

EDITORIAL SECTION.

SERMONIC CRITICISM.

Abstruse versus Doctrinal.

THE confusion of abstruse and learnedly expressed sermons with doctrinal sermons has no doubt done much to discredit the latter. Their difference may be illustrated by the treatment by different persons of the opening verses of the Gospel according to John: "In the beginning was the Word," etc.

Here is one treatment:

The Word which was in the beginning, a testimony—

(1) To the eternal Personality as the ground of all things;

(2) To the eternal Spirit-Light as the law of all things;

(3) To the eternal Love as the kernel of all things;

(4) To eternal Life as the life of all things.

Here is a second treatment:

The three great words concerning Christ: "In the beginning was the Word."

(1) In the beginning was *the Word*; the divine nature of Christ;

(2) In the beginning *was* the Word; the eternity of Christ;

(3) "*In the beginning was* the Word;" the eternal operation and generation of Christ.

Here is a third treatment, that of Dr. Philip Schaff:

The transcendent glory of Christ.

(1) His eternity (against Arianism): "*In the beginning was* the Word."

(2) His distinct personality (against Sabellianism): "The Word was *with* [in intimate personal intercommunion with] God."

(3) His essential divinity (against Socinianism and Rationalism): "And the Word was *God*."

The third treatment furnishes three plain, clear statements in such form that the doctrines embodied in them can be brought out clearly in contrast with the fundamental errors to which they are opposed. The contrasted error is a most important adjunct in this case.

In the second treatment the textual statement is admirable; but beyond that everything becomes more abstruse all the way to the end, where "the eternal operation and generation of Christ" would daze any hearer except a theological professor trained to Ger-

man methods of thought and expression. Moreover, the concrete element in contrasted errors is not taken advantage of, and in the third head could not well be made use of, as the statement is so abstruse that the contrasted error would be hard to find and formulate.

The first treatment is so abstruse and metaphysical as to be beyond the range of any mind not trained to indistinct and speculative methods, and for the average hearer might about as well be stated in Sanscrit.

Stale Texts and Treatment.

THE preacher makes a great mistake who always takes the old texts of the Bible and treats them in the same old threadbare way. The Bible is so rich and varied in its presentation of truth that there is no reason why the preacher should pursue this humdrum method. Moreover, the method is fatal to preaching; for as soon as the text and subject are stated the average deacon settles down to pleasant dreams of the preacher's well-known orthodoxy, and the average hearer to quiet practical or business meditations of his own, letting the sermon "go in at one ear and out at the other."

All this may be avoided by using the requisite amount of brain-labor in studying the Scriptures and in presenting the results of that study. A new and fresh theme, so evidently in the old text that it fastens the attention at once, makes the old text much more effective than any new text in lodging the truth in the hearer's mind.

Take as an illustration 1 Timothy 1: 15, 16: "This is a faithful saying," etc. Everybody has heard it preached from times without number, always in pretty much the same way, and often perhaps by much abler preachers than the one who last takes it up. The announcement of text and theme puts the audience to sleep. But let the preacher give out as his theme: "The salvation of the greatest sinner of all time, and the divine reason for it," and proceed to bring out the real meaning of the text and the one so often ignored. The attention of every hearer will be the more thoroughly aroused and the more intently fixed just because of the old text.