

"The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
But swollen with wind."

Now I do not say that the best and most faithful of preachers may not sometimes, under the forecast shadow of a Sunday morning, be at a loss for a subject; but it ought to be a rare experience, and when it occurs I would advise him to seek an exchange of pulpits or to preach an old sermon. If the experience be habitual, it would be better for the preacher to select some other calling, especially as in the ministry he will have "no continuing city." I have known men of this sort whose single sermons sounded so well that they could always readily obtain a settlement, but whose successive ministries seemed to require for their frequent close the transfer in the hymnal from funeral to parochial occasions of the hymn:—

"How short a course our friend has run!"

On the other hand, I would say, Never preach on a subject simply because for the time being it has a strong hold on your own mind and heart; nay, not even though it be an intimately and intensely religious subject. I heard it said not long ago of a minister that one could always tell from his sermon what book he had last read; but it would be strange if his last book always furnished matter of edification for his hearers. I could name men who are always interested and absorbed in the deepest and highest themes appertaining to divine realities, and who never preach a sermon that is not full of profound thought and feeling, who yet, while more than satisfying the elect few of their hearers, fail to interest and impress the average mind and heart, and deplete their congregations by discourses of transcending merit, which only those on their own high plane can understand and appreciate. Steep and rugged paths may lead to the best feeding-ground; but the greater part of the flock will prefer thinner pasturage which they can reach by less arduous climbing.

But I would say at the same time, Never preach what you do not feel. Preach only truths that you have found precious, duties that you deem sacred, spiritual experiences which you have verified. True, you may have to take cognizance of much that has not entered into your own life, especially of sins, of which if you could talk as an expert, though a penitent, the pulpit is not your place. But even here you can draw very near the sinner and the tempted, though from the adverse side, in the sympathy of one conscious of the possibilities of evil which he might have realized but for the shielding providence and the guiding Spirit of God; and again, not on the adverse side, as so justly chargeable, if not with overt guilt, with omissions and shortcomings, as to have craved and learned the blessedness of him whose sins are forgiven.

Preach, I would say, always out of the fulness of your own mind and soul; but put into your sermons only such of your own thought