.

[20] The highest moral character must be sedulously maintained. Many are disqualified for office in the church who are well enough as simple members. I hold very stern opinions with regard to Christian men who have fallen into gross sin; I rejoice that they may be truly converted, and may be with mingled hope and caution received into the church; but I question, gravely question whether a man who has grossly sinned should be very readily restored to the pulpit. As John Angell James remarks, “When a preacher of righteousness has stood in the way of sinners, he should never again open his lips in the great congregation until his repentance is as notorious as his sin.” Let those who have been shorn by the sons of Ammon tarry at Jericho till their beards be grown; this has often been used as a taunt to beardless boys to whom it is evidently inapplicable, it is an accurate enough metaphor for dishonored and characterless men, let their age be what it may. Alas! the beard of reputation once shorn is hard to grow again. Open immorality, in most cases, however deep the repentance, is a

fatal sign that ministerial graces were never in the man’s character. Caesar’s wife must be beyond suspicion, and there must be no ugly rumors as to ministerial inconsistency in the past, or the hope of usefulness will be slender. Into the church such fallen ones are to be received as penitents, and into the ministry they may be received if God puts them there; my doubt is not about that, but as to whether God ever did place them there; and my belief is that we should be very slow to help back to the pulpit men, who having been once tried, have proved themselves to have too little grace to stand the crucial test of ministerial life.

21 For some work we choose none but the strong; and when God calls us to ministerial labour we should endeavour to get grace that we may be strengthened into fitness for our position, and not be mere novices carried away by the temptations of Satan, to the injury of the church and our own ruin. We are to stand equipped with the whole armour of God, ready for feats of valour not expected of others: to us self-denial, self-forgetfulness, patience, perseverance, longsuffering, must be every-day virtues, and who is sufficient for these things? We had need live very near to God, if we would approve ourselves in our vocation.

22 Recollect, as ministers, that your whole life, your whole pastoral life especially, will be affected by the vigour of your piety. If your zeal grows dull, you will not pray well in the pulpit; you will pray worse in the family, and worst in the study alone. When your soul becomes lean, your hearers, without knowing how or why, will find that your prayers in public have little savour for them; they will feel your barrenness, perhaps, before you perceive it yourself. Your discourses will next betray your declension. You may utter as well-chosen words, and as fitly-ordered sentences, as

aforetime; but there will be a perceptible loss of spiritual force. You will shake yourselves as at other times, even as Samson did, but you will find that your great strength has departed. In your daily communion with your people, they will not be slow to mark the all-pervading decline of your graces. Sharp eyes will see the grey hairs here and there long before you do. Let a man be afflicted with a disease of the heart, and all evils are wrapped up in that one — stomach, lungs, viscera, muscles, and nerves will all suffer; and so let a man have his heart weakened in spiritual things, and very soon his entire life will feel the withering influence. Moreover, as the result of your own decline, everyone of your hearers will suffer more or less; the vigorous amongst them will overcome the depressing tendency, but the weaker sort will be seriously damaged. It is with us and our hearers as it is with watches and the public clock; if our watch be wrong, very few will be misled by it but ourselves; but if the Horse Guards or Greenwich Observatory should go amiss, half London would lose its reckoning. So is it with the minister; he is the parish-clock, many take their time from him, and if he be incorrect, then they all go wrongly, more or less, and he is in a great measure accountable for all the sin which he occasions. This we cannot endure to think of, my brethren. It will not bear a moment’s comfortable consideration, and yet it must be looked at that we may guard against it.

23 You must remember, too, that we have need of very vigorous piety, *because our danger is so much greater than that of others.* Upon the whole, no place is so assailed with temptation as the ministry. Despite the popular idea that ours is a snug retreat from temptation, it is *no less* true that our dangers are more numerous and more insidious than those of ordinary Christians. Ours may be a vantage-ground for height, but that height is perilous, and to many the ministry

has proved a Tarpeian rock. If you ask what these temptations are, time might fail us to particularize them; but among them are both the coarser and the more refined; the coarser are such temptations as self-indulgence at the table, enticements to which are superabundant among a hospitable people; the temptations of the flesh, which are incessant with young unmarried men set on high among an admiring throng of young women: but enough of this, your own observation will soon reveal to you a thousand snares, unless indeed your eyes are blinded. There are more secret snares than these, from which we can less easily escape; and of these the worst is the temptation to ministerialism — the tendency to read our Bibles as ministers, to pray as ministers, to get into doing the whole of our religion as not ourselves personally, but only relatively, concerned in it. To lose the personality of repentance and faith is a loss indeed. “No man,” says John Owen, “preaches his sermon well to others if he doth not first preach it to his own heart.” Brethren, it is eminently hard to keep to this. Our office, instead of helping our piety, as some assert, is through the evil of our natures turned into one of its most serious hindrances; at least, I find it so. How one kicks and struggles against officialism, and yet how easily doth it beset us, like a long garment which twists around the racer’s feet and impedes his running! Beware, dear brethren, of this and all the other seductions of your calling; and if you have done so until now, continue still to watch till life’s latest hour. We have noted but one of the perils, but indeed they are legion. The great enemy of souls takes care to leave no stone unturned for the preacher’s ruin. “Take heed to yourselves,” says Baxter, “because the tempter will make his first and sharpest onset upon you. If you will be the leaders against him, he will spare you no further than God restraineth him. He beareth you the greatest malice that are engaged to do

him the greatest mischief. As he hateth Christ more than any of us, because he is the General of the field, and the ‘Captain of our salvation,’ and doth more than all the world besides against the kingdom of darkness; so doth he note the leaders under him more than the common soldiers, on the like account, in their proportion. He knows what a rout he may make among the rest, if the leaders fall before their eyes. He hath long tried that way of fighting, ‘neither with small nor great,’ comparatively, but these; and of ‘smiting the shepherds, that he may scatter the flock.’ And so great has been his success this way, that he will follow it on as far as he is able. Take heed, therefore, brethren, for the enemy hath a special eye upon you. You shall have his most subtle insinuations, and incessant solicitations, and violent assaults. As wise and learned as you are, take heed to yourselves lest he overwit you. The devil is a greater scholar than you, and a nimbler disputant; he can ‘transform himself into an angel of light’ to deceive, he will get within you and trip up your heels before you are aware; he will play the juggler with you undiscerned, and cheat you of your faith or innocency, and you shall not know that you have lost it: nay, he will make you believe it is multiplied or increased when it is lost. You shall see neither hook nor line, much less the subtle angler himself, while he is offering you his bait. And his baits shall be so fitted to your temper and disposition, that he will be sure to find advantages within you, and make your own principles and inclinations to betray you; and whenever he ruineth you, he will make you the instrument of your own ruin. Oh, what a conquest will he think he hath got, if he can make a minister lazy and unfaithful; if he can tempt a minister into covetousness or scandal! He will glory against the church, and say, ‘These are your holy preachers: you see what their preciseness is, and whither it will bring them.” He

will glory against Jesus Christ himself, and say, ‘These are thy champions! I can make thy chiefest servants to abuse thee; I can make the stewards of thy house unfaithful.’ If he did so insult against God upon a false surmise, and tell him he could make Job to curse him to his face (Job 1:2), what would he do if he should indeed prevail against us? And at last he will insult as much over you that ever he could draw you to be false to your great trust, and to blemish your holy profession, and to do him so much service that was your enemy. O do not so far gratify Satan; do not make him so much sport: suffer him not to use you as the Philistines did Samson — first to deprive you of your strength, and then to put out your eyes, and so to make you the matter of his triumph and derision.” [2] [6]

[24] Once more. We must cultivate the highest degree of godliness *because our work imperatively requires it.* The labour of the Christian ministry is well performed in exact proportion to the vigour of our renewed nature. Our work is only well done when it is well with ourselves. As is the workman, such will the work be. To face the enemies of truth, to defend the bulwarks of the faith, to rule well in the house of God, to comfort all that mourn, to edify the saints, to guide the perplexed, to bear with the froward, to win and nurse souls — all these and a thousand other works beside are not for a Feeble-mind or a Ready-to-halt, but are reserved for Great-heart whom the Lord has made strong for himself. Seek then strength from the Strong One, wisdom from the Wise One, in fact, all from the God of all. [5]

## [25] Thirdly, let the minister take care THAT HIS PERSONAL CHARACTER AGREES IN ALL RESPECTS WITH HIS MINISTRY.

[26] We have all heard the story of the man who preached so well and lived so badly, that when he was in the pulpit everybody said he ought never to come out again, and when he was out of it they all declared he never ought to enter it again. From the imitation of such a Janus may the Lord deliver us. May we never be priests of God at the altar, and sons of Belial outside the tabernacle door; but on the contrary, may we, as Nazianzen says of Basil, “thunder in our doctrine, and lighten in our conversation.” We do not trust those persons who have two faces, nor will men believe in those whose verbal and practical testimonies are contradictory. As actions, according to the proverb, speak louder than words, so an ill life will effectually drown the voice of the most eloquent ministry. After all, our truest building must be performed with our hands; our characters must be more persuasive than our speech. Here I would not alone warn you of sins of commission, but of sins of omission. Too many preachers forget to serve God when they are out of the pulpit, their lives are negatively inconsistent. Abhor, dear brethren, the thought of being clockwork ministers who are not alive by abiding grace within, but are wound up by temporary influences; men who are only ministers for the time being, under the stress of the hour of ministering, but cease to be ministers when they descend the pulpit stairs. True ministers are always ministers. Too many preachers are like those sand-toys we buy for our children; you turn the box upside down, and the little acrobat revolves and revolves till the sand is all run down, and then he hangs motionless; so there are some who persevere in the ministrations of truth as

long as there is an official necessity for their work, but after that, no pay, no paternoster; no salary, no sermon.

27 It is a horrible thing to be an inconsistent minister. Our Lord is said to have been like Moses, for this reason, that he was “a prophet mighty in word and in deed.” The man of God should imitate his Master in this; he should be mighty both in the word of his doctrine and in the deed of his example, and mightiest, if possible, in the second. It is remarkable that the only church history we have is, “*The Acts* of the apostles.” The Holy Spirit has not preserved their sermons. They were very good ones, better than we shall ever preach, but still the Holy Spirit has only taken care of their “acts.” We have no books of the resolutions of the apostles; when we hold our church-meetings we record our minutes and resolutions, but the Holy Spirit only puts down the “acts.” Our acts should be such as to bear recording, for recorded they will be. We must live as under the more immediate eye of God, and as in the blaze of the great all-revealing day. [4]

28 Holiness in a minister is at once his chief necessity and his goodliest ornament. Mere moral excellence is not enough, there must be the higher virtue; a consistent character there must be, but this must be anointed with the sacred consecrating oil, or that which makes us most fragrant to God and man will be wanting. Old John Stoughton, in his treatise entitled “The Preacher’s Dignity and Duty,” insists upon the minister’s holiness in sentences full of weight “If Uzzah must die but for *touching the ark of God,* and that to stay it when it was like to fall; if the men of Beth-shemesh for *looking into it;* if the very beasts that do but come near the holy mount be threatened; then what manner of persons ought they to be who shall be admitted to talk with God familiarly, to ‘stand before him,’ as the angels do, and ‘behold

his face continually;' 'to bear the ark upon their shoulders,' 'to bear his name before the Gentiles;' in a word, to be his ambassadors? 'Holiness becometh thy house, O Lord;' and were it not a ridiculous thing to imagine, that the vessels must be holy, the vestures must be holy, all must be holy, but only he upon whose very garments must be written 'holiness to the Lord,' might be unholy; that the bells of the horses should have an inscription of holiness upon them, in Zechariah, and the saints' bells, the bells of Aaron, should be unhallowed? No, they must be 'burning and shining lights,' or else their influence will dart some malignant quality; they must 'chew the cud and divide the hoof,' or else they are unclean; they must 'divide the word aright,' and walk uprightly in their life, and so join life to learning. If holiness be wanting, the ambassadors dishonor the country from whence they come, and the prince from whom they come; and this dead Amasa, this dead doctrine not quickened with a good life, lying in the way, stops the people of the Lord, that they cannot go on cheerfully in their spiritual warfare." [7]

[29] The life of the preacher should be a magnet to draw men to Christ, and it is sad indeed when it keeps them from him. Sanctity in ministers is a loud call to sinners to repent, and when allied with holy cheerfulness it becomes wondrously attractive. Jeremy Taylor in his own rich language tell us, "Herod's doves could never have invited so many strangers to their dovecotes, if they had not been besmeared with opobalsamum: but, *ἐὰν μύρῳ χρίσῃς τὰς περιστερὰς, καὶ ἔξωθεν ἄλλας ἄξουσιν*, said Didymus; 'make your pigeons smell sweet, and they will allure whole flocks;' and if your life be excellent, if your virtues be like a precious ointment, you will soon invite your charges to run '*in odorem unguentorum,*' 'after your precious odors:' but you must be excellent, not '*tanquam unus de populo,*' but '*tanquam homo*

*Dei;*' you must be a man of God, not after the common manner of men, but 'after God's own heart;' and men will strive to be like you, if you be like to God: but when you only stand at the door of virtue, for nothing but to keep sin out, you will draw into the folds of Christ none but such as fear drives in. '*Ad majorem Dei gloriam*' To do what will most glorify God,' that is the line you must walk by: for to do no more than all men needs must is servility, not so much as the affection of sons; much less can you be fathers to the people, when you go not so far as the sons of God: for a dark lantern, though there be a weak brightness on one side, will scarce enlighten one, much less will it conduct a multitude, or allure many followers by the brightness of its flame."

[30] Another equally admirable episcopal divine[1] has well and pithily said, "The star which led the wise men unto Christ, the pillar of fire which led the children unto Canaan, did not only shine, but go before them. (Matthew 2:9; Exodus 13:21.) The voice of Jacob will do little good if the hands be the hands of Esau. In the law, no person who had any blemish was to offer the oblations of the Lord (Leviticus 21:17-20); the Lord thereby teaching us what graces ought to be in his ministers. The priest was to have in his robes bells and pomegranates; the one a figure of sound doctrine, and the other of a fruitful life. (Exodus 28:33, 34.) The Lord will be sanctified in all those that draw near unto him (Isaiah 52:11); for the sins of the priests make the people abhor the offering of the Lord (1 Samuel 2:17); their wicked lives do shame their doctrine; *Passionem Christi annunciant profitendo, male agendo exhonorant,* as St. Austin speaks: with their doctrine they build, and with their lives they destroy. I conclude this point with that wholesome passage of *Hierom ad Nepotianum.* Let not, saith he, thy works shame thy doctrine, lest they who hear thee in the church tacitly answer, Why doest thou not

thyself what thou teachest to others? He is too delicate a teacher who persuadeth others to fast with a full belly. A robber may accuse covetousness. *Sacerdotis Christi os, mens, manusque concordent;* a minister of Christ should have his tongue, and his heart, and his hand agree." [3]

31 Very quaint also is the language of Thomas Playfere In his "Say Well, Do Well." "There was a ridiculous actor in the city of Smyrna, who, pronouncing *O coelum!* O heaven! pointed with his finger towards the ground; which when Polemo, the chiefest man in the place, saw, he could abide to stay no longer, but went from the company in a great chafe, saying 'This fool hath made a solecism with his hand, he has spoken false Latin with his finger.' And such are they who *teach* well and *do* ill; that however they have *heaven* at their tongue's end, yet the *earth* is at their finger's end; such as do not only speak false Latin with their tongue, but false divinity with their hands; such as live not according to their preaching. But he that sits in the heaven will laugh them to scorn, and hiss them off the stage, if they do not mend their action."

32 Even in little things the minister should take care that his life is consistent with his ministry. He should be especially careful never to fall short of his word. This should be pushed even to scrupulosity; We cannot be too careful; truth must not only be in us, but shine from us. A celebrated doctor of divinity in London, who is now in heaven I have no doubt — a very excellent and godly man — gave notice one Sunday that he intended to visit all his people, and said, that in order to be able to get round and visit them and their families once in the year, he should take all the seatholders in order. A person well known to me, who was then a poor man, was delighted with the idea that the minister was coming to his house to see him, and about a week or two before he conceived it would be

his turn, his wife was very careful to sweep the hearth and keep the house tidy, and the man ran home early from work, hoping each night to find the doctor there. This went on for a considerable time. He either forgot his promise, or grew weary in performing it, or for some other reason never went to this poor man's house, and the result was this, the man lost confidence in all preachers, and said, "They care for the rich, but they do not care for us who are poor." That man never settled down to any one place of worship for many years, till at last he dropped into Exeter Hall and remained my hearer for years till providence removed him. It was no small task to make him believe that any minister could be an honest man, and could impartially love both rich and poor. Let us avoid doing such mischief, by being very particular as to our word.

33 We must remember that we are very much looked at. Men hardly have the impudence to break the law in the open sight of their fellows, yet in such publicity we live and move. We are watched by a thousand eagle eyes; let us so act that we shall never need to care if all heaven, and earth, and hell, swelled the list of spectators. Our public position is a great gain if we are enabled to exhibit the fruits of the Spirit in our lives; take heed, brethren, that you throw not away the advantage.

34 When we say to you, my dear brethren, take care of your life, we mean be careful of even the minutiae of your character. Avoid little debts, unpunctuality, gossipping, nicknaming, petty quarrels, and all other of those little vices which fill the ointment with flies. The self-indulgences which have lowered the repute of many must not be tolerated by us. The familiarities which have laid others under suspicion, we must chastely avoid. The roughnesses which have rendered

some obnoxious, and the fopperies which have made others contemptible, we must put away. We cannot afford to run great risks through little things. Our care must be to act on the rule, “giving no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed.”

35 By this is not intended that we are to hold ourselves bound by every whim or fashion of the society in which we move. As a general rule I hate the fashions of society, and detest conventionalities, and if I conceived it best to put my foot through a law of etiquette, I should feel gratified in having it to do. No, we are men, not slaves; and are not to relinquish our manly freedom, to be the lacqueys of those who affect gentility or boast refinement. Yet, brethren, anything that verges upon the coarseness which is akin to sin, we must shun as we would a viper. The rules of Chesterfield are ridiculous to us, but not the example of Christ; and he was never coarse, low, discourteous, or indelicate.

36 Even in your recreations, remember that you are ministers. When you are off the parade you are still officers in the army of Christ, and as such demean yourselves. But if the lesser things must be looked after, how careful should you be in the great matters of morality, honesty, and integrity! Here the minister must not fail. His private life must ever keep good tune with his ministry, or his day will soon set with him, and the sooner he retires the better, for his continuance in his office will only dishonor the cause of God and ruin himself.

37 Brethren, the limits of a lecture are reached, and we must adjourn.

# Lecture 2. The Call to the Ministry

[1] Any Christian has a right to disseminate the gospel who has the ability to do so; and more, he not only has the right, but it is his duty so to do as long as he lives. (Revelation 22:17.) The propagation of the gospel is left, not to a few, but to all the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ: according to the measure of grace entrusted to him by the Holy Spirit, each man is bound to minister in his day and generation, both to the church and among unbelievers. Indeed, this question goes beyond men, and even includes the whole of the other sex; whether believers are male or female, they are all bound, when enabled by divine grace, to exert themselves to the utmost to extend the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our service, however, need not take the particular form of preaching — certainly, in some cases it must not, as for instance in the case of females, whose public teaching is expressly prohibited: (1 Timothy 2:12); (1 Corinthians 14:34.) But yet if we have the ability to preach, we are bound to exercise it. I do not, however, in this lecture allude to occasional preaching, or any other form of ministry common to all the saints, but to the work and office of the bishopric, in which is included both teaching and bearing rule in the Church, which requires the dedication of a man’s entire life to spiritual work, and separation from every secular calling, (2 Timothy 2:4); and entitles the man to cast himself for temporal supplies upon the church of God, since he gives up all his time, energies, and endeavours, for the good of those over whom he presides. (1 Corinthians 9:11); (1 Timothy 5:18.) Such a man is addressed by Peter in the words, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof.” (1 Peter 5:2.) Now, all in a church cannot oversee, or rule — there must be some to be overseen and ruled; and

we believe that the Holy Ghost appoints in the church of God some to act as overseers, while others are made willing to be watched over for their good. All are not called to labour in word and doctrine, or to be elders, or to exercise the office of a bishop; nor should all aspire to such works, since the gifts necessary are nowhere promised to all; but those should addict themselves to such important engagements who feel, like the apostle, that they have “received this ministry.” (2 Corinthians 4:1.) No man may intrude into the sheepfold as an under-shepherd; he must have an eye to the chief Shepherd, and wait his beck and command. Or ever a man stands forth as God’s ambassador, he must wait for the call from above; and if he does not so, but rushes into the sacred office, the Lord will say of him and others like him, “I sent them not, neither commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord.” (Jeremiah 23:32.)

[2] By reference to the Old Testament, you will find the messengers of God in the old dispensation claiming to hold commissions from Jehovah. Isaiah tells us that one of the seraphim touched his lips with a live coal from off the altar, and the voice of the Lord said, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isaiah 6:8.) Then said the prophet, “Here am I, send me.” He ran not before he had been thus especially visited of the Lord and qualified for his mission. “How shall they preach, except they be sent?” were words as yet unuttered, but their solemn meaning was well understood. Jeremiah details his call in his first chapter: “Then the word of the Lord came unto me saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and

whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth; and the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, and to build, and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:4-10.) Varying in its outward form, but to the same purpose, was the commission of Ezekiel; it runs thus in his own words: "And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the Spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me. And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day." (Ezekiel 2:1-3.) "Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness. And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them." (Ezekiel 3:1-4.) Daniel's call to prophesy, although not recorded, is abundantly attested by the visions granted to him, and the exceeding favour which he had with the Lord, both in his solitary meditations and public acts. It is not needful to pass all the other prophets in review, for they all claimed to speak with "thus saith the Lord." In the present dispensation, the priesthood is common to all the saints; but to prophesy, or what is analogous thereto, namely, to be moved by the Holy Ghost to give oneself up wholly to the

proclamation of the gospel, is, as a matter of fact, the gift and calling of only a comparatively small number; and surely these need to be as sure of the rightfulness of their position as were the prophets; and yet how can they justify their office, except by a similar call?

[3] Nor need any imagine that such calls are a mere delusion, and that none are in this age separated for the peculiar work of teaching and overseeing the church, for the very names given to ministers in the New Testament imply a previous call to their work. The apostle says, “Now then we are *ambassadors* for God;” but does not the very soul of the ambassadorial office lie in the appointment which is made by the monarch represented? An ambassador unsent would be a laughing-stock. Men who dare to avow themselves ambassadors for Christ, must feel most solemnly that the Lord has “committed” to them the word of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18, 19.) If it be said that this is restricted to the apostles, I answer that the epistle is written not in the name of Paul only, but of Timothy also, and hence includes other ministry besides apostleship. In the first epistle to the Corinthians we read, “Let a man so account of us [the *us* here meaning Paul and Sosthenes, (1 Corinthians 1:1)], as of the ministers of Christ, and *stewards* of the mysteries of God.” (1 Corinthians 4:1.) Surely a steward must hold his office from the Master. He cannot be a steward merely because he chooses to be so, or is so regarded by others. If any of us should elect ourselves stewards to the Marquis of Westminster, and proceed to deal with his property, we should have our mistake very speedily pointed out to us in the most convincing manner. There must evidently be authority ere a man can legally become a bishop, “the steward of God,” (Titus 1:7.)

[4] The Apocalyptic title of *Angel* (Revelation 2:1) means a messenger; and how shall men be Christ's heralds, unless by his election and ordination? If the reference of the word *Angel* to the minister be questioned, we should be glad to have it shown that it can relate to any one else. To whom would the Spirit write in the church as its representative, but to some one in a position analogous to that of the presiding elder?

[5] Titus was bidden to make full proof of his ministry — there was surely something to prove. Some are "vessels unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work." (2 Timothy 2:21.) The Master is not to be denied the choice of the vessels which he uses, he will still say of certain men as he did of Saul of Tarsus, "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles." (Acts 9:15.) When our Lord ascended on high he gave gifts unto men, and it is noteworthy that these gifts were men set apart for various works: "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11); from which it is evident that certain individuals are, as the result of our Lord's ascension, bestowed upon the churches as pastors; they are given of God, and consequently not self-elevated to their position. Brethren, I trust you may be able one day to speak of the flock over whom "the Holy Ghost has made you overseers" (Acts 20:28), and I pray that every one of you may be able to say with the apostle of the Gentiles, that your ministry is not of man, neither by man, but that you have received it of the Lord. (Galatians 1:1.) In you may that ancient promise be fulfilled, "I will give them pastors according to mine heart." (Jeremiah 3:15.) "I will set up shepherds over them, which shall feed them." (Jeremiah 23:4.) May the Lord himself fulfil in your several persons his

own declaration: “I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night.” May you take forth the precious from the vile, and so be as God’s mouth. (Jeremiah 15:19.) May the Lord make manifest by you the savour of the knowledge of Jesus in every place, and make you “unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.” (2 Corinthians 2:15.) Having a priceless treasure in earthen vessels, may the excellency of the divine power rest upon you, and so may you both glorify God and clear yourselves from the blood of all men. As the Lord Jesus went up to the Mount and called to him whom he would, and then sent them forth to preach (Mark 3:13), even so may he select you, call you upward to commune with himself, and send you forth as his elect servants to bless both the church and the world. *How may a young man know whether he is called or not?* That is a weighty inquiry, and I desire to treat it most solemnly. O for divine guidance in so doing! That hundreds have missed their way, and stumbled against a pulpit is sorrowfully evident from the fruitless ministries and decaying churches which surround us. It is a fearful calamity to a man to miss his calling, and to the church upon whom he imposes himself, his mistake involves an affliction of the most grievous kind. It would be a curious and painful subject for reflection — the frequency with which men in the possession of reason mistake the end of their existence, and aim at objects which they were never intended to pursue. The writer who penned the following lines must surely have had his eye upon many ill-occupied pulpits: —[10]

> 6 “Declare, ye sages, if ye find
> ‘Mongst animals of every kind,
> Of each condition, sort, and size,
> From whales and elephants to flies,

A creature that mistakes his plan,
And errs so constantly as man!
Each kind pursues its proper good,
And seeks enjoyment, rest and food,
As nature points, and never errs
In what it chooses or prefers;
Man only blunders, though possessed
Of reason far above the rest.
Descend to instances and try:
An ox will not attempt to fly,
Or leave his pasture in the wood
With fishes to explore the flood.
Man only acts of every creature
In opposition to his nature."

[7] When I think upon the all but infinite mischief which may result from a mistake as to our vocation for the Christian pastorate, I feel overwhelmed with fear lest any of us should be slack in examining our credentials; and I had rather that we stood too much in doubt, and examined too frequently, than that we should become cumberers of the ground. There are not lacking many exact methods by which a man may test his call to the ministry if he earnestly desires to do so. It is imperative upon him not to enter the ministry until he has made solemn quest and trial of himself as to this point. His own personal salvation being secure, he must investigate as to the further matter of this call to office; the first is vital to himself as a Christian, the second equally vital to him as a pastor. As well be a professor without conversion, as a pastor without calling. In both cases there is a name and nothing more.

[8] **1.** The first sign of the heavenly call is *an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work.* In order to a true call to the ministry there must be an irresistible, overwhelming craving and raging thirst for telling to others What God has done to our own souls; what if I call it a kind of *στοργή*, such as birds have for rearing their young when the season is come; when the motherbird would sooner die than leave her nest. It was said of Alleine by one who knew him intimately, that "he was infinitely and insatiably greedy of the conversion of souls." When he might have had a fellowship at his university, he preferred a chaplaincy, because he was "inspired with an impatience to be occupied in direct ministerial work." "Do not enter the ministry *if you can help it,"* was the deeply sage advice of a divine to one who sought his judgment. If any student in this room could be content to be a newspaper editor, or a grocer, or a farmer or a doctor, or a lawyer, or a senator, or a king, in the name of heaven and earth let him go his way; he is not the man in whom dwells the Spirit of God in its fulness, for a man so filled with God would utterly weary of any pursuit but that for which his inmost soul pants. If on the other hand, you can say that for all the wealth of both the Indies you could not and dare not espouse any other calling so as to be put aside from preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, then, depend upon it, if other things be equally satisfactory, you have the signs of this apostleship. We must feel that woe is unto us if we preach not the gospel; the word of God must be unto us as fire in our bones, otherwise, if we undertake the ministry, we shall be unhappy in it, shall be unable to bear the self-denials incident to it, and shall be of little service to those among whom we minister. I speak of self-denials, and well I may; for the true pastor's work is full of them, and without a love to his calling he will soon succumb, and either leave the drudgery, or move on in

discontent, burdened with a monotony as tiresome as that of a blind horse in a mill.

> 9 “There is a comfort in the strength of love;
> Twill make a thing endurable which else
> Would break the heart.”

10 Girt with that love, you will be undaunted; divested of that more than magic-belt of irresistible vocation, you will pine away in wretchedness.

11 This desire must be a *thoughtful* one. It should not be a sudden impulse unattended by anxious consideration. It should be the outgrowth of our heart in its best moments, the object of our reverent aspirations, the subject of our most fervent prayers. It must continue with us when tempting offers of wealth and comfort come into conflict with it, and remain as a calm, clear-headed resolve after everything has been estimated at its right figure, and the cost thoroughly counted. When living as a child at my grandfather’s in the country, I saw a company of huntsmen in their red coats riding through his fields after a fox. I was delighted! My little heart was excited; I was ready to follow the hounds over hedge and ditch. I have always felt a natural taste for that sort of business, and, as a child, when asked what I would be I usually said I was going to be a huntsman. A fine profession, truly! Many young men have the same idea of being parsons as I had of being a huntsman — a mere childish notion that they would like the coat and the horn-blowing; the honour, the respect, the ease; and they are probably even fools enough to think, the riches of the ministry. (Ignorant beings they must be if they look for wealth in connection with the Baptist ministry.) The fascination of the preacher’s office is very great to weak minds, and hence I earnestly caution all

young men not to mistake whim for inspiration, and a childish preference for a call of the Holy Spirit.

12 Mark well, that the desire I have spoken of must be *thoroughly disinterested*. If a man can detect, after the most earnest self-examination, any other motive than the glory of God and the good of souls in his seeking the bishopric, he had better turn aside from it at once; for the Lord will abhor the bringing of buyers and sellers into his temple: the introduction of anything mercenary, even in the smallest degree, will be like the fly in the pot of ointment, and will spoil it all.

13 This desire should be one which *continues with us,* a passion which bears the test of trial, a longing from which it is quite impossible for us to escape, though we may have tried to do so; a desire, in fact, which grows more intense by the lapse of years, until it becomes a yearning, a pining, a famishing to proclaim the Word. This intense desire is so noble and beautiful a thing, that whenever I perceive it glowing in any young man's bosom, I am always slow to discourage him, even though I may have my doubts as to his abilities. It may be needful, for reasons to be given you further on, to repress the flame, but it should always be reluctantly and wisely done. I have such a profound respect for this "fire in the bones" that if I did not feel it myself, I must leave the ministry at once. If you do not feel the consecrated glow, I beseech you return to your homes and serve God in your proper spheres; but if assuredly the coals of juniper blaze within, do not stifle them, unless, indeed, other considerations of great moment should prove to you that the desire is not a fire of heavenly origin.

14 **2.** In the second place, combined with the earnest desire to become a pastor, there must be *aptness to teach and some*

*measure of the other qualities needful for the office of a public instructor.* A man to prove his call must make a successful trial of these. I do not claim that the first time a man rises to speak he must preach as well as Robert Hall did in his later days. If he preaches no worse than that great man did at the first, he must not be condemned. You are aware that Robert Hall broke down altogether three times, and cried, “If this does not humble me nothing will.” Some of the noblest speakers were not in their early days the most fluent. Even Cicero at first suffered from a weak voice and a difficulty of utterance. Still, a man must not consider that he is called to preach until he has proved that he can speak. God certainly has not created behemoth to fly; and should leviathan have a strong desire to ascend with the lark, it would evidently be an unwise aspiration, since he is not furnished with wings. If a man be called to preach, he will be endowed with a degree of speaking ability, which he will cultivate and increase. If the gift of utterance be not there in a measure at the first, it is not likely that it will ever be developed.

15 I have heard of a gentleman who had a most intense desire to preach, and pressed his suit upon his minister, until after a multitude of rebuffs he obtained leave to preach a trial sermon. That opportunity was the end of his importunity, for upon announcing his text he found himself bereft of every idea but one, which he delivered feelingly, and then descended the rostrum. “My brethren,” said he, “if any of you think it an easy thing to preach, I advise you to come up here and have all the conceit taken out of you.” The trial of your powers will go far to reveal to you your deficiency, if you have not the needed ability. I know of nothing better. We must give ourselves a fair trial in this matter, or we cannot assuredly know whether God has called us or not; and during

the probation we must often ask ourselves whether, upon the whole, we can hope to edify others with such discourses.

16 We must, however, do much more than put it to our own conscience and judgment, for we are poor judges. A certain class of brethren have a great facility for discovering that they have been very wonderfully and divinely helped in their declamations; I should envy them their glorious liberty and self-complacency if there were any ground for it; for alas! I very frequently have to bemoan and mourn over my non-success and shortcomings as a speaker. There is not much dependence to be placed upon our own opinion, but much may be learned from judicious, spiritual-minded persons. It is by no means a law which ought to bind all persons, but still it is a good old custom in many of our country churches for the young man who aspires to the ministry to preach before the church. It can hardly ever be a very pleasant ordeal for the youthful aspirant, and, in many cases, it will scarcely be a very edifying exercise for the people; but still it may prove a most salutary piece of discipline, and save the public exposure of rampant ignorance. The church book at Arnsby contains the following entry: —

## [17] *A short account of the Call of Robert Hall, Junior, to the work of the Ministry, by the Church at Arnsby,* August 13th, 1780.

[18] “The said Robert Hall was born at Arnsby, May 2nd, 1764; and was, even from his childhood, not only serious, and *given to secret prayer before he could speak plain*, but was always wholly inclined to the work of the ministry. He began to compose hymns before he was quite seven years old, and therein discovered marks of piety, deep thought, and genius. Between eight and nine years he made several hymns, which were much admired by many, one of which was printed in the Gospel Magazine about that time. He wrote his thoughts on various religious subjects, and select portions of Scripture. He was likewise possessed of an intense inclination for learning, and made such progress that the country master under whom he was could not instruct him any further. He was then sent to Northampton boarding school, under the care of the Rev. John Ryland, where he continued about a year and a-half, and made great progress in Latin and Greek. In October, 1778, he went to the Academy at Bristol, under the care of the Rev. Mr. Evans; and on August 13th, 1780, was sent out to the ministry by this church, being sixteen years and three months old. The manner in which the church obtained satisfaction with his abilities for the great work, was his speaking in his turn at conference meetings from various portions of Scripture; in which, and in prayer, he had borne a part for upwards of four years before; and having when at home, at their request, frequently preached on Lord’s-day mornings, to their great satisfaction. They therefore earnestly and unanimously requested his being in a solemn manner set apart to public employ. Accordingly, on the day aforesaid, he was examined by his father before the church,

respecting his inclination, motives, and end, in reference to the ministry, and was likewise desired to make a declaration of his religious sentiments. All which being done, to the entire satisfaction of the church, they therefore set him apart by lifting up their right hands, and by solemn prayer. His father then delivered a discourse to him from 2 Timothy 2:1, 'Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.' Being thus sent forth, he preached in the afternoon from 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8.

19 'May the Lord bless him, and grant him great success!'"[8]

20 Considerable weight is to be given to the judgment of men and women who live near to God, and in most instances their verdict will not be a mistaken one. Yet this appeal is not final nor infallible, and is only to be estimated in proportion to the intelligence and piety of those consulted. I remember well how earnestly I was dissuaded from preaching by as godly a Christian matron as ever breathed; the value of her opinion I endeavoured to estimate with candour and patience — but it was outweighed by the judgment of persons of wider experience. Young men in doubt will do well to take with them their wisest friends when next they go out to the country chapel or village meeting-room and essay to deliver the Word. I have noted — and our venerable friend, Mr. Rogers, has observed the same — that you, gentlemen, students, as a body, in your judgment of one another, are seldom if ever wrong. There has hardly ever been an instance, take the whole house through, where the general opinion of the entire college concerning a brother has been erroneous. Men are not quite so unable to form an opinion of each other as they are sometimes supposed to be. Meeting as you do in class, in prayer-meeting, in conversation, and in

various religious engagements, you gauge each other; and a wise man will be slow to set aside the verdict of the house.

[21] I should not complete this point if I did not add, that mere ability to edify, and aptness to teach is not enough, there must be other talents to complete the pastoral character. Sound judgment and solid experience must instruct you; gentle manners and loving affections must sway you; firmness and courage must be manifest; and tenderness and sympathy must not be lacking. Gifts administrative in ruling well will be as requisite as gifts instructive in teaching well. You must be fitted to lead, prepared to endure, and able to persevere. In grace, you should be head and shoulders above the rest of the people, able to be their father and counsellor. Read, carefully the qualifications of a bishop, given in 1 Timothy 3:2-7, and in Titus 1:6-9. If such gifts and graces be not in you and abound, it may be possible for you to succeed as an evangelist, but as a pastor you will be of no account.

[22] **3.** In order further to prove a man's call, after a little exercise of his gifts, such as I have already spoken of, *he must see a measure of conversion- work going on under his efforts,* or he may conclude that he has made a mistake, and, therefore, may go back by the best way he can. It is not to be expected that upon the first or even twentieth effort in public we shall be apprised of success; and a man may even give himself a life trial of preaching if he feels called to do so, but it seems to me that as a man to be set apart to the ministry, his commission is without seals until souls are won by his instrumentality to the knowledge of Jesus. As a worker, he is to work on whether he succeeds or no, but as a minister he cannot be sure of his vocation till results are apparent. How my heart leaped for joy when I heard tidings of my first convert! I could never be satisfied with a full congregation,

and the kind expressions of friends; I longed to hear that hearts had been broken, that tears had been seen streaming from the eyes of penitents. How did I rejoice, as one that findeth great spoil, over one poor labourer's wife who confessed that she felt the guilt of sin, and had found the Saviour under my discourse on Sunday afternoon: I have the cottage in which she lived in my eye now; believe me, it always appears picturesque. I remember well her being received into the church, and her dying, and her going home to heaven. She was the first seal to my ministry, and, I can assure you, a very precious one indeed. No mother was ever more full of happiness at the sight of her first-born son. Then could I have sung the song of the Virgin Mary, for my soul did magnify the Lord for remembering my low estate, and giving me the great honour to do a work for which all generations should call me blessed, for so I counted the conversion of one soul. There must be some measure of conversion-work in your irregular labours before you can believe that preaching is to be your life-work. Remember the Lord's words by the prophet Jeremiah; they are very much to the point, and should alarm all fruitless preachers. "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings." Jeremiah 23 21, 22. It is a marvel to me how men continue at ease in preaching year after year without conversions. Have they no bowels of compassion for others? no sense of responsibility upon themselves? Dare they, by a vain misrepresentation of divine sovereignty, cast the blame on their Master? Or is it their belief that Paul plants and Apollos waters, and that God gives no increase? Vain are their talents, their philosophy, their rhetoric, and even their

orthodoxy, without the signs following. How are they sent of God who bring no men to God? Prophets whose words are powerless, sowers whose seed all withers, fishers who take no fish, soldiers who give no wounds — are these God's men? Surely it were better to be a mud-raker, or a chimney-sweep, than to stand in the ministry as an utterly barren tree. The meanest occupation confers some benefit upon mankind, but the wretched man who occupies a pulpit and never glorifies his God by conversions is a blank, a blot, an eyesore, a mischief. He is not worth the salt he eats, much less his bread; and if he writes to newspapers to complain of the smallness of his salary, his conscience, if he has any, might well reply, "And what you have is undeserved." Times of drought there may be; ay, and years of leanness may consume the former years of usefulness, but still there will be fruit in the main, and fruit to the glory of God; and meanwhile the transient barrenness will fill the soul with unutterable anguish. Brethren, if the Lord gives you no zeal for souls, keep to the lapstone or the trowel, but avoid the pulpit as you value your heart's peace and your future salvation.

[23] **4.** A step beyond all this is however needful in our inquiry. The will of the Lord concerning pastors is made known through the prayerful judgment of his church. It is needful as a proof of your vocation that *your preaching should be acceptable to the people of God.* God usually opens doors of utterance for those whom he calls to speak in his name. Impatience would push open or break down the door, but faith waits upon the Lord, and in due season her opportunity is awarded her. When the opportunity comes then comes our trial. Standing up to preach, our spirit will be judged of the assembly, and if it be condemned, or if, as a general rule, the church is not edified, the conclusion may not be disputed, that we are not sent of God. The signs and marks of a true

bishop are laid down in the Word for the guidance of the church; and if in following such guidance the brethren see not in us the qualifications, and do not elect us to office, it is plain enough that however well we may evangelize, the office of the pastor is not for us. Churches are not all wise, neither do they all judge in the power of the Holy Ghost, but many of them judge after the flesh; yet I had sooner accept the opinion of a company of the Lord's people than my own upon so personal a subject as my own gifts and graces. At any rate, whether you value the verdict of the church or no, one thing is certain, that none of you can be pastors without the loving consent of the flock; and therefore this will be to you a practical indicator if not a correct one. If your call from the Lord be a real one you will not long be silent. As surely as the man wants his hour, so surely the hour wants its man. The church of God is always urgently in need of living ministers; to her a man is always more precious than the gold of Ophir. Formal officials do lack and suffer hunger, but the anointed of the Lord need never be without a charge, for there are quick ears which will know them by their speech, and ready hearts to welcome them to their appointed place. Be fit for your work, and you will never be out of it. Do not run about inviting yourselves to preach here and there; be more concerned about your ability than your opportunity, and more earnest about your walk with God than about either. The sheep will know the God-sent shepherd; the porter of the fold will open to you, and the flock will know your voice.

[24] At the time of my first delivery of this lecture, I had not read John Newton's admirable letter to a friend on this subject; it so nearly tallies with my own thoughts, that at the risk of being thought to be a copyist, which I certainly am not in this instance, I will read you the letter: —

25 “Your case reminds me of my own; my first desires towards the ministry were attended with great uncertainties and difficulties, and the perplexity of my own mind was heightened by the various and opposite judgments of my friends. The advice I have to offer is the result of painful experience and exercise, and for this reason, perhaps, may not be unacceptable to you. I pray our gracious Lord to make it useful.

26 “I was long distressed, as you are, about what was or was not a proper call to the ministry. It now seems to me an easy point to solve; but, perhaps, it will not be so to you, till the Lord shall make it clear to yourself in your own case. I have not room to say so much as I could. In brief, I think it principally includes three things: —

27 “**1.** A warm and earnest desire to be employed in this service. I apprehend the man who is once moved by the Spirit of God to this work, will prefer it, if attainable, to thousands of gold and silver; so that, though he is at times intimidated by a sense of its importance and difficulty, compared with his own great insufficiency (for it is to be presumed a call of this sort, if indeed from God, will be accompanied with humility and self-abasement), yet he cannot give it up. I hold it a good rule to inquire in this point, whether the desire to preach is most fervent in our most lively and spiritual frames, and when we are most laid in the dust before the Lord? If so, it is a good sign. But if, as is sometimes the case, a person is very earnest to be a preacher to others, when he finds but little hungerings and thirstings after grace in his own soul, it is then to be feared his zeal springs rather from a selfish principle than from the Spirit of God.

28 “**2.** Besides this affectionate desire and readiness to preach, there must in due season appear some competent

sufficiency as to gifts, knowledge, and utterance. Surely, if the Lord sends a man to teach others, he will furnish him with the means. I believe many have intended well in setting up for preachers, who yet went beyond or before their call in so doing. The main difference between a minister and a private Christian, seems to consist in those ministerial gifts, which are imparted to him, not for his own sake, but for the edification of others. But then I say these are to appear in due season; they are not to be expected instantaneously, but gradually, in the use of proper means. They are necessary for the discharge of the ministry, but not necessary as pre-requisites to warrant our desires after it. In your case, you are young, and have time before you; therefore, I think you need not as yet perplex yourself with inquiring if you have these gifts already. It is sufficient if your desire is fixed, and you are willing, in the way of prayer and diligence, to wait upon the Lord for them; as yet you need them not.[9]

[29] "**3.** That which finally evidences a proper call, is a correspondent opening in providence, by a gradual train of circumstances pointing out the means, the time, the place of actually entering upon the work. And until this coincidence arrives, you must not expect to be always clear from hesitation in your own mind. The principal caution on this head is, not to be too hasty in catching at first appearances. If it be the Lord's will to bring you into his ministry, he has already appointed your place and service, and though you know it not at present, you shall at a proper time. If you had the talents of an angel, you could do no good with them till his hour is come, and till he leads you to the people whom he has determined to bless by your means. It is very difficult to restrain ourselves within the bounds of prudence here, when our zeal is warm: a sense of the love of Christ upon our hearts, and a tender compassion for poor sinners, is ready to

prompt us to break out too soon; but he that believeth shall not make haste. I was about five years under this constraint; sometimes I thought I must preach, though it was in the streets. I listened to everything that seemed plausible, and to many things which were not so. But the Lord graciously, and as it were insensibly, hedged up my way with thorns; otherwise, if I had been left to my own spirit, I should have put it quite out of my power to have been brought into such a sphere of usefulness, as he in his good time has been pleased to lead me to. And I can now see clearly, that at the time I would first have gone out, though my intention was, I hope, good in the main, yet I overrated myself, and had not that spiritual judgment and experience which are requisite for so great a service."

[30] Thus much may suffice, but the same subject will be before you if I detail a little of my experience in dealing with aspirants for the ministry. I have constantly to fulfill the duty which fell to the lot of Cromwell's Triers. I have to form an opinion as to the advisability of aiding certain men in their attempts to become pastors. This is a most responsible duty, and one which requires no ordinary care. Of course, I do not set myself up to judge whether a man shall enter the ministry or not, but my examination merely aims at answering the question whether this institution shall help him, or leave him to his own resources. Certain of our charitable neighbours accuse us of having "a parson manufactory" here, but the charge is not true at all. We never tried to make a minister, and should fail if we did; we receive none into the College but those who profess to be ministers already. It would be nearer the truth if they called me a parson killer, for a goodly number of beginners have received their quietus from me; and I have the fullest ease of conscience in reflecting upon what I have so done. It has always been a hard task for me to

discourage a hopeful young brother who has applied for admission to the College. My heart has always leaned to the kindest side, but duty to the churches has compelled me to judge with severe discrimination. After hearing what the candidate has had to say, having read his testimonials and seen his replies to questions, when I have felt convinced that the Lord had not called him, I have been obliged to tell him so. Certain of the cases are types of all. Young brethren apply who earnestly desire to enter the ministry, but it is painfully apparent that their main motive is an ambitious desire to shine among men. These men are from a common point of view to be commended for aspiring, but then the pulpit is never to be the ladder by which ambition is to climb. Had such men entered the army they would never have been satisfied till they had reached the front rank, for they are determined to push their way up — all very laudable and very proper so far; but they have embraced the idea that if they entered the ministry they would be greatly distinguished; they have felt the buddings of genius, and have regarded themselves as greater than ordinary persons, and, therefore, they have looked upon the ministry as a platform upon which to display their supposed abilities. Whenever this has been visible I have felt bound to leave the man “to gang his ain gate,” as the Scotch say; believing that such spirits always come to nought if they enter the Lord’s service. We find that we have nothing whereof to glory, and if we had, the very worst place in which to hang it out would be a pulpit; for there we are brought daily to feel our own insignificance and nothingness.

