

pended, would it make any difference to religion? Large numbers of religious people absent themselves from church, not because they have ceased to believe in the church, and far less in the Christian religion, but because they are not benefited by public ordinances. Religious discourse seem to have become the least influential of all discourse, and those who hear it make no pretense of concealing their indifference.

John Foster, in his well-known "Essay on the Application of the Term Romantic," classifies the extravagant estimate of means such as preaching among the things that are visionary, quixotic, or without foundation in reason. In so doing he draws a discouraging picture, in colors dark even for him, of the faint and feeble influence of pulpit instruction upon the character and conduct of the hearers. In other words, judging by experience, he thinks that preachers should not expect any effect at all commensurate with the solemnity of the themes discussed or the interests involved. Probably, this discrepancy between means and results is much greater in our time and might now be described in much darker colors. But the essayist in this case too much overlooks the fact that permanent effects are not and ought not to be looked for from preaching alone. The most powerful exhibition of revealed truth and the most earnest appeals to duty will be ineffectual without divine grace. It has been amply demonstrated that human depravity is able to resist all the assaults of human eloquence. This has been plaintively and profusely illustrated by Dr. Chalmers, the most eloquent and, for immediate effect, the most powerful preacher in modern times, in his discourse upon the text: "And, lo! Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words but they do them not." All this may be assumed and need not be dwelt upon. Conversion and holiness are God's own work, and essayists of any kind—moral, religious, or social—who do not give prominence to this in their lucubrations, overlook what Christians not only admit but proclaim on all occasions, as a fundamental truth.

What is necessary to be considered now is how far religious discourse may fail of its immediate effects from causes within human control and perfectly removable. Whatever may be the character of the hearer and whatever use he may make of what he hears, he has a right to expect such a discussion of any religious topic as is clear and intelligible. Putting aside the frivolous and indifferent who desire the service to terminate only that they may plunge into worldly conversation, there is always a number of thinking and sensible people who are willing to listen to a discourse on some part of religion. In our day these may occupy different degrees of attachment or relation to the Christian religion. But they all think that they have a right to hear it discussed in an intelligible way—much in the same style in which they might be asked during the week to consider any other