

as factual as the other. Only men who have put divine truth to human uses can affirm that truth with adequate emphasis. "Come all ye that fear God, and I will declare unto you what he hath done for my soul." That was the way of the Apostle Paul. On every occasion he stood boldly up and told the story of his own conversion. That was the way by which opponents and sneerers were put to shame and silence in apostolic times. "And beholding the man which was healed standing by, they could say nothing against it." Experience is argument. We know the truth of Christianity by the discipline through which it conducts the soul. The Gospel is not a dream which lingers and broods in the fancy; it is a discipline and a spur in all the activity and service of life. I put the Bible, therefore, and Experience together as constituting the Authority under which the Christian minister conducts his holy work. This being the basis of the pulpit, it should also be the very substance and tissue of its individuality.

Instead of this, it has been greatly endangered by the vicious system of selecting "texts" for more or less agile and ingenious analysis and manipulation. Texts have ruined the very finest qualities of preaching. The thing we should be most anxious about is the context, not the text; that is to say, the very spirit and genius of the surrounding and illuminating argument. What wonder if, having given ourselves up to text-chopping, we should have fallen into mechanical forms and so-called homiletic treatment! We have actually set up professors of homiletics! I can hardly imagine anything more opposed to the spirit of Christ's teaching. We are in danger of educating a set of text-carpenters; small pulpit cabinet-makers, who can turn out very ingenious contrivances out of the smallest possible material at the smallest possible notice. If I could have my way, I would put down all so-called systems of homiletics. This is but eternal scaffold-building without any attempt to put up the temple of God. We have actually set up what may be called an Orthodoxy of Homiletics! We now know, at least by pretense, which is the right way and which is the wrong way of dividing and subdividing a line or two of all Holy Scripture! Can anything be more monstrously opposed to the spirit of the Scripture which is thus dishonored? I have often ventured to imagine how the Apostle Paul would feel if he entered one of our places of worship whilst one of his own "texts" was being handled by a clever sermon-plotter. I have had no hesitation in concluding that the most bewildered man in the whole assembly would be the Apostle Paul himself. Ideas which are attributed to him never occurred to his own mind, and I should feel no surprise if he rose in the midst of the audience and disclaimed all responsibility for their murkiness, or for their want of reason and dignity.

It is by reason of this treatment of detached portions of Scripture that it has become quite customary to regard the sermon as of infinitely more importance than the "text." The exact contrary should be our