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ARTICLE III.

THE THEORY OF PREACHING.[1]

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IT is a truth which has become a truism, that the character of a people may be inferred from that of their religious teachers. Among a Christian people, the exponent of this relation between the teacher and the taught, is the pulpit. The style of preaching which is current in any age of the church, is like a pulse, by which the disease or the health of the church, in that age, may be discerned. Even minute fluctuations of vitality may be commonly detected, by corresponding fluctuations of the regimen prescribed from the pulpit. This fact gives permanent importance to inquiries respecting the true theory of preaching. Such inquiries are like certain standard problems in philosophy. Every generation must propose and answer them for itself. They have become ancient, but not antiquated themes of discussion.

In our own day, it is not difficult to detect the existence of five distinct theories, by which the Christian ministry are consciously or unconsciously guided in their public labors. Each of these theories has a certain central principle, forming the nucleus of subordinate but kindred principles, which give distinctiveness to the theory, and to the usages which grow up under its operation. These theories are, some of them, so diverse from each other, that it is not easy to see how they can be the product of a common faith. Yet each does affect, by secret affinities and repulsions, a class of Christian minds. Even sectarian divisions are sometimes more distinctly marked to the public eye, by these diversities of theory with regard to the pulpit, than by the ostensible reasons in which those divisions had their origin.

One of the current theories of preaching, is constructed

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upon the doctrine of the priestly character of the Christian ministry. This is its central principle; and around this are clustered, almost with the certainty of corollaries to a theorem in mathematics, certain other principles vitally affecting the province of the pulpit. Among these are the subordination of preaching to worship, in the services of the sanctuary; the cultivation of stateliness of religious forms; veneration for sacred places and for sacerdotal costume; attachment to ancient liturgies; and an inordinate dependence upon music and architecture, as means of awakening the religious sensibilities.

Nearly allied with this, and yet distinct from it, is a second theory of preaching, which is founded upon an extravagant estimate of the value of poetic sentiment to the cause of religion. This theory has comparatively few adherents; yet it often exists in fact rather than in form, where it is not avowed, nor even recognized by its possessor. In its boldest form, it assumes that anomaly in ethics which is so often affirmed by Goethe, and which is a fair inference from certain expressions of Wordsworth, that the love of beauty is equivalent to virtue, and delight in Nature is delight in God. In a modified development, it regards poetic feeling as so nearly kindred to a religious experience, and the cultivation of Taste to a religious culture, that it practically subordinates the pulpit to the cause of polite literature. In its selection of the themes of preaching, and in its favorite methods of discussion, it searches for the materials of imaginative excitement. Its result is a religion of the Imagination, rather than a religion of Conscience. It is a reproduction, under Christian forms, of the genius of the Greek mythology. A mind developed wholly by its influence, would not differ essentially from that of a refined Athenian of the age of Pericles.

A third theory, which appears to give character to the labors of a class of preachers, is distinguished chiefly by the preëminence which it gives to social reforms among the themes of the pulpit. Preachers of this class seem to address themselves to *man* rather than to *men*. They aim, in

their ministrations, at institutions and customs of society, and political systems, more earnestly, if not more frequently, than at individual souls. They are distinguished by the fidelity with which they apply the Gospel to great questions of liberty and of social order, and the fearlessness with which they rebuke systematized and legalized wrong. The heart of such preachers is in the work of Reform; and they bend to its service, in greater or less degree, their theory of the province of the pulpit. As an important ally of this theory, may be commonly observed the conviction, which appears to assume the permanence of a principle in their philosophy respecting this world's progress, that the Christian church is always at a crisis in its history. It is always in a perilous and peculiar emergency. It is always beset by unprecedented dangers. It is always degenerate as compared with the church of olden times. It is always infected with the premonitory symptoms of apostasy. The preaching which is adapted to the age, upon such a theory, is necessarily comminatory. The voice of the preacher is habitually the voice of rebuke and denunciation. It rarely falls into the genial commendatory tone, which so often rings out, like the voice of a glad father, from the Epistles of Paul. It is the voice of a public censor — faithful, earnest, eloquent, it may be — still, not in the noblest symmetry of meaning, the voice of a Christian preacher.

A fourth theory of preaching is distinguished by the ascendency which it gives to Emotion, in religious experience. This theory assumes that, in the natural working of mind on the subject of religion, feeling precedes and often supersedes thought, and that therefore the true method of preaching is that which addresses itself, directly and mainly, to the sensibilities of men. It would use the pulpit chiefly, not for the discussion, but for the direct application, of truth. All that hearers may be presumed to know of the Gospel, it would assume, as the basis of immediate appeal to the conscience. It does not recognize the wisdom of discussing admitted truth. Its dependence for the success of preaching, is mainly upon the power of exhortation, and

upon that magnetic sympathy by which emotion in a speaker's heart reproduces its like in the heart of an audience. It expressly aims at the creation of a degree of excitement which, from its very nature, cannot be permanent. The auxiliaries which it seeks in the dissemination of truth, and the expedients it devises for the promotion of its end, all have the common character of direct stimulants to emotion. We should be wrong in naming this the theory of Enthusiasm; yet its tendencies and perils are in that direction. An unthoughtful piety finds repose under its operation. It tends to create a religion of feeling, such as is most facile to undisciplined minds. An itinerant ministry becomes a necessity to its success; and, indeed, the whole policy to which it would subject the administration of the pulpit, is adjusted to rapid and incessant fluctuation in the pastoral office, as its result.

Of all these theories of preaching, which have now been named, it is to be conceded that they possess, though in widely different proportions, the germs of truth. They may all be made to commend themselves to certain classes of pious minds. They may be held with great sincerity of conviction, and may be acted upon with an earnestness and energy which shall awaken the sympathy of all generous hearts. Still they are not an adequate representation of the province of the pulpit.

There is yet another theory, which it will be the object of this Article to state and to advocate as the true theory of preaching, in a land where Christianity is nominally established as the ruling element in civilization.

To prevent misconception, in speaking of the 'theory of preaching,' it is proper to premise that the Pulpit is here regarded merely as a divinely chosen instrument. Its relation to Divine influence is that of absolute dependence. No real efficacy whatever is attributable to it as an isolated power. Still, as an instrument of Divine appointment, as an institution, operating under the condition of dependence upon the Divine Spirit, it is a proper subject of analysis. Conditions of efficiency inhere in that very constitution which God has

given it. These, if we may know them, constitute the true theory of preaching. We are not irreverent in examining them independently of the supernatural, and therefore anomalous, element of Divine influence, on which they are all dependent. It is proper to study a subject like this philosophically, as the laws of nature may be studied, while in neither case we withhold the grateful acknowledgment of the Divine purpose, of which all true philosophy is only the index or the illustration.