31 Men who since conversion have betrayed great feebleness of mind and are readily led to embrace strange doctrines, or to fall into evil company and gross sin, I never can find it in my heart to encourage to enter the ministry, let their

professions be what they may. Let them, if truly penitent, keep in the rear ranks. Unstable as water they will not excel.

32 So, too, those who cannot endure hardness, but are of the kid-gloved order, I refer elsewhere. We want soldiers, not fops, earnest labourers, not genteel loiterers. Men who have done nothing up to their time of application to the college, are told to earn their spurs before they are publicly dubbed as knights. Fervent lovers of souls do not wait till they are trained, they serve their Lord at once.

33 Certain good men appeal to me who are distinguished by enormous vehemence and zeal, and a conspicuous absence of brains; brethren who would talk for ever and ever upon nothing — who would stamp and thump the Bible, and get nothing out of it all; earnest, awfully earnest, mountains in labour of the most painful kind; but nothing comes of it all, not even the *ridiculus mus.* There are zealots abroad who are not capable of conceiving or uttering five consecutive thoughts, whose capacity is most narrow and their conceit most broad, and these can hammer, and bawl, and rave, and tear, and rage, but the noise all arises from the hollowness of the drum. I conceive that these brethren will do quite as well without education as with it, and therefore I have usually declined their applications.

34 Another exceedingly large class of men seek the pulpit they know not why. They cannot teach and will not learn, and yet must fain be ministers. Like the man who slept on Parnassus, and ever after imagined himself a poet, they have had impudence enough once to thrust a sermon upon an audience, and now nothing will do but preaching. They are so hasty to leave off sewing garments, that they will make a rent in the church of which they are members to accomplish their design. The counter is distasteful, and a pulpit cushion is

coveted; the scales and weights they are weary of, and must needs try their hands at the balances of the sanctuary. Such men, like raging waves of the sea usually foam forth their own shame, and we are happy when we bid them adieu.

35 Physical infirmities raise a question about the call of some excellent men. I would not, like Eusthenes, judge men by their features, but their general physique is no small criterion. That narrow chest does not indicate a man formed for public speech. You may think it odd, but still I feel very well assured, that when a man has a contracted chest, with no distance between his shoulders, the all-wise Creator did not intend him habitually to preach. If he had meant him to speak he would have given him in some measure breadth of chest, sufficient to yield a reasonable amount of lung force. When the Lord means a creature to run, he gives it nimble legs, and if he means another creature to preach, he will give it suitable lungs. A brother who has to pause in the middle of a sentence and work his air-pump, should ask himself whether there is not some other occupation for which he is better adapted. A man who can scarcely get through a sentence without pain, can hardly be called to “Cry aloud and spare not?” There may be exceptions, but is there not weight in the general rule? Brethren with defective mouths and imperfect articulation are not usually called to preach the gospel. The same applies to brethren with no palate, or an imperfect one.

36 Application was received some short time ago from a young man who had a sort of rotary action of his jaw of the most painful sort to the beholder. His pastor commended him as a very holy young man, who had been the means of bringing some to Christ, and he expressed the hope that I would receive him, but I could not see the propriety of it. I

could not have looked at him while preaching without laughter if all the gold of Tarshish had been my reward, and in all probability nine out of ten of his hearers would have been more sensitive than myself. A man with a big tongue which filled up his mouth and caused indistinctness, another without teeth, another who stammered, another who could not pronounce all the alphabet, I have had the pain of declining on the ground that God had not given them those physical appliances, which are as the prayer-book would put it, “generally necessary.”

37 One brother I have encountered — one did I say? I have met ten, twenty, a hundred brethren, who have pleaded that they were sure, quite sure that they were called to the ministry — they were quite certain of it, because they had failed in everything else. This is a sort of model story: — “Sir, I was put into a lawyer’s office, but I never could bear the confinement, and I could not feel at home in studying law; Providence clearly stopped up my road, for I lost my situation.” “And what did you do then?” “Why sir, I was induced to open a grocer’s shop.” “And did you prosper?” “Well I do not think, Sir, I was ever meant for trade, and the Lord seemed quite to shut my way up there, for I failed and was in great difficulties. Since then I have done a little in life-assurance agency, and tried to get up a school, besides selling tea; but my path is hedged up, and something within me makes me feel that I ought to be a minister.” My answer generally is, “Yes, I see; you have failed, in everything else, and therefore you think the Lord has especially endowed you for his service; but I fear you have forgotten that the ministry needs the very best of men, and not those who cannot do anything else.” A man who would succeed as a preacher would probably do right well either as a grocer, or a lawyer, or anything else. A really valuable minister would have

excelled at anything. There is scarcely anything impossible to a man who can keep a congregation together for years, and be the means of edifying them for hundreds of consecutive Sabbaths; he must be possessed of some abilities, and be by no means a fool or ne'er-do-well. Jesus Christ deserves the best men to preach his cross, and not the empty-headed and the shiftless.

[38] One young gentleman with whose presence I was once honoured, has left on my mind the photograph of his exquisite self. That same face of his looked like the title-page to a whole volume of *conceit* and *deceit,* He sent word into my vestry one Sabbath morning that he must see me at once. His audacity admitted him; and when he was before me he said, "Sir, I want to enter your College, and should like to enter it at once." "Well, Sir," said I, "I fear we have no room for you at present, but your case shall be considered." "But mine is a very remarkable case, Sir; you have probably never received such an application as mine before." "Very good, we'll see about it; the secretary will give you one of the application papers, and you can see me on Monday.' He came on the Monday bringing with him the questions, answered in a most extraordinary manner. As to books, he claimed to have read all ancient and modern literature, and after giving an immense list he added, "this is but a selection; I have read most extensively in all departments." As to his preaching, he could produce the highest testimonials, but hardly thought they would be needed, as a personal interview would convince me of his ability at once. His surprise was great when I said, "Sir, I am obliged to tell you that I cannot receive you." "Why not, Sir?" "I will tell you plainly. You are so dreadfully clever that I could not insult you by receiving you into our College, where we have none but rather ordinary men; the president, tutors, and students, are all men of

moderate attainments, and you would have to condescend too much in coming among us." He looked at me very severely, and said with dignity, "Do you mean to say, that because I have an unusual genius, and have produced in myself a gigantic mind such as is rarely seen, I am refused admittance into your College?" "Yes," I replied, as calmly as I could, considering the overpowering awe which his genius inspired, "for that very reason." "Then, Sir, you ought to allow me a trial of my preaching abilities; select me any text you like, or suggest any subject you please, and here in this very room I will speak upon it, or preach upon it without deliberation, and you will be surprised." "No, thank you, I would rather not have the trouble of listening to you." "Trouble, Sir! I assure you it would be the greatest possible pleasure you could have." I said it might be, but I felt myself unworthy of the privilege, and so bade him a long farewell. The gentleman was unknown to me at the time, but he has since figured in the police court as too clever by half.

[39] We have occasionally had applications at which, perhaps, you would be amazed, from men who are evidently fluent enough, and who answer all our questions very well, except those upon their doctrinal views, to which repeatedly we have had this answer: "Mr. So-and-so is prepared to receive the doctrines of the College whatever they may be!" In all such cases we never deliberate a moment, the instantaneous negative is given. I mention it, because it illustrates our conviction that men are not called to the ministry who have no knowledge and no definite belief. When young fellows say that they have not made up their minds upon theology, they ought to go back to the Sunday-school until they have. For a man to come shuffling into a College, pretending that he holds his mind open to any form of truth, and that he is eminently receptive, but has not settled in his mind such

things as whether God has an election of grace, or whether he loves his people to the end, seems to me to be a perfect monstrosity. “Not a novice,” says the apostle; yet a man who has not made up his mind on such points as these, is confessedly and egregiously a novice, and ought to be relegated to the catechism-class till he has learned the first truths of the gospel.

40 After all, gentlemen, we shall have to prove our call by the practical proof of our ministry in after life, and it will be a lamentable thing for us to start in our course without due examination, for if so, we may have to leave it in disgrace. On the whole, experience is our surest test, and if God upholds us from year to year, and gives us his blessing, we need make no other trial of our vocation. Our moral and spiritual fitnesses will be tried by the labour of our ministry, and this is the most trustworthy of all tests. From some one or other I heard in conversation of a plan adopted by Matthew Wilks, for examining a young man who wanted to be a missionary; the drift, if not the detail of the test, commends itself to my judgment though not to my taste. The young man desired to go to India as a missionary in connection with the London Missionary Society. Mr. Wilks was appointed to consider his fitness for such a post. He wrote to the young man, and told him to call upon him at six o’clock the next morning. The brother lived many miles off but he was at the house at six o’clock punctually. Mr. Wilks did not, however, enter the room till hours after. The brother waited wonderingly, but patiently. At last, Mr. Wilks arrived, and addressed the candidate thus, in his usual nasal tones, “Well, young man, so you want to be a missionary?” “Yes, Sir,” “Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?” “Yes, Sir, I hope I do.” “And have you had any education?” “Yes, Sir, a little.” “Well, now, we’ll try you; can you spell ‘cat’?” The young man looked confused, and

hardly knew how to answer so preposterous a question. His mind evidently halted between indignation and submission, but in a moment he replied steadily, “C, a, t, cat.” “Very good,” said Mr. Wilks; “now, can you spell ‘dog’?” Our young martyr hesitated, but Mr. Wilks said in his coolest manner, “Oh, never mind; don’t be bashful; you spelt the other word so well that I should think you will be able to spell this: high as the attainment is, it is not so elevated but what you might do it without blushing.” The youthful Job replied, “D, o, g, dog.” “Well, that is right; I see you will do in your spelling, and now for your arithmetic; how many are twice two?” It is a wonder that Mr. Wilks did not receive “twice two” after the fashion of muscular Christianity, but the patient youth gave the right reply and was dismissed. Matthew Wilks at the committee meeting said, “I cordially recommend that young man; his testimonials and character I have duly examined, and besides that, I have given him a rare personal trial such as few could bear. I tried his self-denial, he was up in the morning early; I tried his temper, and I tried his humility; he can spell ‘cat’ and ‘dog,’ and can tell that ‘twice two make four,’ and he will do for a missionary exceedingly well.” Now, what the old gentleman is thus said to have done with exceedingly bad taste, we may with much propriety do with ourselves. We must try whether we can endure brow-beating, weariness, slander, jeering, and hardship; and whether we can be made the off-scouring of all things, and be treated as nothing for Christ’s sake. If we can endure all these, we have some of those points which indicate the possession of the rare qualities which should meet in a true servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. I gravely question whether some of us will find our vessels, when far out at sea, to be quite so seaworthy as we think them. O my brethren, make sure work of it while you are yet in this retreat; and diligently labour to fit

yourselves for your high calling. You will have trials enough, and woe to you if you do not go forth armed from head to foot with armour of proof. You will have to run with horsemen, let not the footmen weary you while in your preliminary studies. The devil is abroad, and with him are many. Prove your own selves, and may the Lord prepare you for the crucible and the furnace which assuredly await you. Your tribulation may not in all respects be so severe as that of Paul and his companions, but you must be ready for a like ordeal. Let me read you his memorable words, and let me entreat you to pray, while you hear them, that the Holy Ghost may strengthen you for all that lies before you. “Giving no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed: but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in affliction, in necessities, in distresses in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonor, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”

# Lecture 3. The Preacher’s Private Prayer

[1] Of course the preacher is above all others distinguished as a man of prayer. He prays as an ordinary Christian, else he were a hypocrite. He prays more than ordinary Christians, else he were disqualified for the office which he has undertaken. “It would be wholly monstrous,” says Bernard, “for a man to be highest in office and lowest in soul; first in station and last in life.” Over all his other relationships the pre-eminence of the pastor’s responsibility casts a halo, and if true to his Master, he becomes distinguished for his prayerfulness in them all. As a citizen, his country has the advantage of his intercession; as a neighbour those under his shadow are remembered in supplication. He prays as a husband and as a father; he strives to make his family devotions a model for his flock; and if the fire on the altar of God should burn low anywhere else, it is well tended in the house of the Lord’s chosen servant — for he takes care that the morning and evening sacrifice shall sanctify his dwelling. But there are some of his prayers which concern his office, and of those our plan in these lectures leads us to speak most. He offers peculiar supplications *as a minister,* and he draws near to God in this respect, over and above all his approaches in his other relationships.

[2] I take it that as a minister *he is always praying.* Whenever his mind turns to his work, whether he is in it or out of it, he ejaculates a petition, sending up his holy desires as well-directed arrows to the skies. He is not always in the act of prayer, but he lives in the spirit of it. If his heart be in his work, he cannot eat or drink, or take recreation, or go to his bed, or rise in the morning, without evermore feeling a

fervency of desire, a weight of anxiety, and a simplicity of dependence upon God; thus, in one form or other he continues in prayer. If there be any man under heaven, who is compelled to carry out the precept — “Pray without ceasing,” surely it is the Christian minister. He has peculiar temptations, special trials, singular difficulties, and remarkable duties, he has to deal with God in awful relationships, and with men in mysterious interests; he therefore needs much more grace than common men, and as he knows this, he is led constantly to cry to the strong for strength, and say, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” Alleine once wrote to a dear friend, “Though I am apt to be unsettled and quickly set off the hinges, yet, methinks, I am like a bird out of the nest, I am never quiet till I am in my old way of communion with God; like the needle in the compass, that is restless till it be turned towards the pole. I can say, through grace, with the church, ‘With my soul have I desired thee in the night and with my spirit within me have I sought thee early.’ My heart is early and late with God; ‘tis the business and delight of my life to seek him.” Such must be the even tenor of your way, O men of God. If you as ministers are not very prayerful, you are much to be pitied. If, in the future, you shall be called to sustain pastorates, large or small, if you become lax in secret devotion, not only will *you* need to be pitied, but your people also; and, in addition to that, you shall be blamed, and the day cometh in which you shall be ashamed and confounded.

[3] It may scarcely be needful to commend to you the sweet uses of private devotion, and yet I cannot forbear. To you, as the ambassadors of God, the mercy-seat has a virtue beyond all estimate; the more familiar you are with the court of heaven the better shall you discharge your heavenly trust. Among all the formative influences which go to make up a

man honoured of God in the ministry, I know of none more mighty than his own familiarity with the mercy-seat. All that a college course can do, for a student is coarse and external compared with the spiritual and delicate refinement obtained by communion with God. While the unformed minister is revolving upon the wheel of preparation, prayer is the tool of the great potter by which he molds the vessel. All our libraries and studies are mere emptiness compared with our closets. We grow, we wax mighty, we prevail in private-prayer.

4 Your prayers will be your ablest assistants *while your discourses are yet upon the anvil.* While other men, like Esau, are hunting for their portion, you, by the aid of prayer, will find the savoury meat near at home, and may say in truth what Jacob said so falsely, “The Lord brought it to me.” If you can dip your pens into your hearts, appealing in earnestness to the Lord, you will write well; and if you can gather your matter on your knees at the gate of heaven, you will not fail to speak well. Prayer, as a mental exercise, will bring many subjects before the mind, and so help in the selection of a topic, while as a high spiritual engagement it will cleanse your inner eye that you may see truth in the light of God. Texts will often refuse to reveal their treasures till you open them with the key of prayer. How wonderfully were the books opened to Daniel when he was in supplication! How much Peter learned upon the housetop! The closet is the best study. The commentators are good instructors, but the Author himself is far better, and prayer makes a direct appeal to him and enlists him in our cause. It is a great thing to pray one’s self into the spirit and marrow of a text; working into it by sacred feeding thereon, even as the worm bores its way into the kernel of the nut. Prayer supplies a leverage for the uplifting of ponderous truths. One marvels how the stones of

Stonehenge could have been set in their places; it is even more to be inquired after whence some men obtained such admirable knowledge of mysterious doctrines: was not prayer the potent machinery which wrought the wonder? Waiting upon God often turns darkness into light. Persevering inquiry at the sacred oracle uplifts the veil and gives grace to look into the deep things of God. A certain Puritan divine at a debate was observed frequently to write upon the paper before him; upon others curiously seeking to read his notes, they found nothing upon the page but the words, “More light, Lord,” “More light, Lord,” repeated scores of times: a most suitable prayer for the student of the Word when preparing his discourse.

5 You will frequently find fresh streams of thought leaping up from the passage before you, as if the rock had been struck by Moses’ rod; new veins of precious ore will be revealed to your astonished gaze as you quarry God’s Word and use diligently the hammer of prayer. You will sometimes feel as if you were entirely shut up, and then suddenly a new road will open before you. He who hath the key of David openeth, and no man shutteth. If you have ever sailed down the Rhine, the water scenery of that majestic river will have struck you as being very like in effect to a series of lakes. Before and behind the vessel appears to be enclosed in massive walls of rock, or circles of vine-clad terraces, till on a sudden you turn a corner, and before you the rejoicing and abounding river flows onward in its strength. So the laborious student often finds it with a text; it appears to be fast closed against you, but prayer propels your vessel, and turns its prow into fresh waters, and you behold, the broad and deep stream of sacred truth flowing in its fulness, and bearing you with it. Is not this a convincing reason for abiding in supplication? Use prayer as a boring rod, and wells of living water will leap up from

the bowels of the Word. Who will be content to thirst when living waters are so readily to be obtained! The best and holiest men have ever made prayer the most important part of pulpit preparation. It is said of M'Cheyne[11], "Anxious to give his people on the Sabbath what had cost him somewhat, he never, without an urgent reason, went before them without much previous meditation and prayer. His principle on this subject was embodied in a remark he made to some of us who were conversing on the matter. Being asked his view of diligent preparation for the pulpit, he reminded us of Exodus 27:20. *'Beaten oil — beaten oil for the lamps of the sanctuary.'* And yet his prayerfulness was greater still. Indeed, he could not neglect fellowship with God before entering the congregation. He needed to be bathed in the love of God. His ministry was so much a bringing out of views that had first sanctified his own soul, that the healthiness of his soul was absolutely needful to the vigour and power of his ministrations." "With him the commencement of all labour invariably consisted in the preparation of his own soul. The walls of his chamber were witnesses of his prayerfulness and of his tears, as well as of his cries."

6 *Prayer will singularly assist you in the delivery of your sermon;* in fact, nothing can so gloriously fit you to preach as descending fresh from the mount of communion with God to speak with men. None are so able to plead with men as those who have been wrestling with God on their behalf. It is said of Alleine, "He poured out his very heart in prayer and preaching. His supplications and his exhortations were so affectionate, so full of holy zeal, life and vigour, that they quite overcame his hearers; he melted over them, so that he thawed and mollified, and sometimes dissolved the hardest hearts." There could have been none of this sacred dissolving of heart if his mind had not been previously exposed to the

tropical rays of the Sun of Righteousness by private fellowship with the risen Lord. A truly pathetic delivery, in which there is no affectation, but much affection, can only be the offspring of prayer. There is no rhetoric like that of the heart, and no school for learning it but the foot of the cross. It were better that you never learned a rule of human oratory, but were full of the power of heaven-born love, than that you should master Quintilian, Cicero, and Aristotle, and remain without the apostolic anointing.

7 Prayer may not make you eloquent after the human mode, but it will make you truly so, for you will speak out of the heart; and is not that the meaning of the word eloquence? It will bring fire from heaven upon your sacrifice, and thus prove it to be accepted of the Lord.

8 As fresh springs of thought will frequently break up during preparation in answer to prayer, so will it be in the delivery of the sermon. Most preachers who depend upon God’s Spirit will tell you that their freshest and best thoughts are not those which were premeditated, but ideas which come to them, flying as on the wings of angels; unexpected treasures brought on a sudden by celestial hands, seeds of the flowers of paradise, wafted from the mountains of myrrh. Often and often when I have felt hampered, both in thought and expression, my secret groaning of heart has brought me relief, and I have enjoyed more than usual liberty. But how dare we pray in the battle if we have never cried to the Lord while buckling on the harness! The remembrance of his wrestlings at home comforts the fettered preacher when in the pulpit: God will not desert us unless we have deserted him. You, brethren, will find that prayer will ensure you strength equal to your day.

9 As the tongues of fire came upon the apostles, when they sat watching and praying, even so will they come upon you. You will find yourselves, when you might perhaps have flagged, suddenly upborne, as by a seraph's power. Wheels of fire will be fastened to your chariot, which had begun to drag right heavily, and steeds angelic will be in a moment harnessed to your fiery car, till you climb the heavens like Elijah, in a rapture of flaming inspiration.

10 *After the sermon,* how would a conscientious preacher give vent to his feelings and find solace for his soul if access to the mercy-seat were denied him? Elevated to the highest pitch of excitement, how can we relieve our souls but in importunate pleadings. Or depressed by a fear of failure, how shall we be comforted but in moaning out our complaint before our God. How often have some of us tossed to and fro upon our couch half the night because of conscious shortcomings in our testimony! How frequently have we longed to rush back to the pulpit again to say over again more vehemently, what we have uttered in so cold a manner! Where could we find rest for our spirits but in confession of sin, and passionate entreaty that our infirmity or folly might in no way hinder the Spirit of God! It is not possible in a public assembly to pour out all our heart's love to our flock. Like Joseph, the affectionate minister will seek where to weep; his emotions, however freely he may express himself, will be pent up in the pulpit, and only in private prayer can he draw up the sluices and bid them flow forth. If we cannot prevail with men for God, we will, at least, endeavour to prevail with God for men. We cannot save them, or even persuade them to be saved, but we can at least bewail their madness and entreat the interference of the Lord. Like Jeremiah, we can make it our resolve, "If ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, and mine

eye shall weep sore and run down with tears." To such pathetic appeals the Lord's heart can never be indifferent; in due time the weeping intercessor will become the rejoicing winner of souls. There is a distinct connection between importunate agonizing and true success, even as between the travail and the birth, the sowing in tears and the reaping in joy. "How is it that your seed comes up so soon?" said one gardener to another. "Because I steep it," was the reply. We must steep all our teachings in tears, "when none but God is nigh," and their growth will surprise and delight us. Could any one wonder at Brainerd's success, when his diary contains such notes as this: "Lord's Day, April 25th — This morning spent about two hours in sacred duties, and was enabled, more than ordinarily, to agonize for immortal souls; though it was early in the morning, and the sun scarcely shone at all, yet my body was quite wet with sweat." The secret of Luther's power lay in the same direction. Theodorus said of him: "I overheard him in prayer, but, good God, with what life and spirit did he pray! It was with so much reverence, as if he were speaking to God, yet with so much confidence as if he were speaking to his friend." My brethren, let me beseech you to be men of prayer. Great talents you may never have, but you will do well enough without them if you abound in intercession. If you do not pray over what you have sown, God's sovereignty may possibly determine to give a blessing, but you have no right to expect it, and if it comes it will bring no comfort to your own heart. I was reading yesterday a book by Father Faber, late of the Oratory, at Brompton, a marvellous compound of truth and error In it he relates a legend to this effect. A certain preacher, whose sermons converted men by scores, received a revelation from heaven that not one of the conversions was owing to his talents or eloquence, but all to the prayers of an illiterate

lay-brother, who sat on the pulpit steps, pleading all the time for the success of the sermon. It may in the all-revealing day be so with us. We may discover, after having laboured long and wearily in preaching, that all the honour belongs to another builder, whose prayers were gold, silver, and precious stones, while our sermonizing, being apart from prayer, were but hay and stubble.

11 When we have done with preaching, we shall not, if we are true ministers of God, have done with praying, because the whole church, with many tongues, will be crying, in the language of the Macedonian, “Come over and help us” in prayer. If you are enabled to prevail in prayer you will have many requests to offer for others who will flock to you, and beg a share in your intercessions, and so you will find yourselves commissioned with errands to the mercy-seat for friends and hearers. Such is always my lot, and I feel it a pleasure to have such requests to present before my Lord. Never can you be short of themes for prayer, even if no one should suggest them to you. Look at your congregation. There are always sick folk among them, and many more who are soul sick. Some are unsaved, others are seeking and cannot find. Many are desponding, and not a few believers are backsliding or mourning. There are widows’ tears and orphans’ sighs to be put into our bottle, and poured out before the Lord. If you are a genuine minister of God you will stand as a priest before the Lord, spiritually wearing the ephod and the breast-plate whereon you bear the names of the children of Israel, pleading for them within the veil. I have known brethren who have kept a list of persons for whom they felt bound especially to pray, and I doubt not such a record often reminded them of what might otherwise have slipped their memory. Nor will your people wholly engross you; the nation and the world will claim their share. The man

who is mighty in prayer may be a wall of fire around his country, her guardian angel and her shield. We have all heard how the enemies of the Protestant cause dreaded the prayers of Knox more than they feared armies of ten thousand men. The famous Welch was also a great intercessor for his country; he used to say “he wondered how a Christian could lie in his bed all night and not rise to pray.” When his wife fearing that he would take cold, followed him into the room to which he had withdrawn, she heard him pleading in broken sentences, “Lord, wilt thou not grant me Scotland?” O that we were thus wrestling at midnight, crying, “Lord, wilt thou not grant us our hearers’ souls?”

12 The minister who does not earnestly pray over his work must surely be a vain and conceited man. He acts as if he thought himself sufficient of himself, and therefore needed not to appeal to God. Yet what a baseless pride to conceive that our preaching can ever be in itself so powerful that it can turn men from their sins, and bring them to God without the working of the Holy Ghost. If we are truly humble-minded we shall not venture down to the fight until the Lord of Hosts has clothed us with all power, and said to us, “Go in this thy might.” The preacher who neglects to pray much must be very careless about his ministry. He cannot have comprehended his calling. He cannot have computed the value of a soul, or estimated the meaning of eternity. He must be a mere official, tempted into a pulpit because the piece of bread which belongs to the priest’s office is very necessary to him, or a detestable hypocrite who loves the praise of men, and cares not for the praise of God. He will surely become a mere superficial talker, best approved where grace is least valued and a vain show most admired. He cannot be one of those who plough deep and reap abundant harvests. He is a mere loiterer, not a labourer. As a preacher he has a name to

live and is dead. He limps in his life like the lame man in the Proverbs, whose legs were not equal, for his praying is shorter than his preaching.

13 I am afraid that, more or less, most of us need self-examination as to this matter. If any man here should venture to say that he prays as much as he ought, as a student, I should gravely question his statement; and if there be a minister, deacon, or elder present who can say that he believes he is occupied with God in prayer to the full extent to which he might be, I should be pleased to know him. I can only say, that if he can claim this excellence, he leaves me far behind, for I can make no such claim: I wish I could; and I make the confession with no small degree of shame-facedness and confusion, but I am obliged to make it. If we are not more negligent than others, this is no consolation to us; the shortcomings of others are no excuses for us. How few of us could compare ourselves with Mr. Joseph Alleine, whose character I have mentioned before? “At the time of his health,” writes his wife, “he did rise constantly at or before four of the clock, and would be much troubled if he heard smiths or other craftsmen at their trades before he was at communion with God; saying to me often, ‘How this noise shames me. Does not my Master deserve more than theirs?’ From four till eight he spent in prayer, holy contemplation, and singing of psalms, in which he much delighted and did daily practice alone, as well as in the family. Sometimes he would suspend the routine of parochial engagements, and devote whole days to these secret exercises, in order to which, he would contrive to be alone in some void house, or else in some sequestered spot in the open valley. Here there would be much prayer and meditation on God and heaven.”[12] Could we read Jonathan Edwards’ description of David Brainerd and not blush? “His

life," says Edwards, "shows the right way to success in the works of the ministry. He sought it as a resolute soldier seeks victory in a siege or battle; or as a man that runs a race for a great prize. Animated with love to Christ and souls, how did he labour always fervently, not only in word and doctrine, in public and private, but in *prayers* day and night, 'wrestling with God' in secret, and 'travailing in birth,' with unutterable groans and agonies! 'until Christ were formed' in the hearts of the people to whom he was sent! How did he thirst for a blessing upon his ministry, 'and watch for souls as one that must give account!' How did he 'go forth in the strength of the Lord God, seeking and depending on the special influence of the Spirit to assist and succeed him! And what was the happy fruit at last, after long waiting and many dark and discouraging appearances: like a true son of Jacob, he persevered in wrestling through all the darkness of the night, until the breaking of the day."[13]

[14] Might not Henry Martyn's journal shame us, where we find such entries; as these; "Sept. 24th — The determination with which I went to bed last night, of devoting this day to prayer and fasting, I was enabled to put into execution. In my first prayer for deliverance from worldly thoughts, depending on the power and promises of God, for fixing my soul while I prayed, I was helped to enjoy much abstinence from the world for nearly an hour. Then read the history of Abraham, to see how familiarly God had revealed himself to mortal men of old. Afterwards, in prayer for my own sanctification, my soul breathed freely and ardently after the holiness of God, and this was the best season of the day."[14] We might perhaps more truly join with him in his lament after the first year of his ministry that "he judged he had dedicated too much time to public ministrations, and too little to private communion with God."

15 How much of blessing we may have missed through remissness in supplication we can scarcely guess, and none of us can know how poor we are in comparison with what we might have been if we had lived habitually nearer to God in prayer. Vain regrets and surmises are useless, but an earnest determination to amend will be far more useful. We not only ought to pray more, but we *must.* The fact is, the secret of all ministerial success lies in prevalence at the mercy-seat.

16 One bright benison which private prayer brings down upon the ministry is an indescribable and inimitable something, better understood than named; it is a dew from the Lord, a divine presence which you will recognize at once when I say it is “an unction from the holy One.” What is it? I wonder how long we might beat our brains before we could plainly put into words what is meant by *preaching with unction;* yet he who preaches knows its presence, and he who hears soon detects its absence; Samaria, in famine, typifies a discourse without it; Jerusalem, with her feasts of fat things full of marrow, may represent a sermon enriched with it. Everyone knows what the freshness of the morning is when orient pearls abound on every blade of grass, but who can describe it, much less produce it of itself? Such is the mystery of spiritual anointing; we know, but we cannot tell to others what it is. It is as easy as it is foolish to counterfeit it, as some do who use expressions which are meant to betoken fervent love, but oftener indicate sickly sentimentalism or mere cant. “Dear Lord!” “Sweet Jesus!” “Precious Christ!” are by them poured out wholesale, till one is nauseated. These familiarities may have been not only tolerable, but even beautiful when they first fell from a saint of God, speaking, as it were out of the excellent glory, but when repeated flippantly they are not only intolerable, but indecent, if not profane. Some have tried to imitate unction by unnatural

tones and whines; by turning up the whites of their eyes, and lifting their hands in a most ridiculous manner. M'Cheyne's tone and rhythm one hears from Scotchmen continually: we much prefer his spirit to his mannerism; and all mere mannerism without power is as foul carrion of all life bereft, obnoxious, mischievous. Certain brethren aim at inspiration through exertion and loud shouting; but it does not come: some we have known to stop the discourse, and exclaim, "God bless you," and others gesticulate wildly, and drive their finger nails into the palms of their hands as if they were in convulsions of celestial ardour. Bah! The whole thing smells of the green-room and the stage. The getting up of fervour in hearers by the simulation of it in the preacher is a loathsome deceit to be scorned by honest men. "To affect feeling," says Richard Cecil, "is nauseous and soon detected, but to feel is the readiest way to the hearts of others." Unction is a thing which you cannot manufacture, and its counterfeits are worse than worthless; yet it is in itself priceless, and beyond measure needful if you would edify believers and bring sinners to Jesus. To the secret pleader with God this secret is committed; upon him rests the dew of the Lord, about him is the perfume which makes glad the heart. If the anointing which we bear come not from the Lord of hosts we are deceivers, and since only in prayer can we obtain it, let us continue instant, constant, fervent in supplication. Let your fleece lie on the threshing-floor of supplication till it is wet with the dew of heaven. Go not to minister in the temple till you have washed in the laver. Think not to be a messenger of grace to others till you have seen the God of grace for yourselves, and had the word from his mouth. Time spent in quiet prostration of soul before the Lord is most invigorating. David "sat before the Lord;" it is a great thing to hold these sacred sittings; the mind being

receptive, like an open flower drinking in the sunbeams, or the sensitive photographic plate accepting the image before it. Quietude, which some men cannot abide, because it reveals their inward poverty, is as a palace of cedar to the wise, for along its hallowed courts the King in his beauty deigns to walk.

> [17] "Sacred silence! thou that art
> Floodgate of the deeper heart,
> Offspring of a heavenly kind;
> Frost o' the mouth, and thaw o' the mind."[15]

[18] Priceless as the gift of utterance may be, the practice of silence in some aspects far excels it. Do you think me a Quaker? Well, be it so. Herein I follow George Fox most lovingly; for I am persuaded that we most of us think too much of speech, which after all is but the shell of thought. Quiet contemplation, still worship, unuttered rapture, these are mine when my best jewels are before me. Brethren, rob not your heart of the deep sea joys; miss not the far-down life, by forever babbling among the broken shells and foaming surges of the shore.

[19] I would seriously recommend to you, when settled in the ministry, the celebration of extraordinary seasons of devotion. If your ordinary prayers do not keep up the freshness and vigour of your souls, and you feel that you are flagging, get alone for a week, or even a month if possible. We have occasional holidays, why not frequent holy days? We hear of our richer brethren finding time for a journey to Jerusalem; could we not spare time for the less difficult and far more profitable journey to the heavenly city? Isaac Ambrose, once pastor at Preston, who wrote that famous book, "Looking unto Jesus," always set apart one month in the year for seclusion in a hut in a wood at Garstang. No

wonder that he was so mighty a divine, when he could regularly spend so long a time in the mount with God. I notice that the Romanists are accustomed to secure what they call “Retreats,” where a number of priests will retire for a time into perfect quietude, to spend the whole of the time in fasting and prayer, so as to inflame their souls with ardour. We may learn from our adversaries. It would be a great thing every now and then for a band of truly spiritual brethren to spend a day or two with each other in real burning agony of prayer. Pastors alone could use much more freedom than in a mixed company. Times of humiliation and supplication for the whole church will also benefit us if we enter into them heartily. Our seasons of fasting and prayer at the Tabernacle have been high days indeed; never has heaven-gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central glory. I look forward to our month of special devotion, as mariners reckon upon reaching land. Even if our public work were laid aside to give us space for special prayer, it might be a great gain to our churches. A voyage to the golden rivers of fellowship and meditation would be well repaid by a freight of sanctified feeling and elevated thought. Our silence might be better than our voices if our solitude were spent with God. That was a grand action of old Jerome, when he laid all his pressing engagements aside to achieve a purpose to which he felt a call from heaven. He had a large congregation, as large a one as any of us need want; but he said to his people, “Now it is of necessity that the New Testament should be translated, you must find another preacher: the translation must be made; I am bound for the wilderness, and shall not return till my task is finished.” Away he went with his manuscripts, and prayed and laboured, and produced a work — the Latin-Vulgate — which will last as long as the world stands; on the whole a most wonderful translation of Holy

Scripture. As learning and prayerful retirement together could thus produce an immortal work, if we were sometimes to say to our people when we felt moved to do so, “Dear friends, we really must be gone for a little while to refresh our souls in solitude,” our profiting would soon be apparent, and if we did not write Latin Vulgates, yet we should do immortal work, such as would abide the fire.

# Lecture 4. Our Public Prayer

1 It has sometimes been the boast of Episcopalians that Churchmen go to their churches to pray and worship God, but that Dissenters merely assemble to hear sermons. Our reply to this is, that albeit there may be some professors who are guilty of this evil, it is not true of the people of God among us, and these are the only persons who ever will in any church really enjoy devotion. Our congregations gather together to worship God, and we assert, and feel no hesitation in so asserting, that there is as much true and acceptable prayer offered in our ordinary Nonconformist services as in the best and most pompous performances of the Church of England.

2 Moreover, if the observation be meant to imply that the hearing of sermons is not worshipping God, it is founded on a gross mistake, for rightly to listen to the gospel is one of the noblest parts of the adoration of the Most High. It is a mental exercise, when rightly performed, in which all the faculties of the spiritual man are called into devotional action. Reverently hearing the word exercises our humility, instructs our faith, irradiates us with joy, inflames us with love, inspires us with zeal, and lifts us up towards heaven. Many a time a sermon has been a kind of Jacob’s ladder upon which we have seen the angels of God ascending and descending, and the covenant God himself at the top thereof. We have often felt when God has spoken through his servants into our souls, “This is none other than the house of God, and the very gate of heaven.” We have magnified the name of the Lord and praised him with all our heart while he has spoken to us by his Spirit which he has given unto men. Hence there is not the wide distinction to be drawn between preaching and

prayer that some would have us admit; for the one part of the service softly blends into the other, and the sermon frequently inspires the prayer and the hymn. True preaching is an acceptable adoration of God by the manifestation of his gracious attributes: the testimony of his gospel, which pre-eminently glorifies him, and the obedient hearing of revealed truth, are an acceptable form of worship to the Most High, and perhaps one of the most spiritual in which the human mind can be engaged. Nevertheless, as the old Roman poet tells us, it is right to learn from our enemies, and therefore it may be possible that our liturgical opponents have pointed out to us what is in some instances a weak place in our public services. It is to be feared that our exercises are not in every case moulded into the best form, or presented in the most commendable fashion. There are meeting-houses in which the supplications are neither so devout nor so earnest as we desire; in other places the earnestness is so allied with ignorance, and the devotion so marred with rant, that no intelligent believer can enter into the service with pleasure. Praying in the Holy Ghost is not universal among us, neither do all pray with the understanding as well as with the heart. There is room for improvement, and in some quarters there is an imperative demand for it. Let me, therefore, very earnestly caution you, beloved brethren, against spoiling your services by your prayers: make it your solemn resolve that all the engagements of the sanctuary shall be of the best kind.

3 *Be assured that free prayer is the most scriptural, and should be the most excellent form of public supplication.* If you lose faith in what you are doing you will never do it well; settle it in your minds therefore, that before the Lord you are worshipping in a manner which is warranted by the word of God, and accepted of the Lord. The expression, “reading

prayers," to which we are now so accustomed, is not to be found in Holy Scripture, rich as it is in words for conveying religious thought; and the phrase is not there because the thing itself had no existence. Where in the writings of the apostles meet we with the bare idea of a liturgy? Prayer in the assemblies of the early Christians was unrestricted to any form of words. Tertullian writes, "we pray *without a prompter* because from the heart."[16] Justin Martyr describes the presiding minister as praying "according to his ability."[17] It would be difficult to discover when and where liturgies began; their introduction was gradual, and as we believe, co-extensive with the decline of purity in the church; the introduction of them among Nonconformists would mark the era of our decline and fall. The subject tempts me to linger, but it is not the point in hand, and therefore I pass on, only remarking that you will find the matter of liturgies ably handled by Dr. John Owen, whom you will do well to consult.[18]

[4] *Be it ours to prove the superiority of extempore prayer by making it more spiritual and earnest than liturgical devotion.* It is a great pity when the observation is forced from the hearer, our minister preaches far better than he prays: this is not after the model of our Lord; he spake as never man spake — and as for his prayers, they so impressed his disciples that they said, "Lord, teach us to pray." All our faculties should concentrate their energy, and the whole man should be elevated to his highest point of vigour while in public prayer, the Holy Ghost meanwhile baptizing soul and spirit with his sacred influence; but slovenly, careless, lifeless talk in the guise of prayer, made to fill up a certain space in the service, is a weariness to man, and an abomination to God. Had free prayer been universally of a higher order a liturgy would never have been thought of, and today forms of prayer have

no better apology than the feebleness of extemporaneous devotions. The secret is that we are not so really devout at heart as we should be. Habitual communion with God must be maintained, or our public prayers will be vapid or formal. If there be no melting of the glacier high up in the ravines of the mountain, there will be no descending rivulets to cheer the plain. Private prayer is the drill ground for our more public exercises, neither can we long neglect it without being out of order when before the people.

5 *Our prayers must never grovel, they must soar and mount. We need a heavenly frame of mind.* Our addresses to the throne of grace must be solemn and humble, not flippant and loud, or formal and careless. The colloquial form of speech is out of place before the Lord; we must bow reverently and with deepest awe. We may speak boldly with God, but still he is in heaven and we are upon earth, and we are to avoid presumption. In supplication we are peculiarly before the throne of the Infinite, and as the courtier in the king's palace puts on another mien and another manner than that which he exhibits to his fellow courtiers, so should it be with us. We have noticed in the churches of Holland, that as soon as the minister begins to preach every man puts his hat on, but the instant he turns to pray everybody takes his hat off: this was the custom in the older Puritanic congregations of England, and it lingered long among the Baptists; they wore their caps during those parts of the service which they conceived were not direct worship, but put them off as soon as there was a direct approach to God, either in song or in prayer. I think the practice unseemly, and the reason for it erroneous. I have urged that the distinction between prayer and hearing is not great, and I feel sure no one would propose to return to the old custom or the opinion of which it was the index; but still there is a difference, and inasmuch as in prayer we are more

directly talking with God rather than seeking the edification of our fellow men, we must put our shoes from off our feet, for the place whereon we stand is holy ground.

6 *Let the Lord alone be the object of your prayers.* Beware of having an eye to the auditors; beware of becoming rhetorical to please the listeners. Prayer must not be transformed into "an oblique sermon." It is little short of blasphemy to make devotion an occasion for display. Fine prayers are generally very wicked prayers. In the presence of the Lord of hosts it ill becomes a sinner to parade the feathers and finery of tawdry speech with the view of winning applause from his fellow mortals. Hypocrites who dare to do this have their reward, but it is one to be dreaded. A heavy sentence of condemnation was passed upon a minister when it was flatteringly said that his prayer was the most eloquent ever offered to a Boston congregation. We may aim at exciting the yearnings and aspirations of those who hear us in prayer; but every word and thought must be Godward, and only so far touching upon the people as may be needful to bring them and their wants before the Lord. Remember the people in your prayers, but do not mould your supplications to win their esteem: look up, look up with both eyes.

7 *Avoid all vulgarities in prayer.* I must acknowledge to having heard some, but it would be unprofitable to recount them; the more especially as they become less frequent every day. We seldom now meet with the vulgarities of prayer which were once so common in Methodist prayer-meetings, much commoner probably by report than in reality. Uneducated people must, when in earnest, pray in their own way, and their language will frequently shock, the fastidious if not the devout; but for this allowance must be made, and if the spirit is evidently sincere we may forgive uncomely

expressions. I once, at a prayer-meeting, heard a poor man pray thus: “Lord, watch over these young people during the feast time, for thou knowest, Lord, how their enemies watch for them as a cat watches for mice.” Some ridiculed the expression, but it appeared to me to be natural and expressive, considering the person using it. A little gentle instruction and a hint or two will usually prevent a repetition of anything objectionable in such cases, but we, who occupy the pulpit, must be careful to be quite clear ourselves. The biographer of that remarkable American Methodist preacher Jacob Gruber, mentions as an instance of his ready wit, that after having heard a young Calvinistic minister violently attack his creed, he was asked to conclude with prayer, and among other petitions, prayed that the Lord would bless the young man who had been preaching, and grant him much grace, “that his heart might become as soft as his head.” To say nothing of the bad taste of such public animadversion upon a fellow minister, every right-minded man will see that the throne of the Most High is not the place for uttering such vulgar witticisms. Most probably the young orator deserved a castigation for his offence against charity, but the older one sinned ten times more in his want of reverence. Choice words are for the King of kings, not such as ribald tongues have defiled.

[8] *Another fault equally to be avoided in prayer is an unhallowed and sickening superabundance of endearing words.* When “Dear Lord,” and “Blessed Lord,” and “Sweet Lord,” come over and over again, as vain repetitions, they are among the worst of blots. I must confess I should feel no revulsion in my mind to the words, “Dear Jesus,” if they fell from the lips of a Rutherford, or a Hawker, or a Herbert; but when I hear fond and familiar expressions hackneyed by persons not at all remarkable for spirituality, I am inclined to

wish that they could, in some way or other, come to a better understanding of the true relation existing between man and God. The word “dear” has come from daily use to be so common, and so small, and in some cases so silly and affected a monosyllable, that interlarding one’s prayers with it is not to edification.

9 The strongest objection exists to the constant repetition of the word “Lord,” which occurs in the early prayers of young converts, and even among students. The words, “O Lord! O Lord! O Lord!” grieve us when we hear them so perpetually repeated. “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,” is a great commandment, and although the law may be broken unwittingly yet its breach is still a sin and a very solemn one. God’s name is not to be a stop-gap to make up for our want of words. Take care to use most reverently the name of the infinite Jehovah. The Jews in their sacred writings either leave a space for the word “Jehovah,” or else write the word, “Adonai,” because they conceive that holy name to be too sacred for common use: we need not be so superstitious, but it were well to be scrupulously reverent. A profusion of “ohs!” and other interjections may be well dispensed with; young speakers are often at fault here.

10 *Avoid that kind of prayer which may be called* — though the subject is one on which language has not given us many terms — *a sort of peremptory demanding of God*. It is delightful to hear a man wrestle with God, and say, “I will not let thee go except thou bless me,” but that must be said softly, and not in a hectoring spirit, as though we could command and exact blessings from the Lord of all. Remember, it is still a man wrestling, even though permitted to wrestle with the eternal I AM. Jacob halted on his thigh after that night’s holy conflict, to let him see that God is

terrible, and that his prevailing power did not lie in himself. We are taught to say, “Our Father,” but still it is, “Our Father *who art in heaven.*” Familiarity there may be, but holy familiarity; boldness, but the boldness which springs from grace and is the work of the Spirit; not the boldness of the rebel who carries a brazen front in the presence of his offended king, but the boldness of the child who fears because he loves, and loves because he fears. Never fall into a vainglorious style of impertinent address to God; he is not to be assailed as an antagonist, but entreated with as our Lord and God. Humble and lowly let us be in spirit, and so let us pray.

11 *Pray when you profess to pray, and don’t talk about it.* Business men say, “A place for everything and everything in its place;” preach in the sermon and pray in the prayer. Disquisitions upon our need of help in prayer are not prayer. Why do not men go at once to prayer — why stand beating about the bush; instead of saying what they ought to do and want to do, why not set to work in God’s name and do it? In downright earnestness, address yourself to intercession, and set your face towards the Lord. Plead for the supply of the great and constant needs of the church, and do not fail to urge, with devout fervour, the special requirements of the present time and audience. Let the sick, the poor, the dying, the heathen, the Jew, and all forgotten classes of people, be mentioned as they press upon your heart. Pray for your people as saints and sinners — not as if they were all saints. Mention the young and the aged; the impressed and the careless; the devout and the backsliding. Never turn to the right hand or to the left, but plough on in the furrow of real prayer. Let your confessions of sin and your thanksgivings be truthful and to the point; and let your petitions be presented as if you believed in God and had no doubt as to the efficacy

of prayer: I say this, because so many pray in such a formal manner as to lead observers to conclude that they thought it a very decent thing to pray, but, after all, a very poor and doubtful business as to any practical result. Pray as one who has tried and proved his God, and therefore comes with undoubting confidence to renew his pleadings: and do remember to pray to God right through the prayer, and never fall to talking or preaching — much less, as some do, to scolding and grumbling.

