

farmer who knows the nature of fertilizers and the distinction between grains may be just as intelligent as the preacher who is at home in doctrinal definitions. And what are illustrations for but to translate the preacher's thought into the dialect of his hearers? To interpret from one unknown tongue into another unknown tongue is a gratuitous labor; and this is what he would be likely to do who should try to explain theological doctrines to a congregation of farmers by using illustrations drawn from the realm of physics or mathematics. We may heartily commend the wisdom of an eminent Oxford professor as bearing on this point. He had been invited to preach to an exceedingly rural congregation in a country retreat where he was spending a few weeks. Having selected his text, John iii. 14, "As Moses lifted up the serpent," etc., it occurred to him to find out how generally the words would be understood. He discovered to his surprise that very few whom he questioned knew the meaning of the word "serpent," though all were familiar with the word "snake." Therefore he put on a bold face and preached the following Sunday on the text, "As Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness." If such treatment might seem to vulgarize a precious text, this were a slight consideration if only it was thereby popularized. For how humiliating it is, when one has done his best in the pulpit, to discover that he has been misunderstood or not understood by the mass of his hearers; doubly so if in illuminating his subject by some carefully selected metaphor he finds that he has been only darkening counsel thereby. We remember a college friend who, in a literary performance proudly flourished the illustration, borrowed, if we remember rightly, from Campbell's Rhetoric: "A circumlocution, like a torpedo, numbs everything it touches." He afterward had the melancholy satisfaction of being told of the delight of a plain hearer over this apt and vivid illustration, which hearer, supposing that the simile had been borrowed from the realm of pyrotechnics, instead of that of natural history, discoursed with great enthusiasm on its effectiveness, describing the lighting of the fuse, the whizzing through the air, and the certainly benumbing effect upon any human being whom the torpedo should chance to strike. If our thought should ever be above our hearers' heads, by all means let not our parables be so.

On the other hand, let us be careful that, through some unperceived defect in our illustration, a thoughtful listener may not turn it against us. We have been greatly impressed with the tactics of dissenting hearers in this particular. Just because our simile is forcible and telling, look out that some one does not find a vulnerable point in it through which he can bring confusion to our arguments. Dr. Holmes's illustration is a brilliant one. "The mind of the bigot is like the pupil of the eye; the more light you pour upon it the more it contracts." Capital; but what if some shrewd hearer were to answer: "Yes, and what is the harm if it does contract? This is its way of adjusting itself to its work of clear seeing, even as a blacksmith's arm contracts its muscles to deal a heavier blow."