

The Science and Art of Preaching.

[NOTE.—The following article represents the substance of an address given at several Conferences for the training of Missionary Workers, held in various Northern towns during the spring of this year. This fact will account for the type of illustrations which are used in connexion with some of the points. The points themselves, however, are perfectly general, and are applicable to the preparation and presentation of any sermon or address. Hence the adoption of a generalized title for the paper.]

WHEN the greatest of apostolic preachers was giving some practical advice to a young lieutenant, he wrote, "Take heed to thyself and thy teaching." The order of words is noteworthy. It brings out the vitally important truth that the preparation of the preacher is more important than the preparation of the sermon. This is indeed true in more ways than one. In very many cases the effect of the message delivered depends largely upon the general estimate of the character of the preacher which his life has caused to be formed in the minds of the people among whom he lives. "What you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say." But the truth is also directly applicable to the preparation of the message. The preacher must prepare himself first. This is well brought out in that famous definition of a sermon which we owe to Bishop Phillips Brooks. He writes in his *Lectures on Preaching* (pp. 5-9): "Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men. It has in it two essential elements, truth and personality. Neither of those can it spare and still be preaching. . . . Preaching is the bringing of truth through personality. It must have both elements. It is in the different proportion in which the two are mingled that the difference between two great classes of sermons and preaching lies. . . . The truth must come really through the person, not merely over his lips, not merely into his understanding and out through his pen. It must come through his character, his affections, his whole intellectual and moral being. . . . This decrees for us in general what the preparation for the ministry is. It must be nothing less than the making of a man. It cannot be the mere training to certain tricks." If all this be true, as it most profoundly is, there is no need to apologize for spending a little time first on the preparation of the messenger before we study the principles of preparing a message.

THE PREPARATION OF THE MESSENGER.

We are familiar with the threefold division of the spiritual side of human nature into thought, will, and desire. The preacher and his audience alike share this nature. It is his aim to reach his audience in all three departments of their being, and if he is to do this successfully, his own nature must be similarly prepared. This preparation is obviously something which cannot be crowded into half an hour or half a week. It is a life-long process. It may be conscious or it may be unconscious, but it is going on all the time, being indeed part of the general development of character. There is, however, a good deal that may, and indeed *must*, be consciously and definitely done. Let us consider the preparation of intellect, of emotion and of will.

(i) *Intellect.* The first thing required is undoubtedly fullness of knowledge. It has been aptly said that a speaker at the opening of an address ought to bear a resemblance to a full sponge. Wherever you press the sponge, water will flow forth. The speaker ought to be equally full of his subject, able to deal with it at any point. To put the same truth in other words, a speaker ought really always to know more than he intends to say. It is seldom possible in a single address to deal with more than one aspect of a great subject. But this does not mean that a speaker can be content to know merely that one aspect. If he knows that and no more, there is always the danger of an inadequate because one-sided and unbalanced presentation. How great this danger is, the history of Theology witnesses. Calvin, for example, was so keen on emphasizing his great truth of the Sovereignty of God that he forgot the equally great truth, for which Arminius stood, of human freedom and responsibility. Even in missionary addresses there is the danger of onesidedness. We may be so obsessed with the blackness of darkness of heathenism as to forget the gleams of light, the partial revelations of God to those who from without the chosen races have been seeking after God if haply they may find Him. To-day it is possible that the opposite danger may be more serious. Some of us are so keen to find the good points in heathenism as to forget its horrors. What we want, and what will really do most good and run least risk of doing harm, is a fair and balanced statement, and this implies a reserve of knowledge.

Constant reading, therefore, is a part of our intellectual

preparation. And here we are faced with the universal difficulty of lack of time. We are undoubtedly all very busy. At least we think we are. The only thing that can be said is that, generally speaking, the busiest man is the most likely man to find time to do extra work. Nor is the reason far to seek. The busy man has usually learnt the supreme art of not wasting little spaces of time. It is astonishing how many little intervals we have during the day. Some of us waste these. Some of us have learnt to put them to good use, and thus we get more work done without lengthening our day at the two ends. It is good to have a book or a magazine on hand, and to cultivate the art of turning to it at odd moments. I was interested the other day to hear a Secretary of a Missionary Society tell me how many volumes of Theology he had read during the time spent in the train or tram on his daily journey to and from his office.