12 *As a rule, if called upon to preach, conduct the prayer yourself;* and if you should be highly esteemed in the ministry, as I trust you may be, make a point, with great courtesy, but equal firmness, to resist the practice of choosing men to pray with the idea of honoring them by giving them something to do. Our public devotions ought never to be degraded into opportunities for compliment. I have heard prayer and singing now and then called “the preliminary services,” as if they were but a preface to the sermon; this is rare I hope among us — if it were common it would be to our deep disgrace. I endeavour invariably to take all the service myself for my own sake, and I think also for the people’s. I do not believe that “anybody will do for the praying.” No, sirs, it is my solemn conviction that the prayer is one of the most weighty, useful, and honourable parts of the service, and that it ought to be even more considered than the sermon. There must be no putting up of anybodies and nobodies to pray, and then the selection of the abler man to preach. It may happen through weakness, or upon a specific occasion, that it may be a relief to the minister to have someone to offer prayer for him; but if the Lord has made you love your work you will not often or readily fulfill this part of it by proxy. If you delegate the service at all, let it be to one in whose spirituality and present preparedness you

have the fullest confidence; but to pitch on a giftless brother unawares, and put him forward to get through the devotions is shameful.

> 13 “Shall we serve *heaven* with less respect
> Than we do minister to our gross selves?”

14 Appoint the ablest man to pray, and let the sermon be slurred sooner than the approach to heaven. Let the Infinite Jehovah be served with our best; let prayer addressed to the Divine Majesty be carefully weighed, and presented with all the powers of an awakened heart and a spiritual understanding. He who has been by communion with God prepared to minister to the people, is usually of all men present the most fit to engage in prayer; to lay out a programme which puts up another brother in his place, is to mar the harmony of the service, to rob the preacher of an exercise which would brace him for his sermon, and in many instances to suggest comparisons between one part of the service and the other which ought never to be tolerated. If unprepared brethren are to be sent into the pulpit to do my praying for me when I am engaged to preach, I do not see why I might not be allowed to pray, and then retire to let these brethren do the sermonizing. I am not able to see any reason for depriving me of the holiest, sweetest, and most profitable exercise which my Lord has allotted me; if I may have my choice, I will sooner yield up the sermon than the prayer. Thus much I have said in order to impress upon you that you must highly esteem public prayer, and seek of the Lord for the gifts and graces necessary to its right discharge.

15 Those who despise all extempore prayer will probably catch at these remarks and use them against it, but I can assure them that the faults adverted to are not common among us, and are indeed almost extinct; while the scandal

caused by them never was, at the worst, so great as that caused by the way in which the liturgical service is often performed. Far too often is the church service hurried through in a manner as undevout as if it were a ballad-singer's ditty. The words are parroted without the slightest appreciation of their meaning; not sometimes, but very frequently, in the places set apart for Episcopal worship, you may see the eyes of the people, and the eyes of the choristers, and the eyes of the parson himself, wandering about in all directions, while evidently from the very tone of the reading there is no feeling of sympathy with what is being read.[19] I have been at funerals when the burial service of the church of England has been galloped through so indecorously that it has taken all the grace I had to prevent my throwing a hassock at the creature's head. I have felt so indignant that I have not known what to do, to hear, in the presence of mourners whose hearts were bleeding, a man rattling through the service as if he were paid by the piece, and had more work to follow, and therefore desired to get it through as quickly as possible. What effect he could think he was producing, or what good result could come from words jerked forth and hurled out with vengeance and vehemence, I cannot imagine. It is really shocking to think of how that very wonderful burial service is murdered, and made into an abomination by the mode in which it is frequently read, I merely mention this because, if they criticize our prayers too severely, we can bring a formidable countercharge to silence them. Better far, however, for us to amend our own blunders than find fault with others.

[16] In order to make our public prayer what it should be, the first necessary is, that *it must be a matter of the heart.* A man must be really in earnest in supplication. It must be true prayer, and if it be such, it will, like love, cover a multitude of

sins. You can pardon a man's familiarities and his vulgarities too, when you clearly see that his inmost heart is speaking to his Maker, and that it is only the man's defects of education which create his faults, and not any moral or spiritual vices of his heart. The pleader in public must be in earnest; for a sleepy prayer — what can be a worse preparation for a sermon? A sleepy prayer — what can make people more dislike going up to the house of God at all? Cast your whole soul into the exercise. If ever your whole manhood was engaged in anything, let it be in drawing near unto God in public. So pray, that by a divine attraction, you draw the whole congregation with you up to the throne of God. So pray, that by the power of the Holy Spirit resting on you, you express the desires and thoughts of everyone present, and stand as the one voice for the hundreds of beating hearts which are glowing with fervour before the throne of God.

17 Next to this, our prayers must be *appropriate.* I do not say go into every minute detail of the circumstances of the congregation. As I have said before, there is no need to make the public prayer a gazette of the week's events, or a register of the births, deaths, and marriages of your people, but the general movements that have taken place in the congregation should be noted by the minister's careful heart. He should bring the joys and sorrows of his people alike before the throne of grace, and ask that the divine benediction may rest upon his flock in all their movements, their exercises, engagements, and holy enterprises, and that the forgiveness of God may be extended to their shortcomings and innumerable sins.

18 Then, by way of negative canon, I should say, *do not let your prayer be, long.* I think it was John Macdonald who used to say, "If you are in the spirit of prayer, do not be long,

because other people will not be able to keep pace with you in such unusual spirituality; and if you are not in the spirit of prayer, do not be long, because you will then be sure to weary the listeners." Livingstone says of Robert Bruce, of Edinburgh, the famous contemporary of Andrew Melville, "No man in his time spoke with such evidence and power of the Spirit. No man had so many seals of conversion; yea, many of his hearers thought no man, since the apostles, spake with such power ..... He was very short in prayer when others were present, but every sentence was like a strong bolt shot up to heaven. I have heard him say that he wearied when others were long in prayer; but, being alone, he spent much time in wrestling and prayer." A man may, on special occasions, if he be unusually moved and carried out of himself pray for twenty minutes in the long morning prayer, but this should not often happen. My friend, Dr. Charles Brown, of Edinburgh, lays it down, as a result of his deliberate judgment, that ten minutes is the limit to which public prayer ought to be prolonged. Our Puritanic forefathers used to pray for three-quarters of an hour, or more, but then you must recollect that they did not know that they would ever have the opportunity of praying again before an assembly, and therefore, took their fill of it; and besides, people were not inclined in those days to quarrel with the length of prayers or of sermons so much as they do nowadays. You cannot pray too long in private. We do not limit you to ten minutes there, or ten hours, or ten weeks if you like. The more you are on your knees alone the better. We are now speaking of those public prayers which come before or after the sermon, and for these ten minutes is a better limit than fifteen. Only one in a thousand would complain of you for being too short, while scores will murmur at your being wearisome in length. "He prayed me into a

good frame of mind," George Whitfield once said of a certain preacher, "and if he had stopped there, it would have been very well; but he prayed me out of it again by keeping on." The abundant longsuffering of God has been exemplified in his sparing some preachers, who have been great sinners in this direction; they have done much injury to the piety of God's people by their long-winded orations, and yet God, in his mercy, has permitted them still to officiate in the sanctuary. Alas! for those who have to listen to pastors who pray in public for five-and-twenty minutes, and then ask God to forgive their "shortcomings"! Do not be too long, for several reasons. **First**, because you weary yourselves and the people; and **secondly**, because being too long in prayer, puts your people out of heart for hearing the sermon. All those dry, dull, prolix talkifications in prayer, do but blunt the attention, and the ear gets, as it were, choked up. Nobody would think of blocking up Ear-gate with mud or stones when he meant to storm the gate. No, let the portal be cleared that the battering-ram of the gospel may tell upon it when the time comes to use it. Long prayers either consist of repetitions, or else of unnecessary explanations which God does not require; or else they degenerate into downright preachings, so that there is no difference between the praying and the preaching, except that in the one the minister has his eyes shut, and in the other he keeps them open. It is not necessary in prayer to rehearse the Westminster Assembly's Catechism. It is not necessary in prayer to relate the experience of all the people who are present, or even your own. It is not necessary in prayer to string a selection of texts of Scripture together, and quote David, and Daniel, and Job, and Paul, and Peter, and every other body, under the title of "thy servant of old." It is necessary in prayer to draw near unto God, but it is not

required of you to prolong your speech till everyone is longing to hear the word *"Amen."* One little hint I cannot withhold — never appear to be closing, and then start off again for another five minutes. When friends make up their minds that you are about to conclude, they cannot with a jerk proceed again in a devout spirit. I have known men tantalize us with the hope that they were drawing to a close, and then take a fresh lease two or three times; this is most unwise and unpleasant.

[19] Another canon is — *do not use cant phrases*. My brethren, have done with those vile things altogether; they have had their day, and let them die. These pieces of spiritual fustian cannot be too much reprobated. Some of them are pure inventions; others are passages taken from the Apocrypha; others are texts fathered upon Scripture, but which have been fearfully mangled since they came from the Author of the Bible. In the Baptist Magazine for 1861 I made the following remarks upon the common vulgarities of prayer-meetings. "Cant phrases are a great evil. Who can justify such expressions as the following? '*We would not rush into thy presence as the unthinking (!!) horse into the battle.*' As if horses ever did think, and as if it were not better to exhibit the spirit and energy of the horse than the sluggishness and stupidity of the ass! As the verse from which we imagine this fine sentence to be derived has more to do with sinning than with praying, we are glad that the phrase is on its last legs. '*Go from heart to heart, as oil from vessel to vessel,*' is probably a quotation from the nursery romance of 'Ali Baba, and the Forty Thieves,' but as destitute of sense, Scripture, and poetry, as ever sentence could be conceived to be. We are not aware that oil runs from one vessel to another in any very mysterious or wonderful manner; it is true it is rather slow in coming out, and is

therefore an apt symbol of some people's earnestness; but surely it would be better to have the grace direct from heaven than to have it out of another vessel, — a Popish idea which the metaphor seems to insinuate, if indeed it has any meaning at all. *'Thy poor unworthy dust,'* an epithet generally applied to themselves by the proudest men in the congregation, and not seldom by the most moneyed and groveling, in which case the last two words are not so very inappropriate. We have heard of a good man who, in pleading for his children and grandchildren, was so completely beclouded in the blinding influence of this expression, that he exclaimed, 'O Lord, save thy dust, and thy dust's dust, and thy dust's dust's dust.' When Abraham said, 'I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes,' the utterance was forcible and expressive; but in its misquoted, perverted, and abused form, the sooner it is consigned to its own element the better. A miserable conglomeration of perversions of Scripture, uncouth similes, and ridiculous metaphors, constitute a sort of spiritual slang, the offspring of unholy ignorance, unmanly imitation, or graceless hypocrisy; they are at once a dishonor to those who constantly repeat them, and an intolerable nuisance to those whose ears are jaded with them."

[20] Dr. Charles Brown, of Edinburgh, in an admirable address at a meeting of the New College Missionary Association, gives instances of current misquotations indigenous to Scotland, which sometimes, however, find their way across the Tweed. By his permission, I shall quote at length. "There is what might be called an unhappy, sometimes, quite grotesque, mingling of Scripture texts. Who is not familiar with the following words addressed to God in prayer, 'Thou art the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, *and the praises thereof'!* which is but a jumble of two glorious texts,

each glorious taken by itself — -both marred, and one altogether lost indeed, when thus combined and mingled. The one is Isaiah 57:15, ‘Thus saith the high and lofty One, *that inhabiteth eternity,* whose name is Holy.’ The other is, Psalm 22:3, ‘Thou art holy, O thou that *inhabitest the praises of Israel*.’ The inhabiting of the praises *of eternity,* to say the least, is meagre; there were no praises in the *past* eternity to inhabit. But what a glory is there in God’s condescending to inhabit, take up his very abode, in the praises of Israel, of the ransomed church. Then there is an example nothing less than grotesque under this head, and yet one in such frequent use that I suspect it is very generally regarded as having the sanction of Scripture. Here it is, ‘We would put our hand on our mouth, and our mouth in the dust, and cry out, Unclean, unclean; God be merciful to us sinners.’ This is no fewer than *four* texts joined, each beautiful by itself. First, Job 40:4, ‘Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth.’ Second, Lamentations 3:29, ‘He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope.’ Third, Leviticus 13:45, Where the leper is directed to put a covering upon his upper lip, and to cry, Unclean, unclean. And fourth, the publican’s prayer. But how incongruous a man’s first putting his hand on his mouth, then putting his mouth in the dust, and, last of all, crying out, etc.! The only other example I give is an expression nearly universal among us, and, I suspect, almost universally thought to be in Scripture, ‘In thy favour is life, and thy lovingkindness is better than life.’ The fact is, that this also is just an unhappy combination of two passages, in which the term *life* is used in altogether different, and even incompatible senses, namely, Psalm 63:3, ‘Thy lovingkindness is better than life,’ where, evidently, life means the present temporal life.[20]

[21] “A second class may be described as unhappy alterations of Scripture language. Need I say that the 130th Psalm, ‘Out of the depths,’ etc., is one of the most precious in the whole book of the Psalms? Why must we have the words of David and of the Holy Ghost thus given in public prayer, and so constantly that our pious people come all to adopt it into their social and family prayers, ‘There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared, and plenteous redemption *that thou mayest be sought after,*’ or ‘unto’? How precious the simple words as they stand in the Psalm (Psalm 130:4) ‘There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared’ (Psalm 130:7, 8); ‘With the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption; and he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities!’ Again, in this blessed Psalm, the words of the third verse, ‘If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?’ too seldom are left us in their naked simplicity, but must undergo the following change, ‘If thou wert *strict* to mark iniquity,’ etc. I remember in my old college days, we used to have it in a much more offensive shape, ‘If thou wert strict to mark and *rigorous to punish!*’ Another favourite change is the following, ‘Thou art in heaven, and we upon earth; therefore let our words be few *and well ordered*.’ Solomon’s simple and sublime utterance (full of instruction, surely, on the whole theme I am dealing with) is, ‘God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words *be few*.’ Ecclesiastes 5:2. For another example under this class see how Habakkuk’s sublime words are tortured, ‘Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on sin *without abhorrence*.’ The words of the Holy Ghost are (Hebrews 1:13), ‘Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.’ Need I say that the power of the figure, ‘canst not look on iniquity’ is nearly

lost when you add that God *can* look on it, only not without abhorrence?[21]

[22] "A third class is made up of meaningless pleonasms, vulgar, common-place redundancies of expression, in quoting from the Scriptures. One of these has become so universal, that I venture to say you seldom miss it, when the passage referred to comes up at all. 'Be in the midst of us' (or, as some prefer to express it, somewhat unfortunately, as I think, 'in our midst'), 'to bless us, *and to do us good*.' What additional idea is there in the last expression 'and to do us good'? The passage referred to is Exodus 20:24, 'In all places where I record my name, I will come unto you, and I will bless you.' Such is the simplicity of Scripture. Our addition is, 'Bless us, and do us good.' In Daniel 4:35, we read the noble words, 'None can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?' The favourite change is, 'None can stay thy hand *from working*.' 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him!' This is changed, 'Neither hath it entered into the heart of man *to conceive* the things.' Constantly we hear God addressed as 'the hearer *and answerer* of prayer,' a mere vulgar and useless pleonasm, for the Scripture idea of God's hearing prayer is just his answering it — 'O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come;' "Hear my prayer O Lord;' 'I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.' Whence, again, that commonplace of public prayer, 'Thy consolations are neither few nor small'? The reference, I suppose, is to those words of Job, 'Are the consolations of God small with thee?' So one scarce ever hears that prayer of the seventy-fourth Psalm, 'Have respect to the covenant, for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty' without the addition, '*horrid* cruelty;' nor the call to

prayer in Isaiah, ‘Keep not silence and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth,’ without the addition, ‘the *whole* earth;’ nor that appeal of the Psalmist, ‘Whom have I in heaven but thee and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee’ without the addition, ‘none in *all* the earth.’ These last may seem small matters, indeed. And so they are, nor were worth finding fault with, did they occur but occasionally. But viewed as stereotyped commonplaces, weak enough in themselves, and occurring so often as to give an impression of their having Scripture authority, I humbly think they ought to be discountenanced and discarded — banished wholly from our Presbyterian worship. It will, perhaps, surprise you to learn that the only Scripture authority for that favourite and somewhat peculiar expression, about the ‘wicked rolling sin as a sweet morsel under their tongue’ is the following words in the book of Job (20:12), ‘Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he *hide* it under his tongue.’“

23 But enough of this. I am only sorry to have felt bound in conscience to be so long upon so unhappy a subject. I cannot, however, leave the point without urging upon you literal accuracy in all quotations from the word of God.

24 It ought to be a point of honour among ministers always to quote Scripture correctly. It is difficult to be always correct, and because it is difficult, it should be all the more the object of our care. In the halls of Oxford or Cambridge it would be considered almost treason or felony for a fellow to misquote Tacitus, or Virgil, or Homer; but for a preacher to misquote Paul, or Moses, or David, is a far more serious matter, and quite as worthy of the severest censure. Mark, I said a “fellow,” not a freshman, and from a pastor we expect, at least, equal accuracy in his own department as from the

holder of a fellowship. You who so unwaveringly believe in the verbal-inspiration theory (to my intense satisfaction), ought never to quote at all until you can give the precise words, because, according to your own showing, by the alteration of a single word you may miss altogether God's sense of the passage. If you cannot make extracts from Scripture correctly, why quote it at all in your petitions? Make use of an expression fresh from your own mind, and it will be quite as acceptable to God as a scriptural phrase defaced or clipped. Vehemently strive against garblings and perversions of Scripture, and renounce forever all cant phrases, for they are the disfigurement of free prayer.

25 I have noticed a habit among some — I hope you have not fallen into it — of praying with their eyes open. It is unnatural, unbecoming, and disgusting. Occasionally the opened eye uplifted to heaven may be suitable and impressive, but to be gazing about while professing to address the unseen God is detestable. In the earliest ages of the church the fathers denounced this unseemly practice. Action in prayer should be very little used, if at all. It is scarcely comely to lift and move the arm, as if in preaching; the outstretched arms however, or the clasped hands, are natural and suggestive when under strong holy excitement. The voice should accord with the matter, and should never be boisterous, or selfasserting: humble and reverent let those tones be in which man talketh with his God. Doth not even nature itself teach you this? If grace does not I despair.

26 With special regard to your prayers in the Sabbath services, a few sentences may be useful. In order to prevent custom and routine from being enthroned among us, it will be well to *vary the order of service as much as possible.* Whatever the free Spirit moves us to do, that let us do at

once. I was not till lately aware of the extent to which the control of deacons has been allowed to intrude itself upon ministers in certain benighted churches. I have always been accustomed to conduct religious services in the way I have thought most suitable and edifying, and I never have heard so much as a word of objection, although I trust I can say I live on the dearest intimacy with my officers; but a brother minister told me this morning, that on one occasion, he prayed in the morning service at the commencement instead of giving out a hymn, and when he retired into the vestry, after service, the deacons informed him that they would have no innovations. We hitherto understood that Baptist churches are not under bondage to traditions and fixed rules as to modes of worship, and yet these poor creatures, these would-be lords, who cry out loudly enough against a liturgy, would bind their minister with rubrics made by custom. It is time that such nonsense were forever silenced. We claim to conduct service as the Holy Spirit moves us, and as we judge best. We will not be bound to sing here and pray there, but will vary the order of service to prevent monotony. Mr. Hinton, I have heard, once preached the sermon at the commencement of the service, so that those who came late might at any rate have an opportunity to pray. And why not? Irregularities would do good, monotony works weariness. It will frequently be a most profitable thing to let the people sit quite still in profound silence for two or five minutes. Solemn silence makes noble worship.

> [27] True prayer is not the noisy sound
> That clamorous lips repeat,
> But the deep silence of a soul
> That clasps Jehovah’s feet.

[28] Vary the order of your prayers, then, for the sake of maintaining attention, and preventing people going through the whole thing as a clock runs on till the weights are down.

[29] *Vary the length of your public prayers.* Do you not think it would be much better if sometimes instead of giving three minutes to the first prayer and fifteen minutes to the second, you gave nine minutes to each? Would it not be better sometimes to be longer in the first, and not so long in the second prayer? Would not two prayers of tolerable length be better than one extremely long and one extremely short? Would it not be as well to have a hymn after reading the chapter, or a verse or two before the prayer? Why not sing four times, occasionally? Why not be content with two hymns, or only one, occasionally? Why sing after sermon? Why, on the other hand, do some never sing at the close of the service? Is a prayer after sermon always, or even often, advisable? Is it not sometimes most impressive? Would not the Holy Spirit's guidance secure us a variety at present unknown? Let us have anything so that our people do not come to regard any form of service as being appointed, and so relapse into the superstition from which they have escaped.

[30] *Vary the current of your prayers in intercession.* There are many topics which require your attention; the church in its weakness, its backslidings, its sorrows, and its comforts; the outside world, the neighbourhood, unconverted hearers, the young people, the nation. Do not pray for all these every time, or otherwise your prayers will be long and probably uninteresting. Whatever topic shall come uppermost to your heart, let that be uppermost in your supplications. There is a way of taking a line of prayer, if the Holy Spirit shall guide you therein, which will make the service all of a piece, and

harmonize with the hymns and discourse. It is very useful to maintain unity in the service where you can; not slavishly, but wisely, so that the effect is one. Certain brethren do not even manage to keep unity in the sermon, but wander from Britain to Japan, and bring in all imaginable subjects: but you who have attained to the preservation of unity in the sermon might go a little farther, and exhibit a degree of unity in the service, being careful in both the hymn, and the prayer, and the chapter, to keep the same subject prominent. Hardly commendable is the practice, common with some preachers, of rehearsing the sermon in the last prayer. It may be instructive to the audience, but that is an object altogether foreign to prayer. It is stilted, scholastic, and unsuitable; do not imitate the practice.

31 As you would avoid a viper, *keep from all attempts to work up spurious fervour in public devotion.* Do not labour to seem earnest. Pray as your heart dictates, under the leading of the Spirit of God, and if you are dull and heavy tell the Lord so. It will be no ill thing to confess your deadness, and bewail it, and cry for quickening; it will be real and acceptable prayer; but simulated ardour is a shameful form of lying. Never imitate those who are earnest. You know a good man who groans, and another whose voice grows shrill when he is carried away with zeal, but do not therefore moan or squeak in order to appear as zealous as they are. Just be natural the whole way through, and ask of God to be guided in it all.

32 Lastly — this is a word I utter in confidence to yourselves — *prepare your prayer.* You say with astonishment, "Whatever can you mean by that?" Well, I mean what some do not mean. The question was once discussed in a society of ministers, "Was it right for the minister to prepare his prayer beforehand?" It was earnestly asserted by some that it was

wrong; and very properly so. It was with equal earnestness maintained by others that it was right; and they were not to be gainsaid. I believe both parties to have been right. The first brethren understood by preparing the prayer, the studying of expressions, and the putting together of a train of thought, which they all said was altogether opposed to spiritual worship, in which we ought to leave ourselves in the hand of God's Spirit to be taught of him both as to matter and words. In these remarks we altogether agree; for if a man writes his prayers and studies his petitions, let him use a liturgy at once. But the brethren in opposition, meant by preparation quite another thing, not the preparation of the head, but of the heart, which consists in the solemn consideration beforehand of the importance of prayer, meditation upon the needs of men's souls, and a remembrance of the promises which we are to plead; and thus coming before the Lord with a petition written upon the fleshy tables of the heart. This is surely better than coming to God at random, rushing before the throne at haphazard, without a definite errand or desire. "I never am tired of praying," said one man. "because I always have a definite errand when I pray." Brethren, are your prayers of this sort? Do you strive to be in a fit frame to lead the supplications of your people? Do you order your cause in coming before the Lord? I feel, my brethren, that, we ought to prepare ourselves by private prayer for public praying. By living near to God we ought to maintain prayerfulness of spirit, and then we shall not fail in our vocal pleadings. If anything beyond this is to be tolerated, it would be the commitment to memory of the Psalms and parts of Scripture containing promises, supplications, praises, and confessions, such as may be helpful in the act of prayer. It is said of Chrysostom, that he had learned his Bible by heart, so as to be able to repeat it at

his pleasure: no wonder that he was called golden-mouthed. Now, in our converse with God, no speech can be more appropriate than the words of the Holy Ghost —"Do as thou hast said," will always prevail with the Most High. We counsel, therefore, the committing to memory of the inspired devotional exercises of the word of truth, and then your continued reading of the Scriptures will keep you always furnished with fresh supplications, which will be as ointment poured forth, filling the whole house of God with its fragrance, when you present your petitions in public before the Lord. Seeds of prayer thus sown in the memory will yield a constant golden harvest, as the Spirit shall warm your soul with hallowed fire in the hour of congregational prayer. As David used the sword of Goliath for after victories, so may we at times employ a petition already answered, and find ourselves able to say with the son of Jesse, "There is none like unto it," as God shall yet again fulfill it in our experience.

[33] Let your prayers be earnest, full of fire, vehemence, prevalence. I pray the Holy Ghost to instruct every student of this College so to offer public prayer, that God shall always be served of his best. Let your petitions be plain and heart-felt; and while your people may sometimes feel that the sermon was below the mark, may they also feel that the prayer compensated for all.

[34] Much more might be said, perhaps should be said, but time and strength both fail us, and so we draw to a close.

# Lecture 5. Sermons—Their Matter

[1] Sermons *should have real teaching in them,* and their doctrine should be solid, substantial, and abundant. We do not enter the pulpit to talk for talk's sake; we have instructions to convey important to the last degree, and we cannot afford to utter pretty nothings. Our range of subjects is all but boundless, and we cannot, therefore, be excused if our discourses are threadbare and devoid of substance. If we speak as ambassadors for God, we need never complain of want of matter, for our message is full to overflowing. The entire gospel must be presented from the pulpit; the whole faith once delivered to the saints must be proclaimed by us. The truth as it is in Jesus must be instructively declared, so that the people may not merely hear, but *know,* the joyful sound. We serve not at the altar of "the unknown God," but we speak to the worshippers of him of whom it is written, "they that know thy name will put their trust in thee." To divide a sermon well may be a very useful art, but how if there is nothing to divide? A mere division maker is like an excellent carver with an empty dish before him, To be able to deliver an exordium which shall be appropriate and attractive, to be at ease in speaking with propriety during the time allotted for the discourse, and to wind up with a respectable peroration, may appear to mere religious performers to be all that is requisite; but the true minister of Christ knows that the true value of a sermon must lie, not in its fashion and manner, but in the truth which it contains. Nothing can compensate for the absence of teaching; all the rhetoric in the world is but as chaff to the wheat in contrast to the gospel of our salvation. However beautiful the sower's basket it is a miserable mockery if it be without seed. The grandest discourse ever delivered is an ostentatious failure if

the doctrine of the grace of God be absent from it; it sweeps over men's heads like a cloud, but it distributes no rain upon the thirsty earth; and therefore the remembrance of it to souls taught wisdom by an experience of pressing need is one of disappointment, or worse. A man's style may be as fascinating as that of the authoress of whom one said, "that she should write with a crystal pen dipped in dew upon silver paper, and use for pounce the dust of a butterfly's wing"; but to an audience whose souls are in instant jeopardy, what will mere elegance be but "altogether lighter than vanity"?

2 Horses are not to be judged by their bells or their trappings, but by limb and bone and blood; and sermons, when criticized by judicious hearers, are largely measured by the amount of gospel truth and force of gospel spirit which they contain. Brethren, weigh your sermons. Do not retail them by the yard, but deal them out by the pound. Set no store by the quantity of words which you utter, but strive to be esteemed for the quality of your matter. It is foolish to be lavish in words and niggardly in truth. He must be very destitute of wit who would be pleased to hear himself described after the manner of the world's great poet, who says, "Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all Venice: his reasons are as two grains of wheat hidden in two bushels of chaff; you shall seek all day ere you find them; and when you have them they are not worth the search."

3 Rousing appeals to the affections are excellent, but if they are not backed up by instruction they are a mere flash in the pan, powder consumed and no shot sent home. Rest assured that the most fervid revivalism will wear itself out in mere smoke, if it be not maintained by the fuel of teaching. The divine method is to put the law in the mind, and then write it

on the heart; the judgment is enlightened, and then the passions subdued. Read Hebrews 8:10, and follow the model of the covenant of grace. Gouge's note on that place may with fitness be quoted here: — "Ministers are herein to imitate God, and, to their best endeavour, to instruct people in the mysteries of godliness, and to teach them what to believe and practice, and then to stir them up in act and deed, to do what they are instructed to do. Their labour otherwise is like to be in vain. Neglect of this course is a main cause that men fall into many errors as they do in these days." I may add that this last remark has gained more force in our times; it is among uninstructed flocks that the wolves of popery make havoc; sound teaching is the best protection from the heresies which ravage right and left among us.

4 Sound information upon scriptural subjects your hearers crave for, and must have. Accurate explanations of Holy Scripture they are entitled to, and if you are "an interpreter, one of a thousand," a real messenger of heaven, you will yield them plenteously. Whatever else may be present, the absence of edifying, instructive truth, like the absence of flour from bread, will be fatal. Estimated by their solid contents rather than their superficial area, many sermons are very poor specimens of godly discourse. I believe the remark is too well grounded that if you attend to a lecturer on astronomy or geology, during a short course you will obtain a tolerably clear view of his system; but if you listen, not only for twelve months, but for twelve years, to the common run of preachers, you will not arrive at anything like an idea of their system of theology. If it be so, it is a grievous fault, which cannot be too much deplored. Alas! the indistinct utterances of many concerning the grandest of eternal realities, and the dimness of thought in others with regard to fundamental truths, have given too much occasion for the criticism!

Brethren, if you are not theologians you are in your pastorates just nothing at all. You may be fine rhetoricians, and be rich in polished sentences; but without knowledge of the gospel, and aptness to teach it, you are but a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Verbiage is too often the fig-leaf which does duty as a covering for theological ignorance. Sounding periods are offered instead of sound doctrine, and rhetorical flourishes in the place of robust thought. Such things ought not to be. The abounding of empty declamation, and the absence of food for the soul, will turn a pulpit into a box of bombast, and inspire contempt instead of reverence. Unless we are instructive preachers, and really feed the people, we may be great quoters of elegant poetry, and mighty retailers of second-hand windbags, but we shall be like Nero of old, fiddling while Rome was burning, and sending vessels to Alexandria to fetch sand for the arena while the populace starved for want of corn.

5 We insist upon it, that there must be abundance of matter in sermons, and next, that *this matter must be congruous to the text.* The discourse should spring out of the text as a rule, and the more evidently it does so the better; but at all times, to say the least, it should have a very close relationship thereto. In the matter of spiritualizing and accommodation very large latitude is to be allowed; but liberty must not degenerate into license, and there must always be a connection, and something more than a remote connection — a real relationship between the sermon and its text. I heard the other day of a remarkable text, which was appropriate or inappropriate, as you may think. A squire of a parish had given away a number of flaming scarlet cloaks to the oldest matrons of the parish. These resplendent beings were required to attend the parish church on the following Sunday, and to sit in front of the pulpit, from which one of the avowed

successors of the apostles edified the saints from the words, “Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” It is reported that on a subsequent occasion, when the same benefactor of the parish had given a bushel of potatoes to every man who had a family, the topic on the following Sunday was, “And they said, It is manna.” I cannot tell whether the matter in that case was congruous to the selection of the text; I suppose it may have been, for the probabilities are that the whole performance was foolish throughout. Some brethren have done with their text as soon as they have read it. Having paid all due honour to that particular passage by announcing it, they feel no necessity further to refer to it. They touch their hats, as it were, to that part of Scripture, and pass on to fresh fields and pastures new. Why do such men take a text at all? Why limit their own glorious liberty? Why make Scripture a horsing-block by which to mount upon their unbridled Pegasus? Surely the words of inspiration were never meant to be boot-hooks to help a Talkative to draw on his seven-leagued boots in which to leap from pole to pole.

6 The surest way to maintain variety is to keep to the mind of the Holy Spirit in the particular passage under consideration. No two texts are exactly similar; something in the connection or drift of the passage gives to each apparently identical text a shade of difference. Keep to the Spirit’s track and you will never repeat yourself or be short of matter: his paths drop fatness. A sermon, moreover, comes with far greater power to the consciences of the hearers when it is plainly the very word of God — not a lecture about the Scripture, but Scripture itself opened up and enforced. It is due to the majesty of inspiration that when you profess to be preaching from a verse you do not thrust it out of sight to make room for your own thinkings.

7 Brethren, if you are in the habit of keeping to the precise sense of the Scripture before you, I will further recommend you to hold to the *ipsissima verba,* the very words of the Holy Ghost; for, although in many cases topical sermons are not only allowable, but very proper, those sermons which expound the exact words of the Holy Spirit are the most useful and the most agreeable to the major part of our congregations. They love to have the words themselves explained and expounded. The many are not always sufficiently capable of grasping the sense apart from the language — of gazing, so to speak, upon the truth disembodied; but when they hear the precise words reiterated again and again, and each expression dwelt upon after the manner of such preachers as Mr. Jay, of Bath, they are more edified, and the truth fixes itself more firmly upon their memories. Let your matter, then, be copious, and let it grow out of the inspired word, as violets and primroses spring up naturally from the sod, or as the virgin honey drops from the comb.

8 *Take care that your deliverances are always weighty, and full of really important teaching.* Build not with wood, hay, and stubble, but with gold, silver, and precious stones. It is scarcely needful to warn you against the grosser degradations of pulpit eloquence, or the example of the notorious orator Henley might be instanced. That loquacious adventurer, whom Pope has immortalized in his “Dunciad,” was wont to make the passing events of the week the themes of his buffoonery on week days, and theological topics suffered the same fate on Sundays. His forte lay in his low wit and in tuning his voice and balancing his hands. The satirist says of him, “How fluent nonsense trickles from his tongue.” Gentlemen, it were better never to have been born, than to have the like truthfully said of us; we are on peril of our souls

bound to deal with the solemnities of eternity and with no earth-born topics. There are, however, other and more inviting methods of wood and hay-building, and it behooves you not to be duped by them. This remark is necessary, especially to those gentlemen who mistake high-flying sentences for eloquence, and Latinized utterances for great depth of thought. Certain homiletical instructors, by their example, if not by their precepts, encourage rodomontade and great swelling words, and, therefore, are most perilous to young preachers. Think of a discourse commencing with such an amazing and stupendous assertion as the following, which by its native grandeur will strike you at once with a sense of the sublime and beautiful: “MAN IS MORAL.” This genius might have added, “A cat has four feet.” There would have been as much novelty in the one information as the other. I remember a sermon by a would-be profound writer which quite stunned the reader with grenadier words of six-feet length, but which, when properly boiled down, came to as much essence of meat as this — Man has a soul, his soul will live in another world, and therefore he should take care that it occupies a happy place. No one can object to the teaching, but it is not so novel as to need a blast of trumpets and a procession of bedizened phrases to introduce it to public attention. The art of saying commonplace things elegantly, pompously, grandiloquently, bombastically, is not lost among us, although its utter extinction were “a consummation devoutly to be wished.” Sermons of this sort have been held up as models, and yet they are mere bits of bladder which would lie on your finger-nail, blown out until they remind you of those coloured balloons which itinerant dealers carry about the streets to sell at a halfpenny a-piece for the delectation of the extremely juvenile; the parallel, I am sorry to say, holding good a little further, for in some

cases these discourses contain just a tinge of poison by way of coloring, which some of the weaker sort have found out to their cost. It is infamous to ascend your pulpit and pour over your people rivers of language, cataracts of words, in which mere platitudes are held in solution like infinitesimal grains of homoeopathic medicine in an Atlantic of utterance. Better far give the people masses of unprepared truth in the rough, like pieces of meat from a butcher's block, chopped off anyhow, bone and all, and even dropped down in the sawdust, than ostentatiously and delicately hand them out upon a china dish a delicious slice of nothing at all, decorated with the parsley of poetry, and flavored with the sauce of affectation.

9 It will be a happy circumstance if you are so guided by the Holy Spirit as *to give a clear testimony to all the doctrines which constitute or lie around the gospel.* No truth is to be kept back. The doctrine of reserve, so detestable in the mouths of Jesuits, is not one whit the less villainous when accepted by Protestants. It is not true that some doctrines are only for the initiated; there is nothing in the Bible which is ashamed of the light. The sublimest views of divine sovereignty have a practical bearing, and are not, as some think, mere metaphysical subtleties; the distinctive utterances of Calvinism have their bearing upon every-day life and ordinary experience, and if you hold such views, or the opposite, you have no dispensation permitting you to conceal your beliefs. Cautious reticence is, in nine cases out of ten, cowardly betrayal. The best policy is never to be politic, but to proclaim every atom of the truth so far as God has taught it to you. Harmony requires that the voice of one doctrine shall not drown the rest, and it also demands that the gentler notes shall not be omitted because of the greater volume of other sounds. Every note appointed by the great

minstrel must be sounded; each note having its own proportionate power and emphasis, the passage marked with *forte* must not be softened, and those with *piano* must not be rolled out like thunder, but each must have its due hearing. All revealed truth in harmonious proportion must be your theme.

10 Brethren, if you resolve in your pulpit utterances to deal with important verities, *you must not forever hover around the mere angles of truth*. Those doctrines which are not vital to the soul's salvation, nor even essential to practical Christianity, are not to be considered upon every occasion of worship. Bring in all the features of truth in due proportion, for every part of Scripture is profitable, and you are not only to preach the truth, but the whole truth. Do not insist perpetually upon one truth alone. A nose is an important feature in the human countenance, but to paint a man's nose alone is not a satisfactory method of taking his likeness: a doctrine may be very important, but an exaggerated estimate of it may be fatal to an harmonious and complete ministry. Do not make minor doctrines main points. Do not paint the details of the background of the gospel picture with the same heavy brush as the great objects in the foreground of it. For instance, the great problems of sublapsarianism and supralapsarianism, the trenchant debates concerning eternal filiation, the earnest dispute concerning the double procession, and the pre or post millenarian schemes, however important some may deem them, are practically of very little concern to that godly widow woman, with seven children to support by her needle, who wants far more to hear of the lovingkindness of the God of providence than of these mysteries profound; if you preach to her on the faithfulness of God to his people, she will be cheered and helped in the battle of life; but difficult questions will perplex

her or send her to sleep. She is, however, the type of hundreds of those who most require your care. Our great master theme is the good news from heaven; the tidings of mercy through the atoning death of Jesus, mercy to the chief of sinners upon their believing in Jesus.

11 We must throw all our strength of judgment, memory, imagination, and eloquence into the delivery of the gospel; and not give to the preaching of the cross our random thoughts while wayside topics engross our deeper meditations. Depend upon it, if we brought the intellect of a Locke or a Newton, and the eloquence of a Cicero, to bear upon the simple doctrine of "believe and live," we should find no surplus strength. Brethren, first and above all things, keep to plain evangelical doctrines; whatever else you do or do not preach, be sure incessantly to bring forth the soul-saving truth of Christ and him crucified. I know a minister whose shoe-latchet I am unworthy to unloose, whose preaching is often little better than sacred miniature painting — I might almost say holy trifling. He is great upon the ten toes of the beast, the four faces of the cherubim, the mystical meaning of badgers' skins, and the typical bearings of the staves of the ark, and the windows of Solomon's temple: but the sins of business men, the temptations of the times, and the needs of the age, he scarcely ever touches upon. Such preaching reminds me of a lion engaged in mouse-hunting, or a man-of-war cruising after a lost water-butt. Topics scarcely in importance equal to what Peter calls "old wives' fables," are made great matters of by those microscopic divines to whom the nicety of a point is more attractive than the saving of souls. You will have read in Todd's "Student's Manual" that Harcatius, king of Persia, was a notable mole-catcher; and Briantes, king of Lydia, was equally *au fait* at filing needles; but these trivialities by no means prove them to have been

great kings: it is much the same in the ministry, there is such a thing as meanness of mental occupation unbecoming the rank of an ambassador of heaven.[22]

12 Among a certain order of minds at this time the Athenian desire of telling or hearing some new thing appears to be predominant. They boast of new light, and claim a species of inspiration which warrants them in condemning all who are out of their brotherhood, and yet their grand revelation relates to a mere circumstantial of worship, or to an obscure interpretation of prophecy; so that, at sight of their great fuss and loud cry concerning so little, we are reminded of

> 13 "Ocean into tempest tossed
> To waft a feather or to drown a fly."

14 Worse still are those who waste time in insinuating doubts concerning the authenticity of texts, or the correctness of Biblical statements concerning natural phenomena. Painfully do I call to mind hearing one Sabbath evening a deliverance called a sermon, of which the theme was a clever inquiry as to whether an angel did actually descend, and stir the pool at Bethesda, or whether it was an intermitting spring, concerning which Jewish superstition had invented a legend. Dying men and women were assembled to hear the way of salvation, and they were put off with such vanity as this! They came for bread, and received a stone; the sheep looked up to the shepherd, and were not fed. Seldom do I hear a sermon, and when I do I am grievously unfortunate, for one of the last I was entertained with was intended to be a justification of Joshua for destroying the Canaanites, and another went to prove that it was not good for man to be alone. How many souls were converted in answer to the prayers before these sermons I have never been able to ascertain, but I shrewdly

suspect that no unusual rejoicing disturbed the serenity of the golden streets.

15 Believing my next remark to be almost universally unneeded, I bring it forward with diffidence — *do not overload a sermon with too much matter.* All truth is not to be comprised in one discourse. Sermons are not to be bodies of divinity. There is such a thing as having too much to say, and saying it till hearers are sent home loathing rather than longing. An old minister walking with a young preacher, pointed to a cornfield, and observed, “Your last sermon had too much in it, and it was not clear enough, or sufficiently well-arranged; it was like that field of wheat, it contained much crude food, but none fit for use. You should make your sermons like a loaf of bread, fit for eating, and in convenient form.” It is to be feared that human heads (speaking phrenologically) are not so capacious for theology as they once were, for our forefathers rejoiced in sixteen ounces of divinity, undiluted and unadorned, and could continue receiving it for three or four hours at a stretch, but our more degenerate, or perhaps more busy, generation requires about an ounce of doctrine at a time, and that must be the concentrated extract or essential oil, rather than the entire substance of divinity. We must in these times say a great deal in a few words, but not too much, nor with too much amplification. One thought fixed on the mind will be better than fifty thoughts made to flit across the ear. One tenpenny nail driven home and clenched will be more useful than a score of tin-tacks loosely fixed, to be pulled out again in an hour.

16 *Our matter should be well arranged* according to the true rules of mental architecture. Not practical inferences at the basis and doctrines as the topstones; not metaphors in the

foundations, and propositions at the summit; not the more important truths first and the minor teachings last, after the manner of an anticlimax; but the thought must climb and ascend; one stair of teaching leading to another; one door of reasoning conducting to another, and the whole elevating the hearer to a chamber from whose windows truth is seen gleaming in the light of God. In preaching, have a place for everything, and everything in its place. Never suffer truths to fall from you pell-mell. Do not let your thoughts rush as a mob, but make them march as a troop of soldiery. Order, which is heaven's first law, must not be neglected by heaven's ambassadors.

17 *Your doctrinal teaching should be clear and unmistakable.* To be so it must first of all be clear to yourself. Some men think in smoke and preach in a cloud. Your people do not want a luminous haze, but the solid terra firma of truth. Philosophical speculations put certain minds into a semi-intoxicated condition, in which they either see everything double, or see nothing at all. The head of a certain college in Oxford was years ago asked by a stranger what was the motto of the arms of that university. He told him that it was *"Dominus illuminatio mea."* But he also candidly informed the stranger that, in his private opinion, a motto more appropriate might be, *"Aristoteles meae tenebrae."* Sensational writers have half crazed many honest men who have conscientiously read their lucubrations out of a notion that they ought to be abreast of the age, as if such a necessity might not also require us to attend the theaters in order to be able to judge the new plays, or frequent the turf that we might not be too bigoted in our opinions upon racing and gambling. For my part, I believe that the chief readers of heterodox books are ministers, and that if they would not notice them they would fall still-born from the press. Let a

minister keep clear of mystifying himself, and then he is on the road to becoming intelligible to his people. No man can hope to be felt who cannot make himself understood. If we give our people refined truth, pure Scriptural doctrine, and all so worded as to have no needless obscurity about it, we shall be true shepherds of the Sheep, and the profiting of our people will soon be apparent.[23]

[18] *Endeavour to keep the matter of your sermonizing as fresh as you can.* Do not rehearse five or six doctrines with unvarying monotony of repetition. Buy a theological barrel-organ, brethren, with five tunes accurately adjusted, and you will be qualified to practice as an ultra-Calvinistic preacher at Zoar and Jireh, if you also purchase at some vinegar factory a good supply of bitter, acrid abuse of Arminians, and duty-faith men. Brains and grace are optional, but the organ and the wormwood are indispensable. It is ours to perceive and rejoice in a wider range of truth. All that these good men hold of grace and sovereignty we maintain as firmly and boldly as they; but, we dare not shut our eyes to other teachings of the word, and we feel bound to make full proof of our ministry, by declaring the whole counsel of God. With abundant themes diligently illustrated by fresh metaphors and experiences, we shall not weary, but, under God’s hand, shall win our hearers’ ears and hearts.

[19] *Let your teachings grow and advance;* let them deepen with your experience, and rise with your soul-progress. I do not mean preach new truths; for, on the contrary, I hold that man happy who is so well taught from the first that, after fifty years of ministry, he has never had to recant a doctrine or to mourn an important omission; but I mean, let our depth and insight continually increase, and where there is spiritual advance it will be so. Timothy could not preach like Paul. Our

earlier productions must be surpassed by those of our riper years; we must never make these our models; they will be best burned, or only preserved to be mourned over because of their superficial character. It were ill, indeed, if we knew no more after being many years in Christ's school; our progress may be slow but progress there must be, or there will be cause to suspect that the inner life is lacking or sadly unhealthy. Set it before you as most certain that you have not yet attained, and may grace be given you to press forward towards that which is yet beyond. May you all become able ministers of the New Testament, and not a whit behind the very chief of preachers, though in yourselves you will still be nothing.

20 The word "sermon" is said to signify *a thrust,* and, therefore, in sermonizing it must be our aim to *use the subject in hand with energy and effect, and the subject must be capable of such employment.* To choose mere moral themes will be to use a wooden dagger; but the great truths of revelation are as sharp swords. Keep to doctrines which stir the conscience and the heart. Remain unwaveringly the champions of a soul-winning gospel. God's truth is adapted to man, and God's grace adapts man to it. There is a key which, under God, can wind up the musical box of man's nature; get it, and use it daily. Hence I urge you to keep to the old-fashioned gospel, and to that only, for assuredly it is the power of God unto salvation.

