

Every addition made in any way to his knowledge of his physical and social environment, or of his origin and destiny, makes him more able to find something to say that will be helpful to himself and to others. If I emphasize here the need of attending to the formation of style, it is not because I deem it more important than invention, but because it is more neglected in our educational work. How shall the intending preacher be trained to put his thoughts into language at once conventional and effective? An unconventional public speaker may be tolerated on the street; he will not be tolerated in the pulpit. We may find fault, if we please, with the purism of the age, and take the ground that the great thing after all is the message not the delivery, the matter not the form; but the age is just what advancing civilization has made it, and all that is left for us is to admit the demand and think of the best means of providing the supply.

The only way to secure proficiency in any art—and the embodiment of thought in language is an art—is to afford ample opportunity for incessant practice under wise direction. We learn to do by doing. The student, fortunately, has not to learn a new language. The difference between the rough and ready Salvation Army preacher and the scholarly and cultured pulpit orator is not that one is able to use the English language while the other is not; it is that one pronounces his words unconventionally and constructs his sentences ungrammatically, while the other uses both words and sentences in a way to satisfy the fastidious taste of educated people. Correctness of form is the first thing to aim at, but there must be enough of practice to make the correctness habitual, or deterioration will set in as soon as special training ceases.

I cannot here enter into minute details of method, but before leaving this part of my subject I wish to express my conviction, based on the experience of many years spent in writing and in training others in the art of expression, that the only really useful practice is that of original composition on selected themes and that the only really useful instruction is the criticism by the teacher of the student's productions. A few simple rules will serve to indicate the nature of the training which should be aimed at: