

plished their work. One preacher has to address a congregation, the majority of whom are well-instructed Christians; the audience of another consists largely of persons feeling after God, if haply they may find Him; a third has before him people characterized by gross ignorance and stolid indifference; while a fourth wrestles with a community not intellectually backward, but full of avowed unbelief. Now, while in all these cases Christ must be preached, the matter of preaching (and the form also) will be wisely modified in accordance with the circumstances. Any one who will take pains to analyze the recorded addresses of the Apostles will see what is meant, and will admire the wisdom which became all things to all men in order to save them. By careful development of Old Testament principles—reasoning out of the Scriptures, the Apostles would gain the Jew; while the subtle and philosophical Greek (though Paul would not seek reputation for wisdom) is approached by other paths, which promise better access to his position. All eminently successful preachers have shown the like prudence, discriminating conditions intellectually and spiritually diverse, keeping in the foreground the parts of doctrine suitable to begin and carry forward their work in its different stages, and not prematurely giving prominence to any element of teaching.

It is hardly necessary to add that preaching does not become scriptural by the abundant quotation of Scripture. The Bible may be freely cited by the errorist and the sensationalist, as well as by the sound Gospel preacher. It is easy for one who is familiar with Scripture to string together passages to the plausible support of doctrines which the Word of God repudiates, or for the pulpit rhetorician to adorn and give effect to his composition by skillfully inlaying it with the gems of inspiration, or, again, Scripture may be profusely quoted in a way of little discrimination, passage heaped on passage in discourse which is nerveless and aimless. But preaching which is essentially poor or bad cannot be redeemed by the large amount of Scripture which may be embraced in it, and it were an abuse of terms to call such preaching scriptural. It is, however, proper to add that the

FREE USE OF SCRIPTURE

if such use be made with discrimination, is much to be commended. It is well that all our arguments and lines of illustration should draw much upon Scripture. The hearer is then familiarized with the Word of God, our sermons are both adorned and strengthened, and our appreciation of those "judgments" which "are sweeter than honey and the honeycomb" is fully testified. The Scriptures are the truest classics, and while the Christian teacher's appeal in support of the doctrine will constantly be "to the law and the testimony," he will delight in every way to honour and exalt the Book of God.

II. We now come to speak of the epithet "Scriptural," as applied to the form of preaching; i.e., to the sermon as a written or spoken composition. Let it be premised that we refer to form not from the literary or artistic point of view, but strictly with regard to the conformity of preaching to the tone and manner of Scripture, and especially to the specimens of preaching incorporated in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. The æsthetic point of view is one thing, the spiritual is another; and while some of the remarks which we shall make may be applied as literary criticisms, it is the higher question of conformity to Scripture example which we wish to keep before us.

That Scripture should be our model as to the main qualities in the form or manner of religious discourse will hardly be disputed. Every country and age has, of course, its own peculiarities of speech, and we have heard a good deal about the Oriental characteristics of the Bible as distinguishing its compositions from those of Western nations. Let Orientalisms be admitted (though some delight to exaggerate their importance), yet the manner in which the Holy Ghost taught the apostles to order their thoughts and mould the leading features of the discourse is certainly of permanent instruction to the preacher. We cannot without loss adopt a form at variance with Scripture example.

Before indicating some of the qualities in the form of preaching as to which Scriptures should be carefully noted and copied, I need hardly farther premise that no attempt is here made to deal with the questions which belong to the logical and rhetorical form of pulpit discourse—questions which are of sufficient importance in the science of homiletics.

(1) The simplicity and directness of Scripture should ever be the pattern of preaching. Simplicity is more than the perspicuity which makes discourse easily intelligible. The true conception of it implies that objects are distinctly and vividly realized in the mind and presented as they are seen, in definite outline, and free from complication and entanglement. It is first in the thought, then in the expression.

THE SIMPLICITY OF SCRIPTURE

appears in the choice of words and the structure of sentences and discourses. It pervades everything, and, rejecting all that savours of artifice and self-consciousness, gives an air of perfect naturalness to every species of composition. Whilst the highest literary results are reached, the idea of fine thought or fine diction is clearly not in the mind of the writer or speaker. We do not think of the art which conceals art, but of a spiritual condition which transcends all art, and which is forgetful of everything except the truth to be delivered, the glory of Him whose word is spoken, and the well-being of those to whom the word shall come.

A pre-eminent instance of this simplicity is found in the sermon of Peter on the day of Pentecost. Whilst, probably, the record is only an epitome of Peter's discourse, the quality spoken of shines through the outline given. United with simplicity is the wonderful directness of the inspired preacher, growing out of his intense earnestness. Not a superfluous word, not a misplaced word, not a feeble word, because the arrow is sent directly to the mark. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God among you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know. Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and with wicked hands have crucified and slain." "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye crucified both Lord and Christ." With such words Peter delivers his message, and his hearers are "pricked to the heart." What a contrast to the tawdry and ambitious rhetoric which sometimes passes for preaching, and which, alas, many foolish persons are found to admire! Simplicity, directness, fervid earnestness—all in perfection, all really one. The discourses of Paul recorded in the Acts equally illustrate the simplicity of absolute conviction and burning earnestness.

All the great preachers since Peter and Paul have, in their measure, exhibited this quality of which we speak—Chry-

sostom, notwithstanding his long periods and copious diction; Augustine, in spite of the involution of some of his sentences, and the enigmatical terseness of others; Luther, with his fiery, impetuous zeal—kindling the heart of a nation, of Europe, and bearing down everything before him; Bourdaloue and Massillon, Whitfield and Wesley; Chalmers, too, notwithstanding features of style which at first sight are quite unlike simplicity. Sermons in which the preacher shows a painful elaboration, in which, from affectation of some philosophical mode, his thought is recondite and difficult, or in which he deals in an inflated and self-seeking rhetoric—such sermons are not after the scriptural pattern, and can hardly be redeemed even by considerable excellence in their matter. But the truth is that matter and manner are so closely allied the manner so much grows out of the matter, and the matter, again, is so necessarily affected by the manner—that in the deterioration of the one the other will surely suffer. Let the mind and the heart of the preacher be filled with his theme, let the things of God and of the soul be to him what they were to the apostles, and he will be like them in the simple energy with which he delivers his message, and pleads with men to be reconciled to God.

We do not forget that on many subjects and occasions religious discourse cannot exhibit the nervous energy which we have marked in Peter's sermon at Pentecost; such intensity would not agree with the matter treated of, and which should rather require calm exposition or quiet and gentle application; but there should never be wanting the simplicity which is natural to a pure heart and an earnest purpose—which is a moral indication as a rely as a literary excellence.

(2) Another scriptural attribute of manner which should characterize all preaching is

REVERENCE, SOLEMNITY.

Preaching has every reference to God, as well as to man; and God is in heaven and we upon earth. He is infinitely exalted. In His presence the seraphim veil their faces with their wings, and cry, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory. Scripture in every book, in every word, from Genesis to Revelation, is serious and fervent. Whether it be history, or prophecy, or poetry, or didactic statement, it is reverent and solemn. Whether it threatens or promises, rebukes or praises, it is reverent. Whether it be Old Testament or New; whether the writer be of Judah or Ephraim, or perchance a Gentile, as Luke, there is ever profound reverence. The many sacred writers have each his own characteristics, but not one of them is flippant, or jocular, or mirthful in the lower sense, or tries in any way or at any time to amuse his readers. There is seriousness and dignity in every utterance, and the pervading sense of the divine presence makes it impossible to be light or trifling for an instant. The whole spiritual nature of these writers is moved and elevated in the highest degree, but they never vary their tone, and relieve themselves and their readers by some piece of unexpected humour or jocularly. Irony the gravest we have in parts of Scripture, but no fun, or mirth, or nonsense. We are not saying that these things are in themselves sinful, and that on no occasion may a godly man unbend. Many excellent Christians indulge at times in playfulness of speech, and are not conscious of sinning; though even when playful the speech should be seasoned with salt. But we are here speaking of public religious discourse after the Scripture model; and without controversy the manner of Scripture is such as we have represented.