21 Of all I would wish to say this is the sum; my brethren, preach CHRIST, always and evermore. He is the whole gospel. His person, offices, and work must be our one great, all-comprehending theme. The world needs still to be told of its Saviour, and of the way to reach him. Justification by faith should be far more than it is the daily testimony of Protestant

pulpits; and if with this master-truth there should be more generally associated the other great doctrines of grace, the better for our churches and our age. If with the zeal of Methodists we can preach the doctrine of Puritans a great future is before us. The fire of Wesley, and the fuel of Whitfield, will cause a burning which shall set the forests of error on fire, and warm the very soul of this cold earth. We are not called to proclaim philosophy and metaphysics, but the simple gospel. Man's fall, his need of a new birth, forgiveness through an atonement, and salvation as the result of faith, these are our battle-ax and weapons of war. We have enough to do to learn and teach these great truths, and accursed be that learning which shall divert us from our mission, or that willful ignorance which shall cripple us in its pursuit. More and more am I jealous lest any views upon prophecy, church government, politics, or even systematic theology, should withdraw one of us from glorying in the cross of Christ. Salvation is a theme for which I would fain enlist every holy tongue. I am greedy after witnesses for the glorious gospel of the blessed God. O that Christ crucified were the universal burden of men of God. Your guess at the number of the beast, your Napoleonic speculations, your conjectures concerning a personal Antichrist — forgive me, I count them but mere bones for dogs, while men are dying, and hell is filling, it seems to me the veriest drivel to be muttering about an Armageddon at Sebastopol or Sadowa or Sedan, and peeping between the folded leaves of destiny to discover the fate of Germany. Blessed are they who read and hear the words of the prophecy of the Revelation, but the like blessing has evidently not fallen on those who pretend to expound it; for generation after generation of them have been proved to be in error by the mere lapse of time, and the present race will follow to the same inglorious sepulcher. I

would sooner pluck one single brand from the burning than explain all mysteries. To win a soul from going down into the pit is a more glorious achievement than to be crowned in the arena of theological controversy as *Doctor Sufficientissimus;* to have faithfully unveiled the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ will be in the final judgment accounted worthier service than to have solved the problems of the religious Sphinx, or to have cut the Gordian knot of apocalyptic difficulty. Blessed is that ministry of which CHRIST IS ALL.

# Lecture 6. On the Choice of a Text

1 I TRUST, my brethren, that we all feel very deeply the importance of conducting every part of divine worship with the utmost possible efficiency. When we remember that the salvation of a soul may hang, instrumentally, upon the choice of a hymn, we should not consider so small a matter as the selection of the psalms and hymns to be a trifle. An ungodly stranger, stepping into one of our services at Exeter Hall, was brought to the cross by the words of Wesley's verse. — "Jesus, lover of my soul." "Does Jesus love me?" said he: "then why should I live in enmity to him?" When we reflect, too, that God may very especially bless an expression in our prayer to the conversion of a wanderer; and that prayer in the unction of the Holy Spirit, may minister greatly to the edification of God's people, and bring unnumbered blessings down upon them, we shall endeavour to pray with the best gift and the highest grace within our reach. Since, also, in the reading of the Scriptures comfort and instruction may be plenteously distributed, we shall pause over our opened Bibles, and devoutly seek to be guided to that portion of Holy Writ which shall be most likely to be made useful.

2 With regard to the sermon, we shall be most anxious, first of all, respecting the selection of the text. No one amongst us looks upon the sermon in so careless a light as to conceive that a text picked up at random will be suitable for every, or indeed, for any occasion. We are not all of Sydney Smith's mind, when he recommended a brother at a loss for a text, to preach from "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia;" as though anything would do for a sermon. I hope we all make it a matter of very earnest and serious consideration, every week, what shall be the subjects

upon which we shall address our people on the Sabbath morning and evening; for, although all Scripture is good and profitable, yet it is not all equally appropriate for every occasion.[24] To everything there is a season; and everything is the better for being seasonable. A wise householder labours to give to each one of the family his portion of meat in due season; he does not serve out rations indiscriminately, but suits the viands to the needs of the guests. Only a mere official, the slave of routine, the lifeless automaton of formalism, will be content to snatch at the first subject which comes to hand. The man who plucks topics as children in the meadows gather buttercups and daisies, just as they offer themselves, may act in accordance with his position in a church into which a patron may have thrust him, and out of which the people cannot eject him; but those who profess to be called of God, and selected to their positions by the free choice of believers, will need to make fuller proof of their ministry than can be found in such carelessness. Among many gems we have to select the jewel most appropriate for the setting of the occasion. We dare not rush into the King's banquet hall with a confusion of provisions as though the entertainment were to be a vulgar scramble, but as well-mannered servitors we pause and ask the great Master of the feast, "Lord, what wouldst thou have us set upon thy table this day?"

[3] Some texts have struck us as most unhappily chosen. We wonder what Mr. Disraeli's rector did with the words, "In my flesh shall I see God," when lately preaching at a village harvest home! Exceedingly unfortunate was the funeral text for a murdered clergyman (Mr. Plow), from, "So he giveth his beloved sleep." Most manifestly idiotic was he who selected "Judge not, that ye be not judged," for a sermon before the judges at an assize.

4 *Do not be misled by the sound and seeming fitness of scriptural words.* M. Athanase Coquerel confesses to having preached on a third visit to Amsterdam, from the words, "This is the third time I am coming to you," 2 Corinthians 13:1 — well may he add, that he "found great difficulty in afterwards putting into this discourse what was fitting to the occasion." A parallel case was that of one of the sermons on the death of the Princess Charlotte from, "She was sick and died." It is still worse to select words out of a miserable facetiousness, as in the case of a recent sermon on the death of Abraham Lincoln, from the sentence, "Abraham is dead." It is said that a student, who it is to be hoped never emerged from the shell, preached a sermon in public, before his tutor, Dr. Philip Doddridge. Now the good man was accustomed to place himself immediately in front of the student, and look him full in the face, judge therefore of his surprise, if not indignation, when the text announced ran in these words, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" Gentlemen, fools sometimes become students, let us hope none of that order may dishonor our *Alma Mater.* I pardon the man who preached before that drunken Solomon, James I of England and 6 of Scotland, from James 1:6, the temptation was too great to be resisted; but let the wretch be forever execrated, if such a man ever lived, who celebrated, the decease of a deacon by a tirade from, "It came to pass that the beggar died." I forgive the liar who attributed such an outrage to me, but I hope he will not try his infamous arts upon any one else.[26]

5 As we would avoid a careless accidental pitching upon topics, so would we equally *avoid a monotonous regularity.* I have heard of a divine who had fifty-two Sunday sermons, and a few extra ones for holy days, from which he was wont to preach in regular order, year after year. In his case, there

would be no need that the people should entreat that the same things should be spoken to them on the next Sabbath-day, nor would there be much wonder if imitators of Eutychus should be found in other places beside the third loft. It is not very long ago since a clergyman said to a farmer friend of mine, “Do you know, Mr. D — I was turning over my sermons the other day, and really the parsonage is so damp, especially in my study, that my sermons have become quite musty.” My friend, who although he was churchwarden, attended a Dissenting place of worship, was not so rude as to say that he *thought it very likely;* but as the village venerables had frequently heard the aforesaid discourses, it is possible they were musty in more senses than one. There are persons in the ministry who, having accumulated a little stock of sermons, repeat them *ad nauseam,* with horrible regularity. Itinerating brethren must be far more subject to this temptation than those who are stationed for several years in one place. If they fall victims to the habit, it must surely be the end of their usefulness, and send an intolerable death-chill into their hearts, of which their people must soon be conscious while they hear them parroting forth their time-worn productions. The very best invention for promoting spiritual idleness must be the plan of acquiring a two or three years’ stock of sermons, and repeating them in order again and again. As we, my brethren, hope to live for many years, if not for life in one place, rooted to the spot by the mutual affection which will grow up between ourselves and our people, we have need of a far different method from that which may suit a sluggard or an itinerant evangelist.

6 It must be burdensome to some, and very easy to others, I should imagine, to find their subject, as they do whose lot is cast in the Episcopal establishment, where the preacher usually refers to the gospel or the epistle, or the lesson for

the day, and feels himself bound — not by any law, but by a sort of precedent — to preach from a verse in either the one or the other. When Advent and Epiphany, and Lent and Whitsuntide, bring their stereotyped round, no man needs to agonize at heart over the question, “What shall I say unto this people?” The voice of the church is clear and distinct, “Master, say on; there is your work, give yourself wholly to it.” There may be some advantages connected with this pre-arrangement, but the Episcopalian public do not appear to have been made partakers of them, for their public writers are always groaning over the dreariness of sermons, and bemoaning the sad condition of a longsuffering laity who are compelled to listen to them. The slavish habit of following the course of the sun and the revolution of the months, instead of waiting upon the Holy Spirit is, to my mind, quite enough to account for the fact that in many churches, their own writers being judges, the sermons are nothing better than specimens of “that decent debility which alike guards their authors from ludicrous errors, and precludes them from striking beauties.”

[7] Be it then taken for granted, that we all feel it to be most important, not only to preach the truth, but to preach the right truth for each particular occasion; our effort will be to descant upon such subjects as shall be best adapted to our people’s wants, and most likely to prove a channel of grace to their hearts.

[8] *Is there any difficulty in obtaining texts?* I remember, in my earlier days, reading somewhere in a volume of lectures upon Homiletics, a statement which considerably alarmed me at the time; it was something to this effect: “If any man shall find a difficulty in selecting a text, he had better at once go back to the grocer’s shop, or to the plough, for he evidently has not the capacity required for a minister.” Now, as such

had been very frequently my cross and burden, I inquired within myself whether I should resort to some form of secular labour, and leave the ministry; but I have not done so, for I still have the conviction that, although condemned by the sweeping judgment of the lecturer, I follow a call to which God has manifestly set his seal. I was so much in trouble of conscience through the aforesaid severe remark, that I asked my grandfather, who had been in the ministry some fifty years, whether he was ever perplexed in choosing his theme. He told me frankly that this had always been his greatest trouble, compared with which, preaching in itself was no anxiety at all. I remember the venerable man's remark, "The difficulty is not because there are not enough texts, but because there are so many, that I am in a strait betwixt them." Brethren, we are sometimes like the lover of choice flowers, who finds himself surrounded by all the beauties of the garden, with permission to select but one. How long he lingers between the rose and the lily, and how great the difficulty to prefer one among ten thousand blooming lovelinesses! To me still, I must confess, my text selection is a very great *embarrassment — embarras de richesses,* as the French say — an embarrassment of riches, very different from the bewilderment of poverty — the anxiety of attending to the most pressing of so many truths, all clamoring for a hearing, so many duties all needing enforcing, and so many spiritual needs of the people all demanding supply. I confess that I frequently sit hour after hour praying and waiting for a subject, and that this is the main part of my study; much hard labour have I spent in manipulating topics, ruminating upon points of doctrine, making skeletons out of verses and then burying every bone of them in the catacombs of oblivion, sailing on and on over leagues of broken water, till I see the red lights and make sail direct to the desired haven. I believe

that almost any Saturday in my life I make enough outlines of sermons, if I felt at liberty to preach them, to last me for a month, but I no more dare to use them than an honest mariner would run to shore a cargo of contraband goods. Themes flit before the mind one after another, like images passing across the photographer's lens, but until the mind is like the sensitive plate, which retains the picture, the subjects are valueless to us.

9 *What is the right text? How do you know it?* We know it by the signs of a friend. When a verse gives your mind a hearty grip, from which you cannot release yourself, you will need no further direction as to your proper theme. Like the fish, you nibble at many baits, but when the hook has fairly pierced you, you will wander no more. When the text gets a hold of us, we may be sure that we have a hold of it, and may safely deliver our souls upon it. To use another simile: you get a number of texts in your hand, and try to break them up; you hammer at them with might and main, but your labour is lost; at last you find one which crumbles at the first blow, and sparkles as it falls in pieces, and you perceive jewels of the rarest radiance flashing from within. It grows before your eye like the fabled seed which developed into a tree while the observer watched it. It charms and fascinates you, or it weighs you to your knees and loads you with the burden of the Lord. Know then that this is the message which the Lord would have you deliver; and, feeling this, you will become so bound by that scripture that you will never feel at rest until you have yielded your whole mind to its power, and have spoken upon it as the Lord shall give you utterance. Wait for that elect word, even if you wait till within an hour of the service. This may not be understood by cool, calculating men, who are not moved by impulses as we are, but to some of us

these things are a law in our hearts against which we dare not offend. We tarry at Jerusalem till power is given.

10 "I believe in the Holy Ghost." This is one of the articles of the creed, but it is scarcely believed among professors so as to be acted on. Many ministers appear to think that *they* are to choose the text; *they* are to discover its teaching; *they* are to find a discourse in it. We do not think so. We are to use our own volitions, of course, as well as our understandings and affections, for we do not pretend that the Holy Ghost will compel us to preach from a text against our wills. He does not deal with us as though we were musical boxes, to be wound up and set to a certain tune; but that glorious inspirer of all truth deals with us as with rational intelligences, who are swayed by spiritual forces congruous to our natures: still, devout minds evermore desire that the choice of the text should rest with the all-wise Spirit of God, and not with their own fallible understandings, and therefore they humbly put themselves into his hand, asking him to condescend to direct them to the portion of meat in due season which he has ordained for his people. Gurnal says, "Ministers have no ability of their own for their work. Oh! how long may they sit tumbling their books over, and puzzling their brains, until God comes to their help, and then — as Jacob's venison — it is brought to their hand. If God drop not down his assistance, we write with a pen that hath no ink: if any one need walk dependently upon God more than another, the minister is he."

11 If any one inquire of me, *"How shall I obtain the most proper text?"* I should answer, *"Cry to God for it."* Harrington Evans, in his "Rules for Sermons," lays down as the first, "Seek God in prayer for choice of a passage. Inquire why such a passage is decided upon. Let the question be fairly

answered. Sometimes the answer may be such as ought to decide the mind against the choice." If prayer alone should not guide you to the desired treasure, it will in any case be a profitable exercise to you to have prayed. The difficulty of settling upon a topic, if it makes you pray more than usual, will be a very great blessing to you. Praying is the best studying. Luther said so of old — *"Bene orasse est bene studuisse,"* and the well-worn proverb will bear repeating. Pray over the Scripture; it is as the treading of grapes in the wine-vat, the threshing of corn on the barn floor, the melting of gold from the ore. Prayer is twice blest; it blesseth the pleading preacher, and the people to whom he ministers. When your text comes in answer to prayer, it will be all the dearer to you; it will come with a divine savour and unction altogether unknown to the formal orator to whom one theme is as another.[27]

[12] After prayer, *we are bound with much earnestness to use fitting means for concentrating our thoughts, and directing them in the best channel.* Consider the condition of your hearers. Reflect upon their spiritual state as a whole and as individuals, and prescribe the medicine adapted to the current disease, or prepare the food suitable for the prevailing necessity. Let me caution you, however, against considering the whims of your hearers, or the peculiarities of the wealthy and influential. Do not give too much weight to the gentleman and lady who sit in the green pew, if you are so unfortunate as to possess such an abominable place of distinction in a house where all are on a level. Let the large contributor be considered by all means as much as others, and let not his spiritual infirmities be neglected; but he is not everybody, and you will grieve the Holy Spirit if you think him to be so. Look at the poor in the aisles with equal interest, and select topics which are within their range of

thought, and which may cheer them in their many sorrows. Do not suffer your heads to be turned by respect to those one-sided members of the congregation, who have a sweet tooth for one portion of the gospel, and turn a deaf ear to other parts of truth; never go out of your way either to give them a feast or a scolding. It may be satisfactory to think that they are pleased, if they are good people, and one respects their predilections, but faithfulness demands that we should not become mere pipers to our hearers, playing such tunes as they may demand of us, but should remain as the Lord's mouth to declare all his counsels. I return to the remark, think over what your people really want for their edification and let that be your theme. That famous apostle of the north of Scotland, Dr. Macdonald, gives an instance to the point in his "Diary of Work in St. Kilda:" — "Friday, May 27. At our morning exercise this day, I read and gave some illustrations of Romans 12, which afforded me an opportunity of stating the connection between faith and practice, and that the doctrines of grace are according to godliness, and lead to holiness in heart and life. This I deemed necessary, as from the high ground I had occupied for some days past, I was afraid the people might veer towards Antinomianism, an extreme as dangerous as Arminianism, if not more so."

13 *Consider what sins appear to be most rife in the church and congregation — worldliness,* covetousness, prayerlessness, wrath, pride, want of brotherly love, slander, and such like evils. Take into account, affectionately, the trials of your people, and seek for a balm for their wounds. It is not necessary to go into minute details, either in the prayer or in the sermon, as to all these trials of your congregation, although this was the custom of a venerable minister who was once a great bishop in this neighbourhood, and has now gone to heaven. He was wont, in his abundant love to his

people, to give such hints as to births, deaths, and marriages, in his flock, that one of the Sunday afternoon's enjoyments of his constant hearers must have consisted in finding out to whom the minister referred in the various parts of his prayer and sermon. This was tolerated, and even admired *from him* — from us it would be ridiculous: a patriarch may do with propriety what a young man must scrupulously avoid. The venerable divine whom I have just mentioned, had learned this particularizing from the example of his father, for he was one of a family in which the children, having observed that something particular had occurred during the day, would say to each other, "We must wait till family prayer, when we shall know all about it." But I digress; this instance shows how an excellent habit may degenerate into a fault, but the rule which I have laid down is not affected by it. Certain trials will occur, at particular junctures, to many in the congregation, and as these afflictions will invite your mind into new fields of thought, you will do ill to be deaf to their call. Again, we must watch the spiritual state of our people, and if we notice that they are falling into a backsliding condition; if we fear that they are likely to be inoculated by any mischievous heresy or perverse imagining; if anything, in fact, in the whole physiological character of the church should strike our mind, we must hasten to prepare a sermon which, by God's grace, may stay the plague. These are the indications among his hearers which the Spirit of God gives to the careful, observant pastor as to his line of action. The careful shepherd often examines his flock, and governs his mode of treatment by the state in which he finds it. He will be likely to supply one sort of food but sparingly, and another in greater abundance, and medicine in its due quantity, according as his practised judgment finds the one or the other necessary. We

shall be rightly directed if we do but associate ourselves with “that great Shepherd of the sheep.”

14 Do not, however, let us allow our preaching right home to our people to degenerate into scolding them. They call the pulpit “Coward’s Castle,” and it is a very proper name for it in some respects, especially when fools mount the platform and impudently insult their hearers by holding up their faults or infirmities to public derision. There is a personality — an offensive, wanton, unjustifiable personality — which is to be studiously avoided; it is of the earth, earthy, and is to be condemned in unmeasured terms; while there is another personality, wise, spiritual, heavenly, which is to be aimed at unceasingly. The word of God is sharper than any twoedged sword, and therefore you can leave the word of God to wound and kill, and need not be yourselves cutting in phrase and manner. God’s truth is searching: leave it to search the hearts of men without offensive additions from yourself. He is a mere bungler in portrait painting who needs to write the name under the picture when it is hung up in the family parlour where the person himself is sitting. Compel your hearers to perceive that you speak of them, though you have not even in the remotest degree named them, or pointed them out. Occasions may possibly occur when you may be bound to go as far as Hugh Latimer, when speaking upon bribery — he said, “He that took the silver basin and ewer for a bribe, thinketh that it will never come out. But he may know that I know it, and I know it not alone; there be more beside me that know it. Oh, briber and bribery! He was never a good man that will so take bribes; nor can I believe that he that is a briber will be a good justice.” Here was as much prudent reticence as bold disclosure; and if you go no further than this, no man dare, for shame sake, accuse you of too great personality.

15 In the next place, the minister in looking after his text, should *consider what his previous topics have been.* It would be unwise to insist perpetually upon one doctrine to the neglect of others. Some of our profounder brethren may be able to deal with the same subject in a series of discourses, and may be able, by a turn of the kaleidoscope, to present new forms of beauty with no change of subject, but the most of us, who are of less fertile abilities, will find it best, to study variety, and deliver ourselves upon a wide range of truth. I think it well frequently to look over the list of my sermons, and see whether any doctrine has escaped my attention, or any Christian grace has been neglected in my ministrations. It is well to inquire whether we have been too doctrinal lately, or too barely practical, or too exclusively experimental. We do not desire to degenerate into Antinomians, nor, on the other hand, to descend to be mere teachers of a cold morality, but our ambition is to make full proof of our ministry. We would give every portion of Scripture its fair share in our heart and head. Doctrine, precept, history, type, psalm, proverb, experience, warning, promise, invitation, threatening, or rebuke — we would include the whole of inspired truth within the circle of our teachings. Let us abhor all onesidedness, all exaggeration of one truth and disparagement of another, and let us endeavour to paint the portrait of truth with balanced features and blended colours, lest we dishonor her by presenting distortion instead of symmetry, and a caricature for a faithful copy.

16 Supposing, however, that you have prayed in that little room of yours, have wrestled hard and supplicated long, and have thought over your people and their wants, and still you cannot meet with *the* text — well, do not fret about it, nor give way to despair. If you were about to go a warfare at your

own charges, it would be a very miserable thing to be short of powder, and the battle so near; but as your Captain has to provide, there is no doubt that all in good time he will serve out the ammunition. *If you trust in God, he will not, he cannot, fail you.* Continue pleading and watching, for to the industrious student heavenly help is certain. If you had gone up and down idly all the week, and given no heed to proper preparation, you could not expect divine aid; but if you have done your best, and are now waiting to know your Lord's message, your face shall never be ashamed.

17 Two or three incidents have occurred to me which may seem rather odd to you, but then I am an odd man. When I lived at Cambridge, I had, as usual, to preach in the evening at a neighboring village, to which I had to walk. After reading and meditating all day, I could not meet with the right text. Do what I would, no response came from the sacred oracle, no light flashed from the Urim and Thummim; I prayed, I meditated, I turned from one verse to another, but the mind would not take hold, or I was, as Bunyan would say, "much tumbled up and down in my thoughts." Just then I walked to the window and looked out. On the other side of the narrow street in which I lived, I saw a poor solitary canary bird upon the slates, surrounded by a crowd of sparrows, who were all pecking at it as if they would tear it to pieces. At that moment the verse came to my mind — "Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her." I walked off with the greatest possible composure, considered the passage during my long and lonely walk, and preached upon the peculiar people, and the persecutions of their enemies, with freedom and ease to myself, and I believe with comfort to my rustic audience. The text was sent to me, and if the ravens did not bring it, certainly the sparrows did. At another time, while laboring at Waterbeach, I had preached

on the Sunday morning, and gone home to dinner, as was my wont, with one of the congregation. Unfortunately, there were three services, and the afternoon sermon came so close upon the back of the morning, that it was difficult to prepare the soul, especially as the dinner is a necessary but serious inconvenience where a clear brain is required. Alas! for those afternoon services in our English villages, they are usually a doleful waste of effort. Roast beef and pudding lie heavy on the hearers' souls, and the preacher himself is deadened in his mental processes while digestion claims the mastery of the hour. By a careful measuring of diet, I remained, on that occasion, in an earnest, lively condition, but to my dismay, I found that the pre-arranged line of thought was gone from me. I could not find the trail of my prepared sermon, and press my forehead as I might, the missing topic would not come. Time was brief, the hour was striking, and in some alarm I told the honest farmer that I could not for the life of me recollect what I had intended to preach about. "Oh!" he said, "never mind; you will be sure to have a good word for us." Just at that moment a blazing block of wood fell out of the fire upon the hearth at my feet, smoking into one's eyes and nose at a great rate. "There," said the farmer, "there's a text for you sir — 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?'" No, I thought, it was not plucked out, for it fell out of itself. Here was a text, an illustration, and a leading thought as a nest egg for more. Further light came, and the sermon was certainly not worse than my more prepared effusions; it was better in the best sense, for one or two came forward declaring themselves to have been aroused and converted through that afternoon's sermon. I have always considered that it was a happy circumstance that I had forgotten the text from which I had intended to preach. At New Park Street, I once passed through a very singular experience, of which

witnesses are present in this room. I had passed happily through all the early parts of divine service in the evening of the Sabbath, and was giving out the hymn before sermon. I opened the Bible to find the text, which I had carefully studied as the topic of discourse, when on the opposite page another passage of Scripture sprang upon me like a lion from a thicket, with vastly more power than I had felt when considering the text which I had chosen. The people were singing and I was sighing. I was in a strait betwixt two, and my mind hung as in the balances. I was naturally desirous to run in the track which I had carefully planned, but the other text would take no refusal, and seemed to tug at my skirts, crying, “No, no, you must preach from me. God would have you follow me.” I deliberated within myself as to my duty, for I would neither be fanatical nor unbelieving, and at last I thought within myself, “Well, I should like to preach the sermon which I have prepared, and it is a great risk to run to strike out a new line of thought, but still as this text constrains me, it may be of the Lord, and therefore I will venture upon it, come what may.” I almost always announce my divisions very soon after the exordium, but on this occasion, contrary to my usual custom, I did not do so, for a reason which some of you may probably guess. I passed through the first head with considerable liberty, speaking perfectly extemporaneously both as to thought and word. The second point was dwelt upon with a consciousness of unusual quiet efficient power, but I had no idea what the third would or could be, for the text yielded no more matter just then, nor can I tell even now what I could have done had not an event occurred upon which I had never calculated. I had brought myself into great difficulty by obeying what I thought to be a divine impulse, and I felt comparatively easy about it, believing that God would help me, and knowing that I could

at least close the service should there be nothing more to be said. I had no need to deliberate, for in one moment we were in total darkness — the gas had gone out, and as the aisles were choked with people, and the place everywhere crowded, it was a great peril, but a great blessing. What was I to do then? The people were a little frightened, but I quieted them instantly by telling them not to be at all alarmed, though the gas was out, for it would soon be re-lighted; and as for myself, having no manuscript, I could speak just as well in the dark as in the light, if they would be so good as to sit and listen. Had my discourse been ever so elaborate, it would have been absurd to have continued it, and so as my plight was, I was all the less embarrassed. I turned at once mentally to the well-known text which speaks of the child of light walking in darkness, and the child of darkness walking in the light, and found appropriate remarks and illustrations pouring in upon me, and when the lamps were again lit, I saw before me an audience as rapt and subdued as ever a man beheld in his life. The odd thing of all was, that some few church-meetings afterwards, two persons came forward to make confession of their faith, who professed to have been converted that evening; but the first owed her conversion to the former part of the discourse, which was on the new text that came to me and the other traced his awakening to the latter part, which was occasioned by the sudden darkness. Thus, you see, Providence befriended me. I cast myself upon God, and his arrangements quenched the light at the proper time for me. Some may ridicule, but I adore; others may even censure, but I rejoice. Anything is better than mechanical sermonizing, in which the direction of the Spirit is practically ignored. Every Holy Ghost preacher, I have no doubt, will have such recollections clustering around his ministry. I say, therefore, watch the course of Providence; cast yourselves

upon the Lord's guidance and help. If you have solemnly done your best to get a text, and the subject does not start up before you, go up into the pulpit firmly convinced that you will receive a message when the time comes, even though you have not a word at that moment.

18 In the life of Samuel Drew, a famous Methodist preacher, we read, "Whilst stopping at a friend's house, in Cornwall, after preaching, a person who had attended the service, observing to him, that he had, on that occasion, surpassed his usual ability; and other individuals concurring in the opinion, Mr. Drew said, 'If it be true, it is the more singular, because my sermon was entirely unpremeditated. I went into the pulpit designing to address you from another text, but looking upon the Bible, which lay open, that passage from which you heard me speak just now, 'Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel,' arrested my attention so forcibly as to put to flight my former ideas; and though I had never considered the passage before, I resolved instantly to make it the subject of my discourse." Mr. Drew did well to be obedient to the heavenly direction.

19 Under certain circumstances you will be absolutely compelled to cast away the well-studied discourse, and rely upon the present help of the Holy Spirit, using purely extempore speech. You may find yourself in the position of the late Kingman Knott, when preaching in the National Theatre, New York. In one of his letters, he says, "The building was filled full, and mostly with young men and boys of the roughest type. I went with a sermon in my mind, but as soon as I came upon the stage, greeted with a 'Hi! hi!' and saw the motley and uproarious crowd I had to do with, I let all thoughts of the sermon go, and catching up the parable of the Prodigal Son, tried to interest them in that, and

succeeded in keeping most of them inside the house, and tolerably attentive." What a simpleton would he have been had he persevered in his unsuitable prelection! Brethren, I beseech you, believe in the Holy Ghost, and practically carry out your faith.

[20] As a further assistance to a poor stranded preacher, who cannot launch his mind for want of a wave or two of thought, I recommend him in such a case, to *turn again and again to the Word of God itself,* and read a chapter, and ponder over its verses one by one; or let him select a single verse, and get his mind fully exercised upon it. It may be that he will not find his text in the verse or chapter which he reads, but the right word will come to him through his mind being actively engaged upon holy subjects. According to the relation of thoughts to each other, one thought will suggest another, and another, until a long procession will have passed before the mind, out of which one or other will be the predestined theme.

[21] *Read also good suggestive books,* and get your mind aroused by them. If men wish to get water out of a pump which has not been lately used, they first pour water down, and then the pump works. Reach down one of the Puritans, and thoroughly study the work, and speedily you will find yourself like a bird on the wing, mentally active and full of motion.

[22] By way of precaution, however, let me remark, that *we ought to be always in training for text-getting and sermon-making.* We should constantly preserve the holy activity of our minds. Woe unto the minister who dares to waste an hour. Read John Foster's "Essay on the Improvement of Time," and resolve never to lose a second of it. A man who goes up and down from Monday morning till

Saturday night, and indolently dreams that he is to have his text sent down by an angelic messenger in the last hour or two, of the week, tempts God, and deserves to stand speechless on the Sabbath. We have no leisure as ministers; we are never off duty, but are on our watchtowers day and night. Students, I tell you solemnly, nothing will excuse you from the most rigid economy of time; it is at your peril that, you trifle with it. The leaf of your ministry will soon wither unless, like the blessed man in the first Psalm, you meditate in the law of the Lord both day and night. I am most anxious that you should not throw away time in religious dissipation, or in gossiping and frivolous talk. Beware of running about from this meeting to that, listening to mere twaddle, and contributing your share to the general blowing up of windbags. A man great at teadrinkings, evening parties, and Sunday-school excursions, is generally little everywhere else. Your pulpit preparations are your first business, and if you neglect these, you will bring no credit upon yourself or your office. Bees are making honey from morning till night, and we should be always gathering stores for our people. I have no belief in that ministry which ignores laborious preparation. When travelling in Northern Italy, our driver at night slept in the carriage, and when I called him up in the morning, he leaped out, cracked his whip three times, and said he was quite ready. Such a rapid toilet I hardly appreciated, and wished that he had slept elsewhere, or that I had to occupy another seat. You who are ready to preach in a hop, skip, and jump, will pardon me if I take a pew somewhere else. Habitual mental exercise in the direction of our work is advisable. Ministers should always be making their hay, but especially while the sun shines. Do you not find yourself sometimes wonderfully ready at sermonizing? Mr. Jay said that when he felt in such a condition, he would take out his

paper and jot down texts and divisions of sermons, and keep them in store, that they might serve him at times when his mind was not so ready. The lamented Thomas Spencer wrote, “I keep a little book, in which I enter every text of Scripture which comes into my mind with power and sweetness. Were I to dream of a passage of Scripture I should enter it, and when I sit down to compose I look over the book, and have never found myself at a loss for a subject.” Watch for subjects as you go about the city or the country.[25] Always keep your eyes and ears open, and you will hear and see angels. The world is full of sermons — catch them on the wing. A sculptor believes, whenever he sees a rough block of marble that there is a noble statue concealed within it, and that he has only to chip away the superfluities and reveal it. So do you believe that there is within the husk of everything the kernel of a sermon for the wise man. Be wise, and see the heavenly in its earthly pattern. Hear the voices from the skies, and translate them into the language of men. Always a preacher be thou, O man of God, foraging for the pulpit, in all provinces of nature and art, storing and preparing at all hours and seasons.

[23] I am asked whether it is a good thing to announce arrangements, and publish *lists of projected sermons.* I answer, Every man in his own order. I am not a judge for others; but I dare not attempt such a thing, and should signally fail if I were to venture upon it. Precedents are much against my opinion, and at the head of them the sets of discourses by Matthew Henry, John Newton, and a host of others, still I can only speak my own personal impressions, and leave each man to be a law unto himself. Many eminent divines have delivered valuable courses of sermons upon pre-arranged topics, but we are not eminent, and must counsel others like ourselves to be cautious how they act. I

dare not announce what I shall preach from tomorrow, much less what I shall preach from in six weeks' or six months' time, the reason being partly this, that I am conscious of not possessing those peculiar gifts which are necessary to interest an assembly in one subject or set of subjects, for any length of time. Brethren of extraordinary research and profound learning can do it, and brethren with none of these, and no common sense, may pretend to do it, but I cannot. I am obliged to owe a great deal of my strength to variety rather than profundity. It is questionable whether the great majority of list preachers had not far better burn their programs if they would succeed. I have a very lively, or rather a deadly, recollection of a certain series of discourses on the Hebrews, which made a deep impression on my mind of the most undesirable kind. I wished frequently that the Hebrews had kept the epistle to themselves, for it sadly bored one poor Gentile lad. By the time the seventh or eighth discourse had been delivered, only the very good people could stand it: these, of course, declared that they never heard more valuable expositions, but to those of a more carnal judgment it appeared that each sermon increased in dullness. Paul, in that epistle, exhorts us to *suffer* the word of exhortation, and we did so. Are all courses of sermons like this? Perhaps not, and yet I fear the exceptions are few, for it is even said of that wonderful expositor, Joseph Caryl, that he commenced his famous lectures upon Job with eight hundred hearers, and closed the book with only eight! A prophetical preacher enlarged so much upon "the little horn" of Daniel, that one Sabbath morning he had but seven hearers remaining. They doubtless thought it

> [24] "Strange that a harp of thousand strings,
> Should play one tune so long."

25 Ordinarily, and for ordinary men, it seems to me that pre-arranged discourses are a mistake, are never more than an apparent benefit, and generally a real mischief. Surely to go through a long epistle must require a great deal of genius in the preacher, and demand a world of patience on the part of the hearers. I am moved by a yet deeper consideration in what I have now said: it strikes me that many a truly living, earnest preacher, would feel a programme to be a fetter. Should the preacher announce for next Lord's day a topic full of joy, requiring liveliness and exaltation of spirit, it is very possible that he may, from various causes, find himself in a sad and burdened state of mind; nevertheless he must put the new wine into his old bottle, and go up to the wedding feast wearing his sackcloth and ashes, and worst of all, this he may be bound to repeat for a whole month. Is this quite as it should be? It is important that the speaker should be in tune with his theme, but how is this to be secured unless the election of the topic is left to influences which shall work at the time? A man is not a steam engine, to run on metals, and it is unwise to fix him in one groove. Very much of the preacher's power will lie in his whole soul being in accord with the subject, and I should be afraid to appoint a subject for a certain date lest, when the time come, I should not be in the key for it. Besides, it is not easy to see how a man can exhibit dependence upon the guidance of the Spirit of God, when he has already prescribed his own route. Perhaps you will say, "That is a singular objection, for why not rely upon him for twenty weeks as well as for one?" True, but we have never had a promise to warrant such faith. God promises to give us grace according to our days, but he says nothing of endowing us with a reserve fund for the future.

> 26 "Day by day the manna fell;
> Oh, to learn this lesson well!"

27 Even so will our sermons come to us, fresh from heaven, when required. I am jealous of anything which should hinder your daily dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and therefore I register the opinion already given. To you, my younger brethren, I feel safe in saying with authority, leave ambitious attempts at elaborate series of discourses to older and abler men. We have but a small share of mental gold and silver, let us invest our little capital in useful goods which will obtain a ready market, and leave the wealthier merchants to deal in more expensive and cumbrous articles. We know not what a day may bring forth — let us wait for daily teaching, and do nothing which might preclude us from using those materials which providence may today or tomorrow cast in our way.

28 Perhaps you will ask whether you should preach from *texts which persons select for you, and request you to preach upon!* My answer would be as a rule, *never;* and if there must be exceptions let them be few. Let me remind you that you do not keep a shop to which customers may come and give their orders. When a friend suggests a topic, think it over, and consider whether it be appropriate, and see whether it comes to you with power. Receive the request courteously, as you are in duty bound to do as a gentleman and a Christian; but if the Lord whom you serve does not cast his light upon the text, do not preach from it, let who may persuade you.

29 I am quite certain that if we will wait upon God for our subjects, and make it a matter of prayer that we may be rightly directed, we shall be led forth by a right way; but if we are puffed up with the idea that we can very easily choose for ourselves, we shall find that even in the selection of a subject, without Christ we can do nothing. Wait upon the Lord, hear what he would speak, receive the word direct from

God’s mouth, and then go forth as an ambassador fresh from the court of heaven. “Wait, I say, on the Lord.”

# Lecture 7. On Spiritualizing

[1] Many writers upon Homiletics condemn in unmeasured terms even the occasional spiritualizing of a text.[28] “Select texts,” say they, “which give a plain, literal sense; never travel beyond the obvious meaning of the passage; never allow yourself to accommodate or adapt; it is an artifice of men of artificial culture, a trick of mountebanks, a miserable display of bad taste and impudence.” Honour to whom honour is due, but I humbly beg leave to dissent from this learned opinion, believing it to be more fastidious than correct, more plausible than true.[29] A great deal of real good may be done by occasionally taking forgotten, quaint, remarkable, out-of-the-way texts; and I feel persuaded that if we appeal to a jury of practical, successful preachers, who are not theorizers, but men actually in the field, we shall have a majority in our favour. It may be that the learned rabbis of this generation are too sublime and celestial to condescend to men of low estate; but we who have no high culture, or profound learning, or enchanting eloquence to boast of, have deemed it wise to use the very method which the grandees have proscribed; for we find it one of the best ways of keeping out of the rut of dull formality, and it yields us a sort of salt with which to give flavor to unpalatable truth. Many great soul-winners have felt it meet to give a fillip to their ministry, and to arrest their people’s attention by now and then striking out a path which had not been trodden heretofore. Experience has not taught them that they were in error, but the reverse. Within limit, my brethren, be not afraid to spiritualize, or to take singular texts. Continue to look out passages of Scripture, and not only give their plain meaning, as you are bound to do, but also draw from them meanings which may not lie upon their surface. Take the

advice for what it is worth, but I seriously recommend you to show the superfine critics that everybody does not worship the golden image which they have set up. I counsel you to employ spiritualizing within certain limits and boundaries, but I pray you do not, under cover of this advice, rush headlong into incessant and injudicious “imaginings,” as George Fox would call them. Do not drown yourselves because you are recommended to bathe, or hang yourselves on an oak because *tannin* is described as a valuable astringent. An allowable thing carried to excess is a vice, even as fire is a good servant in the grate, but a bad master when raging in a burning house. Too much even of a good thing surfeits and disgusts, and in no case is this fact more sure than in the one before us.

2 **I.** The first canon to be observed is this — *do not violently strain a text by illegitimate spiritualizing.* This is a sin against common sense. How dreadfully the word of God has been mauled and mangled by a certain band of preachers who have laid texts on the rack to make them reveal what they never would have otherwise spoken. Mr. Slopdash, of whom Rowland Hill tells us in his Village Dialogues, is but a type of a numerous generation. That worthy is described as delivering himself of a discourse upon, “I had three white baskets on my head,” from the dream of Pharaoh’s baker, Upon this the “thrice-anointed ninny-hammer,” as a friend of mine would call him, discoursed upon the doctrine of the Trinity! A dear minister of Christ, a venerable and excellent brother, one of the most instructive ministers in his county, told me that he missed one day a laboring man and his wife from his chapel. He missed them again and again, Sunday after Sunday, and one Monday, meeting the husband in the street, he said to him, “Well, John, I have not seen you lately.” “No sir,” was the reply, “We did not seem to profit under your

ministry as we used to do." "Indeed, John, I am very sorry to hear it." "Well, me and my missis likes the doctrines of grace, and therefore we've gone to hear Mr. Bawler lately." "Oh! you mean the good man at the High Calvinist Meeting?" "Yes, sir, and we are *so* happy; we get right good food there, sixteen ounces to the pound. We were getting half starved under your ministry — though I always shall respect you as a man, sir." "All right, my friend; of course you ought to go where you get good for your soul, I only hope it *is* good; but what did you get last Sunday?" "Oh! we had a most refreshing time, sir. In the morning we had — I don't seem to like to tell you — however, we had really a most precious time." "Yes, but what was it, John?" "Well, sir, Mr. Bawler led us blessedly into that passage, 'Art thou a man given to appetite? Put a knife to thy throat when thou sittest before a ruler," "Whatever did he make out of that." "Well, sir, I can tell you what he made out of it, but I should like to know first what you would have said upon it." "I don't know, John; I don't think I should have taken it at all, but if I must have spoken about it, I should have said that a person given to eating and drinking should take care what he was about when he was in the presence of great men, or he would ruin himself. Gluttony even in this life is ruinous." "Ah!" said the man, "that is your dead-letter way of rendering it. As I told my missis the other day, ever since we have been to hear Mr. Bawler, the Bible has been opened up to us so that we can see a great deal more in it than we used to do." "Yes, but what did Mr. Bawler tell you about his text?" "Well, he said a man given to appetite was a young convert, who is sure to have a tremendous appetite for preaching, and always wants food; but he aren't always nice about what sort of food it is." "What next, John?" "He said that if the young convert went to sit before a ruler — that is to say, a legal preacher, or a

duty-faith man, it would be the worse for him." "But how about the knife, John?" "Well, sir, Mr. Bawler said it was a very dangerous thing to hear legal preachers, it would be sure to ruin the man; and he might just as well cut his throat at once, sir!" The subject was, I suppose, the mischievous effects of young Christians listening to any preachers but those of the hyper school; and the moral drawn from it was, that sooner than this brother should go to hear his former minister, he had better cut his throat! That was accommodating considerably! Ye critics, we give over such dead horses as these to your doggish teeth. Rend and devour as ye will, we will not upbraid. We have heard of another performer who delivered his mind upon Proverbs 21:17. "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich." The Proverbs are a favourite field for spiritualizers to disport themselves withal. Our worthy disposed of the proverb in this fashion: " 'He that loveth pleasure, that is, the Christian who enjoys the means of grace, 'shall be a poor man,' that is, he shall be poor in spirit; 'and he that loveth wine and oil;' that is to say, rejoices in covenant provisions, and enjoys the oil and wine of the gospel, 'shall not be rich,' that is, he shall not be rich in his own esteem;" showing the excellence of those who are poor in spirit, and how they shall enjoy the pleasures of the gospel — a very proper sentiment, but my carnal eyes fail to see it in the text. You have all heard of William Huntingdon's famous rendering of the passage in Isaiah 11:8: "The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den." " 'The sucking child,' that is, the babe in grace, 'shall play on the hole of the asp,' 'the asp,' that is, the Arminian: 'the hole of the, asp,' that is, the Arminian's mouth." Then follows an account of the games in which simple minds are more than a match for Arminian

wisdom. Professors of the other school of divinity have usually had the good sense not to return the compliment, or the Antinomians might have found themselves ranked with cockatrices, and their opponents boastfully defying them at the mouths of their dens. Such abuse only injures those who use it. Theological differences are better expounded and enforced than by such buffoonery.

3 Ludicrous results sometimes arise from sheer stupidity inflated with conceit. One instance may suffice. A worthy minister told me the other day that he had been preaching lately to his people upon the nine and twenty knives of Ezra. I am sure he would handle these edged tools discreetly, but I could not refrain from saying that I hoped he had not imitated the very sage interpreter who saw in that odd number of knives a reference to the four-and-twenty elders of the Apocalypse.

4 A passage in the Proverbs reads as follows: “For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear: for a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with meat: for an odious woman when she is married; and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress.” A raving spiritualizer declares that this is a sweet picture of the work of grace in the soul, and shows what it is that disquiets Arminians, and sets them by the ears. “ ‘A servant when he reigneth,’ that is, poor servants like ourselves, when we are made to reign with Christ; ‘a fool when he is filled with meat,’[30] that is, poor foolish men like us, when we are fed with the finest of the wheat of gospel truth; ‘an odious woman when she is married,’ that is, a sinner when he is united to Christ; ‘A handmaid that is heir to her mistress,’ that is, when we poor handmaids that were under the law,

bondslaves, come into the privileges of Sarah, and become heirs to our own mistress."

5 These are a few specimens of ecclesiastical curiosities which are as numerous and valuable as the relics which are every day gathered so plentifully on the battle-field of Waterloo, and accepted by the more verdant as priceless treasures. But we have surfeited you, and have no wish to waste more of your time. From all such rank absurdity need you be admonished to turn away! Such maunderings dishonor the Bible, are an insult to the common-sense of the hearers, and a deplorable lowering of the minister. This, however, is no more the spiritualizing which we recommend to you than the thistle, in Lebanon is the cedar of Lebanon. Avoid that childish trifling and outrageous twisting of texts which will make you a wise man among fools, but a fool among wise men.

6 **II.** Our second is, *never spiritualize upon indelicate subjects.* It is needful to say this, for the Slopdash family are never more at home than when they speak in a way to crimson the cheek of modesty. There is a kind of beetle which breeds in filth, and this creature has its prototype among men. Do I not at this moment call to mind a savoury divine who enlarged with wonderful gusto and sensuous unction upon the concubine cut into ten pieces: Greenacre himself could not have done it better. What abominable things have been said upon some of the sterner and more horrifying similes of Jeremiah and Ezekiel! Where the Holy Spirit is veiled and chaste, these men have torn away the veil, and spoken as none but naughty tongues would venture to do. I am not squeamish, indeed, far from it, but explanations of the new birth by analogies suggested by a monthly nurse, expositions of the rite of circumcision, and minute

descriptions of married life, would arouse my temper and make me feel inclined to command with Jehu that the shameless one should be thrown down from the exalted position disgraced by such brazen-faced impudence.[31] I know it is said, *"Honi soit qui mal y pense,"* but I aver that no pure mind ought to be subjected to the slightest breath of indelicacy from the pulpit. Caesar's wife must be without suspicion, and Christ's ministers must be without speck in their lives or stain in their speech. Gentlemen, the kissing and hugging which some preachers delight in is disgusting: Solomon's Song had better be let alone than dragged in the mire as it often is. Young men especially must be scrupulously, jealously modest and pure in word: an old man is pardoned, I scarce know why, but a young man is utterly without excuse should he overstep the strict line of delicacy.[34]

[7] **III.** Next, and thirdly, *never spiritualize for the sake of showing what an uncommonly clever fellow you are.* Such an intention will be wicked, and the method used will be foolish. Only an egregious simpleton will seek to be noted for doing what nine men out of ten could do quite as well. A certain probationer once preached a sermon upon the word "but," thus hoping to ingratiate himself with the congregation, who would, he thought, be enraptured with the powers of a brother who could enlarge so marvelously upon a mere conjunction. His subject appears to have been, the fact that whatever there may be of good in a man's character, or admirable in a man's position, there is sure to be some difficulty, some trial in connection with us all: "Naaman was a great man with his master, but….." When the orator descended from the pulpit the deacons said, "Well, sir, you have given us a singular sermon, *but* — you are not the man for the place; that we can see very clearly." Alas! for wit

when it becomes so common, and withal puts a weapon into the hand of its own adversaries! Remember that spiritualizing is not such a wonderful display of ingenuity, even if you are able to do it well, and that without discretion it is the most ready method of revealing your egregious folly. Gentlemen, if you aspire to emulate Origen in wild, daring, interpretations, it may be as well to read his life and note attentively the follies into which even his marvellous mind was drawn by allowing a wild fancy to usurp absolute authority over his judgment; and if you set yourselves to rival the vulgar declaimers of a past generation, let me remind you that the cap and bells do not now command the same patronage as fell to their share a few years ago.

8 Our third caution is, *never pervert Scripture* to give it a novel and so-called spiritual meaning, lest you be found guilty of that solemn curse with which the roll of inspiration is guarded and closed. Mr. Cook, of Maidenhead, felt himself obliged to separate from William Huntingdon because of his making the seventh commandment to mean the Lord speaking to his Son and saying, “Thou shalt not covet the devil’s wife, i.e., the non-elect.” One can only say, horrible! Perhaps it would be an insult to your reason and your religion to say, loathe the thought of such profanity. You instinctively shrink from it.[35]

9 Once more, *in no case allow your audience to forget that the narratives which you spiritualize are facts,* and not mere myths or parables. The first sense of the passage must never be drowned in the outflow of your imagination; it must be distinctly declared and allowed to hold the first rank; your accommodation of it must never thrust out the original and native meaning, or even push it into the background. The Bible is not a compilation of clever allegories or instructive

poetical traditions; it teaches literal facts and reveals tremendous realities: let your full persuasion of this truth be manifest to all who attend your ministry. It will be an ill day for the church if the pulpit should even appear to endorse the sceptical hypothesis that Holy Scripture is but the record of a refined mythology, in which globules of truth are dissolved in seas of poetic and imaginary detail.

10 However, there is a legitimate range for spiritualizing, or rather for the particular gift which leads men to spiritualize.[32] For instance, you have frequently been shown that *the types* yield ample scope for the exercise of a sanctified ingenuity. Why need you go about to find "odious women" to preach upon, when you have before you the tabernacle in the wilderness, with all its sacred furniture, the burnt-offering, the peace-offering, and all the various sacrifices which were offered before God? Why struggle for novelties when the temple and all its glories are before you?[33] The largest capacity for typical interpretation will find abundant employment in the undoubted symbols of the Word of God, and it will be safe to enter upon such an exercise, because the symbols are of divine appointment.

11 When you have exhausted all the Old Testament types, you have left to you an heirloom of a thousand *metaphors.* Benjamin Keach, in his laborious treatise, proves most practically what mines of truth lie concealed in the metaphors of Scripture. His work, by the way, is open to much criticism on the score of making metaphors run not only on all-fours, but on as many legs as a centipede; but it does not deserve the condemnation of Dr. Adam Clarke, when he says it has done more to debase the taste both of preachers and people than any other work of the kind. A discreet explanation of the poetical allusions of Holy

Scripture will be most acceptable to your people, and, with God's blessing, not a little profitable.

12 But supposing you have expounded all the usually accepted types, and have cast light upon the emblems and figurative expressions, must your fancy and delight in similitudes go to sleep? By no means. When the apostle Paul finds a mystery in Melchizedek, and speaking of Hagar and Sarah, says, "Which things are an allegory," he gives us a precedent for discovering scriptural *allegories* in other places besides the two mentioned. Indeed, the historical books not only yield us here and there an allegory, but seem as a whole to be arranged with a view to symbolical teaching. A passage from Mr. Andrew Jukes' preface to his work on the types of Genesis, will show how, without violence, a most elaborate theory may be constructed by a devout mind: "As a base or ground for what is to follow, we first are shown what springs from man, and all the different forms of life, which either by nature or grace can grow out of the root of old Adam. This is the book of Genesis. Then we see, that be it bad or good which has come out of Adam, there must be redemption; so an elect people by the blood of the Lamb are saved from Egypt. This is Exodus. After redemption is known, we come to the experience of the elect as needing access, and learning the way of it, to God the Redeemer in the sanctuary. This we get in Leviticus. Then in the wilderness of this world, as pilgrims from Egypt, the house of bondage, to the promised land beyond Jordan, the trials of the journey are learned, from that land of wonders and man's wisdom to the land flowing with milk and honey. This is the book of Numbers. Then comes the desire to exchange the wilderness for the better land, from, entering which for a season after redemption is known the elect yet shrink; answering to the desire of the elect at a certain stage to know the power of the

resurrection, to live even now as in heavenly places. The rules and precepts which must be obeyed, if this is to be done, come next. Deuteronomy, a second giving of the law, a second cleansing, tells the way of progress. After which Canaan is indeed reached. We go over Jordan: we know practically the death of the flesh, and what it is to be circumcised, and to roll away the reproach of Egypt. We know now what it is to be risen with Christ, and to wrestle, not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers in heavenly places. This is Joshua. Then comes the failure of the elect in heavenly places, failure arising from making leagues with Canaanites instead of overcoming them. This is Judges. After which the different forms of rule, which the church may know, pass in review in the books of Kings, from the first setting up of rule in Israel down to its extinction, when for their sin the rule of Babylon supersedes that of the elect. When this is known with all its shame, we see the remnants of the elect, each according to its measure, doing what may be done, if possible, to restore Israel; some, like Ezra, returning to build the temple, that is, to restore the forms of true worship; and some coming up, like Nehemiah, to build the wall, that is, to reestablish, by Gentile permission, a feeble imitation of the ancient polity; while a third remnant in Esther is seen in bonds, but faithful, providentially saved, though God’s name (and this is characteristic of their state) never appears throughout the whole record.” I should be far from recommending you to become as fanciful as the ingenious author I have just quoted sometimes becomes, through the large indulgence of his tendency to mysticism, but nevertheless, you will read the Word with greatly increased interest if you are a sufficiently careful reader to have noticed the general run of the books of the Bible, and their consecutiveness as a system of types.

[13] Then, too, the faculty which turns to spiritualizing will be well employed *in generalizing the great universal principles evolved by minute and separate facts.* This is an ingenious, instructive, and legitimate pursuit. Perhaps you might not elect to preach upon, “Take it by the tail,” but the remark arising from it is natural enough — “there is a way of taking everything.” Moses took the serpent by the tail, so there is a mode of grasping our afflictions and finding them stiffen in our hands into a wonder-working rod; there is a way of holding the doctrines of grace, a way of encountering ungodly men, and so on. In hundreds of scriptural incidents you may find great general principles which may nowhere be expressed in so many words. Take the following instances from Mr. Jay. From Psalm 74:14, “Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness,” he teaches the doctrine that the greatest foes of God’s pilgrim people shall be slain, and the remembrance of the mercy shall refresh the saints. From Genesis 35:8, “But Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse died, and she was buried beneath Bethel, under an oak: and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth,” he discourses upon good servants, and the certainty of death. Upon 2 Samuel 15:15, “And the king’s servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint,” he shows that such language may with propriety be adopted by Christians, and addressed to Christ. Should anyone take exception to the form of spiritualizing which Mr. Jay so efficiently and judiciously indulged in, he must be a person whose opinion need not sway you in the least. After my own ability I have taken the liberty to do the same, and the outlines of many sermons of the kind may be found in my little work entitled “Evening by Evening,” and a less liberal sprinkling in its companion, “Morning by Morning.”

[14] A notable instance of a good sermon fixed upon a strained and unjustifiable basis, is that of Everard, in his “Gospel Treasury” In the discourse upon Joshua 15:16, 17, where the words are, “And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife;” here the run of the preacher’s utterance is based upon the translation of the Hebrew proper names, so that he makes it read, “A good heart said, Whosoever smiteth and taketh the city of the letter, to him will I give the rending of the veil; and Othniel took it as being God’s fit time or opportunity, and he married Achsah, that is, enjoyed the rending of the veil, and thereby had the blessing both of the upper and nether springs.” Was there no other method of showing that we are to search after the inner sense of Scripture, and not rest in the mere words or letter of the Book?

[15] *The parables* of our Lord in their expounding and enforcement afford the amplest scope for a matured and disciplined fancy, and if these have all passed before you, *the miracles* still remain, rich in symbolical teaching. There can be no doubt that the miracles are the acted sermons of our Lord Jesus Christ. You have his “word sermons” in his matchless teaching, and his “deed sermons” in his peerless acts. Despite many doctrinal failures, you will find Trench, on the miracles, most helpful in this direction. All our Lord’s mighty works are full of teaching. Take the story of the healing of the deaf and dumb man. The poor creature’s maladies are eminently suggestive of man’s lost estate, and our Lord’s mode of procedure most instructively illustrates the plan of salvation. “Jesus took him aside from the multitude” — the soul must be made to feel its own personality and individuality, and must be led into loneliness.

He “put his fingers into his ears,” the source of the mischief indicated; sinners are convinced of their state. “And spat” — the gospel is a simple and a despised means, and the sinner, in order to salvation, must humble himself to receive it. He “touched his tongue,” further pointing out where the mischief lay — our sense of need grows on us. He “looked up to heaven” — Jesus reminded his patient that all strength must come from above — a lesson which every seeker must learn. “He sighed,” showing that the sorrows of the Healer are the means of our healing. And then he said, “Ephphatha, Be opened” — here was the effectual word of grace which wrought an immediate, perfect, and lasting cure. From this one exposition learn all, and ever believe that the miracles of Christ are a great picture gallery, illustrating his work among the sons of men.

16 Let it be an instruction, however, to all who handle either the parables or the metaphors, to be discreet. Dr. Gill is one whose name must ever be mentioned with honour and respect in this house in which his pulpit still stands, but his exposition of the parable of the Prodigal Son strikes me as being sadly absurd in some points. The learned commentator tells us, “the fatted calf” was the Lord Jesus Christ! Really, one shudders to see spiritualizing come to this. Then also there is his exposition of the Good Samaritan. The beast on which the wounded man was placed is again our Lord Jesus, and the two pence which the Good Samaritan gave to the host, are the Old and New Testament, or the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

17 Despite this caution, you may allow much latitude in spiritualizing to men of rare poetical temperament, such as John Bunyan. Gentlemen, did you ever read John Bunyan’s spiritualizing of Solomon’s Temple? It is a most remarkable

performance, and even when a little strained it is full of a consecrated ingenuity. Take, for a specimen, one of his most far-fetched explanations, and see if it can be improved. It is on “the Leaves of the Gate of the Temple,” “The *leaves* of this gate or door, as I told you before, were *folding,* and so as was hinted, have something of signification in them. For by this means a man, especially a *young disciple,* may easily be mistaken; thinking that the whole passage, when yet but a part, was open, whereas three parts might be yet kept undiscovered to him. For these doors, as I said before, were never yet set wide open, I mean in the *antitype;* never man yet saw all the riches and fulness which is in Christ. So that I say, *a new comer*, if he judged by present sight, especially if he saw but little, might easily be mistaken, wherefore such for the most part are most horribly afraid that they shall never get in thereat. How sayest thou, young comer, is not this the case with thy soul? So it seems to thee that thou art too big, being so great, so *tun-bellied* a sinner! But, O thou sinner, fear not, the doors are *folding-doors,* and may be opened wider, and wider again after that; wherefore when thou comest to this gate, and imaginest that there is not space enough for thee to enter, *knock, and it shall be wider opened unto thee,* and thou shalt be received. Luke 11:9; John 6:37. So then, whoever thou art, thou art come to the door of which the temple door was a type, trust not to thy first conceptions of things, but believe there is grace abundant. Thou knowest not yet what Christ can do, the doors *are folding-doors.* He *can ‘ do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.’* Ephesians 3:20. The *hinges* on which these doors do hang, were, as I told you, gold; to signify that they both turned upon motives and motions of *love,* and also that the openings thereof were *rich.* Golden hinges the gate to God doth turn upon. The posts on

which these doors did hang *were of the olive tree,* that *fat* and *oily* tree, to show that they do never open with *lothness,* or sluggishness as doors do whose hinges want oil. They are always *oily,* and so open easily and quickly to those who knock at them. Hence you read that he that dwells in this house gives freely, loves freely, and doth us good with all his heart. 'Yea,' saith he, 'I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly, with my whole heart, and with my whole soul.' Jeremiah 3:12, 14, 22; Jeremiah 32:41; Revelation 21:6; Revelation 22:17. Wherefore, the oil of grace, signified by this oily tree, or these *olive-posts,* on which these doors do hang, do cause that they open glibly or frankly to the soul."

[18] When Bunyan opens up the meaning of the doors being made of fir wood, who but he would have said, "The *fir tree* is also the house of the *stork,* that unclean bird, even as Christ is a harbour and shelter for sinners. As for the stork, saith the text, the fir tree is her house; and Christ saith to the sinners that see their want of shelter, 'Come unto me, and I will give you rest.' He is a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in time of trouble. Deuteronomy 14:18; Leviticus 11:19; Psalm 104:17; Psalm 74:2, 3; Matthew 11:27, 28; Hebrews 6:17-20." In his "House of the Forest of Lebanon" he is still more puzzled, but works his way out as no other man could have done. He finds the three rows of pillars of fifteen each to be an enigma rather too deep for him, and gives it up, but not until he has made some brave attempts upon it. Mr. Bunyan is the chief, and head, and lord of all allegorists, and is not to be followed by us into the deep places of typical and symbolical utterance. He was a swimmer, we are but mere waders, and must not go beyond our depth.

19 I am tempted before I close this address to give a sketch or two of spiritualizings which were familiar to me in my earliest days. I shall never forget a sermon preached by an uneducated but remarkable man, who was my near neighbour in the country. I had the notes of the discourse from his own lips, and I trust they will remain as notes, and never be preached from again in this world. The text was, "The night-hawk, the owl, and the cuckoo." That might not strike you as being exceedingly rich in matter; it did not so strike me, and therefore I innocently inquired, "And what were the heads?" He replied most archly, "Heads? why, wring the birds' necks, and there are three directly, the nighthawk, the owl, and the cuckoo." He showed that these birds were all unclean under the law, and were plain types of unclean sinners. Night-hawks were persons who pilfered on the sly, also people who adulterated their goods, and cheated their neighbours in an underhand way without being suspected to be rogues. As for the owls, they typified drunkards, who are always liveliest at night, while by day they will almost knock their heads against a post because they are so sleepy. There were owls also among professors. The owl is a very small bird when he is plucked; he only looks big because he wears so many feathers; so, many professors are all feathers, and if you could take away their boastful professions there would be very little left of them. Then the cuckoos were the church clergy, who always utter the same note whenever they open their mouths in the church, and live on other birds' eggs with their churchrates and tithes. The cuckoos were also, I think, the free-willers, who were always saying, "Do-do-do-do." Was not this rather too much of a good thing? Yet from the man who delivered it the sermon would not seem at all remarkable or odd. The same venerable brother delivered a sermon equally singular but far more

original and useful; those who heard it will remember it to their dying day. It was from this text: “The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting.” The good old man leaned upon the top of the pulpit and said, “Then, my brethren, he *was* a lazy fellow!” That was the exordium; and then he went on to say, “He went out a hunting, and after much trouble he caught his hare, and then was too idle to roast it. He was a lazy fellow indeed!” The good man made us all feel how ridiculous such idleness was, and then he said, “But then you are very likely quite as much to blame as this man, for you do just the same. You hear of a popular minister coming down from London, and you put the horse in the cart, and drive ten or twenty miles to hear him; and then when you have heard the sermon you forget to profit by it. You catch the hare and do not roast it; you go hunting after the truth, and then you do not receive it.” Then he went on to show, that just as meat needs cooking to prepare it for assimilation in the bodily system — I do not think he used that word though — so the truth needs to go through a process before it can be received into the mind so that we may feed thereon and grow. He said he should show how to cook a sermon, and he did so most instructively. He began as the cookery books do — “First catch your hare.” “So,” he said, “first get a gospel sermon.” Then he declared that a great many sermons were not worth hunting for, and that good sermons were mournfully scarce, and it was worth while to go any distance to hear a solid, old-fashioned, Calvinistic discourse. Then after the sermon had been caught, there was much about it which might be necessary because of the preacher’s infirmity, which was not profitable, and must be put away. Here he enlarged upon discerning and judging what we heard, and not believing every word of any man. Then followed directions as to roasting a sermon; run the spit of

memory through it from end to end, turn it round upon the roasting-jack of meditation, before the fire of a really warm and earnest heart, and in that way the sermon would be cooked and ready to yield real spiritual nourishment. I do but give you the outline, and though it may look somewhat laughable, it was not so esteemed by the hearers. It was full of allegory, and kept up the attention of the people from the beginning to the end. “Well, my dear sir, how are you?” was my salutation to him one morning, “I’m pleased to see you so well at your age.” “Yes, I am in fine order for an old man, and hardly feel myself failing at all.” “I hope your good health will continue for years to come, and that like Moses you will go down to your grave with your eye undimmed and your natural force unabated.” “All very fine,” said the old gentleman, “but in the first place, Moses never went down to his grave at all, he went up to it; and in the next place, what is the meaning of all you have been talking about? Why did not the eye of Moses wax dim?” “I suppose, sir,” said I, very meekly, “that his natural mode of life and quiet spirit had helped to preserve his faculties and make him a vigorous old man.” “Very likely,” said he, “but that’s not what I am driving at: what’s the meaning, the spiritual teaching of the whole matter? Is it not just this: Moses is the law, and what a glorious end of the law the Lord gave it on the mount of his finished work; how sweetly its terrors are all laid to sleep with a kiss from God’s mouth! and, mark you, the reason why the law no more condemns us is not because its eye is dim, so that it cannot see our sins, or because its force is abated with which to curse and punish; but Christ has taken it up to the mount and gloriously made an end of it.” Such was his usual talk and such was his ministry. Peace to his ashes. He fed sheep the first years of his life, and was a shepherd of men the next, and, as he used to tell me, “found men by far the

more sheepish of the two." The converts who found the road to heaven under him were so many that, when we remember them, we are like those who saw the lame man leaping through the word of Peter and John; they were disposed to criticize, but "beholding the man that was healed standing with Peter and John, they could say nothing against it."

[20] With this I close, re-asserting the opinion, that guided by discretion and judgment, we may occasionally employ spiritualizing with good effect to our people; certainly we shall interest them and keep them awake.

# Lecture 8. On the Voice

[1] Our first rule with regard to the voice would be — *do not think too much about it,* for recollect the sweetest voice is nothing without something to say, and however well it may be managed, it will be like a well-driven cart with nothing in it, unless you convey by it important and seasonable truths to your people. Demosthenes was doubtless right, in giving a first, second, and third place to a good delivery; but of what value will that be if a man has nothing to deliver? A man with a surpassingly excellent voice who is destitute of a well-informed head, and an earnest heart, will be “a voice crying in the wilderness;” or, to use Plutarch’s expression, *“Vox et praeterea nihil.”* Such a man may shine in the choir, but he is useless in the pulpit. Whitfield’s voice, without his heart-power, would have left no more lasting effects upon his hearers than Paganini’s fiddle. You are not singers but preachers: your voice is but a secondary matter; do not be *fops* with it, or puling invalids over it, as so many are. A trumpet need not be made of silver, a ram’s-horn will suffice; but it must be able to endure rough usage, for trumpets are for war’s conflicts, not for the drawing-rooms of fashion.

[2] On the other hand, *do not think too little of your voice,* for its excellence may greatly conduce to the result which you hope to produce. Plato, in confessing the power of eloquence, mentions the tone of the speaker. “So strongly,” says he, “does the speech and the tone of the orator ring in my ears, that scarcely in the third or fourth day, do I recollect myself, and perceive where on the earth I am; and for awhile I am willing to believe myself living in the isles of the blessed.” Exceedingly precious truths may be greatly marred by being delivered in monotonous tones. I once heard a most esteemed

minister, who mumbled sadly, compared to “a humble bee in a pitcher,” a vulgar metaphor no doubt, but so exactly descriptive, that it brings to my mind the droning sound at this instant most distinctly, and reminds me of the parody upon Gray’s Elegy: —

> [3] “Now fades the glimmering subject from the sight, And all the air a sleepy stillness holds, Save where the parson hums his droning flight, And drowsy tinklings lull the slumb’ring folds.”

[4] What a pity that a man who from his heart delivered doctrines of undoubted value, in language the most appropriate, should commit ministerial suicide by harping on one string, when the Lord had given him an instrument of many strings to play upon! Alas! alas! for that dreary voice, it hummed and hummed like a mill-wheel to the same unmusical tune, whether its owner spake of heaven or hell, eternal life or everlasting wrath. It might be, by accident, a little louder or softer, according to the length of the sentence, but its tone was still the same, a dreary waste of sound, a howling wilderness of speech in which there was no possible relief, no variety, no music, nothing but horrible sameness.

[5] When the wind blows through the AEolian harp, it swells through all the chords, but the heavenly wind, passing through some men, spends itself upon one string, and that, for the most part, the most out of tune of the whole. Grace alone could enable hearers to edify under the drum — drum — drum of some divines. I think an impartial jury would bring in a verdict of justifiable slumbering in many cases where the sound emanating from the preacher lulls to sleep by its reiterated note. Dr. Guthrie charitably traces the slumbers of a certain Scotch congregation, to bad ventilation in the meeting-house; this has something to do with it, but a bad

condition of the valves of the preacher's throat might be a still more potent cause. Brethren, in the name of everything that is sacred, ring the whole chime in your steeple, and do not dun your people with the ding-dong of one poor cracked bell.

6 When you do pay attention to the voice, *take care not to fall into the habitual and common affectations of the present day.* Scarcely one man in a dozen in the pulpit talks like a man. This affectation is not confined to Protestants, for the Abbe Mullois remarks, "Everywhere else, men speak: they speak at the bar and the tribune; but they no longer speak in the pulpit, for there we only meet with a factitious and artificial language, and a false tone. This style of speaking is only tolerated in the church, because, unfortunately, it is so general there; elsewhere it would not be endured. What would be thought of a man who should converse in a similar way in a drawing-room? He would certainly provoke many a smile. Some time ago there was a warder at the Pantheon — a good sort of fellow in his way — who, in enumerating the beauties of the monument, adopted precisely the tone of many of our preachers, and never failed thereby to excite the hilarity of the visitors, who were as much amused with his style of address as with the objects of interest which he pointed out to them. A man who has not a natural and true delivery, should not be allowed to occupy the pulpit; from thence, at least, everything that is false should be summarily banished ..... In these days of mistrust everything that is false should be set aside; and the best way of correcting one's self in that respect, as regards preaching, is frequently to listen to certain monotonous and vehement preachers. We shall come away in such disgust, and with such a horror of their delivery, that we shall prefer condemning ourselves to silence rather than imitate them. The instant you abandon

the natural and the true, you forego the right to be believed, as well as the right of being listened to." You may go all round, to church and chapel alike, and you will find that by far the larger majority of our preachers have a holy tone for Sundays. They have one voice for the parlour and the bedroom, and quite another tone for the pulpit; so that, if not double-tongued sinfully, they certainly are so literally. The moment some men shut the pulpit door, they leave their own personal manhood behind them, and become as official as the parish beadle. There they might almost boast with the Pharisee, that they are not as other men are, although it would be blasphemy to thank God for it. No longer are they carnal and speak as men, but a whine, a broken hum-haw, an *ore rotundo,* or some other graceless mode of noise-making, is adopted, to prevent all suspicion of being natural and speaking out of the abundance of the heart. When that gown is once on, how often does it prove to be the shroud of the man's true self, and the effeminate emblem of officialism!

7 There are two or three modes of speech which I dare say you will recognize as having frequently heard. That dignified, doctorial, inflated, bombastic style, which I just now called the *ore rotundo,* is not quite so common now as it used to be, but it is still admired by some. (Unfortunately, the Lecturer could not here be reported by any known form of letter-press, as he proceeded to read a hymn with a round, rolling, swelling voice.) When a reverend gentleman was once blowing off steam in this way, a man in the aisle said he thought the preacher "had swallowed a dumpling," but another whispered, "No, Jack, he aren't swaller'd un; he's got un in his mouth a-wobblin." I can imagine Dr. Johnson talking in that fashion, at Bolt Court; and from men to whom it is natural it rolls with Olympian grandeur, but in the pulpit away forever with all imitation of it; if it comes naturally, well

and good, but to mimic it is treason to common decency: indeed, all mimicry is in the pulpit near akin to an unpardonable sin.

[8] There is another style, at which I beseech you not to laugh. (Giving another illustration.) A method of enunciation said to be very ladylike, mincing, delicate, servant-girlified, dawdling, Dundrearyish, I know not how else to describe it. We have, most of us, had the felicity of hearing these, or some others, of the extensive genus of falsettos, high-stilts, and affectations. I have heard many different varieties, from the fulness of the Johnsonian to the thinness of the little genteel whisper; from the roaring of the Bulls of Bashan up to the chip, chip, chip of a chaffinch. I have been able to trace some of our brethren to their forefathers — I mean their ministerial forefathers, from whom they first of all gathered these heavenly, melodious, sanctified, in every way beautiful, but I must honestly add detestable modes of speech. The undoubted order of their oratorical pedigree is as follows: — Chip, which was the son of Lisp, which was the son of Simper, which was the son of Dandy, which was the son of Affectation; or Wobbler, which was the son of Grandiose, which was the son of Pomposity, the same was the father of many sons. Understand, that where even these horrors of sound are natural, I do not condemn them — let every creature speak in its own tongue; but the fact is, that in nine cases out of ten, these sacred brogues, which I hope will soon be dead languages, are unnatural and strained. I am persuaded that these tones and semitones and monotones are Babylonian, that they are not at all the Jerusalem dialect; for the Jerusalem dialect has this one distinguishing mark, that it is a man’s own mode of speech, and is the same out of the pulpit as it is in it. Our friend of the affected *ore rotundo* school was never known to talk out of the pulpit as he does

in, or to say in the parlour in the same tone which he uses in the pulpit. “Will you be so good as to give me another cup of tea; I take sugar, if you please.” He would make himself ludicrous if he did so, but the pulpit is to be favoured with the scum of his voice, which the parlour would not tolerate. I maintain that the best notes a man’s voice is capable of should be given to the proclamation of the gospel, and these are such as nature teaches him to use in earnest conversation. Ezekiel served his Master with his most musical and melodious powers, so that the Lord said, “Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument.” Although, this, alas! was of no use to Israel’s hard heart, as nothing will be but the Spirit of God, yet it well became the prophet to deliver the word of the Lord in the best style of voice and manner.

9 In the next place, *if you have any idiosyncrasies of speech, which are disagreeable to the ear, correct them, if possible.* 36It is admitted that this is much more easy for the teacher to inculcate than for you to practice. Yet to young men in the morning of their ministry, the difficulty is not insuperable. Brethren from the country have a flavor of their rustic diet in their mouths, reminding us irresistibly of the calves of Essex, the swine of Berkshire, or the runts of Suffolk. Who can mistake the Yorkshire or Somersetshire dialects, which are not merely provincial pronunciations, but tones also? It would be difficult to discover the cause, but the fact is clear enough, that in some counties of England men’s throats seem to be furred up, like long-used teakettles, and in others, they ring like brass music, with a vicious metallic sound. Beautiful these variations of nature may be in their season and place, but my taste has never been able to appreciate them. A sharp discordant squeak, like a rusty pair of scissors, is to be got

rid of at all hazards; so also is a thick, inarticulate utterance in which no word is complete, but nouns, adjectives, and verbs are made into a kind of hash. Equally objectionable is that ghostly speech in which a man talks without using his lips, ventriloquising most horribly: sepulchral tones may fit a man to be an undertaker, but Lazarus is not called out of his grave by hollow moans. One of the surest ways to kill yourself is to speak from the throat instead of the mouth. This misuse of nature will be terribly avenged by her; escape the penalty by avoiding the offence. It may be well in this place to urge you as soon as you detect yourself interposing hum-haw pretty plentifully in your discourse, to purge yourself of the insinuating but ruinous habit at once. There is no need whatever for it, and although those who are now its victims may never be able to break the chain, you, who are beginners in oratory, must scorn to wear the galling yoke. It is even needful to say, open your mouths when you speak, for much of inarticulate mumbling is the result of keeping the mouth half closed. It is not in vain that the evangelists have written of our Lord, “He *opened his mouth* and taught them.” Open wide the doors from which such goodly truth is to march forth. Moreover, brethren, avoid the use of the nose as an organ of speech, for the best authorities are agreed that it is intended to smell with. Time was, when the nasal twang was the correct thing, but in this degenerate age you had better obey the evident suggestion of nature, and let the mouth keep to its work without the interference of the olfactory instrument. Should an American student be present he must excuse my pressing this remark upon his attention. Abhor the practice of some men, who will not bring out the letter “r” such a habit is “vewy wuinous and wediculous, vewy wetched and wepwehensible.” Now and then a brother has the felicity to possess a most winning and delicious lisp. This is perhaps

among the least of evils, *where the brother himself is little and winning,* but it would ruin any being who aimed at manliness and force. I can scarcely conceive of Elijah lisping to Ahab, or Paul prettily chipping his words on Mars' Hill. There may be a peculiar pathos about a weak and watery eye, and a faltering style; we will go further, and admit that where these are the result of intense passion, they are sublime; but some possess them by birth, and use them rather too freely: it is, to say the least, unnecessary for you to imitate them. Speak as educated nature suggests to you, and you will do well; but let it be educated, and not raw, rude, uncultivated nature. Demosthenes took, as you know, unbounded pains with his voice, and Cicero, who was naturally weak, made a long journey into Greece to correct his manner of speaking. With far nobler themes, let us not be less ambitious to excel. "Deprive me of everything else," says Gregory, of Nazianzen, "but leave me eloquence, and I shall never regret the voyages which I have made in order to study it."

10 *Always speak so as to be heard.* I know a man who weighs sixteen stone, and ought to be able to be heard half-a-mile, who is so gracelessly indolent, that in his small place of worship you can scarcely hear him in the front of the gallery. What is the use of a preacher whom men cannot hear? Modesty should lead a voiceless man to give place to others who are more fitted for the work of proclaiming the messages of the King. Some men are loud enough, but they are not distinct, their words overlap each other, play at leap-frog, or trip each other up. Distinct utterance is far more important than wind-power. Do give a word a fair chance, do not break its back in your vehemence, or run it off its legs in your haste. It is hateful to hear a big fellow mutter and whisper when his lungs are quite strong enough for the loudest speech; but at the same time, let a man shout ever so lustily, he will not be

well heard unless he learns to push his words forward with due space between. To speak too slowly is miserable work, and subjects active minded hearers to the disease called the "horrors." It is impossible to hear a man who crawls along at a mile an hour. One word today and one tomorrow is a kind of slow-fire which martyrs only could enjoy. Excessively rapid speaking, tearing and raving into utter rant, is quite as inexcusable; it is not, and never can be powerful, except with idiots, for it turns what should be an army of words into a mob, and most effectually drowns the sense in floods of sound. Occasionally, one hears an infuriated orator of indistinct utterance, whose impetuosity hurries him on to such a confusion of sounds, that at a little distance one is reminded of Lucan's lines: —

> [11] "Her gabbling tongue a muttering tone confounds, Discordant and unlike to human sounds; It seem'd of dogs the bark, of wolves the howl, The doleful screeching of the midnight owl; The hiss of snakes, the hungry lion's roar, The bound of billows beating on the shore; The groan of winds among the leafy wood, And burst of thunder from the rending cloud! Twas these, all these in one."

[12] It is an infliction not to be endured twice, to hear a brother who mistakes perspiration for inspiration, tear along like a wild horse with a hornet in his ear till he has no more wind, and must needs pause to pump his lungs full again; a repetition of this indecency several times in a sermon is not uncommon, but is most painful. Pause soon enough to prevent that "hough hough," which rather creates pity for the breathless orator than sympathy with the subject in hand. Your audience ought not to know that you breathe at all — the process of respiration should be as unobserved as the

circulation of the blood. It is indecent to let the mere animal function of breathing cause any hiatus in your discourse.

13 *Do not as a rule exert your voice to the utmost in ordinary preaching.* Two or three earnest men, now present, are tearing themselves to pieces by needless bawling; their poor lungs are irritated, and their larynx inflamed by boisterous shouting, from which they seem unable to refrain. Now it is all very well to “Cry aloud and spare not,” but “Do thyself no harm” is apostolical advice. When persons can hear you with half the amount of voice, it is as well to save the superfluous force for times when it may be wanted. “Waste not, want not” may apply here as well as elsewhere. Be a little economical with that enormous volume of sound. Do not give your hearers head-aches when you mean to give them heart-aches: you aim to keep them from sleeping in their pews, but remember that it is not needful to burst the drums of their ears. “The Lord is not in the wind.” Thunder is not lightning. Men do not hear in proportion to the noise created; in fact, too much noise stuns the ear, creates reverberations and echoes, and effectually injures the power of your sermons. Adapt your voice to your audience; when twenty thousand are before you, draw out the stops and give the full peal, but not in a room which will only hold a score or two. Whenever I enter a place to preach, I unconsciously calculate how much sound is needed to fill it, and after a few sentences my key is pitched. If you can make the man at the end of the chapel hear, if you can see that he is catching your thought, you may be sure that those nearer can hear you, and no more force is needed, perhaps a little less will do — watch and see. Why speak so as to be heard in the street when there is nobody there who is listening to you? Whether in doors or out, see that the most remote hearers can follow you, and that will be sufficient. By the way, I may observe, that brethren should

out of mercy to the weak, always attend carefully to the force of their voices in sick rooms, and in congregations where some are known to be very infirm. It is a cruel thing to sit down by a sick man's bed-side, and shout out "THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD." If you act so thoughtlessly, the poor man will say as soon as you are down stairs, "Dear me! how my head aches. I am glad the good man is gone, Mary; that is a very precious Psalm and so quiet like, but he read it out like thunder and lightning, and almost stunned me!" Recollect, you younger and unmarried men, that soft whispers will suit the invalid better than roll of drum and culverin.

[14] Observe carefully the rule to *vary the force of your voice.* The old rule was, to begin very softly, gradually rise higher, and bring out your loudest notes at the end. Let all such regulations be blown to pieces at the cannon's mouth; they are impertinent and misleading. Speak softly or loudly, as the emotion of the moment may suggest, and observe no artificial and fanciful rules. Artificial rules are an utter abomination. As M. de Cormorin satirically puts it, "Be impassioned, thunder, rage, weep, up to the fifth word, of the third sentence, of the tenth paragraph, of the tenth leaf. How easy that would be! Above all, how very natural!" In imitation of a popular preacher, to whom it was unavoidable, a certain minister was accustomed in the commencement of his sermon to speak in so low a key, that no one could possibly hear him. Everybody leaned forward, fearing that something good was being lost in the air, but their straining was in vain, a holy mutter was all they could discern. If the brother *could not* have spoken out none should have blamed him, but it was a most absurd thing to do this when in a short time he proved the power of his lungs by filling the whole structure by sonorous sentences. If the first half of his discourse was of no importance, why not omit it? and if of any value at all, why

not deliver it distinctly? *Effect,* gentlemen, that was the point aimed at; he knew that one who spake in that fashion had produced great effects, and he hoped to rival him. If any of you dare commit such a folly for such a detestable object, I heartily wish you had never entered this Institution. I tell you most seriously, that the thing called *"effect,"* is hateful, because it is untrue, artificial, tricky, and therefore despicable. Never do anything for effect, but scorn the stratagems of little minds, hunting after the approval of connoisseurs in preaching, who are a race as obnoxious to a true minister as locusts to the Eastern husbandman. But I digress: be clear and distinct at the very first. Your exordia are too good to be whispered to space. Speak them out boldly, and command attention at the very outset by your manly tones. Do not start at the highest pitch as a rule, for then you will not be able to rise when you warm with the work; but still be outspoken from the first. Lower the voice when suitable even to a whisper; for soft, deliberate, solemn utterances are not only a relief to the ear, but have a great aptitude to reach the heart. Do not be afraid of the low keys, for if you throw force into them they are as well heard as the shouts. You need not speak in a loud voice in order to be heard well. Macaulay says of William Pitt, "His voice, even when it sank to a whisper, was heard to the remotest benches of the House of Commons." It has been well said that the most noisy gun is not the one which carries a ball the furthest: the crack of a rifle is anything but noisy. It is not the loudness of your voice, it is the force which you put into it that is effective. I am certain that I could whisper so as to be heard throughout every corner of our great Tabernacle, and I am equally certain that I could holloa and shout so that nobody could understand me. The thing could be done here, but perhaps the example is needless, as I fear some of you

perform the business with remarkable success. Waves of air may dash upon the ear in such rapid succession that they create no translatable impression on the auditory nerve. Ink is necessary to write with, but if you upset the ink bottle over the sheet of paper, you convey no meaning thereby, so is it with sound; sound is the ink, but management is needed, not quantity, to produce an intelligible writing upon the ear. If your sole ambition be to compete with —

> [15] "Stentor the strong, endued with brazen lungs,
> Whose throat surpass'd the force of fifty tongues,"

[16] then bawl yourselves into Elysium as rapidly as possible, but if you wish to be understood, and so to be of service, shun the reproach of being "impotent and loud." You are aware that shrill sounds travel the farthest: the singular cry which is used by travellers in the wilds of Australia, owes its remarkable power to its shrillness. A bell will be heard much farther off than a drum; and, very singularly, the more musical a sound is the farther it travels. It is not the thumping of the piano which is needed, but the judicious sounding of the best keys. You will therefore feel at liberty to ease the strain very frequently in the direction of loudness, and you will be greatly relieving both the ears of the audience and your own lungs. Try all methods, from the sledge-hammer to the puff-ball. Be as gentle as a zephyr and as furious as a tornado. Be, indeed, just what every common-sense person is in his speech when he talks naturally, pleads vehemently, whispers confidentially, appeals plaintively, or publishes distinctly.

[17] Next to the moderation of lung-force, I should place the rule, *modulate your tones.* Alter the key frequently and vary the strain constantly. Let the bass, the treble, and the tenor, take their turn. I beseech you to do this out of pity to yourself

and to those who hear you. God has mercy upon us and arranges all things to meet our cravings for variety; let us have mercy upon our fellow creatures, and not persecute them with the tedium of sameness. It is a most barbarous thing to inflict upon the tympanum of a poor fellow creature's ear the anguish of being bored and gimbleted with the same sound for half an hour. What swifter mode of rendering the mind idiotic or lunatic could be conceived than the perpetual droning of a beetle, or buzzing of a blue-bottle, in the organ of hearing? What dispensation have you by which you are to be tolerated in such cruelty to the helpless victims who sit under your drum-drum ministrations? Kind nature frequently spares the drone's unhappy victims the full effect of his tortures by steeping them in sweet repose. This, however, you do not desire; then speak with varied voice. How few ministers remember that monotony causes sleep. I fear the charge brought by a writer in the "Imperial Review" is true to the letter of numbers of my brethren. "We all know how the noise of running water, or the murmur of the sea, or the sighing of the south wind among the pines, or the moaning of wood-doves, induces a delicious dreamy languor. Far be it from us to say that the voice of a modern divine resembles, in the slightest degree, any of these sweet sounds, yet the effect is the same, and few can resist the drowsy influences of a lengthy dissertation, delivered without the slightest variation of tone or alteration of expression. Indeed, the very exceptional use of the phrase 'an awakening discourse,' even by those most familiar with such matters, conveys the implication that the great majority of pulpit harangues are of a decidedly soporific tendency. It is an ill case when the preacher

> [18] Leaves his hearers perplex'd — Twixt the two to determine: 'Watch and pray,' says the text, 'Go to sleep,' says the sermon."

[19] However musical your voice may be in itself, if you continue to sound the same chord perpetually, your hearers will perceive that its notes are by distance made more sweet. Do in the name of humanity cease intoning and take to rational speaking. Should this argument fail to move you, I am so earnest about this point, that if you will not follow my advice out of mercy to your hearers, yet do it out of mercy to yourselves; for as God in his infinite wisdom has been pleased always to append a penalty to every sin against his natural as well as moral laws, so the evil of monotony is frequently avenged by that dangerous disease called *dysphonia clericorum,* or, "Clergyman's sore throat." When certain of our brethren are so beloved by their hearers that they do not object to pay a handsome sum to get rid of them for a few months, when a journey to Jerusalem is recommended and provided for, bronchitis of a modified order is so remarkably overruled for good, that my present argument will not disturb their equanimity; but such is not *our* lot, to us bronchitis means real misery, and therefore, to avoid it, we would follow any sensible suggestion. If you wish to ruin your throats you can speedily do so, but if you wish to preserve them, note what is now laid before you. I have often in this room compared the voice to a drum. If the drummer should always strike in one place on the head of his drum, the skin would soon wear into a hole; but how much longer it would have lasted him if he had varied his thumping and had used the entire surface of the drum-head! So it is with a man's voice. If he uses always the same tone, he will wear a hole in that part of the throat which is most exercised in producing that monotony, and very soon he will suffer from bronchitis. I

have heard surgeons affirm, that Dissenting bronchitis differs from the Church of England article. There is an ecclesiastical twang which is much admired in the Establishment, a sort of steeple-in-the-throat grandeur, an aristocratic, theologic, parsonic, supernatural, infra-human mouthing of language and rolling over of words. It may be illustrated by the following specimen. “He that hath yaws to yaw let him yaw,” which is a remarkable, if not impressive, rendering of a Scripture text. Who does not know the hallowed way of pronouncing — “Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in divers places”? It rolls in my ears now like Big Ben — coupled with boyish memories of monotonous peals of “The Prince Albert, Albert Prince of Wales, and all the Royal Family .... Amen.” Now, if a man who talks so unnaturally does *not* get bronchitis, or some other disease, I can only say that throat diseases must be very sovereignly dispensed. At the Nonconformist hobbies of utterance I have already struck a blow, and I believe it is by them that larynx and lungs become delicate, and good men succumb to silence and the grave. Should you desire my authority for the threat which I have held out to you, I shall give you the opinion of Mr. Macready, the eminent tragedian, who, since he looks at the matter from an impartial but experimental standpoint, is worthy of a respectful hearing. “Relaxed throat is usually caused, not so much by exercising the organ, as by the kind of exercise; that is, not so much by long or loud speaking, as by speaking in a feigned voice. I am not sure that I shall be understood in this statement, but there is not one person in, I may say, ten thousand, who in addressing a body of people, does so in his natural voice; and this habit is more especially observable in the pulpit. I believe that relaxation of the throat results from violent efforts in these affected tones, and that severe irritation, and often ulceration, is the consequence.

The labour of a whole day's duty in a church is nothing, in point of labour, compared with the performance of one of Shakespeare's leading characters, nor I should suppose, with any of the very great displays made by our leading statesmen in the Houses of Parliament; and I feel very certain that the disorder, which you designate as 'Clergyman's sore throat,' is attributable generally to the mode of speaking, and not to the length of time or violence of effort that may be employed. I have known several of my former contemporaries on the stage suffer from sore throat, but I do not think, among those eminent in their art, that it could be regarded as a prevalent disease." Actors and barristers have much occasion to strain their vocal powers, and yet there is no such thing as a counsel's sore throat, or a tragedian's bronchitis; simply because these men dare not serve the public in so slovenly a manner as some preachers serve their God. Samuel Fenwick, Esq., M.D. in a popular treatise upon "Diseases of the Throat and Lungs,"[37] has most wisely said, "From what was stated respecting the physiology of the vocal chords, it will be evident that continued speaking in one tone is much more fatiguing than frequent alterations in the pitch of the voice; because by the former, one muscle or set of muscles alone is strained, whilst by the latter, different muscles are brought into action, and thus relieve one another. In the same way, a man raising his arm at right angles to his body, becomes fatigued in five or ten minutes, because only one set of muscles has to bear the weight; but these same muscles can work the whole day if their action is alternated with that of others. Whenever, therefore, we hear a clergyman droning through the church service, and in the same manner and tone of voice reading, praying, and exhorting, we may be perfectly sure that he is giving ten times more labour to his vocal chords than is absolutely necessary."

[20] This may be the place to reiterate an opinion which I have often expressed in this place, of which I am reminded by the author whom I have quoted. If ministers would speak oftener, their throats and lungs would be less liable to disease. Of this I am quite sure; it is matter of personal experience and wide observation, and I am confident that I am not mistaken. Gentlemen, twice a week preaching is very dangerous, but I have found five or six times healthy, and even twelve or fourteen not excessive. A costermonger set to cry cauliflowers and potatoes one day in the week, would find the effort most laborious, but when he for six successive days fills streets and lanes and alleys with his sonorous din, he finds no *dysphonia pomariorum,* or, "Costermonger's sore throat," laying him aside from his humble toils. I was pleased to find my opinion, that infrequent preaching is the root of many diseases, thus plainly declared by Dr. Fenwick. "All the directions which have been here laid down will, I believe, be ineffectual without regular daily practice of the voice. Nothing seems to have such a tendency to produce this disease as the occasional prolonged speaking, alternating with long intervals of rest, to which clergymen are more particularly subject.

[21] Any one giving the subject a moment's consideration will readily understand this. If a man, or any other animal, be intended for any unusual muscular exertion, he is regularly exercised in it, day by day, and labour is thus rendered easy which otherwise it would be almost impossible to execute. But the generality of the clerical profession undergo a great amount of muscular exertion in the way of speaking only on one day of the week, whilst in the remaining six days they scarcely ever raise their voice above the usual pitch.

[22] Were a smith or a carpenter thus occasionally to undergo the fatigue connected with the exercise of his trade, he would not only be quite unfitted for it, but he would lose the skill he had acquired. The example of the most celebrated orators the world has seen proves the advantages of regular and constant practice of speaking; and I would on this account, most strongly recommend all persons subject to this complaint to read aloud once or twice a day, using the same pitch of voice as in the pulpit, and paying especial attention to the position of the chest and throat, and to clear and proper articulation of the words." Mr. Beecher is of the same opinion, for he remarks, "Newsboys show what out-of-door practice will do for a man's lungs. What would, the pale and feeblespeaking minister do who can scarcely make his voice reach two hundred auditors if he were set to cry newspapers? Those New York newsboys stand at the head of a street, and send down their voices through it, as an athletic would roll a ball down an alley. We advise men training for speaking professions to peddle wares in the streets for a little time. Young ministers might go into partnership with newsboys awhile, till they got their mouths open and their larynx nerved and toughened."

[23] Gentlemen, a needful rule is — *always suit your voice to your matter.* Do not be jubilant over a doleful subject, and on the other hand, do not drag heavily where the tones ought to trip along merrily, as though they were dancing to the tune of the angels in heaven. This rule I shall not enlarge upon, but rest assured it is of the utmost importance, and if obediently followed, will always secure attention, provided your matter is worth it. Suit your voice to your matter always, and, above all, *in everything be natural*.[38] Away for ever with slavish attention to rules and models. Do not imitate other people's voices, or, if from an unconquerable propensity you must

follow them, emulate every orator's excellencies, and the evil will be lessened. I am myself, by a kind of irresistible influence, — drawn to be an imitator, so that a journey to Scotland or Wales will for a week or two materially affect my pronunciation and tone. Strive against it I do, but there it is, and the only cure I know of is to let the mischief die a natural death. Gentlemen, I return to my rule — use your own natural voices. Do not be monkeys, but men; not parrots, but men of originality in all things. It is said that the most becoming way for a man to wear his beard is that in which it grows, for both in colour and form it will suit his face. Your own modes of speech will be most in harmony with your methods of thought and your own personality. The mimic is for the playhouse, the cultured man in his sanctified personality is for the sanctuary. I would repeat this rule till I wearied you if I thought you would forget it; be natural, be natural, be natural evermore. An affectation of voice, or an imitation of the manner of Dr. Silvertongue, the eminent divine, or even of a well beloved tutor or president will inevitably ruin you. I charge you throw away the servility of imitation and rise to the manliness of originality. We are bound to add — *endeavour to educate your voice.* Grudge no pains or labour in achieving this, for as it has been well observed, "However prodigious may be the gifts of nature to her elect, they can only be developed and brought to their extreme perfection by labour and study." Think of Michael Angelo working for a week without taking off his clothes, and Handel hollowing out every key of his harpsichord, like a spoon, by incessant practice. Gentlemen, after this, never talk of difficulty or weariness. It is almost impossible to see the utility of Demosthenes' method of speaking with stones in his mouth, but any one can perceive the usefulness of his pleading with the boisterous billows, that he might know how to command

a hearing amidst the uproarious assemblies of his countrymen; and in his speaking as he ran up hill that his lungs might gather force from laborious use the reason is as obvious as the self-denial is commendable. We are bound to use every possible means to perfect the voice by which we are to tell forth the glorious gospel of the blessed God. Take great care of the consonants, enunciate every one of them clearly; they are the features and expression of the words. Practice indefatigably till you give every one of the consonants its due; the vowels have a voice of their own, and therefore they can speak for themselves. In all other matters exercise a rigid discipline until you have mastered your voice, and have it in hand like a well-trained steed. Gentlemen with narrow chests are advised to use the dumb-bells every morning, or better still, those clubs which the College has provided for you. You need broad chests, and must do your best to get them. Do not speak with your hands in your waistcoat pockets so as to contract your lungs, but throw the shoulders back as public singers do. Do not lean over a desk while speaking, and never hold the head down on the breast while preaching. Upward rather than downward let the body bend. Off with all tight cravats and button-up waistcoats; leave room for the full play of the bellows and the pipes. Observe the statues of the Roman or Greek orators, look at Raphael’s picture of Paul, and, without affectation, fall naturally into the graceful and appropriate attitudes there depicted, for these are best for the voice. Get a friend to tell you your faults, or better still, welcome an enemy who will watch you keenly and sting you savagely, What a blessing such an irritating critic will be to a wise man, what an intolerable nuisance to a fool! Correct yourself diligently and frequently, or you will fall into errors unawares, false tones will grow, and slovenly habits will form insensibly; therefore

criticize yourself with unceasing care. Think nothing little by which you may be even a little more useful. But, gentlemen, never degenerate in this business into pulpit fops, who think gesture and voice to be everything. I am sick at heart when I hear of men taking a whole week to get up a sermon, much of the getting up consisting in repeating their precious productions before a glass! Alas! for this age, if graceless hearts are to be forgiven for the sake of graceful manners. Give us all the vulgarities of the wildest back-woods' itinerant rather than the perfumed prettinesses of effeminate gentility. I would no more advise you to be fastidious with your voices than I would recommend you to imitate Rowland Hill's Mr. Taplash with his diamond ring, his richly-scented pocket handkerchief, and his eyeglass. Exquisites are out of place in the pulpit, they should be set up in a tailor's window, with a ticket, "*This style complete, including MSS.,* £10 10s."

[24] Perhaps here may be the place to observe, that it were well if all parents were more attentive to the teeth of their children, since faulty teeth may cause serious damage to a speaker. There are men, whose articulation is faulty, who should at once consult the dentist, I mean, of course, a thoroughly scientific and experienced one; for a few false teeth or some other simple arrangement would be a permanent blessing to them. My own dentist very sensibly remarks in his circular, "When a portion or the whole of the teeth are lost, a contraction of the muscles of the face and throat follows, the other organs of the voice which have been accustomed to the teeth are impaired, and put out of their common play, producing a break, languor, or depression, as in a musical instrument which is deficient in a note. It is vain to expect perfect symphony, and proportional and consistent accent on the key, tone, and pitch of the voice, with deficiencies in its organs, and of course the articulation

becomes defective; such defect adds much to the *labour* of speaking, to say the least, and in most cases lisping, a too hasty or sudden drop, or a faint delivery, is the result; from more serious deficiencies a mumbling and clattering is almost sure to follow." Where this is the mischief, and the cure is within reach, we are bound for our works' sake to avail ourselves of it. Teeth may seem unimportant, but be it remembered, that nothing is little in so great a calling as ours. I shall in succeeding remarks mention even smaller matters, but it is with the deep impression that hints upon insignificant things may be of unknown value in saving you from serious neglects or gross errors.

25 Lastly, I would say with regard to your throats — *take care of them.* Take care always to clear them well when you are about to speak, but do not be constantly clearing them while you are preaching. A very esteemed brother of my acquaintance always talks in this way — "My dear friends — hem — hem — this is a most — hem — important subject which I have now — hem — hem — to bring before you, and — hem — hem — I have to call upon you to give me — hem — hem — your most serious — hem — attention."[39] Avoid this most zealously. Others, from want of clearing the throat, talk as if they were choked up, and were just about to expectorate; it were far better to do so at once than to sicken the hearer by repeated unpleasant sounds. Snuffling and sniffing are excusable enough when a man has a cold, but they are extremely unpleasant, and when they become habitual, they ought to be indicted under the "Nuisances Act." Pray excuse me, it may appear vulgar to mention such things, but your attention to the plain and free observations made in this lecture room may save many remarks at your expense hereafter.

[26] When you have done preaching take care of your throat by *never wrapping it up tightly.* From personal experience I venture with some diffidence to give this piece of advice. If any of you possess delightfully warm woolen comforters, with which there may be associated the most tender remembrances of mother or sister, treasure them — treasure them in the bottom of your trunk, but do not expose them to any vulgar use by wrapping them round your necks. If any brother wants to die of influenza let him wear a warm scarf round his neck, and then one of these nights he will forget it, and catch such a cold as will last him the rest of his natural life. You seldom see a sailor wrap his neck up. No, he always keeps it bare and exposed, and has a turn-down collar, and if he has a tie at all, it is but a small one loosely tied, so that the wind can blow all round his neck. In this philosophy I am a firm believer, having never deviated from it for these fourteen years, and having before that time been frequently troubled with colds, but very seldom since. If you feel that you want something else, why, then grow your beards! A habit most natural, scriptural, manly, and beneficial. One of our brethren, now present, has for years found this of great service. He was compelled to leave England on account of the loss of his voice, but he has become as strong as Samson now that his locks are unshorn. If your throats become affected consult a good physician, or if you cannot do this, give what attention you please to the following hint. Never purchase "Marsh-mallow Rock," "Cough-no-more Lozenges," "Pulmonic Wafers," Horehound, Ipecacuanha, or any of the ten thousand emollient compounds. They may serve your turn for a time by removing present uneasiness, but they ruin the throat by their laxative qualities; If you wish to improve your throat take a good share of pepper — good Cayenne pepper, and other astringent substances, as much as your stomach

can bear, do not go beyond that, because you must recollect that you have to take care of your stomach as well as your throat, and if the digesting apparatus be out of order, nothing can be right. Common sense teaches you that astringents must be useful. Did you ever hear of a tanner making a piece of hide into leather by laying it to soak in sugar? Neither would tolu, ipecacuanha, or treacle serve his purpose, but the very reverse; if he wants to harden and strengthen the skin, he places it in a solution of oak-bark, or some astringent substance which draws the material together and strengthens it. When I began to preach at Exeter Hall my voice was weak for such a place — as weak as the usual run of voices, and it had frequently failed me altogether in street preaching, but in Exeter Hall (which is an unusually difficult place to preach in, from its excessive width in proportion to its length), I always had a little glass of Chili vinegar and water just in front of me, a draught of which appeared to give a fresh force to the throat, whenever it grew weary and the voice appeared likely to break down. When my throat becomes a little relaxed I usually ask the cook to prepare me a basin of beef-tea, as strong with pepper as can be borne, and hitherto this has been a sovereign remedy. However, as I am not qualified to practice in medicine, you will probably pay no more attention to me in medical matters than to any other quack. My belief is that half the difficulties connected with the voice in our early days will vanish as we advance in years, and find in use a second nature. I would encourage the truly earnest to persevere; if they feel the Word of the Lord like fire in their bones, even stammering may be overcome, and fear, with all its paralyzing results, may be banished. Take heart, young brother, persevere, and God, and nature, and practice, will help you.[40]

[27] I shall not detain you longer, but express the hope that your chest, lungs, windpipe, larynx, and all your vocal organs may last you till you have nothing more to say.

# Lecture 9. Attention!

[1] Our subject is one which I find scarcely ever noticed in any books upon homiletics — a very curious fact, for it is a most important matter, and worthy of more than one chapter. I suppose the homiletical *savans* consider that their entire volumes are seasoned with this subject, and that they need not give it to us in lumps, because, like sugar in tea, it flavors the whole. That overlooked topic is, How TO OBTAIN AND RETAIN THE ATTENTION OF OUR HEARERS. Their attention must be gained, or nothing can be done with them: and it must be retained, or we may go on word-spinning, but no good will come of it.

[2] Over the head of military announcements our English officers always place the word “ATTENTION!” in large capitals, and we need some such word over all our sermons. We need the earnest, candid, wakeful, continued attention of all those who are in the congregation. If men’s minds are wandering far away they cannot receive the truth, and it is much the same if they are inactive. Sin cannot be taken out of men, as Eve was taken out of the side of Adam, while they are fast asleep. They must be awake, understanding what we are saying, and feeling its force, or else we may as well go to sleep too. There are preachers who care very little whether they are attended to or not; so long as they can hold on through the allotted time it is of very small importance to them whether their people hear for eternity, or hear in vain: the sooner such ministers sleep in the churchyard and preach by the verse on their gravestones the better. Some brethren speak up the ventilator, as if they sought the attention of the angels; and others look down upon their book as if they were absorbed in thought, or had themselves for an audience, and

felt much honoured thereby. Why do not such brethren preach on the prairie and edify the stars? If their preaching has no reference to their hearers they might do so with evident propriety; if a sermon be a soliloquy, the more lonely the performer the better. To a rational preacher (and all are not rational) it must seem essential to interest all his audience, from the eldest to the youngest. We ought not to make even children inattentive. “Make them inattentive,” say you, “who does that?” I say that most preachers do; and when children are not quiet in a meeting it is often as much our fault as theirs. Can you not put in a little story or parable on purpose for the little ones? Can you not catch the eye of the boy in the gallery, and the little girl downstairs, who have begun to fidget, and smile them into order? I often talk with my eyes to the orphan boys at the foot of my pulpit. We want all eyes fixed upon us and all ears open to us. To me it is an annoyance if even a blind man does not look at me with his face. If I see anybody turning round, whispering, nodding, or looking at his watch, I judge that I am not up to the mark, and must by some means win these minds. Very seldom have I to complain, and when I do, my general plan is to complain of myself, and own that I have no right to attention unless I know how to command it.

3 Now, there are some congregations whose attention you do not readily gain, they do not care to be interested. It is useless to scold them; that will be like throwing a bush at a bird to catch it. The fact is, that in most cases there is another person whom you should, scold, and that is yourself. It may be their duty to attend, but it is far more your duty to make them do so. You must attract the fish to your hook, and if they do not come you should blame the fisherman and not the fish. Compel them to stand still a while and hear what God the Lord would speak to their souls. The minister who

recommended the old lady to take snuff in order to keep from dozing was very properly rebuked by her reply, — that if he would put more snuff into the sermon she would be awake enough. We must plentifully cast snuff into the sermon, or something yet more awakening. Recollect that to some of our people it is not so easy to be attentive; many of them are not interested in the matter, and they have not felt enough of any gracious operation on their hearts to make them confess that the gospel is of any special value to them. Concerning the Saviour whom you preach you may say to them, —

> 4 "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by, Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die?"

5 Many of them have through the week been borne down by the press of business cares. They ought to roll their burden on the Lord; but do *you* always do so? Do *you* always find it easy to escape from anxieties? Are *you* able to forget the sick wife and the ailing children at home? There is no doubt whatever that many come into the house of God loaded heavily with the thoughts of their daily avocations. The farmer recollects the fields that are to be ploughed or to be sown; it is a wet Sunday, and he is reflecting upon the yellow look of the young wheats. The merchant sees that dishonored bill fluttering before his eyes, and the tradesman counts over his bad debts. I should not wonder if the colours of the ladies' ribbons and the creak of the gentlemen's boots, disturb many. There are troublesome flies about, you know: Beelzebub, the god of flies, takes care that wherever there is a gospel feast the guests should be worried with petty annoyances. Often mental mosquitoes sting the man while you are preaching to him, and he is thinking more of trifling distractions than of your discourse; is it so very wonderful that he does? You must drive the mosquitoes away, and

secure your people's undistracted thoughts, turning them out of the channel in which they have been running six days into one suitable for the Sabbath. You must have sufficient leverage in your discourse and its subject to lift them right up from the earth to which they cleave, and to elevate them a little nearer heaven.

6 *Frequently it is very difficult for congregations to attend, because of the place and the atmosphere.* For instance, if the place is like this room at present, sealed against the pure air, with every window closed, they have enough to do to breathe, and cannot think of anything else: when people have inhaled over and over again the air which has been in other people's lungs, the whole machinery of life gets out of gear, and they are more likely to feel an aching head than a broken heart. The next best thing to the grace of God for a preacher is oxygen. Pray that the windows of heaven may be opened, but begin by opening the windows of your meeting-house. Look at many of our country places, and I am afraid our city chapels too, and you will find that the windows are not made to open. The modern barbarous style of building gives us no more ceiling than a barn, and no more openings for ventilation than would be found in an oriental dungeon, where the tyrant expected his prisoner to die by inches. What would we think of *a house* where the windows could not be opened? Would any of you hire such a dwelling? Yet Gothic architecture and silly pride make many persons renounce the wholesome sash window for little holes in the ceiling, or bird traps in the windows, and so places are made far less comfortable than Nebuchadnezzar's furnace was to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Provided all such chapels were properly insured, I could not pray for their preservation from fire. Even where the windows will open they are often kept closed by the month together, and from

Sunday to Sunday the impure atmosphere is unchanged. This ought not to be endured. I know some people do not notice such things, and I have heard it remarked that foxes are not killed by the stench of their own holes; but I am not a fox, and bad air makes me dull, and my hearers dull too. A gust of fresh air through the building might be to the people the next best thing to the gospel itself, at least it; would put them into a fit frame of mind to receive the truth. Take trouble on week days to remove the hindrance arising from foul air. In my former chapel, in Park Street, I mentioned to my deacons several times my opinion that the upper panes of the iron-framed windows had better be taken out, as the windows were not made to open. I mentioned this several times, and nothing came of it; but it providentially happened one Monday that somebody removed most of those panes in a masterly manner, almost as well as if they had been taken out by a glazier. There was considerable consternation, and much conjecture as to who had committed the crime, and I proposed that a reward of five pounds should be offered for the discovery of the offender, who when found should receive the amount as a present. The reward was not forthcoming, and therefore I have not felt it to be my duty to inform against the individual. I trust none of you will suspect *me,* for if you do I shall have to confess that I have walked with the stick which let the oxygen into that stifling structure.

[7] *Sometimes the manners of our people are inimical to attention;* they are not in the habit of attending; they attend the chapel but do not attend to the preacher. They are accustomed to look round at every one who enters the place, and they come in at all times, sometimes with much stamping, squeaking of boots, and banging of doors. I was preaching once to a people who continually looked round, and I adopted the expedient of saying, “Now, friends, as it is

so very interesting to you to know who comes in, and it disturbs me so very much for you to look round, I will, if you like, describe each one as he comes in, so that you may sit and look at me, and keep up at least a show of decency." I described one gentleman who came in, who happened to be a friend whom I could depict without offence, as "a very respectable gentleman who had just taken his hat off," and so on; and after that one attempt I found it was not necessary to describe any more, because they felt shocked at what I was doing, and I assured them that I was much more shocked that they should render it necessary for me to reduce their conduct to such an absurdity. It cured them for the time being, and I hope forever, much to their pastor's joy.

8 We will now suppose that this is set right. You have let the foul air out of the place, and reformed the manners of the people. What next? *In order to get attention, the first golden rule is, always say something worth hearing.* Most persons possess an instinct which leads them to desire to hear a good thing. They have a similar instinct, also, which you had better take note of, namely, that which prevents their seeing the good of attentively listening to mere words. It is not a severe criticism to say that there are ministers whose words stand in a very large proportion to their thoughts, in fact, their words hide their thoughts, if they have any. They pour out heaps of chaff, and, perhaps, there may be somewhere or other an oat or two, but it would be hard to say where. Congregations will not long attend to words, words, words, words, and nothing else. Amongst the commandments I am not aware of one which runs thus: "Thou shalt not be verbose," but it may be comprehended under the command, "Thou shalt not steal" for it is a fraud upon your hearers to give them words instead of spiritual food. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin," even in the best preacher. Give your hearers

something which they can treasure up and remember; something likely to be useful to them, the best matter from the best of places, solid doctrine from the divine Word. Give them manna fresh from the skies; not the same thing over and over again, in the same form *ad nauseam,* like workhouse bread cut into the same shape all the year round. Give them something striking, something that a man might get up in the middle of the night to hear and which is worth his walking fifty miles to listen to. You are quite capable of doing that. *Do it,* brethren. Do it continually, and you will have all the attention you can desire.

9 *Let the good matter which you give them be very clearly arranged.* There is a great deal in that. It is possible to heap up a vast mass of good things all in a muddle. Ever since the day I was sent to shop with a basket, and purchased a pound of tea, a quarter-of-a-pound of mustard, and three pounds of rice, and on my way home saw a pack of hounds and felt it necessary to follow them over hedge and ditch (as I always did when I was a boy), and found when I reached home that all the goods were amalgamated — tea, mustard, and rice — into one awful mess, I have understood the necessity of packing up my subjects in good stout parcels, bound round with the thread of my discourse; and this makes me keep to firstly, secondly, and thirdly, however unfashionable that method may now be. People will not drink your mustardy tea, nor will they enjoy muddled up sermons, in which you cannot tell head from tail, because they have neither, but are like Mr. Bright’s Skye terrier, whose head and tail were both alike. Put the truth before men in a logical, orderly manner, so that they can easily remember it, and they will the more readily receive it.

10 *Be sure, moreover, to speak plainly;* because, however excellent your matter, if a man does not comprehend it, it can be of no use to him; you might as well have spoken to him in the language of Kam-skatka as in your own tongue, if you use phrases that are quite out of his line, and modes of expression which are not suitable to his mind. Go up to his level if he is a poor man; go down to his understanding if he is an educated person. You smile at my contorting the terms in that manner, but I think there is more going up in being plain to the illiterate, than there is in being refined for the polite; at any rate, it is the more difficult of the two, and most like the Saviour's mode of speech. It is wise to walk in a path where your auditors can accompany you, and not to mount the high horse and ride over their heads. Our Lord and Master was the King of preachers, and yet he never was above anybody's comprehension, except so far as the grandeur and glory of his matter were concerned; his words and utterances were such that he spake like "the holy child Jesus." Let your hearts indite a good matter, clearly arranged and plainly put, and you are pretty sure to gain the ear, and so the heart.

11 *Attend also to your manner of address;* aim in that at the promotion of attention. And here I should say, as a rule do not read your sermons. There have been a few readers who have exercised great power, as, for instance, Dr. Chalmers, who could not have had a more attentive audience had he been extemporising; but then I do not suppose that we are equal to Dr. Chalmers: men of such eminence may read if they prefer it, but for us there is "a more excellent way." The best reading I have ever heard has tasted of paper, and has stuck in my throat. I have not relished it, for my digestion is not good enough to dissolve foolscap. It is better to do without the manuscript, even if you are driven to recite. It is

best of all if you need neither to recite nor to read. If you must read, mind that you do it to perfection. Be the very best of readers, and you had need to be if you would secure attention.

12 Here let me say, if *you would be listened to, do not extemporise in the emphatic sense,* for that is as bad as reading, or perhaps worse, unless the manuscript was written extemporaneously; I mean without previous study. Do not go into the pulpit and say the first thing that comes to hand, for the uppermost thing with most men is mere froth. Your people need discourses which have been prayed over and laboriously prepared. People do not want raw food, it must be cooked and made ready for them. We must give out of our very souls, in the words which naturally suggest themselves, the matter which has been as thoroughly prepared by us as it possibly could have been by a sermon-writer; indeed, it should be even better prepared, if we would speak well. The best method is, in my judgment, that in which the man does not extemporise the matter, but extemporises the words; the language comes to him at the moment, but the theme has been well thought out, and like a master in Israel he speaks of that which he knows, and testifies of what he has seen.

13 In order to get attention, make your manner as pleasing as it can possibly be. Do not, for instance, indulge in monotones. Vary your voice continually. Vary your speed as well — dash as rapidly as a lightning flash, and anon, travel forward in quiet majesty. Shift your accent, move your emphasis, and avoid sing-song. Vary the tone; use the bass sometimes, and let the thunders roll within; at other times speak as you ought to do generally — from the lips, and let your speech be conversational. Anything for a change. Human nature craves

for variety, and God grants it in nature, providence and grace; let us have it in sermons also. I shall not, however, dwell much upon this, because preachers have been known to arouse and sustain attention by their matter alone, when their mode of speech has been very imperfect. If Richard Sibbes, the Puritan, were here this afternoon, I would guarantee him fixed attention to anything that he had to say, and yet he stammered dreadfully. One of his contemporaries says he *Sibilated*, he lisped and hissed so much. We need not look far for instances in modern pulpits, for there are too many of them; but we may remember that Moses was slow of speech, and yet every ear was attent to his words; probably Paul also laboured under a similar infirmity, for his speech was said to be contemptible, of this, however, we are not sure, for it was only the criticism of his enemies. Paul's power in the churches was very great, and yet he was not always able to maintain attention when his sermon was long, for at least one hearer went to sleep under him with serious result. Manner is not everything. Still, if you have gathered good matter, it is a pity to convey it meanly; a king should not ride in a dust-cart; the glorious doctrines of grace should not be slovenly delivered. Right royal truths should ride in a chariot of gold. Bring forth the noblest of your milk-white steeds, and let the music sound forth melodiously from the silver trumpets, as truth rides through the streets. If people do not attend, do not let them find excuses in our faulty utterance. If, however, we cannot mend in this respect let us be the more diligent to make up for it by the richness of our matter, and on all occasions let us do our very best.

14 As a rule, *do not make the introduction too long*. It is always a pity to build a great porch to a little house. An excellent Christian woman once heard John Howe, and, as he took up an hour in his preface, her observation was, that the

dear good man was so long a time in laying the cloth, that she lost her appetite: she did not think there would be any dinner after all. Spread your table quickly, and have done with the clatter of the knives and the plates. You may have seen a certain edition of Doddridge's "Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul," with an introductory essay by John Foster. The essay is both bigger and better than the book and deprives Doddridge of the chance of being read. Is not this preposterous? Avoid this error in your own productions. I prefer to make the introduction of my sermon very like that of the town-crier, who rings his bell and cries, "Oh, yes! Oh, yes! This is to give notice," merely to let people know that he has news for them, and wants them to listen. To do that, the introduction should have something striking in it. It is well to fire a startling shot as the signal gun to clear the decks for action. Do not start at the full pitch and tension of your mind, but yet in such way that all will be led to expect a good time. Do not make your exordium a pompous, introduction into nothing, but a step to something better still. Be alive at the very commencement.

15 In preaching, *do not repeat yourselves.* I used to hear a divine who had a habit, after he had uttered about a dozen sentences, of saying, "As I have already observed," or, "I repeat what I before remarked." Well, good soul, as there was nothing particular in what he had said, the repetition only revealed the more clearly the nakedness of the land. If it was very good, and you said it forcibly, why go over it again? And if it was a feeble affair, why exhibit it a second time? Occasionally, of course, the repetition of a few sentences may be very telling; anything may be good occasionally, and yet be very vicious as a habit. Who wonders that people do not listen the first time when they know it is all to come over again?

16 Yet further, do not repeat the same idea over and over again in other words. Let there be something fresh in each sentence. Be not forever hammering away at the same nail: yours is a large Bible; permit the people to enjoy its length and breadth. And, brethren, do not think it necessary or important every time you preach to give a complete summary of theology, or a formal digest of doctrines, after the manner of Dr. Gill, — not that I would discredit or speak a word against Dr. Gill — his method is admirable for a body of divinity, or a commentary, but not suitable for preaching. I know a divine whose sermons whenever they are printed read like theological summaries, more fitted for a classroom than for a pulpit — they fall flat on the public ear. Our hearers do not want the bare bones of technical definition, but meat and flavor. Definitions and differences are all very well; but when they are the staple of a sermon they remind us of the young man whose discourse was made up of various important distinctions. Upon this performance an old deacon observed, that there was one distinction which he had omitted, namely, the distinction between meat and bones. If preachers do not make that distinction, all their other distinctions will not bring them much distinction..

17 In order to maintain attention, *avoid being too long.* An old preacher used to say to a young man who preached an hour, — “My dear friend, I do not care what else you preach about, but I wish you would always preach *about* forty minutes.” We ought seldom to go much beyond that — forty minutes, or say, three-quarters of an hour. If a fellow cannot say all he has to say in that time, when will he say it? But somebody said he liked “to do justice to his subject.” Well, but ought he not to do justice to his people, or, at least, have a little mercy upon them, and not keep them too long? The subject will not complain of you, but the people will. In some country places,

in the afternoon especially, the farmers have to milk their cows, and one farmer bitterly complained to me about a young man — I think from this College "Sir, he ought to have given over at four o'clock, but he kept on till half-past, and there were all my cows waiting to be milked! *How would he have liked it if he had been a cow?"* There was a great deal of sense in that question. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ought to have prosecuted that young sinner. How can farmers hear to profit when they have cows-on-the-brain? The mother feels morally certain during that extra ten minutes of your sermon that the baby is crying, or the fire is out, and she cannot and will not give her heart to your ministrations. You are keeping her ten minutes longer than she bargained for, and she looks upon it as a piece of injustice on your part. There is a kind of moral compact between you and your congregation that you will not weary them more than an hour-and-a-half, and if you keep them longer, it amounts to an infraction of a treaty and a piece of practical dishonesty of which you ought not to be guilty. Brevity is a virtue within the reach of all of us; do not let us lose the opportunity of gaining the credit which it brings. If you ask me how you may shorten your sermons, I should say, *study them better.* Spend more time in the study that you may need less in the pulpit. We are generally longest when we have least to say. A man with a great deal of well-prepared matter will probably not exceed forty minutes; when he has less to say he will go on for fifty minutes, and when he has absolutely nothing he will need an hour to say it in. Attend to these minor things and they will help to retain attention.

[18] If you want to have the attention of your people — to have it thoroughly and always, *it can only be accomplished by their being led by the Spirit of God into an elevated and devout*

*state of mind*. If your people are teachable, prayerful, active, earnest, devout, they will come up to the house of God on purpose to get a blessing. They will take their seats prayerfully, asking God to speak to them through you; they will remain on the watch for every word, and will not weary. They will have an appetite for the gospel, for they know the sweetness of the heavenly manna, and they will be eager to gather their appointed portions. No man will ever have a congregation to preach to which surpasses my own in this respect. Indeed, those with whom the preacher is most at home are usually the best hearers for him. It is comparatively easy to me to preach at the Tabernacle; my people come on purpose to hear something, and their expectation helps to fulfill itself. If they would hear another preacher with the same expectancy, I believe they would generally be satisfied; though there are exceptions.

19 When the preacher first settles, he cannot expect that his congregation will give him that solemn, earnest attention which those obtain who stand up like fathers among their own children, endeared to their people by a thousand memories, and esteemed for age and experience. Our whole life must be such as to add weight to our words, so that in after years we shall be able to wield the invincible eloquence of a long-sustained character, and obtain, not merely the attention, but the affectionate veneration of our flock. If by our prayers and tears and labours our people become spiritually healthy, we need not fear that we shall lose their attention. A people hungering after righteousness, and a minister anxious to feed their souls, will act in sweetest harmony with each other when their common theme is the Word of the Lord.

[20] If you need another direction for winning attention, I should say, *be interested yourself,* and you will interest others. There is more in those words than there seems to be, and so I will follow a custom which I just now condemned, and repeat the sentence, — be interested yourself, and you will interest other people. Your subject must weigh so much upon your own mind that you dedicate all your faculties at their best to the deliverance of your soul concerning it; and then when your hearers see that the topic has engrossed you, it will by degrees engross them.

[21] Do you wonder that people do not attend to a man who does not feel that he has anything important to say? Do you wonder that they do not listen with all their ears when a man does not speak with all his heart? Do you marvel that their thoughts ramble to subjects which are real to them when they find that the preacher is wasting time over matters which he treats as if they were fiction? Romaine used to say it was well to understand the *art* of preaching, but infinitely better to know the *heart* of preaching; and in that saying there is no little weight. The *heart* of preaching, the throwing of the soul into it, the earnestness which pleads as for life itself, is half the battle as to gaining attention. At the same time, you cannot hold men’s minds in enrapt attention by mere earnestness if you have nothing to say. People will not stand at their doors forever to hear a fellow beat a drum; they will come out to see what he is at, but when they find that it is much ado about nothing, they will slam the door and go in again, as much as to say, “You have taken us in and we do not like it.” Have something to say, and say it earnestly, and the congregation will be at your feet.

[22] It may be superfluous to remark that for the mass of our people it is well that *there should be a goodly number of*

*illustrations in our discourses.* We have the example of our Lord for that: and most of the greatest preachers have abounded in similes, metaphors, allegories, and anecdotes. But beware of overdoing this business. I read the other day the diary of a German lady who has been converted from Lutheranism to our faith, and she speaks of a certain village where she lives: — "There is a mission-station here, and young men come down to preach to us. I do not wish to find fault with these young gentlemen, but they tell us a great many very pretty little stories, and I do not think there is much else in what they say. Also I have, heard some of their little stories before, therefore they do not so much interest me as they would do if they would tell us some good doctrine out of the Scriptures." The same thing has no doubt crossed many other minds. "Pretty stories" are all very well, but it will never do to rely upon them as the great attraction of a sermon. Moreover, take warning concerning certain of these "pretty little stories," for their day is over and gone; the poor things are worn threadbare and ought to go into the rag-bag. I have heard some of them so many times, that I could tell them myself, but there is no need. From stock anecdotes may both ourselves and our hearers be mercifully delivered. Ancient jests sicken us when witlings retail them as their own ideas, and anecdotes to which our great-grandfathers listened have much the same effect upon the mind. Beware of those extremely popular compilations of illustrations which are in every Sunday-school teacher's hand, for nobody will thank you for repeating what everybody already knows by heart: if you tell anecdotes let them have some degree of freshness and originality; keep your eyes open, and gather flowers from the garden and the field with your own hands; they will be far more acceptable than withered specimens borrowed from other men's bouquets, however beautiful

those may once have been. Illustrate richly and aptly, but not so much with parables imported from foreign sources as with apt similes growing out of the subject itself. Do not, however, think the illustration everything; it is the window, but of what use is the light which it admits if you have nothing for the light to reveal? Garnish your dishes, but remember that the joint is the main point to consider, not the garnishing. Real instruction must be given and solid, doctrine taught, or you will find your imagery pall upon your hearers, and they will pine for spiritual meat.

[23] In your sermons *cultivate what Father Taylor calls "the surprise power."* There is a great deal of force in that for winning attention. Do not say what everybody expected you would say. Keep your sentences out of ruts. If you have already said, "Salvation is all of grace" do not always add, "and not by human merit.," but vary it and say, "Salvation is all of grace; self-righteousness has not a corner to hide its head in." I fear I cannot recall one of Mr. Taylor's sentences so as to do it justice, but it was something like this: "Some of you make no advance in the divine life, because you go forward a little way and then you float back again: just like a vessel on a tidal river which goes down with the stream just far enough to be carried back again on the return tide. So you make good progress for a while, and then all of a sudden" — what did he say? — "you hitch up in some muddy creek." Did he not also repeat us a speech to this effect, — "He felt sure that if they were converted they would walk uprightly and keep their bullocks out of their neighbour's corn"? Occasional resorts to this system of surprise will keep an audience in a state of proper expectancy. I sat last year about this time on the beach at Mentone by the Mediterranean Sea. The waves were very gently rising and falling, for there is little or no tide, and the wind was still. The waves crept up

languidly one after another, and I took little heed of them, though they were just at my feet. Suddenly, as if seized with a new passion, the sea sent up one far-reaching billow, which drenched me thoroughly. Quiet as I had been before, you can readily conceive how quickly I was on my, feet, and how speedily my day-dreaming ended. I observed to a ministering brother at my side, “This shows us how to preach, to wake people up we must astonish them with something they were not looking for.” Brethren, take them at unawares. Let your thunderbolt drop out of a clear sky. When all is calm and bright let the tempest rush up, and by contrast make its terrors all the greater. Remember, however, that nothing will avail if you go to sleep yourself while you are preaching. Is that possible? Oh, possible! It is done every Sunday. Many ministers are more than half-asleep all through the sermon; indeed, they never were awake at any time, and probably never will be unless a cannon should be fired off near their ear: tame phrases, hackneyed expressions, and dreary monotones make the staple of their discourses, and they wonder that the people are so drowsy: I confess I do not.

[24] A very useful help in securing attention is *a pause*. Pull up short every now and then, and the passengers on your coach will wake up. The miller goes to sleep while the mill wheels revolve; but if by some means or other the grinding ceases, the good man starts and cries, “What now?” On a sultry summer’s day, if nothing will keep off the drowsy feeling, be very short, sing more than usual, or call on a brother or two to pray. A minister who saw that the people would sleep, sat down and observed, “I saw you were all resting, and I thought I would rest too.” Andrew Fuller had barely commenced a sermon when he saw the people going to sleep. He said, “Friends, friends, friends, this won’t do. I have thought sometimes when you were asleep that it was my

fault, but now you are asleep before I begin, and it must be your fault. Pray wake up and give me an opportunity of doing you some good." Just so. Know how to pause. Make a point of interjecting arousing parentheses of quietude. Speech is silver, but silence is golden when hearers are inattentive. Keep on, on, on, on, on, with commonplace matter and monotonous tone, and you are rocking the cradle, and deeper slumbers will result; give the cradle a jerk, and sleep will flee.

25 I suggest again that in order to secure attention all through a discourse we must *make the people feel that they have an interest in what we are saying to them.* This is, in fact, a most essential point, because nobody sleeps while he expects to hear something to his advantage. I have heard of some very strange things, but I never did hear of a person going to sleep while a will was being read in which he expected a legacy, neither have I heard of a prisoner going to sleep while the judge was summing up, and his life was hanging in jeopardy. Self-interest quickens attention. Preach upon practical themes, pressing, present, personal matters, and you will secure an earnest hearing.

26 It will be well to *prevent attendants traversing the aisles* to meddle with gas or candles, or to distribute plates for collections, or to open windows, Deacons and sextons trotting over the place are a torture never to be patiently endured, and should be kindly, but decidedly, requested to suspend their perambulations.

27 *Late attendance,* also, needs remedying, and our gentlest reasonings and expostulations must be brought to bear upon it. I feel sure that the devil has a hand in many disturbances in the congregation, which jar upon our nerves, and distract our thoughts: the banging of a pew door, the sharp fall of a

stick on the floor, or the cry of a child, are all convenient means in the hands of the evil one for hindering us in our work; we may, therefore, very justifiably beg our people to preserve our usefulness from this class of assaults.

[28] I gave you a golden rule for securing attention at the commencement, namely, always say something worth hearing; I will now give you a diamond rule, and conclude. *Be yourself clothed with the Spirit of God,* and then no question about attention or non-attention will arise. Come fresh from the closet and from communion with God, to speak to men for God with all your heart and soul, and you must have power over them. You have golden chains in your mouth which will hold them fast. When God speaks men must listen; and though he may speak through a poor feeble man like themselves, the majesty of the truth will compel them to regard his voice. Supernatural power must be your reliance. We say to you, perfect yourselves in oratory, cultivate all the fields of knowledge, make your sermon mentally and rhetorically all it ought to be (you ought to do no less in such a service), but at the same time remember, “it is not by might, nor by power,” that men are regenerated or sanctified, but “by my Spirit, saith the Lord.” Are you not conscious sometimes of being clad with zeal as with a cloak, and filled to the full with the Spirit of God? At such times you have had a hearing people, and, ere long, a believing people; but if you are not thus endowed with power from on high, you are to them no more than a musician who plays upon a goodly instrument, or sings a sweet song, with a clear voice, reaching the ear but not the heart. If you do not touch the heart you will soon weary the ear. Clothe yourself, then, with the power of the Spirit of God, and preach to men as those who must soon give an account, and who desire that their

account may not be painful to their people and grievous to themselves, but that it may be to the glory of God.

29 Brethren, may the Lord be with you, while you go forth in his name and cry, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

# Lecture 10. The Faculty of Impromptu Speech

[1] We are not about to discuss the question as to whether sermons should be written and read, or written, committed to memory and repeated, or whether copious notes should be employed, or no notes at all. Neither of these is the subject now under consideration, although we may incidentally allude to each of them, but we are now to speak of extemporaneous speech in its truest and most thorough form — speech impromptu, without special preparation, without notes or immediate forethought.

[2] Our first observation shall be that *we would not recommend any man to attempt preaching in this style as a general rule.* If he did so, he would succeed, we think, most certainly, in producing a vacuum in his meetinghouse; his gifts of dispersion would be clearly manifested. Unstudied thoughts coming from the mind without previous research, without the subjects in hand having been investigated at all, must be of a very inferior quality, even from the most superior men; and as none of us would have the effrontery to glorify ourselves as men of genius or wonders of erudition, I fear that our unpremeditated thoughts upon most subjects would not be remarkably worthy of attention. Churches are not to be held together except by an instructive ministry; a mere filling up of time with oratory will not suffice. Everywhere men ask to be fed, really fed. Those new-fangled religionists, whose public worship consists of the prelections of any brother who chooses to jump up and talk, notwithstanding their flattering inducements to the ignorant and garrulous, usually dwindle away, and die out; because, even men, with the most violently crotchety views, who conceive it to be the mind of the Spirit

that every member of the body should be a mouth, soon grow impatient of hearing other people's nonsense, though delighted to dispense their own; while the mass of the good people grow weary of prosy ignorance, and return to the churches from which they were led aside, or would return if their pulpits were well supplied with solid teaching. Even Quakerism, with all its excellencies, has scarcely been able to survive the poverty of thought and doctrine displayed in many of its assemblies by impromptu orators. The method of unprepared ministrations is practically a failure, and theoretically unsound. The Holy Spirit has made no promise to supply spiritual food to the saints by an impromptu ministry. He will never do for us what we can do for ourselves. If we can study and do not, if we can have a studious ministry and will not, we have no right to call in a divine agent to make up the deficits of our idleness or eccentricity. The God of providence has promised to feed his people with temporal food; but if we came together to a banquet, and no one had prepared a single dish, because all had faith in the Lord that food would be given in the selfsame hour, the festival would not be eminently satisfactory, but folly would be rebuked by hunger; as, indeed, it is in the case of spiritual banquets of the impromptu kind, only men's spiritual receptacles are hardly such powerful orators as their stomachs. Gentlemen, do not attempt, as a rule, to follow a system of things which is so generally unprofitable that the few exceptions only prove the rule. All sermons ought to be well considered and prepared by the preacher; and, as much as possible, every minister should, with much prayer for heavenly guidance, enter fully into his subject, exert all his mental faculties in original thinking, and gather together all the information within his reach. Viewing the whole matter from all quarters, the preacher should think it

out, get it well masticated and digested; and having first fed upon the word himself should then prepare the like nutriment for others. Our sermons should be our mental life-blood — the out-flow of our intellectual and spiritual vigour; or, to change the figure, they should be diamonds well cut and well set — precious, intrinsically, and bearing the marks of labour. God forbid that we should offer to the Lord that which costs us nothing.

3 Very strongly do I warn all of you against reading your sermons, but I recommend, as a most healthful exercise, and as a great aid towards attaining extemporising power, the frequent writing of them, Those of us who write a great deal in other forms, for the press, *et cetera,* may not so much require that exercise; but if you do not use the pen in other ways, you will be wise to write at least some of your sermons, and revise them with great care. Leave them at home afterwards, but still write them out, that you may be preserved from a slipshod style. M. Bautain in his admirable work on extempore speaking, remarks, “You will never be capable of speaking properly in public unless you acquire such mastery of your own thought as to be able to decompose it into its parts, to analyze it into its elements, and then, at need, to re-compose, re-gather, and concentrate it again by a synthetic process. Now this analysis of the idea, which displays it, as it were, before the eyes of the mind, is well executed only by writing. The pen is the scalpel which dissects the thoughts, and never, except when you write down what you behold internally, can you succeed in clearly discerning all that is contained in a conception, or in obtaining its well-marked scope. You then understand yourself, and make others understand you.”

4 We do not recommend the plan of learning sermons by heart, and repeating them from memory, that is both a wearisome exercise of an inferior power of the mind and an indolent neglect of other and superior faculties. The most arduous and commendable plan is to store your mind with matter upon the subject of discourse, and then to deliver yourself with appropriate words which suggest themselves at the time. This is not extemporaneous preaching; the words are extemporal, as I think they always should be, but the thoughts are the result of research and study. Only thoughtless persons think this to be easy; it is at once the most laborious and the most efficient mode of preaching, and it has virtues of its own of which I cannot now speak particularly, since it would lead us away from the point in hand.

5 Our subject is the faculty of pure, unmixed, genuinely extemporaneous speaking, and to this let us return. This power is extremely useful, and in most cases is, with a little diligence, to be acquired. It is possessed by many, yet not by so many that I shall be incorrect if I say that the gift is rare. The *improvisatori* of Italy possessed the power of impromptu speech to such an extent, that their extemporaneous verses upon subjects suggested on the spot by the spectators, frequently amounted to hundreds and even thousands of lines. They would produce whole tragedies as spontaneously as springs bubble up with water, and rhyme away by the half-hour and the hour together, on the spur of the moment, and perhaps also on the spur of a little Italian wine. Their printed works seldom rise above mediocrity, and yet one of them, Perfetti, gained the laurel crown which had been awarded only to Petrarch and Tasso. Many of them at this hour produce off-hand verses which are equal to the capacities of their hearers, and secure their breathless

attention. Why cannot we acquire just such a power in prose? We shall not be able, I suppose, to produce verses, nor need we desire the faculty. Many of you have no doubt versified a little, (as which of us in some weak moment has not?) but we have put away childish things now that the sober prose of life and death, and heaven and hell, and perishing sinners, demands all our thought.[41]

[6] Many *lawyers* possess the gift of extemporaneous speech in a high degree. They should have some virtues! Some weeks ago a wretched being was indicted for the horrible crime of libeling a lawyer; it is well for him that I was not his judge, for had such a difficult and atrocious crime been fairly brought home to him, I would have delivered him over to be cross-examined during the term of his natural life, hoping for mercy's sake that it might be a brief one. But the gentlemen of the bar are many of them most ready speakers, and as you will clearly see, they must to a considerable degree be extemporaneous speakers too, because it would be impossible for them always to foresee the line of argument which the evidence, or the temper of the judge, or the pleadings on the other side would require. However well a case may be prepared, points must and will arise requiring an active mind and a fluent tongue to deal with them. Indeed, I have been astonished to observe the witty, sharp, and in every way appropriate replies which counsel will throw off without forethought in our courts of law. What a barrister can do in advocating the cause of his client, you and I should surely be able to do in the cause of God. The bar must not be allowed to excel the pulpit. We will be as expert in intellectual arms as any men, be they who they may, God helping us.

[7] *Certain Members of the House of Commons* have exercised the faculty of extemporaneous speaking with great results. Usually of all tasks of hearing, the most miserable is that of listening to one of the common ruck of speakers from the House of Lords and Commons. Let it be proposed that when capital punishment is abolished, those who are found guilty of murder shall be compelled to listen to a selection of the dreariest parliamentary orators. The members of the Royal Humane Society forbid. Yet in the House some of the Members are able to speak extemporaneously, and to speak well. I should imagine that some of the finest things which have been said by John Bright, and Gladstone, and Disraeli, were altogether what Southey would call jets from the great Geyser when the spring is in full play. Of course, their long orations upon the Budget, the Reform Bill, and so on, were elaborated to the highest degree by previous manipulation; but many of their briefer speeches have, no doubt, been the offspring of the hour, and yet have had an amazing amount of power about them. Shall the representatives of the nation attain an expertness of speech beyond the representatives of the court of heaven? Brethren, covet earnestly this good gift, and go about to win it.

[8] You are all convinced that the ability which we are considering must be a priceless possession for a minister. Did we hear a single heart whisper, “I wish I had it, for then I should have no need to study so arduously”? Ah! then you must not have it, you are unworthy of the boon, and unfit to be trusted with it. If you seek this gift as a pillow for an idle head, you will be much mistaken; for the possession of this noble power will involve you in a vast amount of labour in order to increase and even to retain it. It is like the magic lamp in the fable, which would not shine except it was well rubbed, and became a mere dim globe as soon as the rubbing

ceased. What the sluggard desires for the sake of ease, we may however covet for the best of reasons.

9 Occasionally one has heard or read of men agreeing, by way of bravado, to preach upon texts given them at the time in the pulpit, or in the vestry: such vainglorious displays are disgusting, and border on profanity. As well might we have exhibitions of juggling on the Sabbath as such mountebankism of oratory. Our talents are given us for far other ends. Such a prostitution of gift I trust you will never be allowed to perpetrate. Feats of speech are well enough in a debating club, but in the ministry they are abominable even when a Bossuet lends himself to them.

