

and literature it is the fault of overstatement.

The earnest sincere soul will be careful to limit itself to the enclosures of truth. After the vehement and lavish declarations of their affection for their father from her shallow sisters, pure, true Cordelia would simply say: "I love your majesty according to my bond, nor more nor less."

The temptation to voice more than is in the heart is very strong, and at times very plausible and deceptive. It is one of the greatest dangers of the pulpit. The consciousness that the transcendent truths with which he is dealing demand commensurate utterance leads the preacher to adopt, not infrequently, a tone and language surpassing his own experience. He endeavours to express what he thinks he ought to feel rather than what he really does feel; the result is the creation of that atmosphere of spiritual extravagance which is so repellent to the thoughtful and sincere.

Hardly less insidious is the same temptation to extravagance of expression which meets the author. In description, in argument, in theory, in appeal, he is moved by a natural disposition to overstate the case. Dean Church, in his admirable address on Bishop Butler, says of him: "We feel in every page and every word the law that writer and thinker has imposed on himself, not only to say nothing for show or effect, but to say nothing that he has not done his best to make clear to himself, nothing that goes a shade beyond what he thinks and feels; he is never tempted to sacrifice exactness to a flourish or an epigram. A qualm comes over the ordinary writer as he reads Butler, when he thinks how often heat or prejudice, or lazy fear of trouble, or the supposed necessities of a cause, or conscious incapacity for thinking out thoroughly a difficult subject,

have led him to say something different from what he felt authorized to say by his own clear perceptions, and to veil his deficiencies by fine words, by slurring over or exaggerating. If only as a lesson in truth—truth in thought and expression—Butler is worth studying. He is a writer who, if there is any reason for it, always *understates* his case; and he is a writer, too, from whom we learn the power and force, in an argument, of understatement, the suggestion which it carries with it both of truthfulness and care, of strength and reserve."* The language of power is that which is "fit and fair and simple and sufficient."†

The moral obligations which attach to the use of language are not recognized and estimated at their full value. It was a severe but not an unjust application of moral law which Jesus made when He said: "By thy words shalt thou be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned." Whoever assumes the office of preacher, teacher, or author puts himself under amenability to that standard of judgment. "Words, words, words" are not to be carelessly traded with, flippantly or inconsiderately employed. Moral responsibility is involved in their use.

But excessive expression is not the only fault in the way of a correct representation of truth. It is due (2) to the contrasted fault of inadequacy, insufficiency of expression. This, too, is morally reprehensible. When one takes it upon himself to express truth, whether in form or color, speech or literature, he is bound to give it a form in some sense adequate to its nature. Defective expression is as blameworthy as excessive; understatement is as wrong as overstatement. The artist in his portrayal of nature, if he fails to catch expression,

* Pascal and other sermons, p. 30.

† Robert Browning. One Word More.