

P O E T R Y.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

By Bishop Heber.

By cool Siloam's shady rill
How sweet the lily grows !
How sweet the breath beneath the hill
Of Sharon's dewy rose !
Lo! such the child whose early feet
The paths of peace have trod ;
Whose secret heart, with influence sweet,
Is upward drawn to God !
By cool Siloam's shady rill
The lily must decay ;
The rose that blooms beneath the hill
Must shortly fade away.
And soon, too soon, the wintry hour
Of man's maturer age
Will shake the soul with sorrow's power,
And stormy passion's rage !
O Thou, whose infant feet were found
Within thy Father's shrine !
Whose years, with changeless virtue crown'd
Were all alike divine,
Dependant on thy bounteous breath,
We seek thy grace alone,
In childhood, manhood, age, and death,
To keep us still thine own !

From the British Critic.

COMPARATIVE EXCELLENCE OF EXTEMPORE AND WRITTEN DISCOURSES.

The question is, not whether a man should be able to preach extempore, but whether he is wise to preach extempore; not whether he possesses what are called the gifts; but whether he is prudent and judicious in using them. Now, between a sermon which should be really extemporaneous, and a sermon which should be really premeditated, the balance is easily struck. It is the same, in fact, as the question, Whether sound religion is likely to be the result of patient and serious thought, or of unprepared and passionate utterance. No man will venture to assert, that deliberation and research are useless and valueless, unless he pretends that he can insure immediate and extraordinary impulses from the HOLY SPIRIT—a pretension which no man, we presume, is now rash enough and blasphemous enough to make. Except in a case of peculiar and pressing emergency, a sermon really extemporaneous would be an insult to a Christian congregation, and an offence against Heaven.

Rowland Hill might have been an extempore preacher: Robert Hall certainly was not. He is known to have delivered the same sermon, word for word, after an interval of four years; so retentive was his memory; so fixed and consecutive were his thoughts. Of Massillon it is related, as Mr. Gresley tells us, that he delivered his most celebrated discourse again and again, after a regular announcement, to audiences who flocked for the express purpose of hearing them. And there were men, who enjoyed Whitefield's harangues the second time more than the first; because, upon a repetition, his delivery was more powerful, inasmuch as his recollection was more perfect.

The question, then, of real extemporaneousness being disposed of, there comes the question, Whether much is to be sacrificed to the semblance, when every wise man would deplore the reality? To affirm that a minister should never speak any thing off hand, if circumstances should arise at the moment among his congregation, is, of course, as idle as to assert that, in general, he should inculcate religion without having previously considered what he was going to say. Perhaps, too, the inquiries will not admit of one universal solution, if we ask whether it is better for a man to write the sermon down, and preach from the copy; or to prepare it, to learn it by heart, and then preach it from memory, and without book; or to have mere-

ly the scheme and outline of the sermon before him, filling up the canvas on the spur of the occasion.

The precedents drawn in favor of extemporaneous preaching from earlier times, and the practice of the Reformers, are quite destitute as, we conceive, of pertinence and force. Different modes are adapted to different periods. Our own day would reject the homely plainness of Latimer. And our opinion is, that extemporaneous preaching more properly belongs to an unpolished age, to an unfastidious, uncultivated audience—or, at least, to persons more accustomed to feel than to think; apt to be affected by bursts of passion, rather than able to follow up the thread of an argument. But, as education introduces more of accuracy and depth; as men are trained to habits of more philosophical reflection, and learn to read and judge for themselves, we venture to prophesy that impromptu harangues, together with all the common artifices and devices of oratory, will be more and more discouraged. We say artifices and devices, for extemporaneous preaching is very often a mere fraud or trick. It carries with it a greater appearance of nature and reality: but, in point of fact, the one mode is quite as elaborate and artificial a thing as the other. The title of extemporaneous preaching is a misnomer: for we have seen, that an actually unpremeditated address, delivered on any great doctrine of religion, without previous thought, must be either inspiration or rhapsody. Robert Hall and many others draw instances and comparisons from the senate and the bar. But how little extemporaneous speaking is there either in the houses of parliament, or in courts of law. A man either comes prepared, if he opens debate; or he answers a preceding speaker, whose arguments, whether he notes them down or not, serve as landmarks to his mind. And at the bar, if a pleader really speaks extempore, it is from his carelessness in not taking the trouble to read his brief. Such an advocate is not altogether likely to do justice to his client.