10 The power of impromptu speech is invaluable, because it enables a man on the spur of the moment, in an emergency, to deliver himself with propriety. These emergencies will arise. Accidents will occur in the best regulated assemblies. Singular events may turn the premeditated current of your thoughts quite aside. You will see clearly that the subject selected would be inopportune, and you will as a wise man drift into something else without demur. When the old road is closed, and there is no help for it but to make a new way for the chariot, unless you are qualified to drive the horses over a ploughed field as well as along the macadamised road on which you hoped to travel, you will find yourself off the coach-box, and mischief will befall the company. It is a great acquisition to be able at a public meeting, when you have heard the speeches of your brethren, and believe that they have been too frivolous, or it may be, on the other hand, too dull, without any allusions to them, quietly to counteract the mischief, and lead the assembly into a more profitable line of thought. This gift may be of the utmost importance in the church-meeting, where business may arise which it would be

difficult to foresee. All the troublers of Israel are not yet dead. Achan was stoned, and his wife, and his children, but others of his family must have escaped, for the race has certainly been perpetuated, and needs to be dealt with discreetly and vigorously. In some churches certain noisy men will rise and speak, and when they have done so, it is of great importance that the pastor should readily and convincingly reply, lest bad impressions should remain. A pastor who goes to the church-meeting in the spirit of his Master, feeling sure that in reliance upon the Holy Spirit he is quite able to answer any untoward spirit, sits at ease, keeps his temper, rises in esteem on each occasion, and secures a quiet church; but the unready brother is flurried, probably gets into a passion, commits himself, and inherits a world of sorrow. Besides this, a man may be called upon to preach at a moment's notice, through the non-arrival of the expected minister, or his sudden sickness; at a public meeting one may feel stirred to speak where silence had been resolved upon; and at any form of religious exercise emergencies may arise which will render impromptu speech as precious as the gold of Ophir.

[11] The gift is valuable — how is it to be obtained? The question leads us to remark that *some men will never obtain it.* There must be a natural adaptedness for extemporaneous speech; even as for the poetic art: a poet is born, not made. "Art may develop and perfect the talent of a speaker, but cannot produce it." All the rules of rhetoric, and all the artifices of oratory cannot make a man eloquent, it is a gift from heaven, and where it is withheld it cannot be obtained. This "gift of utterance," as we call it, is born with some people, inherited probably from the mother's side.[42] To others the gift is denied; their conformation of jaw, and yet more their conformation of brain, never will allow of their

becoming fluent and ready speakers. They may, perhaps, make moderate stutterers and slow deliverers of sober truth, but they can never be impromptu orators; unless they should rival Methuselah in age, and then perhaps on the Darwinian theory, which educes an Archbishop of Canterbury from an oyster, they might develop into speakers. If there be not a natural gift of oratory a brother may attain to a respectable post in other departments, but he is not likely to shine as a bright particular star in extemporary speech.

12 *If a man would speak without any present study, he must usually study much*. This is a paradox perhaps, but its explanation lies upon the surface. If I am a miller, and I have a sack brought to my door, and am asked to fill that sack with good fine flour within the next five minutes, the only way in which I can do it, is by keeping the flour-bin of my mill always full, so that I can at once open the mouth of the sack, fill it, and deliver it. I do not happen to be grinding at that time, and so far the delivery is extemporary; but I have been grinding before, and so have the flour to serve out to the customer. So, brethren, you must have been grinding, or you will not have the flour. You will not be able to extemporise good thinking unless you have been in the habit of thinking and feeding your mind with abundant and nourishing food. Work hard at every available moment. Store your minds very richly, and then, like merchants with crowded warehouses, you will have goods ready for your customers, and having arranged your good things upon the shelves of your mind, you will be able to hand them down at any time without the laborious process of going to market, sorting, folding, and preparing. I do not believe that any man can be successful in continuously maintaining the gift of extemporaneous speech, except by ordinarily using far more labour than is usual with those who write and commit their discourses to memory.

Take it as a rule without exception, that to be able to overflow spontaneously you must be full.

13 *The collection of a fund of ideas and expressions is exceedingly helpful.* There is a wealth and a poverty in each of these respects. He who has much information, well arranged, and thoroughly understood, with which he is intimately familiar, will be able like some prince of fabulous wealth to scatter gold right and left among the crowd. To you, gentlemen, an intimate acquaintance with the Word of God, with the inward spiritual life, with the great problems of time and eternity will be indispensable. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Accustom yourselves to heavenly meditations, search the Scriptures, delight yourselves in the law of the Lord, and you need not fear to speak of things which you have tasted and handled of the good word of God. Men may well be slow of speech in discussing themes beyond the range of their experience; but you, warmed with love towards the King, and enjoying fellowship with him, will find your hearts inditing a good matter, and your tongues will be as the pens of ready writers. Get at the roots of spiritual truths by an experimental acquaintance with them, so shall you with readiness expound them to others. Ignorance of theology is no rare thing in our pulpits, and the wonder is not that so few men are extempore speakers, but that so many are, when theologians are so scarce. We shall never have great preachers till we have great divines. You cannot build a man-of-war out of a currant bush, nor can great soul-moving preachers be formed out of superficial students. If you would be fluent, that is to say flowing, be filled with all knowledge, and especially with the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord. But we remarked that a fund of expressions would be also of much help to the extempore speaker; and, truly, second only to a store of ideas

is a rich vocabulary. Beauties of language, elegancies of speech, and above all forcible sentences are to be selected, remembered, and imitated. You are not to carry that gold pencil-case with you, and jot down every polysyllabic word which you meet with in your reading, so as to put it in your next sermon, but you are to know what words mean, to be able to estimate the power of a synonym, to judge the rhythm of a sentence, and to weigh the force of an expletive. You must be masters of words, they must be your genii, your angels, your thunderbolts, or your drops of honey. Mere word-gatherers are hoarders of oyster shells, bean husks, and apple-parings; but to a man who has wide information and deep thought, words are baskets of silver in which to serve up his apples of gold. See to it that you have a good team of words to draw the wagon of your thoughts.

14 I think, too, that a man who would speak well, extemporaneously, *must be careful to select a topic which he understands.* This is the main point. Ever since I have been in London, in order to get into the habit of speaking extemporaneously, I have never studied or prepared anything for the Monday evening prayer-meeting. I have all along selected that occasion as the opportunity for off-hand exhortation; but you will observe that I do not on such occasions select difficult expository topics, or abstruse themes, but restrict myself to simple, homely talk, about the elements of our faith, When standing up on such occasions, one’s mind makes a review, and inquires, “What subject has already taken up my thought during the day? What have I met with in my reading during the past week? What is most laid upon my heart at this hour? What is suggested by the hymns or the prayers?” It is of no use to rise before an assembly, and hope to be inspired upon subjects of which you know nothing; if you are so unwise, the result will be that as

you know nothing you will probably say it, and the people will not be edified. But I do not see why a man cannot speak extemporaneously upon a subject which he fully understands. Any tradesman, well versed in his line of business, could explain it to you without needing to retire for meditation; and surely we ought to be equally as familiar with the first principles of our holy faith; we ought not to feel at a loss when called upon to, speak upon topics which constitute the daily bread of our souls. I do not see what benefit is gained in such a case, by the mere manual labour of writing before speaking; because in so doing, a man would write extemporaneously, and extemporaneous writing is likely to be even feebler than extemporaneous speech. The gain of the writing lies in the opportunity of careful revision; but as able writers are able to express their thoughts correctly at the first, so also may able speakers. The thought of a man who finds himself upon his legs, dilating upon a theme with which he is familiar, may be very far from being his first thought; it may be the cream of his meditations warmed by the glow of his heart. He, having studied the subject well before, though not at that moment, may deliver himself most powerfully; whereas another man, sitting down to write, may only be penning his first ideas, which may be vague and vapid. Do not attempt to be impromptu then, unless you have well studied the theme — this paradox is a counsel of prudence. I remember to have been tried rather sharply upon one occasion, and had I not been versed in impromptu address, I know not how it would have sped with me. I was expected to preach in a certain chapel, and there was a crowded congregation, but I was not in time, being delayed by some blockade upon the railroad; so another minister went on with the service, and when I reached the place, all breathless with running, he was already preaching a sermon. Seeing me

appear at the front door and pass up the aisle, he stopped and said, “There he is,” and looking at me, he added, “I’ll make way for you; come up and finish the sermon.” I asked him what was the text and how far he had gone with it. He told me what the text, was, and said he had just passed through the first head; without hesitation I took up the discourse at that point and finished the sermon, and I should be ashamed of any man here who could not have done the same, the circumstances being such as to make the task a remarkably easy one. In the first place the minister was my grandfather, and, in the second place, the text was — “By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” He must have been a more foolish animal than that which Balaam rode, if, at such a juncture, he had not found a tongue. “By grace are ye saved,” had been spoken of as indicating *the source* of salvation; who could not follow by describing the next clause — “through faith,” as the *channel?* One did not need to study much to show that salvation is received by us through faith. Yet, on that occasion, I had a further trial; for when I had proceeded a little, and was warming to my work, a hand patted my back approvingly, and a voice said, “That’s right — that’s right; tell them that again, for fear they should forget it.” Thereupon I repeated the truth, and a little further on, when I was becoming rather deeply experimental I was gently pulled by my coat-tail, and the old gentleman stood up in front and said, “Now, my grandson can tell you this as a theory, but I am here to bear witness to it as a matter of practical experience: I am older than he is, and I must give you my testimony as an old man.” Then after having given us his personal experience, he said, “There, now, my grandson can preach the gospel a great deal better than I can, but he cannot preach a better gospel, can he?” Well, gentlemen, I

can easily imagine that if I had not possessed some little power of extemporaneous speech upon that occasion, I might have been somewhat ruffled; but as it was, it came as naturally as if it had been prearranged.

[15] *The acquisition of another language* affords a fine drilling for the practice of extempore speech. Brought into connection with the roots of words, and the rules of speech, and being compelled to note the differentia of the two languages, a man grows by degrees to be much at home with parts of speech, moods, tenses, and inflections; like a workman he becomes familiar with his tools, and handles them as everyday companions. I know of no better exercise than to translate with as much rapidity as possible a portion of Virgil or Tacitus, and then with deliberation to amend one's mistakes. Persons who know no better, think all time thrown away which, is spent upon the classics, but if it were only for the usefulness of such studies to the sacred orator, they ought to be retained in all our collegiate institutions. Who does not see that the perpetual comparison of the terms and idioms of two languages must aid facility of expression? Who does not see moreover that by this exercise the mind becomes able to appreciate refinements and subtleties of meaning, and so acquires the power of distinguishing between things that differ — a power essential to an expositor of the Word of God, and an extempore declarer of his truth. Learn, gentlemen, to put together, and unscrew all the machinery of language, mark every cog, and wheel, and bolt, and rod, and you will feel the more free to drive the engine, even at an express speed should emergencies demand it.

[16] *Every man who wishes to acquire this art must practice it.* It was by slow degrees, as Burke says, that Charles Fox

became the most brilliant and powerful debater that ever lived. He attributed his success to the resolution which he formed when very young, of speaking well or ill, at least once every night. “During five whole sessions” he used to say, “I spoke every night but one, and I regret only that I did not speak on that night too.” At first he may do so with no other auditory than the chairs and books of his study, imitating the example of a gentleman who, upon applying for admission to this college, assured me that he had for two years, practised himself in extempore preaching in his own room. Students living together might be of great mutual assistance by alternately acting the part of audience and speaker, with a little friendly criticism at the close of each attempt. Conversation, too, may be of essential service, if it be a matter of principle to make it solid and edifying. Thought is to be linked with speech, that is the problem; and it may assist a man in its solution, if he endeavours in his private musings to think aloud. So has this become habitual to me that I find it very helpful to be able, in private devotion, to pray with my voice; reading aloud is more beneficial to me than the silent process; and when I am mentally working out a sermon, it is a relief to me to speak to myself as the thoughts flow forth. Of course this only masters half the difficulty, and you must practice in public, in order to overcome the trepidation occasioned by the sight of an audience; but half way is a great part of a journey. Good impromptu speech is just the utterance of a practised thinker — a man of information, meditating on his legs, and allowing his thoughts to march through his mouth into the open air. Think aloud as much as you can when you are alone, and you will soon be on the high road to success in this matter. The discussion and debates in the classroom are of vital importance as a further step, and I would urge the more

retiring brethren to take a part in them. The practice of calling upon you to speak upon a topic drawn at random from a bowl out of a wide selection has been introduced among you, and we must more frequently resort to it. What I condemned as a part of religious worship, we may freely use as a scholastic exercise among ourselves. It is calculated to try a man's readiness and self-command, and those who fail in it are probably as much benefited as those who succeed, for self-knowledge may be as useful to one as practice to another. If the discovery that you are as yet a bungler in oratory should drive you to severer study and more resolute endeavours, it may be the true path to ultimate eminence.

[17] In addition to the practice commended, I must urge upon you the necessity of being *cool and confident.* As Sydney Smith says, "A great deal of talent is lost to the world for want of a little courage." This is not to be easily acquired by the young speaker. Cannot you young speakers sympathize with Blondin, the rope walker? Do you not sometimes feel when you are preaching as though you were walking on a rope high in the air, and do you not tremble and wonder whether you will reach the other end in safety? Sometimes when you have been flourishing that beautiful balancing pole, and watching the metaphorical spangles which flash poetry upon your audience, have you not been half regretful that you ever exposed yourself to such risks of sudden descent, or, to drop the figure, have you not wondered whether you would be able to conclude the sentence, or find a verb for the nominative, or an accusative for the verb? Everything depends upon your being cool and unflurried. Forebodings of failure, and fear of man, will ruin you. Go on, trusting in God, and all will be well. If you have made a blunder in grammar, and you are half inclined to go back to correct it, you will soon make another, and your hesitation will involve you as in

a net. Let me whisper — for it is meant for your ear alone — it is always a bad thing to go back. If you make a verbal blunder go on, and do not notice it. My father gave me a very good rule when I was learning to write, which I think of equal utility in learning to speak. He used to say, “When you are writing, if you make a mistake by misspelling a word, or by writing a wrong word, do not cross it out and make a mess of it, but see how you can in the readiest way alter what you were going to say so as to bring in what you have written, and leave no trace of mistake.” So in speaking, if the sentence will not finish in the best way, conclude it in another. It is of very little use to go back to amend, for you thus call attention to the flaw which perhaps few had noticed, and you draw off the mind from your subject to your language, which is the last thing which the preacher should do. If, however, your *lapsus linguae* should be noticed, all persons of sense will forgive a young beginner, and they will rather admire you than otherwise for attaching small importance to such slips, and pressing on with your whole heart towards your main design. A novice at public speaking is like a rider unused to horseback; if his horse stumbles he fears he will be down and throw him over his head, or if it be a little fresh, he feels assured that it will run away; and the eye of a friend, or the remark of a little boy, will make him as wretched as if he were lashed to the back of the great red dragon. But when a man is well used to mount he knows no dangers, and he meets with none, because his courage prevents them. When a speaker feels, “I am master of the situation,” he usually is so. His confidence averts the disasters which trembling would be certain to create. My brethren, if the Lord has indeed ordained you to the ministry, you have the best reasons for being bold and calm, for whom have you to fear? You have to deliver your Lord’s errand as

he enables you, and if this be done, you are responsible to no one but your heavenly Master, who is no harsh judge. You do not enter the pulpit to shine as an orator, or to gratify the predilections of your audience; you are the messenger of heaven and not the servant of men.[43] Remember the words of the Lord to Jeremiah, and be afraid to be afraid. "Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them." Jeremiah 1:17. Trust in the Holy Spirit's present help, and the fear of man which bringeth a snare will depart from you. When you are able to feel at home in the pulpit, and can look round and speak to the people as a brother talking to brethren, then you will be able to extemporize, but not till then. Bashfulness and timidity which are so beautiful in our younger brethren, will be succeeded by that true modesty which forgets self, and is not careful as to its own reputation so long as Christ is preached in the most forcible manner at command.

[18] In order to the holy and useful exercise of extemporal speech, the Christian minister must cultivate a childlike *reliance upon the immediate assistance of the Holy Spirit.* "I believe in the Holy Ghost," says the Creed. It is to be feared that many do not make this a real article of belief. To go up and down all the week wasting time, and then to cast ourselves upon the Spirit's aid, is wicked presumption, an attempt to make the Lord minister to our sloth and self-indulgence; but in an emergency the case is widely different. When a man finds himself unavoidably called upon to speak without any preparation, then he may with fullest confidence cast himself upon the Spirit of God. The divine mind beyond a doubt comes into contact with the human intellect, lifts it out of its weakness and distraction, makes it soaring and strong, and enables it both to understand and to

express divine truth in a manner far beyond its unaided powers. Such interpositions, like miracles, are not meant to supersede our efforts or slacken our diligence, but are the Lord's assistance which we may count upon at an emergency. His Spirit will be ever with us, but especially under severe stress of service. Earnestly as I advise you not to try purely impromptu speaking more than you are obliged to do, till you have become somewhat matured in your ministry, I yet exhort you to speak in that manner whenever compelled to do so, believing that in the selfsame hour it shall be given you what you shall speak.

19 If you are happy enough to acquire the power of extemporary speech, pray recollect that *you may very readily lose it*. I have been struck with this in my own experience, and I refer to that because it is the best evidence that I can give you. If for two successive Sundays I make my notes a little longer and fuller than usual, I find on the third occasion that I require them longer still; and I also observe that if on occasions I lean a little more to my recollection of my thoughts, and am not so extemporaneous as I have been accustomed to be, there is a direct craving and even an increased necessity for pre-composition. If a man begins to walk with a stick merely for a whim, he will soon come to *require* a stick; if you indulge your eyes with spectacles they will speedily demand them as a permanent appendage; and if you were to walk with crutches for a month, at the end of the time they would be almost necessary to your movements, although naturally your limbs might be as sound and healthy as any man's. Ill uses create an ill nature. You must continually practice extemporising, and if to gain suitable opportunities you should frequently speak the word in cottages, in the school-rooms of our hamlets, or to two or

three by the wayside, your profiting shall be known unto all men.[44]

20 It may save you much surprise and grief if you are forewarned, that there will be great variations in your power of utterance. Today your tongue may be the pen of a ready writer, tomorrow your thoughts and words may be alike frost-bound. Living things are sensitive, and are affected by a variety of forces; only the merely mechanical can be reckoned upon with absolute certainty. Think it not strange if you should frequently feel yourself to have failed, nor wonder if it should turn out that at such times you have best succeeded. You must not expect to become sufficient as of yourself, no habit or exercise can render you independent of divine assistance; and if you have preached well forty-nine times when called upon without notice, this is no excuse for self-confidence on the fiftieth occasion, for if the Lord should leave you you will be at a dead stand. Your variable moods of fluency and difficulty, will by God’s grace tend to keep you humbly looking up to the strong for strength.

21 Above all things beware of letting your tongue outrun your brains. Guard against a feeble fluency, a garrulous prosiness, a facility of saying nothing. What a pleasure it is to hear of a brother breaking down who presumed upon his powers to keep on when he really had nothing to say! May such a consummation come to all who err in that direction. My brethren, it is a hideous gift to possess, to be able to say nothing at extreme length. Elongated nonsense, paraphrastic platitude, wire-drawn commonplace, or sacred rodomontade, are common enough, and are the scandal and shame of extemporizing. Even when sentiments of no value are beautifully expressed, and neatly worded, what is the use of them? Out of nothing comes nothing. Extemporary speech

without study is a cloud without rain, a well without water, a fatal gift, injurious equally to its possessor and his flock. Men have applied to me whom I have denied admission to this College, because being utterly destitute both of education and of a sense of their own ignorance, their boundless conceit and enormous volubility made them dangerous subjects for training. Some have even reminded me of the serpent in the Apocalypse, which cast out of his mouth water as a flood so plenteously that the woman was likely to have been carried away with it. Wound up like clocks, they keep on, and on, and on, till they run down, and blessed is he who has least acquaintance with them. The sermons of such preachers are like Snug the joiner's part when he acted the lion.

22 "You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring." Better to lose, or rather never to possess, the gift of ready utterance, than to degrade ourselves into mere noise makers, the living representations of Paul's sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.

23 I might have said much more if I had extended the subject to what is *usually called* extempore preaching, that is to say, the preparation of the sermon so far as thoughts go, and leaving the words to be found during delivery; but this is quite another matter, and although looked upon as a great attainment by some, it is, as I believe, an indispensable requisite for the pulpit, and by no means a mere luxury of talent; but of this we will speak on another occasion,

# Lecture 11. The Minister's Fainting Fits

1 As it is recorded that David, in the heat of battle, waxed faint, so may it be written of all the servants of the Lord. Fits of depression come over the most of us. Usually cheerful as we may be, we must at intervals be cast down. The strong are not always vigorous, the wise not always ready, the brave not always courageous, and the joyous not always happy. There may be here and there men of iron, to whom wear and tear work no perceptible detriment, but surely the rust frets even these; and as for ordinary men, the Lord knows, and makes them to know, that they are but dust. Knowing by most painful experience what deep depression of spirit means, being visited therewith at seasons by no means few or far between, I thought it might be consolatory to some of my brethren if I gave my thoughts thereon, that younger men might not fancy that some strange thing had happened to them when they became for a season possessed by melancholy; and that sadder men might know that one upon whom the sun has shone right joyously did not always walk in the light.

2 It is not necessary by quotations from the biographies of eminent ministers to prove that seasons of fearful prostration have fallen to the lot of most, if not all of them. The life of Luther might suffice to give a thousand instances, and he was by no means of the weaker sort. His great spirit was often in the seventh heaven of exultation, and as frequently on the borders of despair. His very death bed was not free from tempests, and he sobbed himself into his last sleep like a great wearied child. Instead of multiplying cases, let us dwell upon the reasons why these things are permitted; why it is

that the children of light sometimes walk in the thick darkness; why the heralds of the daybreak find themselves at times in tenfold night.

3 Is it not first that *they are men?* Being men, they are compassed with infirmity, and heirs of sorrow. Well said the wise man in the Apocrypha,[45] “Great travail is created for all men, and a heavy yoke on the sons of Adam, from the day that they go out of their mother’s womb unto that day that they return to the mother of all things — namely, their thoughts and fear of their hearts, and their imagination of things that they wait for, and the day of death. From him that sitteth in the glorious throne, to him that sitteth beneath in the earth and ashes; from him that is clothed in blue silk, and weareth a crown, to him that is clothed in simple linen — wrath, envy, trouble, and unquietness, and fear of death and rigour, and such things come to both man and beast, but sevenfold to the ungodly.” Grace guards us from much of this, but because we have not more of grace we still suffer even from ills preventable. Even under the economy of redemption it is most clear that we are to endure infirmities, otherwise there were no need of the promised Spirit to help us in them. It is of need be that we are sometimes in heaviness. Good men are promised tribulation in this world, and ministers may expect a larger share than others, that they may learn sympathy with the Lord’s suffering people, and so may be fitting shepherds of an ailing flock. Disembodied spirits might have been sent to proclaim the word, but they could not have entered into the feelings of those who, being in this body, do groan, being burdened; angels might have been ordained evangelists, but their celestial attributes would have disqualified them from having compassion on the ignorant; men of marble might have been fashioned, but their impassive natures would have been a

sarcasm upon our feebleness, and a mockery of our wants. Men, and men subject to human passions, the all-wise God has chosen to be his vessels of grace; hence these tears, hence these perplexities and castings down.

4 Moreover, *most of us are in some way or other unsound physically.* Here and there we meet with an old man who could not remember that ever he was laid aside for a day; but the great mass of us labour under some form or other of infirmity, either in body or mind. Certain bodily maladies, especially those connected with the digestive organs, the liver, and the spleen, are the fruitful fountains of despondency; and, let a man strive as he may against their influence, there will be hours and circumstances in which they will for awhile overcome him. As to mental maladies, is any man altogether sane? Are we not all a little off the balance? Some minds appear to have a gloomy tinge essential to their very individuality; of them it may be said, "Melancholy marked them for her own;" fine minds withal, and ruled by noblest principles, but yet most prone to forget the silver lining, and to remember only the cloud. Such men may sing with the old poet —[46]

> 5 "Our hearts are broke, our harps unstringed be, Our only music's sighs and groans, Our songs are to the tune of lachrymae, We're fretted all to skin and bones."

6 These infirmities may be no detriment to a man's career of special usefulness; they may even have been imposed upon him by divine wisdom as necessary qualifications for his peculiar course of service. Some plants owe their medicinal qualities to the marsh in which they grow; others to the shades in which alone they flourish. There are precious fruits put forth by the moon as well as by the sun. Boats need ballast as well as sail; a drag on the carriage-wheel is no

hindrance when the road runs downhill. Pain has, probably, in some cases developed genius; hunting out the soul which otherwise might have slept like a lion in its den. Had it not been for the broken wing, some might have lost themselves in the clouds, some even of those choice doves who now bear the olive-branch in their mouths and show the way to the ark. But where in body and mind there are predisposing causes to lowness of spirit, it is no marvel if in dark moments the heart succumbs to them; the wonder in many cases is — and if inner lives could be written, men would see it so — how some ministers keep at their work at all, and still wear a smile upon their countenances. Grace has its triumphs still, and patience has its martyrs; martyrs none the less to be honoured because the flames kindle about their spirits rather than their bodies, and their burning is unseen of human eyes. The ministries of Jeremiahs are as acceptable as those of Isaiahs, and even the sullen Jonah is a true prophet of the Lord, as Nineveh felt full well. Despise not the lame, for it is written that they take the prey; but honour those who, being faint, are yet pursuing. The tender-eyed Leah was more fruitful than the beautiful Rachel, and the griefs of Hannah were more divine than the boastings of Peninnah. “Blessed are they that mourn,” said the Man of Sorrows, and let none account them otherwise when their tears are salted with grace. We have the treasure of the gospel in earthen vessels, and if there be a flaw in the vessel here and there, let none wonder.

7 *Our work, when earnestly undertaken, lays us open to attacks in the direction of depression.* Who can bear the weight of souls without sometimes sinking to the dust? Passionate longings after men’s conversion, if not fully satisfied (and when are they?), consume the soul with anxiety and disappointment. To see the hopeful turn aside, the godly

grow cold, professors abusing their privileges, and sinners waxing more bold in sin — are not these sights enough to crush us to the earth? The kingdom comes not as we would, the reverend name is not hallowed as we desire, and for this we must weep. How can we be otherwise than sorrowful, while men believe not our report, and the divine arm is not revealed? All mental work tends to weary and to depress, for much study is a weariness of the flesh; but ours is more than mental work — it is heart work, the labour of our inmost soul. How often, on Lord's-day evenings, do we feel as if life were completely washed out of us! After pouring out our souls over our congregations, we feel like empty earthen pitchers which a child might break. Probably, if we were more like Paul, and watched for souls at a nobler rate, we should know more of what it is to be eaten up by the zeal of the Lord's house. It is our duty and our privilege to exhaust our lives for Jesus. We are not to be living specimens of men in fine preservation, but living *sacrifices,* whose lot is to be consumed; we are to spend and to be spent, not to lay ourselves up in lavender, and nurse our flesh. Such soultravail as that of a faithful minister will bring on occasional seasons of exhaustion, when heart and flesh will fail. Moses' hands grew heavy in intercession, and Paul cried out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Even John the Baptist is thought to have had his fainting fits, and the apostles were once amazed, and were sore afraid.

8 *Our position in the church will also conduce to this.* A minister fully equipped for his work, will usually be a spirit by himself, above, beyond, and apart from others. The most loving of his people cannot enter into his peculiar thoughts, cares, and temptations. In the ranks, men walk shoulder to shoulder, with many comrades, but as the officer rises in rank, men of his standing are fewer in number. There are

many soldiers, few captains, fewer colonels, but only one commander-in-chief. So, in our churches, the man whom the Lord raises as a leader becomes, in the same degree in which he is a superior man, a solitary man. The mountain-tops stand solemnly apart, and talk only with God as he visits their terrible solitudes. Men of God who rise above their fellows into nearer communion with heavenly things, in their weaker moments feel the lack of human sympathy. Like their Lord in Gethsemane, they look in vain for comfort to the disciples sleeping around them; they are shocked at the apathy of their little band of brethren, and return to their secret agony with all the heavier burden pressing upon them, because they have found their dearest companions slumbering. No one knows, but he who has endured it, the solitude of a soul which has outstripped its fellows in zeal for the Lord of hosts: it dares not reveal itself, lest men count it mad; it cannot conceal itself, for a fire burns within its bones: only before the Lord does it find rest. Our Lord's sending out his disciples by two and two manifested that he knew what was in men; but for such a man as Paul, it seems to me that no helpmeet was found; Barnabas, or Silas, or Luke, were hills too low to hold high converse with such a Himalayan summit as the apostle of the Gentiles. This loneliness, which if I mistake not is felt by many of my brethren, is a fertile source of depression; and our ministers' fraternal meeting, and the cultivation of holy intercourse with kindred minds will with God's blessing, help us greatly to escape the snare.

9 There can be little doubt that *sedentary habits* have a tendency to create despondency in some constitutions. Burton, in his "Anatomy of Melancholy," has a chapter upon this cause of sadness; and, quoting from one of the myriad authors whom he lays under contribution, he says — "Students are negligent of their bodies. Other men look to

their tools; a painter will wash his pencils; a smith will look to his hammer, anvil, forge; a husbandman will mend his plough-irons, and grind his hatchet if it be dull; a falconer or huntsman will have an especial care of his hawks, hounds, horses, dogs, etc.; a musician will string and unstring his lute; only scholars neglect that instrument (their brain and spirits I mean) which they daily use. Well saith Lucan, 'See thou twist not the rope so hard that it break.'" To sit long in one posture, poring over a book, or driving a quill, is in itself a taxing of nature; but add to this a badly-ventilated chamber, a body which has long been without muscular exercise, and a heart burdened with many cares, and we have all the elements for preparing a seething cauldron of despair, especially in the dim months of fog —

> [10] "When a blanket wraps the day, When the rotten woodland drips, And the leaf is stamped in clay."

[11] Let a man be naturally as blithe as a bird, he will hardly be able to bear up year after year against such a suicidal process; he will make his study a prison and his books the warders of a gaol, while nature lies outside his window calling him to health and beckoning him to joy. He who forgets the humming of the bees among the heather, the cooing of the wood-pigeons in the forest, the song of birds in the woods, the rippling of rills among the rushes, and the sighing of the wind among the pines, needs not wonder if his heart forgets to sing and his soul grows heavy. A day's breathing of fresh air upon the hills, or a few hours' ramble in the beech woods' umbrageous calm, would sweep the cobwebs out of the brain of scores of our toiling ministers who are now but half alive. A mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind's face, would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is next best.

12 “Heaviest the heart is in a heavy air, Ev’ry wind that rises blows away despair.”

13 The ferns and the rabbits, the streams and the trouts, the fir trees and the squirrels, the primroses and the violets, the farm-yard, the new-mown hay, and the fragrant hops — these are the best medicine for hypochondriacs, the surest tonics for the declining, the best refreshments for the weary. For lack of opportunity, or inclination, these great remedies are neglected, and the student becomes a self-immolated victim.

14 The times most favourable to fits of depression, so far as I have experienced, may be summed up in a brief catalogue. First among them I must mention *the hour of great success.* When at last a long-cherished desire is fulfilled, when God has been glorified greatly by our means, and a great triumph achieved, then we are apt to faint. It might be imagined that amid special favours our soul would soar to heights of ecstasy, and rejoice with joy unspeakable, but it is generally the reverse. The Lord seldom exposes his warriors to the perils of exultation over victory; he knows that few of them can endure such a test, and therefore dashes their cup with bitterness. See Elias after the fire has fallen from heaven, after Baal’s priests have been slaughtered and the rain has deluged the barren land! For him no notes of self-complacent music, no strutting like a conqueror in robes of triumph; he flees from Jezebel, and feeling the revulsion of his intense excitement, he prays that he may die. He who must never see death, yearns after the rest of the grave, even as Caesar, the world’s monarch, in his moments of pain cried like a sick girl. Poor human nature cannot bear such strains as heavenly triumphs bring to it; there must come a reaction. Excess of joy or excitement must be paid for by subsequent depressions. While the trial lasts, the strength is equal to the

emergency; but when it is over, natural weakness claims the right to show itself. Secretly sustained, Jacob can wrestle all night, but he must limp in the morning when the contest is over, lest he boast himself beyond measure. Paul may be caught up to the third heaven, and hear unspeakable things, but a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, must be the inevitable sequel. Men cannot bear unalloyed happiness; even good men are not yet fit to have "their brows with laurel and with myrtle bound," without enduring secret humiliation to keep them in their proper place. Whirled from off our feet by a revival, carried aloft by popularity, exalted by success in soulwinning, we should be as the chaff which the wind driveth away, were it not that the gracious discipline of mercy breaks the ships of our vainglory with a strong east wind, and casts us shipwrecked, naked and forlorn, upon the Rock of Ages.

15 *Before any great achievement,* some measure of the same depression is very usual. Surveying the difficulties before us, our hearts sink within us. The sons of Anak stalk before us, and we are as grasshoppers in our own sight in their presence. The cities of Canaan are walled up to heaven, and who are we that we should hope to capture them? We are ready to cast down our weapons and take to our heels. Nineveh is a great city, and we would flee unto Tarshish sooner than encounter its noisy crowds. Already we look for a ship which may bear us quietly away from the terrible scene, and only a dread of tempest restrains our recreant footsteps. Such was my experience when I first became a pastor in London. My success appalled me; and the thought of the career which it seemed to open up, so far from elating me, cast me into the lowest depth, out of which I uttered my *miserere* and found no room for a *gloria in excelsis.* Who was I that I should continue to lead so great a multitude? I would

betake me to my village obscurity, or emigrate to America, and find a solitary nest in the backwoods, where I might be sufficient for the things which would be demanded of me. It was just then that the curtain was rising upon my lifework, and I dreaded what it might reveal. I hope I was not faithless, but I was timorous and filled with a sense of my own unfitness. I dreaded the work which a gracious providence had prepared for me. I felt myself a mere child, and trembled as I heard the voice which said, “Arise, and thresh the mountains, and make them as chaff.” This depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing a larger blessing for my ministry; the cloud is black before it breaks, and overshadows before it yields its deluge of mercy. Depression has now become to me as a prophet in rough clothing, a John the Baptist, heralding the nearer coming of my Lord’s richer benison. So have far better men found it. The scouring of the vessel has fitted it for the Master’s use. Immersion in suffering has preceded the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Fasting gives an appetite for the banquet. The Lord is revealed in the backside of the desert, while his servant keepeth the sheep and waits in solitary awe. The wilderness is the way to Canaan. The low valley leads to the towering mountain. Defeat prepares for victory. The raven is sent forth before the dove. The darkest hour of the night precedes the daydawn. The mariners go down to the depths, but the next wave makes them mount to the heaven: their soul is melted because of trouble before he bringeth them to their desired haven.

16 *In the midst of a long stretch of unbroken labour, the same affliction* may be looked for. The bow cannot be always bent without fear of breaking. Repose is as needful to the mind as sleep to the body. Our Sabbaths are our days of toil, and if we do not rest upon some other day we shall break down. Even

the earth must lie fallow and have her Sabbaths, and so must we. Hence the wisdom and compassion of our Lord, when he said to his disciples, “Let us go into the desert and rest awhile.” What! when the people are fainting? When the multitudes are like sheep upon the mountains without a shepherd? Does Jesus talk of rest? When Scribes and Pharisees, like grievous wolves, are rending the flock, does he take his followers on an excursion into a quiet resting place? Does some red-hot zealot denounce such atrocious forgetfulness of present and pressing demands? Let him rave in his folly. The Master knows better than to exhaust his servants and quench the light of Israel. Rest time is not waste time. It is economy to gather fresh strength. Look at the mower in the summer’s day, with so much to cut down ere the sun sets. He pauses in his labour — is he a sluggard? He looks for his stone, and begins to draw it up and down his scythe, with “rink-a-tink — rink-a-tink — rink-a-tink.” Is that idle music — is he wasting precious moments? How much he might have mown while he has been ringing out those notes on his scythe! But he is sharpening his tool, and he will do far more when once again he gives his strength to those long sweeps which lay the grass prostrate in rows before him. Even thus a little pause prepares the mind for greater service in the good cause. Fishermen must mend their nets, and we must every now and then repair our mental waste and set our machinery in order for future service. To tug the oar from day to day, like a galley-slave who knows no holidays, suits not mortal men. Mill-streams go on and on for ever, but we must have our pauses and our intervals. Who can help being out of breath when the race is continued without intermission? Even beasts of burden must be turned out to grass occasionally; the very sea pauses at ebb and flood; earth keeps the Sabbath of the wintry months; and man, even

when exalted to be God's ambassador, must rest or faint; must trim his lamp or let it burn low; must recruit his vigour or grow prematurely old. It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less. On, on, on for ever, without recreation, may suit spirits emancipated from this "heavy clay," but while we are in this tabernacle, we must every now and then cry halt and serve the Lord by holy inaction and consecrated leisure. Let no tender conscience doubt the lawfulness of going out of harness for awhile, but learn from the experience of others the necessity and duty of taking timely rest.

17 *One crushing stroke has sometimes laid the minister very low.* The brother most relied upon becomes a traitor. Judas lifts up his heel against the man who trusted him, and the preacher's heart for the moment fails him. We are all too apt to look to an arm of flesh, and from that propensity many of our sorrows arise. Equally overwhelming is the blow when an honoured and beloved member yields to temptation, and disgraces the holy name with which he was named. Anything is better than this. This makes the preacher long for a lodge in some vast wilderness, where he may hide his head for ever, and hear no more the blasphemous jeers of the ungodly. Ten years of toil do not take so much life out of us as we lose in a few hours by Ahithophel the traitor, or Demas the apostate. Strife, also, and division, and slander, and foolish censures, have often laid holy men prostrate, and made them go "as with a sword in their bones." Hard words wound some delicate minds very keenly. Many of the best of ministers, from the very spirituality of their character, are exceedingly sensitive — too sensitive for such a world as this. "A kick that scarce would move a horse would kill a sound divine." By experience the soul is hardened to the rough blows which are inevitable in our warfare; but at first these things utterly

stagger us, and send us to our homes wrapped in a horror of great darkness. The trials of a true minister are not few, and such as are caused by ungrateful professors are harder to bear than the coarsest attacks of avowed enemies. Let no man who looks for ease of mind and seeks the quietude of life enter the ministry; if he does so he will flee from it in disgust.

18 To the lot of few does it fall to pass through such a horror of great darkness as that which fell upon me after the deplorable accident at the Surrey Music Hall. I was pressed beyond measure and out of bounds with an enormous weight of misery. The tumult, the panic, the deaths, were day and night before me, and made life a burden. Then I sang in my sorrow —

> 19 "The tumult of my thoughts Doth but increase my woe, My spirit languisheth, my heart Is desolate and low."

20 From that dream of horror I was awakened in a moment by the gracious application to my soul of the text, "Him hath God the Father exalted." The fact that Jesus is still great, let his servants suffer as they may, piloted me back to calm reason and peace. Should so terrible a calamity overtake any of my brethren, let them both patiently hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God.

21 *When troubles multiply,* and discouragements follow each other in long succession, like Job's messengers, then, too, amid the perturbation of soul occasioned by evil tidings, despondency despoils the heart of all its peace. Constant dropping wears away stones, and the bravest minds feel the fret of repeated afflictions. If a scanty cupboard is rendered a severer trial by the sickness of a wife or the loss of a child, and if ungenerous remarks of hearers are followed by the

opposition of deacons and the coolness of members, then, like Jacob, we are apt to cry, “All these things are against me.” When David returned to Ziklag and found the city burned, goods stolen, wives carried off, and his troops ready to stone him, we read, “he encouraged himself in his God;” and well was it for him that he could do so, for he would then have fainted if he had not believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Accumulated distresses increase each other’s weight; they play into each other’s hands, and, like bands of robbers, ruthlessly destroy our comfort. Wave upon wave is severe work for the strongest swimmer. The place where two seas meet strains the most seaworthy keel. If there were a regulated pause between the buffetings of adversity, the spirit would stand prepared; but when they come suddenly and heavily, like the battering of great hailstones, the pilgrim may well be amazed. The last ounce breaks the camel’s back, and when that last ounce is laid upon us, what wonder if we for awhile are ready to give up the ghost!

22 *This evil will also come upon us, we know not why,* and then it is all the more difficult to drive it away. Causeless depression is not to be reasoned with, nor can David’s harp charm it away by sweet discoursings. As well fight with the mist as with this shapeless, undefinable, yet, all-beclouding hopelessness. One affords himself no pity when in this case, because it seems so unreasonable, and even sinful to be troubled without manifest cause; and yet troubled the man is, even in the very depths of his spirit. If those who laugh at such melancholy did but feel the grief of it for one hour, their laughter would be sobered into compassion. Resolution might, perhaps, shake it off, but where are we to find the resolution, when the whole man is unstrung? The physician and the divine may unite their skill in such cases, and both

find their hands full, and more than full. The iron bolt which so mysteriously fastens the door of hope and holds our spirits in gloomy prison, needs a heavenly hand to push it back; and when that hand is seen we cry with the apostle, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4. It is the God of all consolation who can —

> [23] “With sweet oblivious antidote Cleanse our poor bosoms of that perilous stuff Which weighs upon the heart.”

[24] Simon sinks till Jesus takes him by the hand. The devil within rends and tears the poor child till the word of authority commands him to come out of him. When we are ridden with horrible fears, and weighed down with an intolerable incubus, we need but the Sun of Righteousness to rise, and the evils generated of our darkness are driven away; but nothing short of this will chase away the nightmare of the soul. Timothy Rogers, the author of a treatise on Melancholy, and Simon Browne, the writer of some remarkably sweet hymns, proved in their own cases how unavailing is the help of man if the Lord withdraw the light from the soul.

[25] If it be inquired why the Valley of the Shadow of Death must so often be traversed by the servants of King Jesus, the answer is not far to find. All this is promotive of the Lord’s mode of working, which is summed up in these words — “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.” Instruments shall be used, but their intrinsic weakness shall be clearly manifested; there shall be no division of the glory, no diminishing the honour due to the Great Worker. The man

shall be emptied of self, and then filled with the Holy Ghost. In his own apprehension he shall be like a sere leaf driven of the tempest, and then shall be strengthened into a brazen wall against the enemies of truth. To hide pride from the worker is the great difficulty. Uninterrupted success and unfading joy in it would be more than our weak heads could bear. Our wine must needs be mixed with water, lest it turn our brains. My witness is, that those Who are honoured of their Lord in public, have usually to endure a secret chastening, or to carry a peculiar cross, lest by any means they exalt themselves, and fall into the snare of the devil. How constantly the Lord calls Ezekiel “Son of man”! Amid his soarings into the superlative splendors, just when with eye undimmed he is strengthened to gaze into the excellent glory, the word “Son of man” falls on his ears, sobering the heart which else might have been intoxicated with the honour conferred upon it. Such humbling but salutary messages our depressions whisper in our ears; they tell us in a manner not to be mistaken that we are but men, frail, feeble, apt to faint.

[26] By all the castings down of his servants God is glorified, for they are led to magnify him when again he sets them on their feet, and even while prostrate in the dust their faith yields him praise. They speak all the more sweetly of his faithfulness, and are the more firmly established in his love. Such mature men as some elderly preachers are, could scarcely have been produced if they had not been emptied from vessel to vessel, and made to see their own emptiness and the vanity of all things round about them. Glory be to God for the furnace, the hammer, and the file. Heaven shall be all the fuller of bliss because we have been filled with anguish here below, and earth shall be better tilled because of our training in the school of adversity.

[27] The lesson of wisdom is, *be not dismayed by soul-trouble.* Count it no strange thing, but a part of ordinary ministerial experience. Should the power of depression be more than ordinary, think not that all is over with your usefulness. Cast not away your confidence, for it hath great recompense of reward. Even if the enemy's foot be on your neck, expect to rise and overthrow him. Cast the burden of the present, along with the sin of the past and the fear of the future, upon the Lord, who forsaketh not his saints. Live by the day — ay, by the hour. Put no trust in frames and feelings. Care more for a grain of faith than a ton of excitement. Trust in God alone, and lean not on the reeds of human help. Be not surprised when friends fail you: it is a failing world. Never count upon immutability in man: inconstancy you may reckon upon without fear of disappointment. The disciples of Jesus forsook him; be not amazed if your adherents wander away to other teachers: as they were not your all when with you, all is not gone from you with their departure. Serve God with all your might while the candle is burning, and then when it goes out for a season, you will have the less to regret. Be content to be nothing, for that is what you are. When your own emptiness is painfully forced upon your consciousness, chide yourself that you ever dreamed of being full, except in the Lord. Set small store by present rewards; be grateful for earnests by the way, but look for the recompensing joy hereafter. Continue, with double earnestness to serve your Lord when no visible result is before you. Any simpleton can follow the narrow path in the light: faith's rare wisdom enables us to march on in the dark with infallible accuracy, since she places her hand in that of her Great Guide. Between this and heaven there may be rougher weather yet, but it is all provided for by our covenant Head. In nothing let us be turned aside from the path which the divine call has urged us

to pursue. Come fair or come foul, the pulpit is our watch-tower, and the ministry our warfare; be it ours, when we cannot see the face of our God, to trust UNDER THE SHADOW OF HIS WINGS.

# Lecture 12. The Minister's Ordinary Conversation

1 Our subject is to be the minister’s common conversation when he mingles with men in general, and is supposed to be quite at his ease. How shall he order his speech among his fellow-men? First and foremost, let me say, *let him give himself no ministerial airs,* but avoid everything which is stilted, official, fussy, and pretentious. “The Son of Man” is a noble title; it was given to Ezekiel, and to a greater than he: let not the ambassador of heaven be other than a son of man. In fact, let him remember that the more simple and unaffected he is, the more closely will he resemble that child-man, the holy child Jesus. There is such a thing as trying to be too much a minister, and becoming too little a man; though the more of a true man you are, the more truly will you be what a servant of the Lord should be. Schoolmasters and ministers have generally an appearance peculiarly their own; in the wrong sense, they “are not as other men are.” They are too often speckled birds, looking as if they were not at home among the other inhabitants of the country; but awkward and peculiar. When I have seen a flamingo gravely stalking along, an owl blinking in the shade, or a stork demurely lost in thought, I have been irresistibly led to remember some of my dignified brethren of the teaching and preaching fraternity, who are so marvellously proper at all times that they are just a shade amusing. Their very respectable, stilted, dignified, important, self-restrained manner is easily acquired; but is it worth acquiring?

2 Theodore Hook once stepped up to a gentleman who was parading the street with great pomposity, and said to him, “Sir, are you not a person of great importance?” and one has

felt half inclined to do the same with certain brethren of the cloth. I know brethren who, from head to foot, in garb, tone, manner, necktie, and boots, are so utterly *parsonic* that no particle of manhood is visible. One young sprig of divinity must needs go through the streets in a gown, and another of the High Church order has recorded it in the newspapers with much complacency that he traversed Switzerland and Italy, wearing in all places his biretta; few boys would have been so proud of a fool's cap. None of us are likely to go as far as that in our apparel; but we may do the like by our mannerism. Some men appear to have a white cravat twisted round their souls, their manhood is throttled with that starched rag. Certain brethren maintain an air of superiority which they think impressive, but which is simply offensive, and eminently opposed to their pretensions as followers of the lowly Jesus. The proud Duke of Somerset intimated his commands to his servants by signs, not condescending to speak to such base beings; his children never sat down in his presence, and when he slept in the afternoon one of his daughters stood on each side of him during his august slumbers. When proud Somersets get into the ministry, they affect dignity in other ways almost equally absurd. "Stand by, I am holier than thou," is written across their foreheads.