Leaving behind us therefore the supernatural Power which energizes all instrumentalities of good in this world, we may observe the characteristic principle of the true theory of preaching in the fact that preaching should consist pre-eminently of *the argumentative discussion of Theology.* This is the central idea, under and around which are gathered a group of elements, which cluster together by natural affinities, and are commonly found in conjunction in the history of the pulpit.

Of these, may be observed first, *The relative dignity of the work of preaching.* There are certain institutions, of the dignity of which it is difficult to speak in the tone of measured argument. They seem to speak for themselves, upon the first disclosure of their character, and to command instantaneous reverence. Such an institution stands, among kindred objects, like the dome of St. Peter's amidst the other basilicas of Rome, towering so far above them, and expanding into such ampler proportions, that these seem as if erected by the cunning architect, for no purpose but to enhance, by comparison, the grandeur of the other. Approach it from whatever quarter of the compass you choose, view it in the distance, or standing in its shadow, at noon day or in a clear evening, or in the morning twilight; it always looms up before you, in the solitude of inimitable greatness. Such an institution is the Christian Pulpit; and an appreciation of its dignity must enter fundamentally into the theory of effective preaching. No man can preach well who does not reverence his work as one of unique grandeur. It stands alone, in its intrinsic magnitude, and in the results which it

is destined to accomplish. The *Press* and the *School*—the other two great instruments of moral power over mankind—find their true position, so far as the destiny of religion is concerned, only when they fall into the rank of allies to the pulpit, and yet its inferiors.

The foundation of this view might, without difficulty, be discovered in the very nature of oratory as compared with other modes of exerting moral power. It is no arrogance in the genius of oratory, viewing it in its relation to the moral wants of this world, to claim precedence over the genius of authorship. Of the two, oratory is, in this relation, the superior development of mind. Its range is at a loftier elevation of thought, and it sustains at that height a greater variety of faculties, moved by sensibilities more profound and more thoroughly trained, and adjusted with more exquisite balance to their object. The fecundity of the modern press is apt to shake our confidence in the truth universally held by the ancient world, of the superiority of oral speech to all other means of power over mind. Yet it is the significant fact now, as in the best days of Greek wisdom, that the rarest phenomenon in the world of mind is a truly great orator. The world numbers its solitary thinkers and its great writers by scores, and its great books by hundreds, where it can boast of one great orator. Literature, in the course of ages, reproduces many times over the cast of mind which Aristotle represents, where it once reproduces Demosthenes. It is not then without regard to the nature of things, that Divine wisdom has ordained the pulpit to the front rank of dignity, in the work of this world's conversion. This arrangement stands upon one of the profoundest laws of human nature, the law of influence by living speech. This is an arrangement also, the wisdom of which the world has always recognized whenever a genuine orator has appeared in the pulpit. Mediocrity and incompetency, and above all hypocrisy, in the pulpit, have done much to degrade it; and often its history, for a period, has seemed to furnish no illustration of the secret of its great strength. But when emergencies have arisen, and the spirit of true eloquence has been

aroused in the Christian ministry, it has been like the descent of a spirit of prophecy. Nations have been swayed by it, as by no other power known in the history of the world. It has so proved its nobility, that all far-seeing minds have recognized it as a power which had no peer. It has created currents of opinion and of purpose, to which cabinets and armies and universities and synods have alike given way. When Luther trembled in entering the pulpit, he felt only the instinctive reverence of a great mind for a great mission. No man can preach well, who has not a similar appreciation of the dignity of his work.

The point which deserves to be specially noticed in this connection, is, that the only theory which in practice can secure to the Christian pulpit an honorable *existence*, is that which assigns to it the supremacy among all conceivable instrumentalities which might be employed to support the institutions of Christianity. In the nature of the case, and by the ordinance of God, the demands of the pulpit here are imperative. It must hold the place of chief honor in the policy of Christian effort, or it can hold no place in which it shall either command or deserve a pittance of respect. To depress it, is to destroy it. Make it subordinate, and you make it effeminate. Like a certain class of individual minds, it proves its superior power only in a range of influence that gives scope for superior reach of plan and energy of exertion. Subject it, in the estimation of the clergy, to the press or to schools of learning, considered as instruments of moral power, and you inevitably extinguish its vitality. Degrade it by submission to a petty rivalry with forms of worship, with liturgies, with the fascinations of music, with architecture, with posture and costume and intonation, in the administration of the sanctuary, and the living spirit goes out of it. It ceases to command respect, because it ceases to be respectable. Christian institutions may, it is true, temporarily command respect for other reasons, where the effort is made to support them, notwithstanding a depression of the pulpit; but from the pulpit, in such a state of depression, they gain nothing. That ceases

to be a power in the support of Christianity, instantly, when its inferiority to anything on earth, is confessed in the convictions of the church. It becomes an appendage and an incumbrance. The natural working of the system of policy which has killed it, is to throw it, sooner or later, from Christian usage, as was virtually done by the Romish church, for five hundred years before the Reformation.

It is specially necessary to the dignity of the pulpit, that we reject, without reserve, the doctrine of the priestly character of the clergy. The history of this doctrine, in all its varieties, illustrates its tendency to subject the work of preaching to humiliation. It is not, strictly speaking, a Christian doctrine. Its essential idea is foreign to all that is peculiar to Christianity as an advance upon Judaism. It is a relic of an extinct dispensation. All attempts to resuscitate it, under Christian forms, have signally proved its incongruity with a vital and aggressive form of Christian faith. A Christian church loses its distinctive character when it becomes a temple. A Christian pulpit is shorn of its power when it gives place to an altar. A Christian minister sinks beneath all legitimate and honorable influence over earnest minds, when he becomes a priest. Temples, altars, and priesthoods belong to a buried past. So far as they ever had a place in the history of true religion, they were the symbols of a system which the world has outgrown, and which, long since, fell out from the plans of God for the world's redemption. The constitution of a Christian priesthood, at the present stage, in the execution of those plans, is scarcely less incongruous than the attempt would be to reconstruct, for all future time, the priesthood of Apollo or of Isis. When we look for the symbol of dignity which distinguishes the Christian ministry, we must find it in the pulpit. A minister of Christ must be regarded as being, above all his other distinctions, a preacher. His character as a preacher cannot be submerged in the character of priest, and yet *exist* in any manly and commanding form. The testimony to this effect, furnished by the history of the Romish church, is almost too palpable to need remark. What would the world

have ever known of Bourdaloue or Massillon, if their claims to remembrance had rested upon their discharge of priestly functions? When have such men ever appeared in the Romish church, without reversing the order of thought in the Romish theory of the clerical office, and causing the idea of the priest to sink in that of the preacher?