Still, it is contended, the appearance ought to count. And we have allowed, that we would not insist upon the slavish and irksome constraint, that a man is never to say more than is set down before him. We allow too, that, although to preach a written sermon may be the safer plan, to fire off an unwritten one may be the more effective. And, certainly, the best style of speaking is a higher and more impressive effort than the most graceful recitation of a discourse, which the congregation sees to be fairly transcribed upon paper, instead of fancying to come warm from the heart. But the other scale preponderates, when we set the possibility of brilliant success against the probability of serious mischief.

One great argument for the (so called) extemporaneous mode of preaching is, that the written discourse, whether lying on the cushion, or held in the hand, acts as a non-conductor of persuasion between the preacher and his audience. We might doubt, perhaps, whether this is the case, where the hearers come with right minds and proper dispositions, and have formed to themselves a true notion of the ordinance of preaching, and the aim of pulpit ministrations. The minister of the Gospel is, in truth, a teacher, rather than an orator: and it is the business of a congregation to listen to him with a view of being instructed, rather than being excited. And here we might remark, that the worshippers in a church do not constitute a deliberative assembly, although even in some deliberative assemblies,—in France, for instance,—the unwritten is preferred to the written; and, we might ask, whether, in attending upon a course of lectures upon any science, or any department of philosophy, men would be wise to insist, or expect, that the lecturer should address them without having beforehand committed his observations to paper. But we will allow that the circumstances are not quite parallel: we will allow that the hearers in the temple of God require to be persuaded as well as taught,—to be roused as well as reminded. We quite deny, however, that it is not possible quite sufficiently to rouse and stimulate an audience, not indeed by the monotonous, unimpressive, unimpassioned reading, but by the emphatic delivery of a written discourse:—by recovering, in fact, and exhibiting, and therefore by communicating—and what is more natural than this process?—the same glow in uttering, which was felt in writing it. The objection may still be urged, that most men, and most women,

in the lower classes more especially, like that a preacher should speak to them, rather than he should read to them; and that they find, or imagine, more energy and power in appeals which they believe to be extemporaneous. It may be so; probably, it is so:—but the question recurs, whether this is the soundest and healthiest state of things; and whether a religious system based upon any such excitement has not rottenness at its foundation.

Our inference, then, is, upon the whole, that extemporaneous preaching ought to be the exception, and not the rule; and that for a large body, comprising many thousands of men, possessed of the average amount of ability and discretion, it is far better to write the sermon, and preach from the written sermon, than either to vent what happens to come at the moment into the mind, or to trust, without any necessity whatever, to the powers of the memory. The former of these alternatives is obviously to be deprecated; for who, that has ever thought seriously upon the subject, wants, or could endure, an improvisatore in the pulpit? For the next thing is, of necessity, to have a mountebank in the pulpit. And as to the latter alternative, a minister or curate of a parish, who does his duty, will often have no time, first to write down his sermons, and then to learn them by heart that he may preach them as unwritten; and to exact or encourage any such course, would be to give a vast and most unfair advantage over the diligent Parish priest, to a declaimer, who has either no parochial functions, or who slurs them over, that he may display himself and his eloquence with the greater effect.

(To be concluded in our next.)

Noble Example of Missionary Spirit.—We learn from one of our London papers that the Rev. Dr. Andrew Reed, whose name in connexion with his visit to this country, last year, as a delegate of the Congregationalists of England, is familiar to our readers, has offered himself as a missionary to China, or to any other part of the world. His Church are unwilling to part with him, and his brethren in the Ministry, it is said, are of opinion that he may be as useful, if not more useful, at home than abroad. Whether the expression of their opinions will probably induce him to remain in London, we have no means of judging. Doctor R. must now be not far from sixty years of age, and surrounded in his present situation, by all that can make life pleasant, his determination to devote himself to Missionary labours among the heathen is indeed a rare example of Christian heroism.—*N. Y. Obs.*

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C. H. BELCHER.

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