The other thing required in preparation of intellect is the cultivation of freshness of outlook. The danger of getting into a groove is proverbial. It is an insidious danger. We may be in a groove almost without knowing it. But it is a danger to be avoided. Somehow we must keep alive within ourselves the capacity to take in new ideas. We need to retain intellectual sympathy. Constant contact with others from whom we differ is a great help in this direction. Most of all, perhaps, it is good for us to be in contact with men of a younger generation. They look at things with different eyes from ourselves. The freshness of outlook is very much needed in the world of missionary workers. Missionary methods abroad have not remained unaltered in the last twenty-five years. Nor are methods of missionary propaganda at home the same. There is no reason why freshness of outlook and sympathy with new ideas and new methods should not be combined with that ripeness of judgment which is the crown of the experience of a long life.

(ii) *Emotions.* The candid critic is apt to talk sometimes of "uninspiring" sermons. If he is brutal as well as candid, he may even accuse the preacher of talking "dry rot." The "rot," if rot there be, is a matter for the intellect. The lack of inspiring power and the dryness fall within the sphere of the emotions. It is possible to have the best and most carefully prepared matter, but to present it in a dull and lifeless and uninspiring way. There

is therefore real need to cultivate the emotions as well as the mind. No doubt we are not all made alike. Our temperaments differ considerably, as our intellectual powers do. But even if we cannot by nature be classed as emotional, none of us ought to let ourselves deserve the epithet of "dry." Sir John Seeley wrote: "No heart is pure that is not passionate. No virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic." And certainly no sermon or address will be effective unless the matter is shot through with emotion. In other words, our facts want to have got down from our heads to our hearts. We need to have felt them as well as to have grasped them. They must be poured forth with the force of a passionate conviction. The warmth in ourselves will create a warmth in our audience which will make them receptive.

Much can be done to cultivate and refine the emotions. Such things as music and art appeal directly to them. Or again, real help is to be found sometimes in letting the soul go out in response to the appeal of a glorious landscape. The regular reading of *Punch* was even suggested by a well-known authority in these matters. Contact with human life in its joys and its sorrows will do much for us. The great thing is to give ourselves time to feel. The play of emotion cannot be hurried or systematized. But the time thus spent is well spent. We all know the marvellous effect of an address coming through a personality whose emotions have been really cultivated and chastened. On the other hand, unless the emotion of an audience is touched by emotion in the speaker, the facts communicated to the intellect have little effect.

(iii) *Will*. The will is the practical part of us. Modern psychologists are even inclined to make it the innermost centre of personality. It also needs its cultivation because a speaker must exercise a real control over his audience by sheer force. He must compel them to listen. The force of will varies much in different persons. In some men it is so outstanding as to become a difficulty. Others are too pliant. The way to cultivate the will is to do things sometimes just because we intend to do them: to do them for the mere sake of doing them, though there may be no necessity to do them, nor anything very attractive about them when done. One or two efforts of sheer will are wonderfully strengthening to a weak man.

There is another aspect of this matter altogether. No man can

speak with real constraining force unless in his own mind he is conscious that he is practising what he preaches. Sincerity is an essential ingredient in the constitution of a successful speaker. Insincerity speedily brings failure in its train. No one can plead the claims of service in the Mission Field unless he is quite clear about the soundness of the reasons which have kept him at home. No one can urge home service in the Missionary cause unless he is doing his own full share. No one can plead for financial support unless he is himself giving in proportion to his means. The life of a speaker becomes a real factor in the helpfulness of his message, and life is a matter of conduct and will.

THE PREPARATION OF THE MESSAGE.