Even the attenuated form of this priestly theory of ministerial character, which has been admitted into the constitution of some Protestant churches, has exerted a degrading influence upon the pulpit. If there was ever a period in the history of the English church, when the legitimate fruits of this theory might have been expected to display themselves most amply, it was during the reign of the second Charles. The restoration of their church had been welcomed by the people of England, even more enthusiastically than the restoration of their king. The reaction from Puritanism was complete. Exiled clergymen were recalled, in scores, to their benefices, and they recommenced the discharge of their functions amidst the rejoicings of a national jubilee. Never was a fairer opportunity given to a national clergy, to impress their own character on an affectionate and docile people. That was a period, too, when this doctrine of the vicarious character of the clerical functions seems to have been far more generally and practically applied, than in the later and, as we must believe, happier years of the church of England. Yet what was, then, the position of the clerical body? From the graphic picture of them, drawn by Mr. Macaulay, and confirmed by Burnet and other early historians, we derive a judgment which, if it came from any less trustworthy source, we should, for the honor of our common ancestry, denounce as a calumny. We are told that, with rare exceptions, a reproach lay broadcast upon the clergy through the whole country. The rural clergy especially were regarded as inferiors, even among the plebeian classes. Nine-tenths of them were in the station of menial servants. Never, before or since, has the clerical office fallen to so low a state in the English Church. The country gentleman who thought it necessary to his dignity or his salvation, that grace should

be said at his table daily, by an ecclesiastic in full canonicals, sought to reconcile dignity and safety with economy by requiring of his chaplain the discharge of, not only his professional duties, but also those of a gardener or a groom. "Sometimes the reverend man nailed up the apricots, and sometimes he curried the coach-horses." The unfortunate divine who exchanged a chaplaincy for a benefice, was often compelled to resort to the feeding of swine, that he might obtain his daily bread. And this occupation on the week-day was a fit emblem of the caricatures of preaching, which were exhibited in the rural pulpits of England on the Sabbath. Commanding influence in the pulpit, in such a state of things, was an impossibility.

Evidence of the accuracy of this view, is still furnished to a traveller who, at this day, roams over the ruins of England's baronial halls and castles. At Haddon Hall, the ancient seat of the Earls of Rutland, a clerical stranger, as he wanders through the domicils which he is told were once fitted up in a style which was princely in that day, for the convenience of this and that division of the noble household, is apt to inquire for the chaplain's quarters. "This way, sir, if you please," replies the garrulous guide, and we follow. We leave behind us the tapestried chambers, and the lofty halls, rich with massive oaken art. We wind our way down a narrow staircase, to the midst of a series of low, dark apartments, which are arranged around the castle in a quadrangle, remote from the main edifice, somewhat after the manner of the huts of slaves on an American plantation. There, in close proximity to the kitchen, we are conducted through a door-way which any ordinary Scotch highlander must stoop to enter, into a pantry measuring, by the eye, scarcely eight feet by four, and lighted by a window not two feet square. And this is the chaplain's study. Here, amidst the Babel of seven score of servants, as we are told, the reverend priest of the Earldom of Rutland once thumbed the "ten or a dozen dog-eared volumes," which Mr. Macaulay very generously allows to the library of an English clergyman of that day, and which we may imagine

to have been gracefully arranged "amidst the pots and pans on the shelves." Here, with the inspiration of culinary art, the meek divine was expected to spend the fragments of hours which could be spared from the carrot-garden or the coach-house, in preparing such spiritual food as was craved by an earl's conscience, on the Lord's day and the festivals of the church. Thus lived the man of God,—"the Levite," as he was called in the dialect of the age,—without honor, without influence, without intelligence, without self-respect, inferior in rank to the chambermaid and the cook, and not to be named in the same breath that should speak the dignity of the butler. He existed only on the strength of a superstition which did not dare to dispense with his services, lest detriment should ensue to more noble souls, for the sake of whose salvation he was tolerated as a necessary incumbrance.

Now let it not be imagined that this picture is drawn in special reproach of the Church of England. It is the reproach rather of the age than of any church or clan. But it represents the legitimate fruit of that theory of the clerical functions, which throws a minister of the gospel, for the support of his influence, upon the supposed Levitical character of his office rather than upon the strength of the pulpit. We gratefully acknowledge that we owe to the Church of England some of the noblest examples of a practical refutation of this theory, that can be found in the annals of Protestantism. In the very age at which we have just glanced, there were men in the metropolitan pulpit, and at the universities of England, who in their own persons were living proof of what the pulpit may become, when the energy of great minds is thrown into it, and the priestly function of the clergy is suffered to sink out of sight. There were William Sherlock, and Tillotson, and Stillingfleet, and Sharp in London. There was Dr. South at Oxford, and Dr. Barrow at Cambridge, and at the head of the Irish see of Down and Connor stood Jeremy Taylor. It is the honor of the church of England that, in an age when the profligacy of the nobles and the superstition of the masses favored the degra-

ding notion of the priesthood of the clergy, she did raise up men who practically beat down that notion into subjection to the dignity of the pulpit. It is true, they could not see eye to eye with the Puritans on this subject. But they practically illustrated the Puritan theory. It was the weak ones among the Levites who derided the Puritan clergy as mere "pulpiteers," possessed of no apostolical authority, and yet who purchased, at the bookstalls, the anonymous manuscript sermons of these same "pulpiteers," to supply their own mental poverty. There were, at the same time, strong men, trained for the universities and the cities and the court, who, in opposition to the spirit of the system with which they were identified, threw themselves, for the support of their influence, upon the power of their pulpits. They rose above the whole tribe of Levi, and aspired to become preachers. They poured the treasures of their learning and the force of their character into their sermons. By the originality of genius, and in many cases by the fervor of godliness which they breathed into their pulpits, they gave to our Protestant literature, names which no section of Protestant Christendom can afford to lose. Thus it has been, and will be, everywhere. If a Protestant clergy sustain themselves as men of power in their profession, they will owe their power to their reverence for the pulpit. If a truly eminent man among them calls himself a priest, the world, as it follows him reverently, will forget this, and will do him greater honor. He will be known and honored as a preacher. Wake and Fowler and Sprat stood higher in Episcopal dignity than Jeremy Taylor; yet who knows them now? And who does not know Jeremy Taylor? When the world has ceased to care at what altars, in what cathedrals, such a man officiated, or how high in priestly rank he rose, pilgrims from distant lands will seek out the "Golden Grove," where he ministered, that they may stand in the shadow of his pulpit and say: "Here he preached the gospel of Christ."

