

subjects of contemplation distinctly marked out for us:

- "I. The irreparable past.
- "II. The available future."

2. A second quality in effectiveness in preaching is found in the striking character of the subject thus naturally drawn from the text.

However natural and easy, and however ingenious, it may be worthless if it is merely commonplace. It should strike and fix the attention, and thus open the mind to the hospitable reception of the truth to be presented. In this respect many themes of sermons fail—the preacher being content with stating some commonplace of theology, or restating the words of his text instead of a distinctive theme. Often, too—and that with the so-called great masters no less than with ordinary preachers—the rhetorical form of the statement overshadows and obscures or extinguishes the thought or truth. Many years ago a distinguished Scotch elder in the Presbyterian Church attended a meeting of the General Assembly for the purpose of hearing several prominent preachers who had been suggested for the pastorate of the vacant church in New York city of which he was an elder. When asked what he thought of their preaching, he said, "There was too much poother for the ba'!" The striking feature essential to effectiveness should be in the thought, the truth, rather than in the rhetoric or the "start and stare theatric."

Robertson in the sermon under consideration shows rare skill in this regard. What intelligent hearer could escape his sharp, ringing statements. "The irreparable past"; "The available future"? One instinctively feels that there must be a fulness of apposite meaning in them.

3. But the main element in effectiveness is to be attained by bringing out this fulness of meaning in connection with the life-and-death questions that weigh upon the soul.

Fulness of thought is not enough. One of the fullest sermons we ever

heard and by one of the greatest theologians of this age—was the only sermon that ever put us to sleep. Its abstract statements were admirable, but they were out of all connection with concrete reality, with life.

Just here was one of the secrets of Robertson's power. Naturally and inevitably the living, stirring thoughts come sweeping into and over the soul. This is the case in the sermon referred to.

I. After fixing clearly upon the principle, that "the past is irreparable, and after a certain moment waking will do no good," see how he proceeds "to give illustrations of this principle":

"It is true, first of all, with respect to *time* that is gone by." The solemn inheritance, the priceless opportunities, the high destinies, having once slipped away, are gone forever.

"Again, this principle of the irreparable past holds good with respect to preparing for temptation." The opportunities for laying up spiritual strength for the stress of conflict, once missed, return no more!

"Once again this principle is true in another respect. Opportunities of doing good do not come back." And how the ghosts of these lost opportunities are made to haunt the unfaithful soul!

"Lastly, this principle applies to a misspent youth." How the opportunities and possibilities and mistakes of youth are swept in upon the soul to rouse it to immediate action, bringing the transition to the second point!

He passes thus, secondly, to "the available future":

"Wake to the opportunities that yet remain. Ten years of life—five years—one year—say you have only that—will you sleep that away because you have already slept too long? Eternity is crying out to you louder and louder as you near its brink, Rise, be going: count your resources: learn what you are not fit for, and give up wishing for it: learn what you can do, and do it with the energy of a man. That is the great lesson of this passage. But now consider it a little more closely.

"Christ impress two things on His Apostles' minds: