

profuse illustration often weakened the power of the sermon; and yet the great Master Teacher Himself spoke with the illustration of parables. Our Lord's method of teaching was a recognition of the fact that with the majority of persons the perceptive faculties are stronger than the reflective. With most listeners incidents have a much more powerful effect than argument.

The very large number of books of illustration, and the ready sale of such books, as well as of sermons which are full of illustrations prove how acceptable such a method of instruction is found to be; but it is very necessary that anecdote and illustration should be used sparingly. They may be derived from books, but they should come from the speaker's lips as though they were the result either of personal experience or of actual reading and study. We are familiar with the story of the congregation which sent a deputation to wait upon their pastor with the request that he would purchase a new book of anecdotes. Incidents taken from the actual ministerial life of the preacher are always the most telling, and listeners are quick to discern whether the story told is derived from personal experience, or whether it is merely worked up for the occasion. "Papa," said the little girl, "was that a true story, or only preaching?"

It is on record that Daniel Webster said that the most eloquent sermon he ever heard was from an aged minister, who began his discourse with the very telling words, "A man can only die once." Of course the sermon was an "eloquent" one for three reasons. Firstly, the statement was an aphorism. Secondly, the aged minister was clearly within sight of the goal of death himself. Thirdly, the subject of death was always an interesting one to the great American orator, of whom it is recorded that he studied the circumstances of his own death and watched its approach with intense interest. These three conditions combined would serve to make *any* sermon "eloquent,"

for they are the favorable conditions of the sower, the seed, and the ground which make preaching effective. This is clearly demonstrated in "the parable of the four kinds of ground," as spoken by our Lord; and it is notable that while most people find fault with the pulpit, our Lord found fault with the congregation. The fault was neither with the sower nor with the seed, but with the ground.

The best book of illustrations which a clergyman can possess is what is called "a commonplace book," collected, tabulated, and indexed, and of such incidents as can be gathered in the daily experiences of life and in the reading of the study. When the great Bishop Wilberforce died, it was found that his library contained hundreds of such volumes. He had commenced even before his ordination to collect, tabulate, and index incidents, facts, anecdotes, and illustrations in uniform volumes. The fragments were gathered, so that nothing was lost. The Rev. Hugh Stowell Brown also left "commonplace books" from which extracts have been printed.

After looking over a large number of sermons in which illustrations abound, including those of old Thomas Guthrie, it would seem necessary to caution ministers, especially young ministers, against depending too much upon illustrations for giving effect to a sermon.

Anecdotes and illustrations should at all times be well and carefully chosen, for if they are not appropriate they will do more harm than good. A funny story, for example, is always remembered for better or for worse, usually for the worse.

The following incident illustrates the perverse possibilities of an ill-chosen illustration: A Sunday-school teacher in England was instructing his class in a room which overlooked a river, and a boat belonging to his brother was swiftly gliding down the stream. The Sunday-school lesson was on faith. "Now," said the teacher, "I know there is a mutton pie in that boat. If I tell you