Passing from this view of the province of the pulpit, as related in point of dignity to other instruments of moral power, we may observe further the true theory of preaching

by specifying, in the second place, the *importance which it attaches to individuality of practical aim.* The Gospel is not an abstract system of truth, valuable only as a science, and fitted to awaken the interest of only a few minds, which are enthusiastic in scientific research. Viewed as practical truth, it is the most intensely living system that has been framed in any department of human thought. The most practical of the natural sciences which are transforming the physical civilization of the world, is not so profoundly vital in its connection with the welfare of man. The most necessary of mechanic arts is not more direct in its reach into the heart of man's interests, than are many even of the more recondite themes of the pulpit. The religion of the Bible asserts claims in this respect which the world has not yet acknowledged. The prevailing spirit of modern science is specially adverse to them. They are often represented as arrogant or puerile. Yet the faith of a Christian preacher in them cannot waver. He must be assured that he preaches a system of truth, which in its practical relations is correlative with all forms of human life, and with history through all time. Its genius is that of practical agitation and change. It is transforming, it is subversive, it is revolutionary. It cometh to send a sword on earth. Its destiny is to overturn and overturn and overturn.

Yet, with all this far-reaching practical energy, it is primarily addressed to individual man; not to communities, not to governments, not to nations, not to the race as such, but to individual man. It has to do, directly, with man singly; not with man in his organic relations. It knows nothing of the race of man as distinct from the individuals who compose the race. It is primarily a scheme of individual salvation; not a system of social civilization, not a standard of political economy, not a theory of Reform, not a manual of universal progress, any more than it is a revelation of geology or a theory of navigation. Enfolding, as it does, the entire race in its regards, it still reaches the race man by man. Its great workings are in the depths of the individual spirit. The great argument by which its reception is to be

enforced upon any human mind, is not that it was the religion of his fathers, not that it is the religion of his country, not that it is salutary in its bearings on organized society and on the progress of the species. These have been the arguments of superstition. But they are not, primarily, the arguments of the Christian religion. This comes to man as an individual. It singles him out, and claims his faith, on the ground of his own individual necessities. It is a scheme of individual salvation, devised to restore an individual ruin. Its only approach with power of conquest, to the organized forms of human life, lies through the avenue of individual regeneration.

This view is intensified by the almost absolute solitude in which the moral destiny of every individual is wrought out. Human probation possesses a peculiarity which is familiar to the thoughts of preachers, but which others, and especially those whose minds are much occupied with the organic forms of human being, are slow to appreciate, in its bearings on the duties of the pulpit. It is that those transactions on which individual destiny for eternity is suspended, are conducted in a state of probationary *seclusion*. Every man, woman, child, in those transactions, stands alone. The great changes of character, and the critical transitions of destiny, for which chiefly, the Christian religion is designed to make provision, every individual meets in solitude. Probation implies insulation. This necessarily gives intensity to the individualizing power of preaching. In a sense peculiar to the work of the pulpit, the message of a preacher has a solitary aim. It has to do with isolated destiny. It regards individual men, each in the singleness of his relation to the mind of God. It views each as on a secluded pilgrimage to one or another of the eternal worlds. It therefore penetrates beneath institutions, governments, customs, organizations. It seems often to be negligent of these, because it is at work in the under ground, below them. It is delving in the mine of individual being. It is piercing depths of individual conflict which no philosophy has sounded and no history has recorded. There it is ordained to do its work.

There is the real arena of its strife with evil, and of its triumph.

Now, a true preacher is never unmindful of this peculiarity of his mission. He preaches to individual men. His word is to this man and to that man; it is to you, and to me, and to him; to each, in the singleness of his identity, and in that impressive solitude in which every man is appointed to work out his own salvation. Preaching, in this view of it, has the directness, the minuteness, the earnestness, the naturalness, often the tearful stillness, of a private interview between friend and friend. It is like the low pleading of one who should take by the hand an only brother, and, leading him away to a prophet's chamber, should there reason with him of a judgment to come, as if he were the only lost being in the universe — lost through some dread anomaly in the working of probationary discipline. Such preaching is always powerful. It becomes instinct with life, through such individuality of aim. The arrow trembles with living energy, in its eagerness for its mark.

That element in the true theory of preaching, which is here presented, is obviously opposed to an inordinate discussion, in the pulpit, of themes appertaining to social and political reform. Not that it requires a preacher to be silent upon such themes. Not that he should practise a politic reserve upon them as perilous or unpopular themes. The claim which would impose silence or reserve upon the pulpit, in reference to this class of topics, can scarcely be treated with respect. It is always a dishonest or a puerile claim. No man will honestly assert it, who has studied well either the history of the pulpit or the bearings of Christianity upon the organic forms of human character, which are worked out in institutions, systems of policy, laws, and governments. The truth is, that it is in the very nature of the Christian religion to bear down upon these organic creations of the human mind at all points, with a pressure like that of the atmosphere upon the globe's surface. More than this — Christian truth, where it is effectual, is constantly work-

ing downward into the heart of society, and heaving up to the light of the common conscience, forms of corruption which have lain embedded for ages in opinions, and usages, and institutions, of the guilt of which the wisest and the best of men in former times were unconscious, and in God's sight innocent. That Christianity does this, is one evidence of its Divine origin; and wherever it does this, we have indubitable evidence that it has been faithfully preached. He must have studied the philosophy of Reform to little purpose, who is unable to detect an invariable proportion between the fidelity with which the Gospel has been preached as a scheme of individual redemption, and the elevation of the world's thought and sensibility respecting all forms of social wrong. The two things move together in the evolutions of the Divine plan, almost with the regularity and beauty of binary stars. When therefore, in the fulness of time, Christian ethics throw up to the light, and force to the battle, corrupt principles of legislation and of social usage, which have skulked behind ignorance and under moral torpidity, and when the heart of Christendom is agitated, and nations and races of men reel in the conflict, a true-hearted preacher is the last man on earth to stand still and keep silence. The pulpit *has* a message for the world in such emergencies, which is strictly *within* the range of religious teaching, and *as* a religious teacher he *must* speak that message. No man cherishes less sympathy than he with that cant of political pietism which is so slimy in its adulation of the clergy, when their voice happens to harmonize with the watchword of a dominant partisanship, and yet becomes so deadly in its hate when its heartlessness is rebuked, and so arrogant in its tone of command to a preacher, saying: "Confine thyself, O man of God, to thy vocation. Give heed to the sacredness of thy calling. Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Meddle not with things which thou knowest not. Leave to our wisdom these worldly themes, and preach unto us — "the Gospel." Give ear to our words, and we will honor thee; we will applaud thee with our many voices; we will make thy name great in the land,

and will teach our children to reverence thee. All the kingdoms of the world will we give unto thee. But, refuse our counsel and we will turn from thee; we will seek out a more prudent ministry. We will join ourselves to more conservative assemblies. We will blacken thy name; our many mouths shall be opened against thee, and thou shalt become a hissing and a byword." To such flattery and frowns, alike, an honest preacher has but one reply: "Get thee behind me, Satan."

Yet, on the other hand, a wise preacher cannot find it in his commission to make the relation of Christian ethics to organic society the *chief* burden of his ministration. He cannot find in this the chief incentive to enthusiasm in his work. He cannot *often* direct the forces of the pulpit against the mere correction of social wrongs, and the demolition of oppressive institutions. He cannot give to these themes a *pervasive presence* in his discourses. He cannot *so* preach upon them, that the level of his sympathy with his work shall appear to rise as high, in the discussion of them, as in that of Christian doctrines in their application to individual hearts. He cannot preach so that he shall never seem to have *forgotten* such themes. On the contrary, he must generally forget them. They are not eminent among the true topics of the pulpit. They are collateral and not central to the duty of a preacher in the ministry of the Gospel. He must commonly preach as if he were unconscious of their existence. The Gospel, as a scheme of individual salvation, lies deeper than such themes in the plans of God. A preacher must commonly be absorbed in its individual relations, as if it had no others. He must, for the most part, bury himself in the individuality of his work as in an old and long-wrought mine, where he shall toil with a singleness of purpose, and an intensity of abstraction from collateral objects, which shall often cause him to appear, like Archimedes at the sack of Syracuse, as if he knew nothing of the commotions, and heard nothing of the din of the conflicts, that are going on in the upper air.

Claims are often made upon preachers in reference to the

advocacy of reforms, which can never be conceded, without a diversion of the pulpit from the main design of its existence. The majority of the American clergy have been subjected to an ordeal, in this respect, which is one of the most singular that have ever tested the nerve of the Christian ministry. They have been censured for a policy in preaching, which is the inevitable result of fidelity to their commission. They have been loaded with epithets which they are too gentlemanly to retort, for having simply subordinated Reform to Regeneration, in their theory of progress. That has been ascribed to their pusillanimity, which was the necessary fruit of truthfulness to the individuality of the Christian religion in its practical aim. Bad men have hawked at them, and good men have joined in the calumny. Men have gone out from them, and shaken off the dust to their shame. Those who had taken counsel with them have lifted up the heel against them. Poetry and Fiction have lent the charm of genius to their reproach. Strange lands have rung with the rumors of their recreancy, and the echo has come back in caricature and libel. Now, to all this, it would be their right to reply, in calm but indignant rebuke: "Ye fools and blind." But we forbear. It is mournful, it is afflictive, as the fall of a brother, when the friends of a truthful cause thus assail its last hope. They know not what they do. If the organic corruptions of this world are ever to be purged away, it will be done by the Christian church energized by the grace of God in blessing upon the Christian pulpit. That blessing will go forth to the nations in the channel of *individual regeneration.* Its flow will be like that of subterranean rivers. If the tone of discussion on topics of Reform is ever to become more manly; if the cry of Scythian warfare is to fall into the deep calm voice of argument and remonstrance from millions of self-possessed souls, which are too earnest to be in a rage, this change must come from the spirit of a Christian ministry who shall have walked much with God, and have gathered humility of heart, and strength of purpose, and steadiness of aim, and repose in duty, from having been coworkers with God in the salvation of souls.

The moral sense of the world has yet to be trained to the perception of this fundamental principle of Christian progress: that individual regeneration underlies the whole system of the improvement of society, in all its ramifications. And in that specific work of individual regeneration lies the strength of the Pulpit as a power of Reform. On this principle, as Christian preachers, we must stand. We can do no otherwise. If others think they discern a more profound wisdom in a different principle, the two methods may be tested side by side. We need not tremble for the result. If there be any truth in the Christian idea of salvation, we may be assured that, upon any and every theory of reform which dishonors it, the providence of God will, in the language of Dr. Chalmers, "impress the stamp of a solemn and expressive mockery."

Thirdly. The true theory of preaching is distinguished, further, by the *preëminence which it gives to the distinctive doctrines of Theology, among the themes of the pulpit.* This theory is preëminent above others, for the distinctness with which it recognizes, in the Bible, a substratum of doctrines which underlies its sentiments, its precepts, its exhortations, and its commands; its poetry, its historic narratives, its biographies, and its epistolary discourses. Beneath all these, and as the foundation which supports the significance of them all, there is a system of doctrine, which it was the ultimate object of the Bible to discover to the world. These doctrines the theory before us exalts as the life of the pulpit. It projects them as the characteristic and ascendant themes of all Christian preaching. The pervasive presence of them is the thing which must distinguish the eloquence of the pulpit from that of the senate, or the bar, or the platform, or the chair of philosophy. According to this view, a preacher is, in the highest style of the character, a theologian. His office is to perform, under the conditions requisite to effective address to the popular mind, the same work in substance which the theologian of the schools performs, under the conditions requisite to the purposes of theological science. The same system of truth which lies em-

bedded in the Scriptures, and which constitutes theology as a science, and which, in its philosophic forms, is the theme of discussion in the schools, it is a preacher's province to discuss in its rhetorical forms in the pulpit. A wise preacher will translate that system, in its forms of statement, from the philosophic dialect of the schools, and from the antique dialect of the Scriptures, to that of popular and present usage. He will expand that system, by the introduction of subordinate topics which throng along the line of the discussion of all great doctrines, and which are in logical connection with them. And the system of Scriptural and scientific theology, thus reconstructed and expanded, will constitute the treasury of the themes of his sermons.

This theory, moreover, looks with suspicion upon the distinction so often loosely made, between doctrinal and practical sermons. It affirms that if by doctrinal preaching be meant that which is not practical, there is no such preaching. Essays, disquisitions, disputations, creeds, there may be; but they are not preaching. If, on the other hand, by practical preaching be meant that which is not doctrinal, there is no such preaching. Exhortations, rhapsodies, allegories, dreams, there may be, but they are not preaching. Preaching is Christian discourse, the roots of which run thriftily into a groundwork of distinctive doctrines. In every powerful growth of usefulness in the ministry, a circulation as regular as the revolution of the seasons, carries up from root to branch a subtle energy which invigorates every fibre of every leaf, and tints every blossom, and in the exuberance of its vitality sheds fragrance on the very air. The whole structure is permeated by a common life. The crowning excellence of such a ministry is its being, at all points of its versatile development, suggestive of a consistent and an athletic theology. Direct doctrinal discussion must constitute the spinal strength of it. From the titles of the sermons preached during such a ministry, if it be of long duration, a theological system might be constructed. The history of such a ministry would be the biography of a mind which has dwelt thoughtfully amidst the foundations of Christian

truth; of one whose life has been a walk about Zion, in which he has told her towers, and considered her palaces, and marked *well* her bulwarks.

Of the truth of this view, presumptive evidence is found in the fact that *the Scriptural system of theology can be preached.* It is not a mystical system which cannot be made known to the masses of mankind. It involves no esoteric and exoteric distinctions, such as constituted the boasted wisdom of Grecian and Oriental philosophy. It has no secrets which its own safety requires should be concealed from all but initiated pupils. It needs no concealment. It seeks the light of common day, and submits itself artlessly to the inspection of the common mind. The policy of reserve, in the communication of truth, which has been advocated so earnestly by the Tractarians of Oxford, and which enters so uniformly into the history of superstition and oppression, is abhorrent to the whole nature of Christianity as we find it in the Bible. Nor is this Biblical system indefinite, so that it cannot be preached affirmatively. Nor is it self-contradictory, so that it must be held only in the form of scholastic theses, which cannot be preached without doing violence to the common sense or common conscience of the world. On the contrary, it is a system which we instinctively feel to be adapted to the pulpit. It is practical; it is intelligible; it is positive; it is accordant with the true philosophy of mind, and especially with the instincts of the human conscience. If theology, so called, has ever enclosed a dogma which does not bear all these tests, the presumption is that that dogma is *not true*, and cannot be legitimately found in the Scriptures. The Scriptures certainly assume that the system of truth they contain was meant to be preached. It was framed to be communicated by living speech. Interpreted consistently with themselves, they present us with a system which *can* be preached to the whole human race.

This, however, is comparatively a feeble point in the argument by which the doctrines of Theology are to be vindicated as the chief themes of the pulpit. It is a more suggestive fact, that these doctrines *comprise the materials of*

the most effective preaching. It would be an instructive experiment in speculation on this subject, if we could bring an accomplished rhetorician or orator of the best age of Grecian or Roman eloquence, to a strictly rhetorical examination of the doctrines of the Scriptures. Let such a master of his art bring, to the criticism of Christianity, no heathen prepossessions, but only the just principles of oratory and a spirit appreciative of truth, and let him test the Christian doctrines simply as *thoughts* to be used in living speech to the mind of the world. Who can doubt what the verdict of ancient wisdom, thus elicited, would have been? Who can doubt that this system of Christian doctrine, all knotty and rugged as it is, would have been pronounced by such a tribunal, an advance upon the previous knowledge of the race, as respects the materials of eloquence? Can we not imagine how Demosthenes would have exulted in them, had his been a regenerated mind? Can we not conceive that Aristotle, had he been in Christian experience an Augustine or a Cyprian, would have commented in folios upon them? All Greek and Roman wisdom, if its unbiassed criticism could have been obtained, would have pronounced this system to be the most splendid discovery of any age, for the purposes of massive oratory. It would have declared this *theological* style of preaching to be the only one by which an adequate trial could be made, of the power of Christianity to reach and overspread the world. And if it should be thus preached, a career of renown would have been predicted for its ministers unequalled in the annals of human fame. It is justly deemed one of the astonishing illustrations of the perversion to which depravity subjects the intellect of man, that when the master of apostolic eloquence proclaimed this system of truth to a classic Athenian audience, it should have been received with that model of insult in criticism: "What will this babbler say?"

But not to dwell upon the decision of any imaginary tribunal, let us observe that the view of the true theory of preaching, which we are now considering, is supported by *its analogy to secular eloquence.* The fact is significant, in

its bearings on the preaching of the distinctive doctrines of theology, that the strength of those specimens of speech, which are acknowledged by the world to be triumphs of oratory, lies in their statement and advocacy of certain great principles of truth. This is true of all eloquence that lives in the admiration of the world. It *is* eloquence, and is felt to be so, only because of the profound elements of truth which it encloses. Say what we may, of the incidents and accidents of speech; say what we may of the phenomena of delivery, of person, of station, of occasion, of style, the secret of great power in speech is never in any of these, in themselves considered. It is in the simple utterance of thoughts that are principles, thoughts that are elemental, thoughts that are pillars in the erection of systems, thoughts that are eternal, because they are essential to compact structures of truth. These constitute the force which the human mind feels, when it is sensible of the sway of high oratory. The becoming utterance of these, it calls eloquence, and nothing else is eloquence. Amidst a thousand counterfeits, this is always known, for it is always felt. It was felt in the orations of Demosthenes; it was felt in the best orations of Cicero; it was felt in the speeches of Chatham and Burke. The debates of the English Parliament on the abolition of the slave-trade; the most powerful of the French Revolutionary orators; Napoleon in his harangues to his armies; the orators of our own colonial and revolutionary history; and the later masters of eloquence in the American Senate, all have been illustrations of it; and the world of a future age will pronounce it illustrious, in some of those who are now striving to arrest the progress of American slavery. Whatever has been factitious and fictitious in any of these examples, the world has forgotten, or will soon forget. But there is that in them which will live; and it will live, because it is the utterance of eternal principles of legislation, of order, of honor, of liberty, or of justice. Nothing in human eloquence permanently moves the world, but these great thoughts — thoughts which wander through eternity — thoughts which are segments, however brief, of the great

circle of truth which constitutes the knowledge and the joy of the Divine mind.

Now the bearing of this fact upon the argument in defence of that which is here termed theological preaching, is direct and conclusive. If preachers are to learn anything from the analogy of secular and sacred eloquence, they must learn that the standard and distinctive doctrines of theology are necessarily the chief themes of an eloquent pulpit. If there is, or can be, such a thing as pulpit eloquence, which shall have a character of its own, as the eloquence of the senate or the bar has, it must derive that character from the doctrines of systematic theology. These are the great thoughts of the pulpit, for they are the great thoughts of God, which the pulpit is commissioned to deliver. The power of the pulpit lies in them, and grows out of them. To turn from them in search of ephemeral topics of excitement — the topics of *the day* as they are appropriately called — is to degrade the pulpit. To hold them only in fond attachment to a creed, and to withhold faith from them as the best themes of pertinent and modern preaching, is childish. To view them with secret contempt, or to insinuate ridicule upon them as the topics of the pulpit, is blasphemous. They are to the eloquence of the pulpit, just what the eternal principles of liberty, and of law, and of the rights of man, have been to the eloquence of senates, and of just revolutions.