Let us now study the immediate preparation of a particular message. Before, however, we deal with questions of science and art, there is perhaps one not uncommon misconception which ought to be removed. It is by some people thought that there is a contradiction between the use of art and the practice of dependence upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit given in answer to prayer. The contradiction does not exist. The use of art and the dependence upon the Holy Spirit are complementary. Both are necessary. Kingsley used to say, "There is no more use in praying without practising than there is in practising without prayer." And Fleming wrote, "Pray as if everything depended upon God. Act as if everything depended upon yourself" (*Life*, p. 12). In what follows the prayer is assumed. Attention is directed solely to the art. There are four points to be considered.

A. *The Aim.* (i) It is necessary to have an aim in every address. Otherwise, as some one has remarked, if you aim at nothing, you will certainly hit it. There is a further use in an aim besides the primary one. It gives unity to an address. Unity is as necessary to an address as it is supposed to be to a Shakespearean play. Unless there is an aim to give unity, to form a centre round which all the matter falls into its due place, an address may fail through being disconnected and fragmentary. A theological student once criticized a brother beginner in preaching for having delivered an address which was "like a country ramble." There are others besides young preachers whose addresses approximate

to the "country ramble" type. These are apt to strike the audience as having no beginning and no end (sometimes the end is very long in coming!), and they are very difficult to carry away. Both for the preacher and for his audience a clearly conceived aim is necessary, and the very first step in preparation is to find the aim. Those who use the lessons in the magazine published by the Church of England Sunday School Institute will have noticed that each lesson begins with an aim. Preachers may take a hint from the teachers.

(ii) The aim of course varies enormously, but there are a few general remarks which can be made about it. The speaker is endeavouring to reach an audience whose nature, like his own, is composed of intellect, emotions and will. An address therefore ought to appeal to all these constituents, and the aim must always be three-sided. I think it was Cicero who said that the aim of an orator was "docere, placere, movere," to teach, to please, to move. In other words, we want to give knowledge, to rouse interest, and to cause action. In missionary addresses the giving of knowledge is of primary importance. We deplore the apathy which is so common among professing Churchmen and even among a large proportion of communicants, on the subject of Missions. The cause of the apathy is very largely sheer ignorance. Missionary instruction is apt to be confined in some parishes to an annual visit by a deputation, and the subject is never mentioned during the rest of the year. It ought really to form part of the ordinary round of preaching. Hence there is the greater need that when missionary addresses are being given, definite facts should be abundantly presented as mental food. Not that the need for instruction is confined to missionary topics. The average Churchgoer's knowledge of what are really the fundamentals of the faith is painfully limited. There is much truth in the accusation that our sermons have contained too much vague exhortation and too little definite instruction.

The knowledge must be imparted with such emotional power that it stirs up emotions in the hearers. It must rouse pity or sympathy or the desire to help or the desire for further information as the case may be. Then the emotions must be used as a stimulus to action. It is fatal to let emotion spend itself fruitlessly. That process leads only to the drying up of the springs of emotion. The

will must be invoked, and suggestions must be made for practical conduct.

The relative prominence of these three aspects of an aim will vary in each address with the subject and the audience, though they should probably all be present in some degree. If an audience is large and mixed, and its intellectual standard is varied, it becomes difficult proportionately to teach, and greater prominence has to be given to the appeal to emotion and will. Where the audience is small and the intellectual calibre is fairly equal, the aspect of pure instruction can be proportionately emphasized. The choice of the right aim is perhaps the most difficult part of the preparation of an address. But it is worth while to spend time and thought over it. Obviously it really presupposes some knowledge of the audience, and therein lies the difficulty of framing a suitable address for an audience one has never seen, and the composition of which is problematical. Such an address has to depend upon guess work, and may fail accordingly.

B. The Introduction. The aim is probably kept locked up in the speaker's own mind. The introduction is the first part of the address itself. It may be, and probably usually is, very short in proportion to the total length. It must be tremendously varied in form. But the principle which controls it in all its variations is a simple and yet vitally important one. The principle is that all education proceeds from the known to the unknown. The purpose of the introduction, therefore, is to find a point of contact between the known and the unknown, between the previous knowledge of the audience or class and the new knowledge which the address is to give them.

