

## II.—HOMILETICS VIEWED AS RHETORIC.

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WHEN we consider the exceptionally favorable circumstances under which religious discourses are delivered, the results seem to come far short of reasonable expectation. In cities, towns, villages, and quiet rural shades, multitudes of the best people in every land assemble for purposes of religious worship and instruction. They have previously prepared for the occasion by setting their houses in order, and on this day all business is suspended. There is no fear in their minds that by absence from office or home their business or estate can suffer in any degree. Regarding all ordinary and secular affairs the day on which they appear in the house of God is a *dies non*—a day on which the wheels of business have stopped and the pulse, heated with the strife of existence, beats more slowly. Doubtless, numbers have come merely by force of habit and because they have done so often before. Many have come without asking themselves a reason—so many actions that men perform being purely mechanical. And many others have come for reasons which are perfectly understood and which are not religious. But with all these and many other deductions that might be made, it must surely be allowed that a great majority, and consequently a vast multitude, assemble every Sunday with a fair measure of desire to receive a religious benefit, and under conditions most favorable for its reception. The day may be calm and bright and the place may have many hallowed associations with both the living and the dead. In rural churches in many lands the eye of the worshiper may rest for a moment upon sculptured stones, that remind him of many whose dust is dead and whose spirits have entered the City of God. The forms of the departed rise up before him. The voice of the preacher has been heralded perhaps by sacred song, designed to call up emotion and bathe the soul in a sea of spiritual delight. When all is hushed and still, surely there is offered to the preacher a golden opportunity—not for display, nor for a declamatory outburst, nor for histrionic performances of which the world is too full—but for plain, earnest, simple, well-chosen words on the subject which of all others must continue to command attention—the subject of man's relation to God and a future life—the subject which no philosophical theories and no delirium of business or pleasure can drown in oblivion.

And yet every one knows that the outward efforts of the tens of thousands of religious discourses delivered each Lord's Day are so disappointing that the cry is heard from many quarters—*Cui bono?* People have begun to ask, If on any particular day this were all sus-