This view is still farther supported by the fact that the distinctive doctrines of theology find *sympathy in a spirit of religious inquiry.* The study of the experience of earnest minds, is one of the most faultless guides to the policy of the pulpit. One of the most instructive facts furnished by such an experience is, that a spirit of practical religious inquiry always attaches itself to those great questions in theology, which are the theme of standard discussion in theological schools, and the answers to which form systems of theological science. Christianity has this distinction above infidelity and superstition, that earnest practical inquiry does not turn away from its difficulties, and its mysteries, but is drawn towards them by a secret affinity. When such

a spirit of inquiry has been awakened in the general experience of nations, it has gathered instinctively around some one or more of the most characteristic doctrines of grace. Thus the spirit of the Reformation gathered around the doctrine of justification by faith. Thus the spirit of the Great Awakening in the time of President Edwards, gathered around the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God. Experienced pastors observe the same tendency of inquiring mind, in individuals who are awakened to solitary anxiety on the subject of their salvation. Often, the most recondite topics of theology are the favorite subjects of thought to such a mind. The very doctrines which are often deemed the most abstract from practical use in the pulpit — Predestination and Election; Ability and Dependance; the Being of God and the Trinity — become the centres of inquiry, and of mental conflict. Talk as you will of the simplicity of duty, and the futility of speculation at such a juncture in the soul's destiny, the mind of man *will* speculate on such themes, and then more than ever before. It is drawn to them by a fascination. It cannot break away. Doctrines which it hates, still hold it fast. It must grapple with them, and wrestle till the morning light. The more thorough its awakening, and the more profound its convictions; the more sternly does the conflict deepen around some one of these pillars of evangelic truth. Spectators often look on in perplexity, not knowing the spirit of a man. Sometimes, in the result, the specific object of the struggle does not appear, unless it has been to steady by tension of the intellect, the tumult of emotive excitement which might otherwise have overwhelmed the soul with delusive change. Account for it as we may, the doctrines of theology draw to themselves in their most repulsive forms, the sympathy of an inquiring spirit. The most successful preachers have employed them most effectually, as Edwards and as Nettleton did, in religious revivals. Often, the purity and permanence of revivals of religion, are in visible proportion to the prominence which has been given in the pulpit, to the discussion of evangelic doctrines. Now, the interpretation of such phenomena

cannot well be mistaken in its relation to the policy of a preacher. Those forms of truth which thus hold the sympathies of an inquiring spirit, in the most intensely practical emergency of its moral career, ought to be the favorite forms of the pulpit.

In the same line of thought with the fact here presented, we may observe a further confirmation of the view we are considering, in the fact that the ascendency of the distinctive doctrines of theology among the themes of the pulpit, is *necessary to meet the wants of an enlarged Christian experience.* Every wise preacher, will study the wants of the most experienced Christians among his people. The craving of mature Christian mind will be an unfailing index to the general characteristics, by which preaching may reach most powerfully all classes of minds. That is always the noblest eloquence in the pulpit, whatever a fictitious standard of eloquence may call it, which speaks most genially to the satisfaction of regenerated hearts in an advanced period of their discipline. Such hearts are bound, by the tendrils of a Divine sympathy, to those forms of truth which are the source of all power in preaching. A preacher may better encounter the censure of all other criticism, than the rebuke of that fine Christian instinct, of which the judgment of such hearts is the expression. They are the spirits who shall judge angels. Now, in this view, that preaching which gives ascendency to the doctrines of theology, receives honor. A profound axiom in Christian experience is contained in the remark of a Scotch divine, "that one of the most unequivocal signs of ripeness of Christian character, is a growing fondness for the doctrines of the Gospel, as distinguished from its precepts." Even those doctrines which are assumed in the Bible, become, to an advanced piety, topics of profound interest, as well as those which it reveals. You will often find, in the later periods of the Christian life, a yearning after thought upon those themes which, in the logical order, precede the system of revealed truth. A cultivated Christian mind, especially, looks backward, as well as forward, with strong desire. It is of-

ten observed that a mature Christian discipline invests the Old Testament with a peculiar charm. In like manner, there is that in the working of such experience which often invests the doctrines of Natural Theology with an augmented interest. The light of Christianity is thrown back upon that obscurer region. It glows, in the eye of faith, with a halo like that with which tradition invests the golden age. God revealed in Christ, gives to the question of the Being of a God a new significance. It was as much the expression of religious taste, as of intellectual enthusiasm, in a living theologian, whose faith could not be supposed to need argument on the subject of God's existence, when he said: "I never, to this day, open a volume which contains a vindication of the doctrine of the Being of God, without a kindling of fresh ardor."

It is often the case, also, that a period of mental repose follows the first and more anxious years of the Christian life. A Christian mind is then sensible of leisure from the agitations of an unformed character. It can calmly extend the range of its meditations. It can exercise its reasoning powers more securely. It can soar, without hazard to its moral strength, over those realms of truth which are the more distant from the truth as it is in Christ. It mounts up on wings, as eagles; and it returns from its discursive flight invigorated by the effort, and with greater compass of being with which to enjoy the simplicity of the Gospel. It is this working of religious experience, which often renders the study of the ancient philosophers so valuable to a Christian scholar. The surmises of Plato and Plutarch work into the experience of such a mind, as tributaries to the doctrines of Solomon and of Paul. Not to pursue this train of thought further, let the fact be observed, that no doctrine that is essential to the system of Theology, is too abstract from practical use to be admitted among the themes of the pulpit. And furthermore, that theory of preaching which exalts the doctrines of Theology as the chief themes of the pulpit, has this confirmation of its truth, that it accords with the mature taste of regenerated minds.

Fourthly. The true theory of preaching is distinguished, still further, by *the predominance which it gives to impassioned argument in the discussions of the pulpit.* This theory assumes that religious truth, like all other truth, is addressed, by its Divine Author, to man as a reasoning mind. It places a generous estimate upon man's intellectual worth; and upon the capacity which the soul retains, in its fallen state, of discerning the rational basis of truth. Revealed truth, according to this theory, stands related to the human mind not otherwise, in this respect, than natural science and philosophy. The credit of the Scriptures must rest ultimately on a process of reasoning. A religious faith is not to be established by an assumption of sacredness, any more than the science of astrology. It is not to be supported by cathedral or patristic authority. It has, in its very nature, less susceptibility of being satisfactorily defended in this way than a natural science may have, or one of the Fine Arts. Nor can it be, properly, thrust into honor, as an appendage to a sensuous ritual, or wafted into power by the credulity of imaginative temperaments. It cannot be truly preached in any of these modes, any more than it can be rightly enforced by the sword, or tested by the ordeal of torture. It is never, therefore, a leading object of preaching, to assert uninspired authorities. A system of religion is always a thing to be proved. The strength of its claims must lie in stern logic. If it be the true system, its power of conquest, the world over, must depend, under God, upon the impassioned responses which it will evoke from man's reason. Here, according to the theory we are considering, lies the peculiar strength of the Scriptures, as a standard of appeal in preaching. It is that they are God's word, *proved* to be God's word; and that thus their Divine authority comes home to the mind, with the force second only to that of an intuitive conviction. It is a force which none but a distorted intellect will resist. A system of correspondences, like a magnetic network, covers over the domains of Revelation and Reason. Each records, as its own, the oracular utterances of the other. Each claims the other, in fraternal

descent, from a common Author. Each greets the other as colleague in a universal empire. A recusant mind which would fly to either, in the hope of evading the other, finds itself hedged in, under a compact dominion, from which it has no escape and no appeal.

