

NOTES ON PREACHING.

No. III. THE SERMON.

We are following the lead of the Bishop of Ripon in the selection of the subjects, and to a large extent in the line of thought we are pursuing in these papers. The subject of the present paper is The Sermon, the next will be on the Structure of the Sermon. The first qualification for the writing of a sermon is that the writer should have something to say. This is not an unnecessary remark. It is only too true of some preachers, that they have nothing to say and they say it. A great authority tells us, and we can hardly need to be told, that whenever a preacher finds he has nothing to say, he may be sure that the fault is in himself. How has he come to this? At first, enthusiasm supplied him with emotions, and these are apt to become quiescent. Has the preacher left off study and reflection and meditation? There must be some such reason. We must not despair. This is no very uncommon experience. The feelings of the older man are not those of the youth, and he must draw upon solid conviction and purpose for his inspiration. In order to this, the Bishop remarks, a man must have material at command. "It is better to realize this necessity even though it should lead you to discover how small your stock of material is, than that you should indulge in indolent self-complacency, and should attempt to spin something out of nothing." The preacher must have something to say, and he must know how to say it. He must first get his material, and then he must put it into form. "First get your material," and this by Reflection, Reading and Writing. 1. *Reflection.* This must come first. It is the condition of profitable reading. Jean Paul Richter says: "Never read until you have thought yourself hungry; never write until you have read yourself full." The first of these counsels is as important as the second. This does not mean that we are to do all our thinking before reading. We cannot separate things in that way. But it does mean that reading without previous thought can hardly be profitable. It is like sitting down to a meal without an appetite. Thought is to the mind what exercise is to the body. When we thus prepare for reading, we know what we want and our reading becomes intelligent. Moreover, there is danger in reading without reflection—the danger of utilizing in reading without making it our own. We shall then give out the thoughts and opinions of other men at second hand. Therefore, says the Bishop, "do not get into the habit of ransacking on Saturday all the books which are likely to give you suggestions for the Sunday sermon. Be wise and thoughtful beforehand. Have your subjects well in hand. Think them out. Find out where you need information." 2. *Reading.* Reading maketh a full man. The preacher should use theology in all its departments. He should also read up on the subject of his sermon. But he should do more than this. "No person" says Dr. Fitch, "can adequately teach any subject unless he knows more than the points he is prepared to put forward." It was said of a preacher that he worked himself up to his subject. It is better to go down to the subject. That is to say, that a man should, out of his fullness give his thoughts to the subject in hand. The wise preacher is like the able general, who acquaints himself not only with his forces and those of his adversaries, but with all the surroundings of the field of battle. So the preacher "should know not only the idea