A common illustration may help. There is an indoor game the apparatus of which consists of a piece of cardboard carrying hoops to which are affixed the numbers one to thirteen, and a small supply of rubber rings. The game is to throw the rings from a distance so that they are caught on the hooks. Each successful throw scores a number of points identical with the number attached to the hook. Now the cardboard resembles the mind of man with its store of knowledge. The rings represent the new knowledge contained in the address. The problem is to attach the rings to a suitable hook. In the game, unless the ring catches on a hook it falls to the ground, and there is no score. In speaking, unless the point of contact be found,

the speech falls flat and is ineffective. No more need be said, surely, to prove the tremendous importance of the introduction. The selection of the right introduction, the finding of the point of contact, is a problem whose solution requires ever fresh ingenuity. One or two general remarks may be made.

If the audience be small and familiar, such as a Sunday school or Bible class, the problem is very much easier. In this case the teacher knows, or should know, a good deal about the personal and home and workaday life of his audience, and it ought not to be difficult to find something in one or other of these which would form a suitable opening. In other instances where the audience is unknown, or only partially known, as is the case with most congregations or meetings which a missionary speaker is called upon to address, a guess has to be made. It is well then to pitch upon some large matter of interest at the moment, with which most audiences may be presumed to have at least a measure of acquaintance. At the present time, for instance, a variety of points of contact can be constructed by selecting different aspects of the war situation.

The importance of finding a point of contact is not really confined to the introduction, although it is particularly urgent there. The more fully contact can be established all the way through an address, the better. An illustration from carpentry is of use here. The new matter contained in an address should be as perfectly united to the old as two pieces of board are dovetailed together by a carpenter. This is a high ideal, but it is worth aiming at. In the language of Herbart, we need to labour at "association" along with our "presentation." But this leads us on to the next stage.

C. The substance. This is of course the longest part of the address. It is also the centre of it, the part for which the rest exists. The introduction is intended to lead up to it: the application is intended to drive it home in all its bearings. There are perhaps three counsels which may be given concerning the form in which it is presented.

(i) It should be suitable to the audience. Some audiences are thoroughly mixed, and have to be dealt with accordingly. But some partake of a special character. If they do, the address ought to be suited to that character. We may have an audience of children. If so, the address would dwell upon the heroic or adventurous sides of missionary work, or upon the child life of other lands. We may

have an audience of women. If so, the situation of women in heathenism might well be considered; or if that particular topic be out of the question, reference might be made to the pitiable plight of the heathen, and an appeal lodged to the softer emotions. For a body of working men stress might be laid upon the social unrighteousness which is so common in heathen lands. A body of theological students would be interested in the comparisons between the theologies of the different religions. Each of these and similar classes may often be subdivided along other lines, for instance according to their familiarity with the subject or their keenness about it. With children the question of their age and so of their dominant mental characteristics is no unimportant one. The consideration of these types of audience in the preparation of any particular address may sound like a counsel of perfection. We must, however, at any rate pay some heed to it, and always regard it as an ideal to be kept before the mind.

(ii) The matter should be clearly divided, so that not only the speaker but also the listeners may be able easily to see the divisions or stages of the subject. No doubt there are some great sermons where the absence of division seems plain. Sermons of this type are intended rather to create a single impression than to convey definite instruction. But we may be forgiven for suggesting that most of us speakers of a humbler sort are on safer ground if our sermons can be easily and clearly analysed. There is then in them a series of connected and consecutive points. These points serve a double purpose. They assist the preacher in the orderly development of his matter, and should prevent him from being illogical or inconsequent. Their very name suggests also that they may find their way like arrows into the hearers' minds and stick there, so that there is something definite which can be carried away and thought over at leisure in hours and days to come. Some preachers always number their points; others have a great fondness for more or less successful alliteration. Neither of these things is necessary, nor even always desirable. But upon the need for the existence of clear points hardly too much stress can be laid.