Well, here again the great teachers of the Church have followed Scripture. They ever handle their great themes under a solemn sense of their momentous importance, of the commission they have received from God, and of His presence; and whatever be their natural aptitude for wit and mirthfulness they do not indulge it when they appear as God's messengers. They are not dull and tedious, they know how to enlist the sympathies of their hearers and to retain unflinching attention, but they never descend to the jocular, or the grotesque, or the utterly foolish. Nor is it merely cultivated taste which restrains them, but the fear of God and the earnest desire to awaken in men's minds worthy thoughts of Him who is the King, eternal, immortal and invisible. Nor will such preachers willingly touch any sentiment in their hearers, the activity of which would tend to defeat the very end which they have in view, and to lead the attention away from the high and holy theme on which it should be concentrated.

I do not know that in any age more occupants of the pulpit have been chargeable with

DEFECTIVE REVERENCE

than at the present day. It is a serious evil; it is very sad. Many who stand to speak in God's name and to continue the work in which prophets and apostles were engaged, deliberately count upon their irreverent eccentricities, whether in their selection of subjects, or in their manner of speech, as an element of popularity. There are, it must be confessed, instances of really good and useful preachers forgetting themselves and dropping expressions which were better wanting; these are dead flies in the apothecary's ointment; but what shall be said of those who, of set purpose and continually, use the language of low comedy—of broad and vulgar farce—language which any respectable speaker would refuse to employ in secular address? That any Christian people should be heard vindicating such language or apologizing for it is a thing to be deplored and shows the extent to which their own sentiments have been depraved. "Will a man plead for Baal?" Shall we "do evil that good may come?" Had any specimens of language such as may be abundantly gathered from some sermons been found in any book professing to be Scripture, the whole Christian world would have immediately pronounced it spurious; and yet some would have us believe that the public ear is to be gained and the masses won for Christ by the free use of such extraordinary speech.

While disallowing all that is irreverent and low, there is no wish, I need hardly say, to encourage a dull and heavy pulpit diction or any kind of mock solemnity. In commendable directness and earnestness of speech we have already pronounced against such a manner. The true remedy for dullness is not in flippancy and jocularly, not in slang and the phrases of the reprobate, but in clearer and more vital thought, in a more earnest purpose, in a stronger sense of the divine presence, in greater zeal for the spiritual well-being of men. Let everything be real, and false solemnity, whether in words or in voice, will be hardly possible. A dead, formal, artificial manner is indeed a great evil, but there is no gain in exchanging it for vulgarity and levity or any of the arts of the pulpit mountebank. It is an ungrateful task to discuss this matter, but in addressing the future teachers of the Church I may be allowed to speak with the utmost frankness,

and before the evil referred to has made its appearance to any extent in our own Church, to lift up my humble but most earnest testimony against it. There is really no power in this irreverence—there is no wisdom in it. It does gross violence to the feelings of all well-regulated minds, it associates what is highest, purest and noblest with the debased and impure, and it is in open revolt against the manner and spirit of Holy Scripture.

(3) Preaching, like Scripture, should always be characterized by the

SPIRIT OF LOVE.

God is love, and love breathes in every part of His Word. God has other attributes than love such as truth and justice; and we need not affirm that the divine perfections may be summed up in love. But, certainly, if asked to name one quality of the infinitely perfect Being which shines with special lustre in the Bible, as in Redemption, we should name this one "God so loved the world that He gave," etc. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and gave His Son," etc. "God commendeth His love toward us in that," etc. When God warns, rebukes or threatens men—speaks rather, with the voice of the Law-giver and Judge—there is nothing inconsistent with love, but fresh evidence of it. Scripture is bathed in an atmosphere of love. The specimens of apostolic preaching in the Acts of the Apostles, to which reference has repeatedly been made, are pervaded by love; the very terrors of the Lord to which they appeal become the instruments of love.

The true messenger of God, to whose word hearts have opened, has ever spoken in love. Himself filled with the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord, he has taken his stand within sight of the Cross, nay, near to it, and with deep affection, perhaps many tears, has spoken to his fellow-sinners in the Saviour's name. Nothing in his speech has proved so powerful as this element of love, kindled in his own soul by the view of Calvary. By this he has won his way, disarmed hostility, and vanquished all unbelief and sin.

The preacher should carefully avoid a manner which is unsympathetic, harsh or dictatorial. Especially when called to rebuke sin or declare the fate of transgressors should he look to the spirit in which he speaks. It is so easy to forget the tenderness and solemnity with which the issues of sin and the doom of the wicked should be referred to that we must be ever on our guard. In hearing the future of the impenitent announced, one has not seldom deplored the use of a loud, impetuous and stern manner, very inconsistent with the position of a poor sinner, himself standing under the shadow of a judgment seat before which he has also merited condemnation, and from which it is possible, his own sentence of rejection may be pronounced. Sin must of course be denounced, and no false or treacherous ideas of humanity should prevent the preacher from warning the wicked of the end; but if ever the Lord's servant should pray for

THE SPIRIT OF HUMILITY

and love it is when he must speak this part of his message. One has sometimes known a ministry in the earlier part of which the Law was most conspicuous, while a tone of severity pervaded the sermons delivered; but as grace accomplished its work in the preacher he gave increasing prominence to the Gospel, and while hatred of sin was not less marked than before, there were also seen a gentleness and a richness of sympathy which did not belong to the youthful preacher. The Son of Thunder—not ceasing to be such—became a Son of Consolation, and losing nothing of his old power, the "man of God" acquired a new power which was still more effectual in doing his Master's work.

Let those who are preparing for the sacred office aspire to become good preachers in the highest sense. Preaching will be a great part—may I not say the main part?—of your work. If you fail in this you fail as ministers; if you succeed in this your ministry cannot be fruitless. But seek so to preach that your sermons may all deserve to be called scriptural. This is the preaching which the Master will approve, whatever be the judgment of the frivolous, or the ill-instructed, or those who have a false standard; which will bring men into the kingdom of God; which will edify and comfort God's children, and fit them for His service on earth and His presence in heaven; and if, by grace, we have been enabled thus to preach, we shall, as our ministry hastens to a close, be increasingly thankful that in our teaching we have been kept from forsaking "the simplicity that is in Christ," and have been strengthened "to declare the whole counsel of God."

UNFRUITFUL CHURCHES.

Henry Ward Beecher was a man of rare power and eloquence, and his congregation was very large and wealthy. But we do not remember that the congregation ever made for itself a record of good deeds. Did it send forth missionaries to the heathen? Did it help any educational institutions? Did it establish city missions or asylums? We have not heard of any such. We would almost as soon expect to find missions or other Christian enterprises associated with a respectable theatre as with Plymouth Church, so called. It was a Church that lived to its own honour, pleasure and glory; and Beecher was liberally paid to perform his part in entertaining the company.

There is in Brooklyn another church which is now calling forth much comment for its phenomenal unfruitfulness—Talmage's Tabernacle. Year after year its contributions to the seven Schemes of the Presbyterian Church have been nothing; and for a few years there have been very small sums to a few objects. The Brooklyn Tabernacle claims to be the largest church in America, with a membership of 4,020. Dr. Talmage is a famous orator. His sermons are singularly racy and pungent. Yet the fruit for the common good yielded by his 4,020 Church members is simply shocking in its minuteness! In the last seven years, all that those members gave for Home Missions, Foreign Missions, Education, etc., was about \$2,500. There must be something desperately wrong. It is time for Dr. Talmage to rise and explain. When our own Synods and Presbyteries meet they claim the right if they see cause to ask for reasons for blanks in the returns. The Presbytery of Brooklyn might profitably propose a few questions to the pastors and elders of the tabernacle. Suppose all the other congregations gave nothing to the cause of Missions? Suppose they neglected Colleges? Suppose they forgot about Home Missions, Augmentation? Brother Talmage, you are preaching on a lofty platform, and setting a pretty shabby example from a very high place. What do you say about it? Why not hurl some of your fierce invectives against a selfish and illiberal congregation.—*Presbyterian Witness.*