he wishes to put before his people, but also the facts which justify his doing so, and their general significance in relation to the realms of thought. Survey your subject from the heights of wide and careful study. Read more than is required for the immediate occasion. This gives the sense of security, which only conscientious work can supply." These are counsels of the utmost importance, and they might be enforced by considerations which will occur to the mind of the reader. "It is meditation and study that zeal will awaken. What we gather heedlessly, and treat without reverence, will never awaken our interest or stir our ardour. It was when the prophet had built his altar, prepared the wood, and laid his sacrifice in order, that the fire from heaven descended in answer to his prayer. God helps those who help themselves. To those who use all diligence and neglect no means of success, He gives His aid." 3. *Writing.* Writing maketh an exact man. In recommending writing to the preacher, we do not mean merely that sermons which are read must be written, nor, again, that sermons which are committed to memory and delivered memoriter should be written. This is self-evident. But we mean, also, that those who improvise, who preach extemporaneously, clothing the prepared thoughts in language which the moment supplies, should never abandon the habit of written composition. "No man can afford to do without his pen. It is no doubt true that a man, after thirty or forty years' experience of preaching may use his pen comparatively little in his preparation, but his power to forego the use of the pen is due to the accumulated force of those thirty or forty years of hard pen work. Cicero said, 'The best master of the orator is his pen,' and Cicero will be allowed to be a good authority in such matters. If you are going to deliver your sermon extemporaneously, still write, write much," and this is useful in drawing up the plan of the sermon. "It is by thinking with your pen that you will find your way to the heart of the subject." "You will choose your text. There will have dawned on you the first conception of its meaning. Your mind will be full, perhaps, of the novelty or the attractiveness of your first thoughts. Write them down by all means, but depend upon it, you are not going to use them as they are. For let your second thoughts go over the subject, and you will be possessed by a critical mood. Your thoughts will not seem so fit or worthy as they did at first. You feel bound to reject, to add, to rearrange. Do not be afraid. Go through it all over and over again. After a time you will find that the thoughts begin to come to you in clearer fashion and better form. Your third thoughts will, perhaps, harmonize with your first, through the aid of the criticism of your second thoughts. Write till your mind is perfectly clear, and till you certainly know your own thoughts." Moreover, writing improves our power of expression and our command of language. We can look at our thoughts when we have put them down, and we can then see more clearly whether they could not have been expressed more lucidly or more forcibly. And in striving to do so we shall obtain greater mastery over thought and speech. Then there is the sum of what has been said. "First, find out what you want: Reflect. Secondly, supply yourself with it. Read. Thirdly, clear away all needless encumbrances, and get your thoughts on the subject clear: Write." So far on the matter of the sermon. We must consider the form next week.

RELIGION AND EDUCATION.

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The advance of nationalism, that is, the idea of State control of all questions, going so far with some of its advocates as to make the State the owner of all property, and to abolish all individual rights, is being felt in many directions, and the State is assuming control of subjects which up to a comparatively recent time were largely managed and controlled by the Church. For instance, marriage and divorce, philanthropy and charity, and education, are now dealt with by the State in utter disregard oftentimes of the doctrines and claims of the Church, and with small consideration for the views and sentiments of Christian people. This is due to many causes, among them the inability of the Church, owing partly to divisions, to deal effectually with the subjects referred to, the changed conditions of society, and chiefly perhaps an advancing secularism, a reaction from too much other worldliness, which characterized the ordinary and prevailing type of Protestant and evangelical religion. The spiritualized conception of the Church which thought only of man's salvation after death, and but little of his conduct and happiness here, and ceased to interest itself in human interests and affairs, is largely responsible for that relaxed hold upon those great questions which determine life and conduct. When the Church has no message or duties for her members but to bid them pay and pray, and abdicates those solemn responsibilities laid upon her by the teaching and example of her founder, viz., the regulation of marriage and divorce, the relations of the sexes, the care of the sick and needy, the teaching of children, indeed, all that can humanize and raise men in the scale of being; can we wonder that the State steps in and endeavours to do that which the Church has neglected, or at best but imperfectly performed? One of the subjects upon which the State has laid a heavy hand, is that of education, which our Lord especially committed to His Church when He bid His Apostles, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations." We are glad that the Manitoba school question has arisen, because it has drawn wide-spread attention to the arbitrary action of the State, not only in the Province of Manitoba, but in all the provinces of the Dominion, in separating religion from education, and practically handing the schools of the country over to the secularists. The Roman branch of the Catholic Church should be commended by all the friends of religious instruction for the consistent stand it has made on this subject. It is the same position that our mother Church in England has always maintained, and is struggling for at the present moment. The Church of England in this country has always stood for the same principle though it must be confessed that she has allowed the difficulties which stood in the way to deter her from asserting it as strongly as she should have done, and from making the sacrifices which were necessary to give effect to her convictions on this important subject. The school question in Manitoba has drawn attention not only to the rights of Roman Catholics, but also to the fact that in the other provinces rights are conceded to them which are withheld from other denominations of Christians, and that a system of Separate schools for one denomination, and a general secular system for all others, is as unjust as it is unsatisfactory. How religion can be imparted in State aided schools is, it is confessed, a different question, but the difficulties of the case should not lead us to acquiescence in a system in which religion is en-

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