

standard of estimate. Taking the Bible as an inspired volume, there can be no doubt that the text is infinitely more precious than any sermon that can be preached upon it. Preaching should not be an exercise in homiletic analysis; it should be breathing, music, sympathy, and the very sum and force of the holiest prayer. If the Church could come to some such understanding as to its estimate of preaching, we should get rid of all that is mechanical and conventional in this part of public worship. As the matter now stands, the preacher must at a regular time give out a regular text, and occupy a regular period frequently in misinterpreting it. Great preaching should take no account of time. A great sermon may be preached in ten minutes, and a very poor sermon may be spread over an hour. It is not to be wondered at that if preachers have fallen into a very mechanical style people should estimate them by formal mechanical standards. Now the hearer tests the preacher by the preacher's own clock. The hearer declares with amazement, and even with dissatisfaction, that the preacher occupied thirty-five minutes in the delivery of his sermon! If the hearer had been in the right disposition and the sermon had taken the right course there had been no consciousness of time in listening to the divine message. But if preachers will be mechanical it will be difficult for hearers to be spiritual. I daily pray for courage to sit down when my message is finished. Striving after the occupation of a conventional duration spoils all that is best and noblest in pulpit exercises. I have not hesitated to advise young preachers to sit down the moment they are done, and to suggest that they may have been done some time before they had the courage to conclude. As a minister who has been preaching for more than forty years, I can not recall many instances in which the hearers have complained of the sermon being too short.

Merely intellectual preachers are tempted to consider the sermon from its artistic rather than from its spiritual side. They study proportion in the distribution of their matter. They labor after the acquirement of what they term polish and finish. They are tempted to admire a discourse from the architectural point of view. They should consider the condition in which people generally come to hear a sermon. Taking hearers in the mass, they are not artists, architects, or worshippers of mere literary form. They are wearied, disappointed, perplexed, and broken-hearted. They do not come to an academy of art to gratify their fancy and their taste; they come to what should be a fountain of living waters for the satisfaction of the soul's burning thirst. When men want art they can go to the academy. When men come to the church to hear the Gospel it should be presented to them in the most direct and sympathetic way. So long as there are broken hearts in the world so long will evangelical preaching be needed. I have no doubt that in the progress of evolution the time will come when he who most tenderly delivers the Gospel of the love of God will

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