

Gray's "Elegy"—a piece of perfect work—the labor, to speak freely, of eight years. Edgar Poe has himself led us behind the scenes into the workshop of his dim, mysterious "Raven," assuring us that it, by no means came into existence at a nod, or its wild and haunting music depending upon the favor of the clouds or wind, some dark, tempestuous night, and yet these two poems are perfect of their kind—the best of what to man is given—as good as they would have been had they been composed under the *furor* of one frenzied hour and, withal, perfectly natural. In both, as was said of Irving's Lyceum Theatre, "The art that conceals art is over all." The old Greeks called the poet the *poietes*, or maker. We do not deny the fact of genius; but genius without toil and patience is like the horse as nature bestowed him, wild upon the prairies. In all ages mankind has owed more to the latter than to the former. Art means skill, and he that would become skillful, from the circus boy to the painter of the Vatican, must labor and persevere. Many times ere he becomes perfect, he must follow Ovid dealing with his first poems, *Emendaturis ignibus dedi*. Ovid tells us that although in his youth he could not speak without talking poetry, yet he gave his earlier efforts to the flames to correct. And of the contemporaries of Horace, one boasted that he wrote two hundred verses a day, while his rival only produced two. Now nearly two thousand years have passed, and time has pronounced for the one and not for the other. Horace may still claim his *Non Omnis Moriar*, while probably the verses of the more fecund songster did not survive the loss of the accompaniment of his own fiddle. It is only by art and man's device that the diamond exists to serve and beautify the world. It is rescued from being a mere clod.

Now, let us regard a sermon as a work of art, and accordingly as a field for the exercise of labor and application, and whose success will infallibly be greater or less according to the amount of *time* spent upon it. Upon this question of Time, says an eminent writer on homiletics—one whose sermons were masterly specimens of the sacred art of preaching, "Some of the first sermons of a young man may, with advantage, receive the thought and labor of weeks and even months, instead of days." President Porter, of Yale College, in writing of Dr. Lyman Beecher says that "he often spent *two weeks* on a sermon, and," he adds, "it was this painstaking, this thoroughness, this patient working over and working up his material that made his sermons models of strength and perfectness, and effectiveness for all time."

I think that the tax upon newly ordained men is often tremendous. Undoubtedly the first year is the most trying, apart from the view of the impending examination for priest's orders, for most young clergymen seem held by the delusion that at their ordination they promised always to preach their own sermons, and that their people will tolerate no other, and so they try to produce regularly two sermons a week, which is disastrous to themselves in more ways than one, and also to the congregation. Two or three discourses per month would be ample. In order to meet the deficiency, let a young man copy printed sermons, and, having rehearsed and studied them, let him announce from the pulpit the name of the author, and then proceed to

deliver them as his own. The act becomes perfectly graceful if the author's name is given out—it is only common justice to do it—and then, moreover, no painful misunderstandings can arise. It is better to copy out than to take a book into the pulpit, which looks slovenly. Also, it is unkind, if not dishonest, to change and alter what another has printed as his best. If you observe what you consider defects in another's work, *your own* compositions are the place to avoid them. It is a mistake to think that your people will object; however excellent your own may be, they will rather *welcome* a discourse by another man, as they would occasionally a fresh preacher. "How many discourses do you think a minister can get up in a week?" was once asked of Robert Hall. "If he is a deep thinker and condenser, one sermon," was the reply; "If he is an ordinary, average man, two sermons; if he is an ass, he will produce half-a-dozen."

What would be the glories of a sermon on which a hundred hours had honestly been spent, which had been six times re-written! I think that if such an one ever came into being, it would not be too much to say that it might be repeated once a year in every parish a man might minister in. Yes, if only in this, a good sermon pays—that it will bear *repetition*. I know an intelligent and fairly educated man, who heard the same sermon twice on a Sunday. The clergyman with whom he was travelling (now I believe deceased) had intended to give it also at the third station, but hesitated on account of his companion. The latter, on learning this, begged that he would not consider him, since, for his part, he would enjoy it again. This settled the matter, and in his own words, "My friend enjoyed that sermon more the third time even than the first time." And, we ask, how is it *possible or natural* that the people should be able in twenty or twenty-five minutes to come into *full possession* of what it cost *you*, say fifteen hours to put together? I believe that in cases where a pastor's discourses have continuously failed to interest or arouse—idealess and dull, and exercising principally (after George Herbert) the virtue of patience in them that hear—when all history and biography, when all the natural world, when one's own personal experience in the past and daily passing events in the world around, when the Bible itself, are full of interest, replete with striking memories and may all contribute to illuminate his subject; in these days of many books and cheap, good church papers, gleaning the earth over, and laying it week by week ever fresh and varied at his feet, doing half the work for him, by all of which he may illustrate and enliven, make real and profitable every subject he is called to treat—that in such cases it will mostly be found that *time* has "failed" the man, through pressure of other duties, or else that he has failed to make good use of his time, and can blame no one but himself. If anything must "go," it should not be reading. As the *Church Times* said recently, "It is of much more importance that the parish priest should preach useful sermons and hold good classes for further instruction, than that he should keep the accounts of the penny bank, or preside at the choir practice." Further it adds, "But in point of fact, it is bad distribution of time, rather than actual lack of time, which makes a conflict of duties apparent. It is an old and true saying, that only busy people have ever time to do anything, and it is ridiculous to allege that an ordinary small country parish makes such demands on its incumbent's time that he has no leisure for reading."