

some of us *less* than others. And in a parable we have a supposed action set forth, and in an anecdote a real action set forth; and we can see, by what someone else did, or refused to do, an example, a precedent, for ourselves. We *have not the least trouble* in coming to a conclusion, regarding some other body's action, as to its right or wrong nature: and we have to set human actions *away from us*, as it were, in this way, before we see them aright!

And with respect to every principle and theory, people want to know "How it will work?" Here they can be shown. How often is the test applied to a theoretical speaker—if not in words, in the thought of the listener,—“Well, did you ever know anybody do that?” And if, before he was done, he showed, by actual facts, that it had been done, he gained his point, and satisfied the hearer.

There are anecdotes *and* anecdotes! An anecdote, whose only importance is that it refers to some great man, will soon lose its freshness with oft repetition. Some will never lose their freshness—yet, not to “repeat ourselves” too often, we even then seek to vary the garb in which we present the same truth. But we shall find, that the stories that fit us best, and are best received, are facts and circumstances that have come under our own experience. They possess more of our own individuality, and will be better remembered in connection with what *we were trying to enforce*, than if they were merely things we had read.

An anecdote or illustration must be, as it were, *spontaneous*. It just springs up, or comes to hand, to fill up a place required,—to put the finishing touch upon an argument,—or to strengthen by example what has already been proved in theory.

It is not to be forgotten, that an illustration *proves nothing*. We could obtain—(perhaps not so readily, for all truth fits into all other truth; still we could obtain) illustrations from Nature and from History, for false principles. And, in this connection, an illustration or parable is not to be pressed farther than *it fits*. For instance, our Lord's coming is said to be like “a thief in the night.” Now, there is but one single point in which the likeness holds between our Lord and a thief: and that is that neither allows it to be known beforehand when he is coming!

Take an illustration of a faulty principle ap-

plied: A man was about to be excluded from church-membership, for persistent wrong-doing. He said, “The *Church* is an *Hospital*; you take in poor weak people, to watch over them, and make them better; you shouldn't turn me out because I am bad in moral health—you should cure me!” Now, if a church is an hospital, and is in every respect to be conducted as one, the man was right: but that prior “fact” was only assumed. But the church took the “illustration” as *proving* something; and the man was retained in membership. Another brother, speaking of it, said, “That church did wrong. A church is a *family*; and if one member of the family is incorrigible, and is corrupting the other children, it becomes absolutely necessary to *separate him* from the others, till he has reformed: they should therefore have excluded him!” Here were two conclusions reached; each legitimately enough, from its own illustration. But a church is not, in every respect, an *hospital*; nor is it, in every respect, a *family*. The illustration only holds good *as far as it fits*.

An illustration is like a *picture*: an argument is like a *description*. The one shows the truth to the eye, the ear, the imagination, the sense—the other to the thought, the judgment, the perception alone. “Charlotte Elizabeth” (Mrs. Tonna) tells us of a deaf-and-dumb little boy she was bringing up, who described to her his idea of the Day of Judgment: when one gave his heart to Christ, the Saviour of men took the great “book” that lay before the throne of God, and in which all our sins were put down, and, turning to the proper page, brought down his hand (still bleeding from the nails of Calvary) over the page, leaving a *red streak* down the centre of the page! Then, as each one was called up on the Great Day, and the book was opened, a “page-full” of sins were there, it is true, but the streak of blood was down the centre—they were all cancelled! Now the illustration of this poor little waif would perhaps set the mediatorial and atoning work of Christ more clearly before an enquirer's mind, than a great many labored arguments and explanations.

A caution: not to let a sermon or an address be mainly stories. An “illustration” is something that *illustrates*, or lets in “lustre” or light—as a “window.” But a house must not be *all* windows!