

delivery of the Gospel message. He has to deliver the old message but in a way that it shall come with new force and power to those who hear it. It is his task to present not religious truths in the abstract or uninteresting form, but to present them touched with emotion, winged with the energy and power and the dynamic force of the preacher's own mind and soul, so that they may strike other souls, and impress them, and influence them, and finally win them to good. His work is not so much to impart knowledge as to make more vivid what is already known, and to transmute knowledge into life. What faculty, then, of mind and heart are we to cultivate? There is one that has been long kept in the background because it was supposed to work against truthful preaching rather than in its favor, but which of late has been receiving more attention than formerly, viz., imagination. As Prof. Blackie says, "I much fear neither teachers nor scholars are sufficiently impressed with the importance of the proper training of the imagination. Some there are who despise it altogether as having to do with fiction rather than with fact, and of no value to the severe student who wishes to acquire exact knowledge. But that is not the case. Count yourself not to know a fact when you know it took place but then only when you see it as it did take place!"

Imagination may be defined as "A mind of passion, the thinking of the heart." It is the faculty of the mind which sees, mirrors, retains and combines the ideal images furnished by reflection and memory, that shines upon the cold and unwilling intellect, pierces its logic, warms its powers and enables it to see truth in all her radiant forms. It is the imagination which lends greatness or meanness, beauty or deformity to life. It sees God in the single flower, or hears Him in the sullen roar of the tempest. Beneath its sway one pulpit becomes a Sinai, a Bethel, a Mount of Transfiguration, an Isle of Patmos, with kindling and glowing skies, apocalyptic visions radiant and sweet. Without it another pulpit is as desolate as a theatre when the lights are out, the players and the music hushed. It makes a parable, frames an allegory, clothes the bones of the valley with sinew and flesh, and repopulates the plain with living men, touches the old time with the sympathy of the loving heart, and the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and fathers live again.

And now some practical uses of imagination. One of the most important functions of imagination is its power to supply the natural surroundings of an object, action, or conception. The power to conceive a situation is the chief characteristic of a natural, effective preacher. This situation or background must be intuitively and instinctively conceived; it cannot be reasoned out, it cannot be

produced by mechanical adjustment; it must come from imaginative intuition. One of the most common violations of this function is found in the public reading of the Scriptures. If the minister does what he professes to do—read the Word of God—he must in every way endeavor to be accurate. He must consult authorities, and above all, judge for himself, from internal evidence, what was the real situation; but when he comes to read he must give his imagination some freedom. All this requires long and patient study. But that is our work, it is our duty, yea, it ought to be considered a pleasure. The great trouble to-day is that because a man knows he can read words, he thinks he has done everything. He has done nothing at all until he has allowed his imagination to carry him back to the position of the writer, and from out of the midst of that conceived situation reads.

Another use of imagination is to give a point of view. Whatever is seen by man is perceived from some point of view. Power to change point of view, to appreciate or to understand the attitude of the other man, lies at the foundation of all appreciation of truth. A fruitful source of narrowness in character and monotony and artificiality in expression is oneness or limitation of point of view. To understand the simplest object requires that it shall be seen from different directions and in varied relations.

But to turn from the reading of the Scriptures to the delivery of the sermon. Too often we settle down to what seems a truism, that the reason why so little interest is taken in the discourse arises from the sinful nature of men. That may be true, but before we undertake to make an attack upon them it will be as well to look after our own defences, else we may fall before the first assault. I know that the spirit of the age is enthusiastic in almost everything else, but is comparatively cold in religion. But at the same time is it not a fact that most sermons are manufactured to order? At all events they are not fabricated "in fire." They do not issue glowing and sparkling from the living furnace within. They not only smell of the lamp, but they bear obvious marks of the hammer and chisel. Their power is mechanical and earthly, not vital and divine. Too often a large portion of them are formed of the most commonplace materials collected here and there from old piles of mental rubbish. It may be said of them as it was said of the poems of a certain author, that "they are very pious and very poor." Orthodox enough, perhaps, but like the bones seen by Ezekiel in the valley of vision, very dry. What we need along with God in us to awaken in the soul higher conceptions, purer instincts and loftier aspirations, is the power of im-