

Allowing the text to determine the form of discourse, has done infinite mischief to the art of preaching. It has introduced great confusion. Because of it sermons are classified as Topical, Textual and Expository, the Topical being based on a clause, the Textual on a verse, the Expository on a more extended passage. This classification, although adopted by many great and scholarly men, is misleading and unscientific, as it is founded on a vicious principle. It is simply a question of the lineal measurement of the text, an affair of the foot-rule.

The purpose of a text is not to provide heads for a sermon ; its purpose is to supply the preacher with an idea from God, a theme, a subject, which subject it is the preacher's business to discuss for practical ends. Unless a passage of Scripture contains a subject, a theme, it is not a proper text ; it may serve the purposes of an undisciplined mind, but it will not provide the true preacher with a basis for a sermon.

The SUBJECT, then, is the principal thing. For that we are to seek as for hid treasure. God's Word is an exhaustless mine. Beneath its surface lie gems richer than the jewels of the mountain or the pearls of the sea. But it yields its wealth only to patient toilers. The ignorant and indolent gather, it may be, a few specimens ; but the prizes are not for them. Let us be very sure of this, that the Bible is a sealed book to the sluggard. The words of God are like the words of men, their meaning does not always lie on the surface.

Words, like Nature, half reveal  
And half conceal the Soul within.

And it is that "Soul within" that is the true theme of a text, the vital subject out of which a living sermon grows ; and not until we have grasped that has the text become ours.

How, then, are we to so master our text as to gain its true subject ? It is here the trained mind has the advantage of the untrained. It is here that finished study and discipline reveal themselves. It is here that scientific analysis, critical exactness and logical power are called into play. The unscholarly man, the blunderer in exegesis, the despiser of lexicons and grammars, the stalwart champion of the Bagster Bible with wide margins, the deluded victim of short cuts to the ministry—it is here his ignorance, his inefficiency, his folly is made manifest. He is brought