

mien, fluency of utterance, and outward grace of elocution. It is this which has become the opprobrium of extempore preachers, and it must be admitted that the danger is imminent. As all men dislike labor in itself considered, the majority will perform any task in the easiest way which is acceptable. And as most hearers unfortunately judge more by external than internal qualities, they will be, for a certain time, satisfied with this ready but superficial preaching. The resulting fact is, that in numberless instances, the extemporaneous preacher neglects his preparation. If he has begun this slovenly way while still young, and before he has laid up stores of knowledge, he will in nine cases out of ten, be a shallow, rambling sermonizer as long as he lives. Immense gymnastic action and fearful vociferation will probably be brought in to eke out the want of theology, as a garrison destitute of ball, will be likely to make unusual pother with blank cartridge.

Omitting, for the moment, the unfaithfulness of such a ministry, the man who thus errs will find the evil consequences rebound upon himself. It is only for a time the most injudicious or partial congregation can be held by indigested and unsubstantial matter, however gracefully delivered. They may not trace it to the right cause, but they know that they are wearied, if not disgusted. The minister, having rung all the changes on his very small peal of bells, has nothing for it but to repeat the old chimes.

Another inevitable result of unstudied preaching is the habit of wandering or scattering. Nothing but laborious discipline, unintermitted through life, can enable a man to stick logically to his line of argument. Discerning hearers know better than the preacher, why, after stating his point, he constantly plays about it like a boat in an eddy, which moves but makes no progress. "Skeletons," as they are ludicrously called, however good, do not prevent this evil, unless they be afterwards thought out to their remotest articulations. The idle but voluble speaker, will flutter about his first head, and flutter about his second, but will mark no ratiocinative connection, and effect no fruitful deduction. Evidently he who is continually pouring out, and but scantily pouring in, must soon be at the empty bottom.

*Ministerial study* is a *sine qua non* of success. It is absurdly useless to talk of methods of preaching, where there is no method of preparation. Ministerial study is two-fold—special and general. By *special study*, I mean that preparation for a given sermon, which is analogous to the lawyer's preparation of the case. If faithful and thorough, this may lead to high accomplishment; but, as in the instance of *case lawyers*, it may be carried too far, and if exclusively followed must become narrowing. The man who grows old with no studies but those which terminate upon the several demands of the pulpit, becomes a mannerist, falls into monotony of thought, and ends stiffly, drily, and wearisomely. At the same time, he wants that enlargement and enriching of mind derived from wide excursions into collateral studies, of which all the world recognizes the fruits in such preachers as Owen, Mason, Chalmers, and Hall. Yet even this inferior way of study into which busy and overtaxed men are prone to slide, is infinitely better than the way of idleness, oscillancy, and indecent haste. For thus the student who begins betimes, manages to pick up a great deal more than is necessary for his special task. In premeditating one sermon, he often finds hints for three more. By tunnelling into the rock of a single prophetic passage, he comes upon gems of illustration, nuggets of doctrine, and cool springs of experience, all which goes into the general stock. Yet no wise student will restrict himself to the lucubration asked by next Sunday's sermon.

By *general study* I mean that preparation which a liberal mind is perpetually making, by reading, writing, and thinking, over and above the sermonizing, and without any direct reference to preaching. Such studies do indeed pour in their contributions to every future discourse with a continually increasing tide; but this is not seen at once, nor is this the proximate aim. No man can make full use of his talent, who does not all his life pursue a high track of generous reading and inquiry.—*J. W. Alexander, D.D.*