(iii) The subject matter should be vividly presented. Concrete cases are usually better than abstract principles. It is a good rule that we should "think pictorially," so as to appeal to the imagination. A little reflection will show how largely the success of our

Lord's public teaching lay in its concrete and dramatic presentation. Consider how ineffective a discourse on the necessity and nature of repentance would have been in comparison with the beautiful story of the Prodigal Son, or a talk on the duty of kindness compared to the moving anecdote of the Good Samaritan. In missionary addresses particularly it seems to be the concrete which tells, and this is most of all true in the presentation of statistics. An illustration may be given from a foot-note in a recent missionary magazine. The writer said that if Christ had on Ascension Day set Himself the task of visiting one Indian village each day, and had persevered with it till now, so far from having exhausted the number, he would still have to go on for another seventy years before He had got round them once. This seems to present the population of India in a much more impressive way than the bald statement that it is about 300,000,000.

D. The application. If the substance of the address has been occupied with a statement of the facts, the function of the application is to show the bearing of the facts: to drive them home, and persuade the audience to act upon them. If the special purpose of the substance of the address has been to teach, the purpose now is chiefly to interest and to move. There is therefore, a special appeal to the emotions and the will. Nothing is so valuable for appealing to the emotions as a good story from human life which puts into a dramatic form the main lessons which have been taught. Such a story may well be modelled on the Lord's moving story of the Good Samaritan, which always stirs up a desire to "go and do likewise." The writer well remembers with what forcefulness a speaker in his hearing drove home an address on the appeal of the Mass Movements by a personal story. Happy is the speaker who has read so widely and wisely as to have at his disposal a suitable stock of illustrations.

Last comes the appeal to the will. Let it be said again that an appeal to the emotions without a following appeal to the will is dangerous. It can only produce spiritual callousness. Concerning appealing to the will, one wise rule may be mentioned. It is generally better to act by suggestion than by command. It is said of Yorkshire people "you can lead them, but you can't drive them." There is psychological truth at the back of this proverb. If an idea is suggested to a person, and he makes it his own, when he acts upon it he seems to act of his own accord, and therefore he acts the more

strenuously and willingly. There are, unfortunately, exceptions to this rule. Some people seem to be so constituted that they will not do things unless they are compelled. But despite these exceptions, the rule is a good one and worthy of extended trial.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE MESSAGE.

What rules are there for the delivery of an address? Very many and very few. Very few because people are made differently and a method which suits one will not suit another. Some people seem to do best when they have an address fully written out. Some have fairly full notes, giving carefully the substance of what they intend to say but leaving the choice of words and the framing of sentences to the moment of speaking. Some have only scanty notes, containing the broad divisions of the subject and any exceptional figures or quotations which cannot be safely trusted to memory. Some feel that any reference whatever to manuscript ties them, and prefer to depend upon memorized notes alone. Each man and woman must experiment and adopt the method which seems to yield the best results. The present writer can only speak for himself in advocating notes, and plead as a theoretical defence for this method that it gives the happy combination of a freedom of speech with a guarantee against wandering far from a prepared plan.

A few sentences may be quoted again from Phillips Brooks: "In the written sermon . . . there is deliberateness. There is the assurance of industry and the man's best work. The truth comes to the people with the weight that it gets from being evidently the preacher's serious conviction. There is self-restraint. There is some exemption from those foolish fluent things that slip so easily off the ready tongue. . . . On the other hand, the extemporaneous discourse has the advantage of alertness. It gives a sense of liveliness. It is more immediately striking. It possesses more activity and warmth" (*op. cit.*, 170, 171).

The principle which must decide the matter is that definition of preaching and teaching which was quoted at the outset. Truth must be given through personality. Whatever amount of manuscript is used, it must not be allowed to get between the speaker's personality and the audience. If the Holy Spirit has been training a personality during many years, He wants it to come into action for the recommending of the truth, which by it is being passed on.

And if fears of forgetfulness and nervousness arise, the antidote lies in an appeal to that same Holy Spirit, one of whose duties in connexion with Christ's disciples was to bring all things to their remembrance.

In missionary teaching, perhaps more than in teaching on any other subject, there is every need for the address to be thoroughly inspiring and stimulating, just because of the apathy and indifference which seems to be so deeply rooted in a large section of our communicants. But inspiration can only be engendered by contact with an inspiring man; and the thrilling appeal which missionary facts contain within themselves is doubly enhanced when those facts come through a personality whose sincerity, enthusiasm and passion are patent to all.

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