[3] A well-known minister was once rebuked by a sublime brother for his indulgence in a certain luxury, and the expense was made a great argument. "Well, well," he replied, "there may be something in that; but remember, I do not spend half so much upon my weakness as you do in starch." That is the article I am deprecating, that dreadful ministerial starch. If you have indulged in it, I Would earnestly advise you to "go and wash in Jordan seven times," and get it out of you, every particle of it. I am persuaded that one reason why our working-men so universally keep clear of ministers is

because they abhor their artificial and unmanly ways. If they saw us, in the pulpit and out of it, acting like real men, and speaking naturally, like honest men, they would come around us. Baxter's remark still holds good: "The want of a familiar tone and expression is a great fault in most of our deliveries, and that which we should be very careful to amend." The vice of the ministry is that ministers will *parsonificate* the gospel. We must have humanity along with our divinity if we would win the masses. Everybody can see through affectations, and people are not likely to be taken in by them. Fling away your stilts, brethren, and walk on your feet; doff your ecclesiasticism, and array yourselves in truth.

4 *Still, a minister, wherever he is, is a minister, and should recollect that he is on duty.* A policeman or a soldier may be off duty, but a minister never is. Even in our recreations we should still pursue the great object of our lives; for we are called to be diligent "in season and out of season." There is no position in which we may be placed but the Lord may come with the question, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" and we ought to be able at once to answer, "I have something to do for thee even here, and I am trying to do it." The bow, of course, must be at times unstrung, or else it will lose its elasticity; but there is no need to cut the string. I am speaking at this time of the minister in times of relaxation; and I say that even then he should conduct himself as the ambassador of God, and seize opportunities of doing good: this will not mar his rest, but sanctify it. A minister should be like a certain chamber which I saw at Beaulieu, in the New Forest, in which a cobweb is never seen. It is a large lumber-room and is never swept; yet no spider ever defiles it with the emblems of neglect. It is roofed with chestnut, and for some reason, I know not what, spiders will not come near that wood by the year together. The same thing was

mentioned to me in the corridors of Winchester School: I was told, “No spiders ever come here.” Our minds should be equally clear of idle habits.

5 On our public rests for porters in the City of London you may read the words, “Rest, but do not loiter;” and they contain advice worthy of our attention. I do not call the *dolce far niente* laziness; there is a sweet doing of nothing which is just the finest medicine in the world for a jaded mind. When the mind gets fatigued and out of order, to rest it is no more idleness than sleep is idleness; and no man is called lazy for sleeping the proper time. It is far better to be industriously asleep than lazily awake. Be ready to do good even in your resting times and in your leisure hours; and so be really a minister, and there will be no need for you to proclaim that you are so.

6 *The Christian minister out of the pulpit should be a sociable man.* He is not sent into the world to be a hermit, or a monk of La Trappe. It is not his vocation to stand on a pillar all day, above his fellow-men, like that hairbrained Simon Stylites of olden time. You are not to warble from the top of a tree, like an invisible nightingale; but to be a man among men, saying to them, “I also am as you are in all that relates to man.” Salt is of no use in the box; it must be rubbed into the meat; and our personal influence must penetrate and season society. Keep aloof from others, and how can you benefit them? Our Master went to a wedding, and ate bread with publicans and sinners, and yet was far more pure than those sanctimonious Pharisees, whose glory was that they were separate from their fellow-men. Some ministers need to be told that they are of the same species as their hearers. It is a remarkable fact, but we may as well state it, that bishops, canons, archdeacons, prebendaries, rural deans, rectors, vicars, and

even archbishops, are only men after all; and God has not railed off a holy corner of the earth to serve as a chancel for them, to abide therein by themselves.

[7] It would not be amiss if there could be a revival of holy talk in the churchyard and the meeting-yard. I like to see the big yew-trees outside our ancient churches with seats all round them. They seem to say: “Sit down here, neighbour, and talk upon the sermon; here comes the pastor, he will join us, and we shall have a pleasant, holy chat.” It is not every preacher we would care to talk with; but there are some whom one would give a fortune to converse with for an hour. I love a minister whose face invites me to make him my friend — a man upon whose doorstep you read, “Salve,” *“Welcome;”* and feel that there is no need of that Pompeian warning, “Cave Canem,” *“Beware of the dog.”* Give me the man around whom the children come, like flies around a honey-pot: they are first-class judges of a good man. When Solomon was tried by the Queen of Sheba, as to his wisdom, the rabbis tell us that she brought some artificial flowers with her, beautifully made and delicately scented, so as to be facsimiles of real flowers. She asked Solomon to discover which were artificial and which were real. The wise man bade his servants open the window, and when the bees came in they flew at once to the natural flowers, and cared nothing for the artificial. So you will find that children have their instincts, and discover very speedily who is their friend, and depend upon it the children’s friend is one who will be worth knowing. Have a good word to say to each and every member of the family — the big boys, and the young ladies, and the little girls, and everybody. No one knows what a smile and a hearty sentence may do. A man who is to do much with men must love them, and feel at home with them. An individual who has no geniality about him had better be an undertaker, and bury

the dead, for he will never succeed in influencing the living. I have met somewhere with the observation that to be a popular preacher one must have bowels. I fear that the observation was meant as a mild criticism upon the bulk to which certain brethren have attained: but there is truth in it. A man must have a great heart if he would have a great congregation. His heart should be as capacious as those noble harbors along our coast, which contain sea-room for a fleet. When a man has a large, loving heart, men go to him as ships to a haven, and feel at peace when they have anchored under the lee of his friendship. Such a man is hearty in private as well as in public; his blood is not cold and fishy, but he is warm as your own fireside. No pride and selfishness chill you when you approach him; he has his doors all open to receive you, and you are at home with him at once. Such men I would persuade you to be, every one of you. *The Christian minister should also be very cheerful.* I don't believe in going about like certain monks whom I saw in Rome, who salute each other in sepulchral tones, and convey the pleasant information, "Brother, we must die;" to which lively salutation each lively brother of the order replies, "Yes, brother, we must die." I was glad to be assured upon such good authority that all these lazy fellows are about to die; upon the whole, it is about the best thing they can do; but till that event occurs, they might use some more comfortable form of salutation.

8 No doubt there are some people who will be impressed by the very solemn appearance of ministers. I have heard of one who felt convinced that there must be something in the Roman Catholic religion, from the extremely starved and pinched appearance of a certain ecclesiastic. "Look," said he, "how the man is worn to a skeleton by his daily fastings and nightly vigils! How he must mortify his flesh!" Now, the

probabilities are that the emaciated priest was laboring under some internal disease, which he would have been heartily glad to be rid of, and it was not conquest of appetite, but failure in digestion, which had so reduced him; or, possibly a troubled conscience, which made him fret himself down to the light weights. Certainly, I have never met with a text which mentions prominence of bone as an evidence of grace. If so, “The Living Skeleton” should have been exhibited, not merely as a natural curiosity, but as the standard of virtue. Some of the biggest rogues in the world have been as mortified in appearance as if they had lived on locusts and wild honey. It is a very vulgar error to suppose that a melancholy countenance is the index of a gracious heart. I commend cheerfulness to all who would win souls; not levity and frothiness, but a genial, happy spirit. There are more flies caught with honey than with vinegar, and there will be more souls led to heaven by a man who wears heaven in his face than by one who bears Tartarus in his looks.

9 Young ministers, and, indeed, all others, when they are in company, should *take care not to engross all the conversation.* They are quite qualified to do so, no doubt; I mean from their capacity to instruct, and readiness of utterance; but they must remember that people do not care to be perpetually instructed; they like to take a turn in the conversation themselves. Nothing pleases some people so much as to let them talk, and it may be for their good to let them be pleased. I spent an hour one evening with a person who did me the honour to say that he found me a very charming companion, and most instructive in conversation, yet I do not hesitate to confess that I said, scarcely anything at all, but allowed him to have the talk to himself. By exercising patience I gained his good opinion, and an opportunity to address him on other occasions. A man has no

more right at table to talk all than to eat all. We are not to think ourselves Sir Oracle, before whom no dog must open his mouth. No; let all the company contribute of their stores, and they will think all the better of the godly words with which you try to season the discourse.

10 There are some companies into which you will go, especially when you are first settled, where everybody will be awed by the majesty of your presence, and people will be invited because the new minister is to be there. Such a position reminds me of the choicest statuary in the Vatican. A little room is screened off, a curtain is drawn, and lo! before you stands the great Apollo! If it be your trying lot to be the Apollo of the little party, put an end to the nonsense. If I were the Apollo, I should like to step right off the pedestal and shake hands all round, and you had better do the same; for sooner or later the fuss they make about you will come to an end, and the wisest course is to end it yourself. Hero-worship is a kind of idolatry, and must not be encouraged. Heroes do well when they, like the apostles at Lystra, are horrified at the honours done to them, and run in among the people crying, “Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you.” Ministers will not have to do it long; for their foolish admirers are very apt to turn round upon them, and if they do not stone them nearly to death, they will go as far as they dare in unkindness and contempt.

11 While I say, “Do not talk all, and assume an importance which is mere imposture;” still, *do not be a dummy.* People will form their estimate of you and your ministry by what they see of you in private as well as by your public deliverances. Many young men have ruined themselves in the pulpit by being indiscreet in the parlour, and have lost all hope of doing good by their stupidity or frivolity in company. Don’t be

an inanimate log. At Antwerp Fair, among many curiosities advertised by huge paintings and big drums, I observed a booth containing “a great wonder” to be seen for a penny a head; it was *a petrified man.* I did not expend the amount required for admission, for I had seen so many petrified men for nothing, both in and out of the pulpit — lifeless, careless, destitute of common sense, and altogether inert though occupied with the weightiest business which man could undertake. *Try to turn the conversation to profitable use.* Be sociable and cheerful and all that, but labour to accomplish something. Why should you sow the wind, or plough a rock? Consider yourself, after all, as being very much responsible for the conversation which goes on where you are; for such is the esteem in which you will usually be held, that you will be the helmsman of the conversation. Therefore, steer it into a good channel. Do this without roughness or force. Keep the points of the line in good order, and the train will run on to your rails without a jerk. Be ready to seize opportunities adroitly, and lead on imperceptibly in the desired track. If your heart is in it and your wits are awake, this will be easy enough, especially if you breathe a prayer for guidance.

12 I shall never forget the manner in which a thirsty individual once begged of me upon Clapham Common. I saw him with a very large truck, in which he was carrying an extremely small parcel, and I wondered why he had not put the parcel into his pocket, and left the machine at home. I said, “It looks odd to see, so large a truck for such a small load.” He stopped, and looking me seriously in the face, he said, “Yes, sir, it is a very odd thing; but, do you know, I have met with an odder thing than that this very day. I’ve been about, working and sweating all this ‘ere blessed day, and till now I haven’t met a single gentleman that looked as if he’d give me a pint of beer, till I saw you.” I considered that turn

of the conversation very neatly managed, and we, with a far better subject upon our minds, ought to be equally able to introduce the topic upon which our heart is set. There was an ease in the man's manner which I envied, for I did not find it quite so simple a matter to introduce my own topic to his notice; yet if I had been thinking as much about how I could do him good as he had upon how to obtain a drink, I feel sure I should have succeeded in reaching my point. If by any means we may save some, we must, like our Lord, talk at table to good purpose — yes, and on the margin of the well, and by the road, and on the sea-shore, and in the house, and in the field. To be a holy talker for Jesus might be almost as fruitful an office as to be a faithful preacher. Aim at excellence in both exercises, and if the Holy Spirit's aid be called in, you will attain your desire.

[13] Here, perhaps, I may insert a canon, which nevertheless I believe to be quite needless, in reference to each one of the honourable brethren whom I am now addressing. *Do not frequent rich men's tables to gain their countenance, and never make yourself a sort of general hanger-on at tea-parties and entertainments.* Who are you that you should be dancing attendance upon this wealthy man and the other, when the Lord's poor, his sick people and his wandering sheep require you? To sacrifice the study to the parlour is criminal. To be a tout for your church, and waylay people at their homes to draw them to fill your pews, is a degradation to which no man should submit. To see ministers of different sects fluttering round a wealthy man, like vultures round a dead camel, is sickening. Deliciously sarcastic was that famous letter "from an old and beloved minister to his dear son" upon his entrance into the ministry, the following extract from which hits our present point. It is said to have been copied from the *Smellfungus Gazette,* but I suspect our

friend Paxton Hood knows all about its authorship: — “Keep also a watchful eye on all likely persons, especially wealthy or influential, who may come to your town; call upon them, and attempt to win them over by the devotions of the drawing-room to your cause. Thus you may most efficiently serve the Master’s interests. People need looking after, and the result of a long experience goes to confirm my convictions long cherished, that the power of the pulpit is trifling compared with the power of the parlour. We must imitate and sanctify, by the word of God and prayer, the exercises of the Jesuits. They succeeded not by the pulpit so much as by the parlour. In the parlour you can whisper — you can meet people on all their little personal private ideas. The pulpit is a very unpleasant place; of course it is the great power of God, and so on, but it is the parlour that tells, and a minister has not the same chance of success if he be a good preacher as if he is a perfect gentleman; nor in cultivated society has any man a legitimate prospect of success if he is not, whatever he may be, a gentleman. I have always admired Lord Shaftesbury’s character of St. Paul in his ‘Characteristics’ — that he was a fine gentleman. And I would say to you, be a gentleman. Not that I need to say so, but am persuaded that only in this way can we hope for the conversion of our growing, wealthy middle classes. We must show that our religion is the religion of good sense and good taste; that we disapprove of strong excitements and strong stimulants; and oh, my dear boy, if you would be useful, often in your closet make it a matter of earnest prayer that you may be proper. If I were asked what is your first duty, *be proper;* and your second, *be proper;* and your third, *be proper.”* Those who remember a class of preachers who flourished fifty years ago will see the keenness of the satire in this extract. The evil is greatly mitigated now; in fact, I fear

we may be drifting into another extreme. In all probability, sensible conversation will sometimes drift into controversy, and here many a good man runs upon a snag. *The sensible minister will be particularly gentle in argument.* He, above all men, should not make the mistake of fancying that there is force in temper, and power in speaking angrily. A heathen who stood in a crowd in Calcutta, listening to a missionary disputing with a Brahmin, said he knew which was right though he did not understand the language — he knew that he was in the wrong who lost his temper first. For the most part, that is a very accurate way of judging. Try to avoid debating with people. State your opinion and let them state theirs. If you see that a stick is crooked, and you want people to see how crooked it is, lay a straight rod down beside it; that will be quite enough. But if you are drawn into controversy, use very hard arguments and very soft words. Frequently you cannot convince a man by tugging at his reason, but you can persuade him by winning his affections. The other day I had the misery to need a pair of new boots, and though I bade the fellow make them as large as canoes, I had to labour fearfully to get them on. With a pair of boot-hooks I toiled like the men on board the vessel with Jonah, but all in vain. Just then my friend put in my way a little French chalk, and the work was done in a moment. Wonderfully coaxing was that French chalk. Gentlemen, always carry a little French chalk with you into society, a neat packet of Christian persuasiveness, and you will soon discover the virtues of it.

14 And lastly, with all his amiability, *the minister should be firm for his principles, and bold to avow and defend them in all companies.* When a fair opportunity occurs, or he has managed to create one, let him not be slow to make use of it. Strong in his principles, earnest in his tone, and affectionate

in heart, let him speak out like a man and thank God for the privilege. There need be no reticence — there should be none. The maddest romances of Spiritualists, the wildest dreams of Utopian reformers, the silliest chit-chat of the town, and the vainest nonsense of the frivolous world, demand a hearing and get it. And shall not Christ be heard? Shall his message of love remain untold, for fear we should be charged with intrusion or accused of cant? Is religion to be tabooed — the best and noblest of all themes forbidden? If this be the rule of any society, we will not comply with it. If we cannot break it down, we will leave the society to itself, as men desert a house smitten with leprosy. We cannot consent to be gagged. There is no reason why we should be. We will go to no place where we cannot take our Master with us. While others take liberty to sin, we shall not renounce our liberty to rebuke and warn them.

15 Wisely used, our common conversation may be a potent means for good. Trains of thought may be started by a single sentence which may lead to the conversion of persons whom our sermons have never reached. The method of button-holing people, or bringing the truth before them individually, has been greatly successful: this is another subject, and can hardly come under the head of Common Conversation; but we will close by saying that it is to be hoped that we shall never, in our ordinary talk, any more than in the pulpit, be looked upon as nice sort of persons, whose business it is to make things agreeable all round, and who never by any possibility cause uneasiness to any one, however ungodly their lives may be. Such persons go in and out among the families of their hearers, and make merry with them, when they ought to be mourning over them. They sit down at their tables and feast at their ease, when they ought to be warning them to flee from the wrath to come. They are

like that American alarm I have heard of, which was warranted not to wake you if you did not wish it to do so.

16 Be it ours to sow, not only on the honest and good soil, but on the rock and on the highway, and at the last great day to reap a glad harvest. May the bread which we cast upon the waters in odd times and strange occasions be found again after many days.

# Lecture 13. To Workers with Slender Apparatus

[1] What are those ministers to do who have a slender apparatus? By a slender apparatus I mean that they have few books, and little or no means wherewith to purchase more. This is a state of things which ought not to exist in any case; the churches ought to take care that it should be rendered impossible. Up to the highest measure of their ability they should furnish their minister, not only with the food which is needful to sustain the life of his body, but with mental nutriment, so that his soul may not be starved. A good library should be looked upon as an indispensable part of church furniture; and the deacons, whose business it is "to serve tables," will be wise if, without neglecting the table of the Lord, or of the poor, and without diminishing the supplies of the minister's dinner-table, they give an eye to his study-table, and keep it supplied with new works and standard books in fair abundance. It would be money well laid out, and would be productive far beyond expectation. Instead of waxing eloquent upon the declining power of the pulpit, leading men in the church should use the legitimate means for improving its power, by supplying the preacher with food for thought. Put the whip into the manger is my advice to all grumblers.

[2] Some years ago I tried to induce our churches to have ministers' libraries as a matter of course, and some few thoughtful people saw the value of the suggestion, and commenced carrying it out. With much pleasure I have seen here and there the shelves provided, and a few volumes placed upon them. I earnestly wish that such a beginning had been made everywhere; but, alas! I fear that a long

succession of starveling ministers will alone arouse the miserly to the conviction that parsimony with a minister is false economy. Those churches which cannot afford a liberal stipend should make some amends by founding a library as a permanent part of their establishment; and, by making additions to it from year to year, it would soon become very valuable. My venerable grandfather's manse had in it a collection of very valuable ancient Puritanic volumes, which had descended from minister to minister: well do I remember certain ponderous tomes, whose chief interest to me lay in their curious initial letters, adorned with pelicans, griffins, little boys at play, or patriarchs at work. It may be objected that the books would be lost through change of users, but I would run the risk of that; and trustees, with a little care over the catalogue, could keep the libraries as securely as they keep the pews and pulpit.

[3] If this scheme be not adopted, let another and simpler one be tried; let all the subscribers towards the preacher's support add ten percent or more to their subscriptions, expressly to provide food for the minister's brain. They would get back what they gave in the improved sermons they would hear. If some little annual income could be secured to poor ministers, to be sacredly spent in books, it would be a God-send to them, and an incalculable blessing to the community. Sensible persons do not expect a garden to yield them herbs from year to year unless they enrich the soil; they do not expect a locomotive to work without fuel, or even an ox or an ass to labour without, food; let them, therefore, give over expecting to receive instructive sermons from men who are shut out of the storehouse of knowledge by their inability to purchase books.

4 But the subject is, what are men to do who have no stores, who have no church library, and no allowance made them to provide books? Let us remark at once that, if these men succeed, greater honour is due to them than to those who have large appliances.

5 Quintin Matsys is said to have had all his tools except his hammer and file taken from him by his fellow workmen, and to have produced his famous well-cover without them; so much the more honour to him! Great credit is due to those workers for God who have done great things without helpful tools. Their labour would have been greatly lightened if they had possessed them; but what they have done is the more wonderful. At the present International Exhibition at Kensington, Mr. Buckmaster's School of Cookery is mainly admired because he produces such savoury dishes from unpromising material; from a handful of bones and a little macaroni he serves up royal dainties. If he had all the materials employed in French cookery, and used them all, every person would say, "Well, anybody could do that;" but when he shows you scraps of meat and bones, and tells you that he bought them at the butcher's for a few pence, and that he can make out of them a dinner for a family of five or six, all the good wives open their eyes, and wonder how on earth it can be done; and when he passes round his dish, and they taste how delicious it is, they are full of admiration. Work away, then, poor brother, for you may yet succeed in doing great things in your ministry, and your welcome of "Well done, good and faithful servant," will be all the more emphatic because you laboured under serious difficulties.

6 If a man can purchase but very few books, my first advice to him would be, *let him purchase the very best.* If he cannot spend much, let him spend well. The best will always be the

cheapest. Leave mere dilutions and attenuations to those who can afford such luxuries. Do not buy milk and water, but get condensed milk, and put what water you like to it yourself. This age is full of word-spinners — professional book-makers, who hammer a grain of matter so thin that it will cover a five-acre sheet of paper; these men have their uses, as gold-beaters have, but they are of no use to you. Farmers on our coast used to cart wagon-loads of seaweed, and put them upon their land; the heaviest part was the water: now they dry the weeds, and save a world of labour and expense, Don't buy thin soup; purchase the essence of meat. Get much in little. Prefer books which abound in what James Hamilton used to call "Bibline," or the essence of books. You require accurate, condensed, reliable, standard books, and should make sure that you get them. In preparing his "Horae Biblicae Quotidianae," which is an admirable comment upon the Bible, Dr. Chalmers used only the "Concordance," the "Pictorial Bible," "Poole's Synopsis," "Matthew Henry's Commentary," and "Robinson's Researches in Palestine." "These are the books I use," said he to a friend; "all that is Biblical is there; I have to do with nothing besides in my Biblical study." This shows that those who have unlimited stores at their command, yet find a few standard books sufficient. If Dr. Chalmers were now alive, he would probably take Thomson's "Land and the Book," instead of "Robinson's Researches," and give up the "Pictorial Bible" for Kitto's "Daily Bible Illustrations;" at least I should recommend the alteration to most men. This is clear evidence that some most eminent preachers have found that they could do better with few books than with many when studying the Scriptures, and this, I take it, is our main business.

7 Forego, then, without regret, the many books which, like poor Hodge's razors, of famous memory, "are made to sell,"

and do sell those who buy them, as well as themselves. Matthew Henry's Commentary having been mentioned, I venture to say that no better investment can be made, by any minister, than that peerless exposition. Get it, if you sell your coat to buy it.

8 The next rule I shall lay down is, *master those books you have.* Read them thoroughly. Bathe in them until they saturate you. Read and re-read them, masticate them, and digest them. Let them go into your very self. Peruse a good book several times, and make notes and analyses of it. A student will find that his mental constitution is more affected by one book thoroughly mastered than by twenty books which he has merely skimmed, lapping at them, as the classic proverb puts it; "As the dogs drink of Nilus." Little learning and much pride come of hasty reading. Books may be piled on the brain till it cannot work. Some men are disabled from thinking by their putting meditation away for the sake of much reading. They gorge themselves with book-matter, and become mentally dyspeptic.

9 Books *on* the brain cause disease. Get the book *into* the brain, and you will grow. In D'Israeli's "Curiosities of Literature" there is an invective of Lucian upon those men who boast of possessing large libraries, which they either never read or never profit by. He begins by comparing such a person to a pilot who has never learned the art of navigation, or a cripple who wears embroidered slippers but cannot stand upright in them. Then he exclaims, "Why do you buy so many books? You have no hair, and you purchase a comb; you are blind, and you must need buy a fine mirror; you are deaf, and you will have the best musical instrument!" — a very well deserved rebuke to those who think that the possession of books will secure them learning. A measure of that

temptation happens to us all; for do we not feel wiser after we have spent an hour or two in a bookseller's shop? A man might as well think himself richer for having inspected the vaults of the Bank of England. In reading books let your motto be, "Much, not many." Think as well as read, and keep the thinking always proportionate to the reading, and your small library will not be a great misfortune.

10 There is very much sound sense in the remark of a writer in the *Quarterly Review* many years back. "Give us the *one* dear book, cheaply picked from the stall by the price of the dinner, thumbed and dog-eared, cracked in the back and broken in the corner, noted on the fly-leaf and scrawled on the margin, sullied and scorched, torn and worn, smoothed in the pocket and grimed on the hearth, damped by the grass and dusted among the cinders, over which you have dreamed in the grove and dozed before the embers, but read again, again, and again, from cover to cover. It is by this one book, and its three or four single successors, that more real cultivation has been imparted than by all the myriads which bear down the mile-long, bulging, bending shelves of the Bodleian."

11 But if you feel you must have more books, *I recommend to you a little judicious borrowing.* You will most likely have some friends who have books, and who will be kind enough to let you use them for a time; and I specially advise you, in order to borrow again, to return whatsoever is lent, promptly, and in good condition. I hope there is not so much need that I should say much about returning books, as there would have been a few months ago, for I have lately met with a statement by a clergyman, which has very much raised my opinion of human nature; for he declares that he has a personal acquaintance with three gentlemen who have actually

returned borrowed umbrellas! I am sorry to say that he moves in a more favoured circle than I do, for I have personal acquaintance with several young men who have borrowed books and never returned them. The other day, a certain minister, who had lent me *five* books, which I have used for two years or more, wrote to me a note to request the return of *three* of them. To his surprise, he had them back by the next “Parcels’ Delivery,” and two others which he had forgotten. I had carefully kept a list of books borrowed, and, therefore, could make a complete return to the owner. I am sure he did not expect their prompt arrival, for he wrote me a letter of mingled astonishment and gratitude, and when I visit his study again, I feel sure I shall be welcome to another loan. You know the rhyme which has been written in many a man’s book —

> [12] If thou art borrowed by a friend, Right welcome shall he be To read, to study, not to lend, But to return to me. Not that imparted knowledge doth Diminish learning’s store, But books I find when once they’re lent, Return to me no more.”

[13] Sir Walter Scott used to say that his friends might be very indifferent accountants, but he was sure they were good “book-keepers.” Some have even had to go the length of the scholar who, when asked to lend a book, sent word by the servant that he would not let the book go out of his chamber, but that the gentleman who sought the loan might come and sit there and read as long as he liked. The rejoinder was unexpected but complete, when, his fire being slow to burn, he sent to the same person to borrow a pair of bellows, and received for answer that the owner would not lend the bellows out of his own chamber, but the gentleman might come and blow there as long as he liked. Judicious borrowing

may furnish you with much reading, but remember the man's ax-head in the Scriptures, and be careful of what you borrow. "The wicked borroweth and payeth not again."

14 In case the famine of books should be sore in the land, *there is one book which you all have, and that is your Bible;* and a minister with his Bible is like David with his sling and stone, fully equipped for the fray. No man may say that he has no well to draw from while the Scriptures are within reach. In the Bible we have a perfect library, and he who studies it thoroughly will be a better scholar than if he had devoured the Alexandrian Library entire. To understand the Bible should be our ambition; we should be familiar with it, as familiar as the housewife with her needle, the merchant with his ledger, the mariner with his ship. We ought to know its general run, the contents of each book, the details of its histories, its doctrines, its precepts, and everything about it. Erasmus, speaking of Jerome, asks, "Who but he ever learned by heart the whole Scripture? or imbibed, or meditated on it as he did?" It is said of Witsius, a learned Dutchman, author of the famous work on "The Covenants," that he also was able, not merely to repeat every word of Scripture in the original tongues, but to give the context, and the criticisms of the best authors; and I have heard of an old minister in Lancashire, that he was "a walking Concordance," and could either give you chapter and verse for any passage quoted, or *vice versa,* could correctly give the words when the place was mentioned. That may have been a feat of memory, but the study needful to it must have been highly profitable. I do not say that you must aspire to that; but if you could, it would be well worth the gaining. It was one of the fortes of that singular genius, William Huntington (whom I will not now either condemn or commend), that in preaching he incessantly quoted Holy Scripture, and was accustomed,

whenever he did so, to give the chapter and the verse; and in order to show his independence of the printed book, it was his uncomely habit to remove the Bible from the front of the pulpit.

15 A man who has learned not merely the letter of the Bible, but its inner spirit, will be no mean man, whatever deficiencies he may labour under. You know the old proverb, *“Cave ab homine unius libri” — Beware of the man of one book.* He is a terrible antagonist. A man who has his Bible at his fingers’ ends and in his heart’s core is a champion in our Israel; you cannot compete with him: you may have an armory of weapons, but his Scriptural knowledge will overcome you; for it is a sword like that of Goliath, of which David said, “There is none like it.” The gracious William Romaine, I believe, in the latter part of his life, put away all his books and read nothing at all but his Bible. He was a scholarly man, yet he was monopolized by the one Book, and was made mighty by it. If we are driven to do the same by necessity, let us recollect that some have done it by choice, and let us not bemoan our lot, for the Scriptures will be sweeter than honey to our taste, and will make us “wiser than the ancients.” We shall never be short of holy matter if we are continually studying the inspired volume; nay, it is not only matter that we shall find there, but illustration too; for the Bible is its own best illustrator. If you want anecdote, simile, allegory, or parable, turn to the sacred page. Scriptural truth never looks more lovely than when she is adorned with jewels from her own treasury. I have lately been reading the Books of the Kings and the Chronicles, and I have become enamored of them; they are as full of divine instruction as the Psalms or Prophets, if read with opened eyes. I think it was Ambrose who used to say, “I adore the infinity of Scripture.” I hear that same voice which sounded

in the ears of Augustine, concerning the Book of God, *"Tolle, lege"* — "Take, read." It may be you will dwell in retirement in some village, where you will find no one to converse with who is above your own level, and where you will meet with very few books worth your reading; then read and meditate in the law of the Lord both day and night, and you shall be "as a tree planted by the rivers of water." Make the Bible the man of your right hand, the companion of every hour, and you will have little reason to lament your slender equipment in inferior things.

16 I would earnestly impress upon you the truth, that a man who is short of apparatus can *make up for it by much thought.* Thinking is better than possessing books. Thinking is an exercise of the soul which both develops its powers and educates them. A little girl was once asked whether she knew what her soul was, and, to the surprise of all, she said, "Sir, my soul is my think." If this be correct, some persons have very little soul. Without thinking, reading cannot benefit the mind, but it may delude the man into the idea that he is growing wise. Books are a sort of idol to some men. As the image with the Roman Catholic is intended to make him think of Christ, and in effect keeps him from Christ, so books are intended to make men think, but are often a hindrance to thought. When George Fox took a sharp knife and cut out for himself a pair of leather breeches, and, having done with the fashions of society, hid himself in a hollow tree, to think by the month together, he was growing into a man of thought before whom men of books speedily beat a retreat. What a flutter he made, not only among the Poperies, and Prelacies, and Presbyteries of his day, but also among the well-read proprieties of Dissent. He swept no end of cobwebs out of the sky, and gave the bookworms a hard time of it. Thought is the backbone of study, and if more ministers would think, what a

blessing it would be! Only, we want men who will think about the revealed truth of God, and not dreamers who evolve religions out of their own consciousness. Now-a-days we are pestered with a set of fellows who must needs stand on their heads and think with their feet. Romancing is their notion of meditation. Instead of considering revealed truth, they excogitate a mess of their own, in which error, and nonsense, and conceit appear in about equal parts; and they call this broth "modern thought." We want men who will try to think straight, and yet think deep, because they think God's thoughts. Far be it from me to urge you to imitate the boastful thinkers of this age, who empty their meeting-houses, and then glory that they preach to the cultivated and intellectual. It is miserable cant. Earnest thought upon the things which are assuredly believed among us is quite another matter, and to that I urge you. Personally I owe much to many hours, and even days, spent alone, under an old oak-tree, by the river Medway. Happening to be somewhat indisposed at the time when I was leaving school, I was allowed considerable leisure, and, armed with an excellent fishing-rod, I caught a few small fishes, and enjoyed many day-dreams, intermingled with searchings of heart, and much ruminating of knowledge acquired. If boys would think, it would be well to give them less class work and more opportunity for thought. All cram and no digestion makes flesh destitute of muscle, and this is even more deplorable mentally than physically. If your people are not numerous enough to supply you with a library, they will make fewer demands on your time, and, in having time for meditation, you will be even better off than your brethren with many books and little space for quiet contemplation.

17 Without books *a man may learn much by keeping his eyes open.* Current history, incidents which transpire under his

own nose, events recorded in the newspaper, matters of common talk — he may learn from them all. The difference between eyes and no eyes is wonderful. If you have no books to try your eyes, keep them open wherever you go, and you will find something worth looking at. Can you not learn from nature? Every flower is waiting to teach you. “Consider the lilies,” and learn from the roses. Not only may you go to the ant, but every living thing offers itself for your instruction. There is a voice in every gale, and a lesson in every grain of dust it bears. Sermons glisten in the morning on every blade of grass, and homilies fly by you as the sere leaves fall from the trees. A forest is a library, a cornfield is a volume of philosophy, the rock is a history, and the river at its base a poem. Go, thou who hast thine eyes opened, and find lessons of wisdom everywhere, in heaven above, in the earth beneath, and in the waters under the earth. Books are poor things compared with these.

18 Moreover, however scant your libraries, *you can study yourself*. This is a mysterious volume, the major part of which you have not read. If any man thinks that he knows himself thoroughly, he deceives himself; for the most difficult book you will ever read is your own heart. I said to a doubter the other day, who seemed to be wandering in a maze, “Well, really I cannot understand you; but I am not vexed, for I never could understand myself;” and I certainly meant what I said. Watch the twists and turns and singularities of your own mind, and the strangeness of your own experience; the depravity of your heart, and the work of divine grace; your tendency to sin, and your capacity for holiness; how akin you are to a devil, and yet how allied to God himself! Note how wisely you can act when taught of God, and how foolishly you behave when left to yourself. You will find the study of your heart to be of immense importance to you as a watcher over

the souls of others. A man's own experience should be to him the laboratory in which he tests the medicines which he prescribes for others. Even your own faults and failures will instruct you if you bring them to the Lord. Absolutely sinless men would be unable to sympathize with imperfect men and women. Study the Lord's dealings with your own souls, and you will know more of his ways with others.

19 *Read other men;* they are as instructive as books. Suppose there should come up to one of our great hospitals a young student so poor that he could not purchase surgical books; it would certainly be a great detriment to him; but if he had the run of the hospital, if he saw operations performed, and watched cases from day to day, I should not wonder but what he might turn out as skillful a surgeon as his more favoured companions. His observation would show him what books alone could not; and as he stood by to see the removal of a limb, the binding up of a wound, or the tying up of an artery, he might, at any rate, pick up enough practical surgery to be of immense service to him. Now, much that a minister needs to know he must learn by actual observation. All wise pastors have walked the hospitals spiritually, and dealt with inquirers, hypocrites, backsliders, the despairing, and the presumptuous. A man who has had a sound practical experience in the things of God himself, and watched the hearts of his fellows, other things being equal, will be a far more useful man than he who knows only what he has read. It is a great pity for a man to be a college Jack-a-dandy, who comes out of the classroom as out of a band-box, into a world he has never seen before, to deal with men he has never observed, and handle facts with which he has never come into personal contact. "Not a novice," says the apostle; and it is possible to be a novice and yet a very accomplished scholar, a classic, a mathematician, and a theoretical

theologian. We should have practical familiarity with men's souls; and if we have much of it, the fewness of our books will be a light affliction. "But," says an inquiring brother, "how can you read a man?" I have heard of a gentleman of whom it was said that you could never stop five minutes under an archway with him but what he would teach you something. That was a wise man; but he would be a wiser man still who would never stop five minutes under an archway without learning somewhat from other people. Wise men can learn as much from a fool as from a philosopher. A fool is a splendid book to read from, because every leaf is open before you; there is a dash of the comic in the style, which entices you to read on, and if you gather nothing else, you are warned not to publish your own folly.

[20] *Learn from experienced saints.* What deep things some of them can teach to us younger men! What instances God's poor people can narrate of the Lord's providential appearances for them; how they glory in his upholding grace and his faithfulness to his covenant! What fresh light they often shed upon the promises, revealing meanings hidden from the carnally wise, but made clear to simple hearts! Know you not that many of the promises are written with invisible ink, and must be held to the fire of affliction before the letters will show themselves? Tried spirits are grand instructors for ministers.

[21] *As for the inquirer, how much is to be gathered from him!* I have seen very much of my own stupidity while in conversation with seeking souls. I have been baffled by a poor lad while trying to bring him to the Saviour; I thought I had him fast, but he has eluded me again and again with perverse ingenuity of unbelief. Sometimes inquirers who are really anxious surprise me with their singular skill in battling

against hope; their arguments are endless and their difficulties countless. They put us to a *non plus* again and again. The grace of God at last enables us to bring them to the light, but not until we have seen our own inefficiency. In the strange perversities of unbelief, the singular constructions and misconstructions which the desponding put upon their feelings and upon scriptural statements, you will often find a world of instruction. I would sooner give a young man an hour with inquirers and the mentally depressed than a week in the best of our classes, so far as practical training for the pastorate is concerned.

22 Once more, *be much at death-beds;* they are illuminated books. There shall you read the very poetry of our religion, and learn the secrets thereof. What splendid gems are washed up by the waves of Jordan! What fair flowers grow on its banks! The everlasting fountains in the glory-land throw their spray aloft, and the dew-drops fall on this side the narrow stream! I have heard humble men and women, in their departing hours, talk as though they were inspired, uttering strange words, aglow with supernal glory. These they learned from no lips beneath the moon; they must have heard them while sitting in the suburbs of the New Jerusalem. God whispers them in their ears amid their pain and weakness; and then they tell us a little of what the Spirit has revealed. I will part with all my books, if I may see the Lord’s Elijahs mount their chariots of fire.

23 Is not this enough upon our subject? If you desire more, it is time I remember the sage saying, that it is better to send away an audience longing than loathing, and, therefore, Adieu!

# Notes

**1.** Bishop Reynolds. Spurgeon’s note identifies the theologian quoted here. ↑

**2.** The 1875 printing gives Job 1:2. The challenge described is in Job 1:11; compare 2:5. The inaccurate reference is retained from the original. ↑

**3.** The words about God being sanctified in those who draw near correspond to Leviticus 10:3. The historical printing cites Isaiah 52:11, which concerns the purity of those bearing the Lord’s vessels. Its reference is retained. ↑

**4.** The contrast between the apostles’ acts and their sermons is rhetorical. Acts contains speeches by Peter, Stephen, Paul, and others; Spurgeon’s words should not be taken as a literal denial of this. ↑

**5.** Feeble-mind, Ready-to-halt, and Great-heart are allegorical characters in Part II of John Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress. Spurgeon uses their names as images of spiritual weakness and strength. ↑

**6.** The Tarpeian Rock was a cliff on Rome’s Capitoline Hill from which condemned people were thrown. Here it is an image of an elevated position becoming a place of destruction. ↑

**7.** Amasa was a commander killed by Joab. His body, lying in the road, caused passing soldiers to stop (2 Samuel 20:9–13). ↑

**8.** Biographical Recollections of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M. By J. M. Morris, 1833. ↑

**9.** We should hesitate to speak precisely in this manner. The gifts must be somewhat apparent before the desire should be encouraged. Still in the main we agree with Mr. Newton. ↑

**10.** Editorial note. The original names Titus here. The exhortation to make full proof of the ministry is addressed to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:5). The author’s wording is retained. ↑

**11.** Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M’Cheyne, page 61. This is one of the best and most profitable volumes ever published. Every minister should read it often. ↑

**12.** Joseph Alleine: His Companions and Times. By CHAS. STANFORD. An admirable biography. ↑

**13.** The life of the Rev. David Brainerd, Missionary to the Indians. By JONATHAN EDWARDS, A.M., President of the College of New Jersey. London, 1818. ↑

**14.** A Memoir of the Rev. Henry Martyn, B.D., Chaplain to the Hon. East India Company. By Rev. JOHN SARGENT, M.A., Rector of Lavington. 1855. ↑

**15.** Flecknoe. ↑

**16.** "Denique sine monitore, quia de pectore oramus." Tertulliani Apologet c. 30. ↑

**17.** "Ὅση δύναμις αὐτῷ." Justin Martyr, Apol. I, c. 68. p. 270. Ed. Otto. ↑

**18.** A Discourse concerning Liturgies and their Imposition. Vol. 15. OWEN'S Works, Goold's Edition. ↑

**19.** It is but fair to admit, and we do so with pleasure, that of late years this fault has grown more and more rare. ↑

**20.** Editorial note for the Russian edition. Biblical numbering follows the English original in this discussion. The Russian renderings preserve the English wording where the argument depends on particular expressions and additions. ↑

**21.** Editorial note. The 1875 edition prints "Heb. i. 13". The quotation is Habakkuk 1:13, as the preceding sentence also indicates. The original erroneous reference is retained. ↑

**22.** Editorial note. The phrase "old wives' fables" occurs in Paul's First Epistle to Timothy (4:7); the original attributes it to Peter. The original wording is retained. ↑

**23.** Editorial note for the Russian edition. Terra firma means "firm ground"; Dominus illuminatio mea, "The Lord is my light"; Aristoteles meae tenebrae, "Aristotle is my darkness". The Latin phrases are retained. ↑

**24.** "A moment's reflection upon the eternal consequences that may issue from the preaching of a single sermon in the name of the great Author and Finisher of faith, should be sufficient to effectually rebuke the haphazard carelessness and the reckless self-conceit with which texts are sometimes taken and treated, and to impress every true minister of the gospel with the

duty of choosing his texts in such a frame of mind as may harmonize with the divine guidance as often as he may perform that important task." — DANIEL P. KIDDER. "A Treatise on Homiletics, designed to Illustrate the True Theory and Practice of Preaching the Gospel." ↑

**25.** "I was led into a profitable strain of meditation, on our good Shepherd's care of his flock, by seeing some lambs exposed to the cold, and a poor sheep perishing for want of care." — ANDREW FULLER'S DIARY. ↑

**26.** Editorial note for the Russian edition. The wordplay depends on the shared English name James: James I of England, James VI of Scotland, and James 1:6. ↑

**27.** Editorial note. Bene orasse est bene studuisse means "To have prayed well is to have studied well". ↑

**28.** "Allegorical preaching debases the taste, and fetters the understanding both of preacher and hearers." — ADAM CLARKE. Wesley's rule is better: "Be sparing in allegorizing or spiritualizing." ↑

**29.** What, for instance, but mere fastidiousness or worse, could make M. Athanase Coquerel write such criticisms as these: "For us Christians the universal and supreme priesthood of the Son is not at all commended by likening it to the pontificate of Melchisedek; and our pilgrimage towards the heavenly country under the leadership of Jesus very little resembles that of Israel towards the promised land under that of Joshua, notwithstanding the identity of the names."!!!..... "A great number of texts lend themselves with a marvellous facility to this interpretation, which is not one. 'Lord, save us, we perish!' cried the apostles, when the tempest upon the lake of Galilee threatened to engulf their barque. 'Wilt thou be made whole?' said Christ to the paralytic of Bethesda. We feel how easy it is to allegorize these words. They have been so a thousand times; and perhaps no preacher, especially in a day of poverty of studied texts, of matured plans, refuses himself permission to employ this resource, so much the more seducing as it is extremely easy. I composed a long sermon upon the invitation of Moses to his father-in-law, Hobab, or Jethro. Numbers 10:29. 'We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you; come thou with us,' The division was already made, by commencing with an historical exordium. This place, it is heaven. The Lord alone gives it us for our country. The true believer says to each of his brethren, 'Come with us.' .... And I have still to forgive myself for having written and learned by heart thirty pages in quarto upon this theme." If M. Coquerel were responsible for no greater fault than this, he would be a far better divine than he is at present. ↑

**30.** Might not this be accurately applied to hearers filled with such nonsense? ↑

**31.** South is not always decent, and had he been a Dissenter he would have been howled down for vulgarity. His genius is indisputable, but he might have washed his mouth. ↑

**32.** Men destitute of fancy and humour will deny this, even as the eagles might dispute the lawfulness of hawking for flies, yet as swallows are created for this last purpose, even so to some men the exercise of a godly imagination is a main design of their constitution ↑

**33.** SAMUEL MATHER still remains a standard authority in this lore. We commend his work to the student. ↑

**34.** Editorial note. “Ten pieces” is the reading of the original edition and has been retained. Judges 19:29 specifies twelve pieces. ↑

**35.** Editorial note. The original does read “seventh.” The words “thou shalt not covet … wife,” however, belong to Exodus 20:17, the tenth commandment in the author’s Protestant numbering; the seventh is “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). The repeated designation “third caution” has likewise been retained from the original. ↑

**36.** “Take care of anything awkward or affected, either in your gesture, phrase, or pronunciation.” — JOHN WESLEY. ↑

**37.** A popular Treatise on the “Causes and Prevention of Diseases,” by SAMUEL FENWICK, M.D., Volume I. “Diseases of the Throat and Lungs.” JOHN CHURCHILL, New Burlington Street. ↑

**38.** When Johnson was asked whether Burke resembled Tullius Cicero, “No Sir,” was the reply, “he resembles Edmund Burke.” ↑

**39.** A young preacher, desirous of improving his style, wrote to Jacob Gruber for advice. He had contracted the habit of prolonging his words, especially when under excitement. The old gentleman sent him the following laconic reply. “Dear — ah! brother — ah! — When — ah you — ah go — ah to — ah preach — ah, take — ah care — ah you — ah do not — ah say — ah ah — ah! — Yours — ah, JACOB — AH GRUBER — AH” ↑

**40.** Editorial note. This lecture’s claims about throat disease, bronchitis, colds, scarves, pepper, and astringents convey the views and personal experience of its nineteenth-century author. They are retained as historical

text, not as contemporary medical guidance. Spurgeon himself expressly states that he is not qualified to practise medicine. ↑

**41.** Mr. Wesley thought it needful to say, “Sing no hymns of your own composing.” The habit of giving out rhymes of their own concoction was rife among the divines of his day: it is to be hoped it is now utterly extinct. ↑

**42.** “There are men organized to speak well, as there are birds organized to sing well, bees to make honey, and beavers to build.” — M. BAUTAIN. ↑

**43.** “At first my chief solicitude used to be what I should find to say? I hope it is now rather that I may not speak in vain. For the Lord hath not sent me here to acquire the character of a ready speaker, but to win souls to Christ and to edify his people, Often when I begin I am at a loss how I shall proceed, but one thing insensibly offers after another, and in general the best and most useful parts of my sermon occur de novo, while I am preaching.” — JOHN NEWTON. Letters to a Student in Divinity. ↑

**44.** Editorial note. The claims about eyes becoming dependent on spectacles and the body on walking sticks or crutches form a historical analogy used by the author. They are not contemporary medical guidance and do not imply that prescribed vision correction or mobility aids should be discontinued. ↑

**45.** Ecclesiasticus 40:1, 2, 3, 4, 5–8. ↑

**46.** Thomas Washbourne. ↑

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