Now, the true theory of preaching affirms that it is the chief office of a preacher to express these correspondences between the written word of God and man's own rational decisions. This expression should be made with the force of earnest conviction in the preacher's mind. And such expression will be no other than impassioned argument. It will be a reasoning, in God's name, with lost men. It will be an appeal to calm and sober judgment, and yet to a judgment which is to be exercised in a great emergency. It will be adjusted to mind, as a thing capable of thoughtful and cautious action, "a being of large discourse, looking before and after," and yet a being who must perform this function amidst the perils of a suspended destiny. In one aspect of a preacher's ministry, its results depend on the breathing force of his reasonings. This should be the pervasive characteristic of his preaching, considered in reference to its rhetorical form. It is not, then, that arid demonstration of a theorem, in theology, is true preaching. But that that is true preaching which, in its general strain, is feelingly, earnestly, vitally argumentative. That is true preaching which corresponds to the highest oratory in other departments of life. It recognizes the logical process as the central process in all earnest thinking. Yet it immerses argument in the depths of emotion, which are stirred by the earnestness of the preacher's own faith. That is true preaching, in which logical conviction has accumulated and gathered around itself, and now pours into the expression of itself, a volume of feeling in which it is often concealed, yet which it always steadies, and directs to an object. Even when not directly engaged in the proving of a truth, a preacher should, through the mere force of his argumentative habits, give consecutiveness and consistency, and unity of aim, to other methods of discussion. Such habits should infuse into his dis-

courses a chastened rather than a luxuriant imagination. They should bring to the aid of truth, emotive forces which are pertinent, and manly, and compressed, rather than erratic and effervescent. "Gravitation," says Dr. Chalmers, "is more valuable than magnetism." This theory would give play to all diversities of talents and susceptibilities in the work of preaching, but it would bind them to the service of consecutive thinking, which, under the momentum of appreciative feeling, holds steadily on its way to an object. The eloquence of the pulpit, according to this view, should be preëminently the eloquence of elevated thought, uttered through that various structure of discourse and style of expression in which a versatile mind will convey such thought. It should be the eloquence of real life, and of great occasion. It should be the eloquence of manly purpose, in great exigencies. In its best forms it will resemble, and yet surpass, the best eloquence of senates, in the emergencies of nations.

Of the numerous suggestions which might be made in defence of the feature here ascribed to the true theory of preaching, we have space for the observation of only two. The first is, the necessity of this element in preaching, *to give to a popular religious faith its highest practical vitality.* A great problem in the history of any religion is, how shall it be enabled to preserve its practical force, after it has been once established, and has become the popular religion of the age? A living historian has observed it as a universal law, "that a pursuit or doctrine which becomes fashionable, loses somewhat of that dignity which it had while it was professed by an earnest minority, and was loved for its own sake alone." This is no less true of religious doctrines than of others. The tendency of a dominant religion, among any people, is to a decay of energy. Christianity has, more than once, encountered this peril and suffered from it, as well as Mohammedanism and Buddhism. How this result is to be prevented, is one of the chief questions of every age, in a country where Christianity is the ascendant religion of a people.

Now, foremost among the means of prevention, so far as human agencies are concerned, is the predominance of impassioned argument in the pulpit. Especially when associated with an ascendency of the doctrines of theology among the themes of the pulpit, this gives to the pulpit its utmost practical force. No other single process of mind has such affinities for healthful moral excitement, as those which belong to the reasoning process, when it is concerned with *principles* of faith. Men love to reason upon such principles, because the sensibilities start up one after another, and play so naturally around truths which the intellect is laboriously proving. Therefore, men love to listen to a preacher who earnestly reasons with them. They are themselves made parties in such an evolution of truth, and their affections are the more likely to gather around and embrace that truth. They respect the emotions which truth, thus presented, excites in them, and they respect themselves for those emotions, as they cannot do when emotive excitement is produced by less weighty means. A great truth, proved to be a great truth, and earnestly enforced because it is proved to be a great truth, leaves men no reserve of self-respect to fall back upon, when they stifle the emotions which that truth excites. All the noble elements of their nature are taken captive by that truth. They have nothing left to support them in its rejection, but the meanest and the most depraved. All that instrumentality can do, is done, by such a mode of address.

It is not true that so great difference exists as is often imagined, in this respect, between different classes of mind. It lies in human nature, under all degrees of cultivation. It is the prerogative and the pleasure of man to reason. The *common* mind deserves a more generous appreciation than it often receives, of its capacity to profit by the style of preaching here commended. The minds of men are susceptible of far higher culture, under the influence of religious motive, than of any other. Men in the ordinary walks of life do often gain a power of sustained thought on religious subjects, which they have not on other subjects. There is

that in the working of every earnest soul on the themes of religion, which cannot be satisfied with lullaby songs. Such a mind awakes to an intelligence which outruns its culture. It craves stern and strong thought. It craves argument. Without knowing by what name to designate its wants, it craves a faultless and vitalized logic. That preacher is deficient in one essential qualification for his work, who does not believe this. In scarcely any one thing did the greatness of Dr. Chalmers's mind appear more conspicuous, than in the respect which he felt for the capacities of the common people in appreciating religious discourse. It was an evidence of his singular wisdom that, on a certain fast-day, in mid-winter, he walked five miles in a severe snow-storm, to meet a little company of the cottagers of Kilmany, one of the humblest of the Scottish villages, and there, as they sat shivering together in the damp dining-room of the manse, preached to them as elaborate and eloquent a sermon, as was that day heard by the most brilliant assembly in the kingdom. It was a token of his fitness for the chair of Philosophy in the College of St. Andrews, that when he was the incumbent of that office, he was accustomed to gather into his own dwelling, on the Sabbath evenings, the poorest of the neglected children of the neighborhood, and for that *respected* audience, "prepared himself, with his pen, as thoughtfully as for his class in the University." A noble specimen was this, of a Christian ministry. We can conceive it possible that a Christian should stand unmoved in the halls of Abbotsford, or on the banks of the Doon; but we envy not the heart or the intellect of that man, who can enter the darkened study of the manse of Morningside, where the Apollos of the Scottish Pulpit breathed out his life at midnight and alone, and there look without emotion upon the manuscript piles that bear witness to the earnest respect he felt for the villagers of Kilmany, and the pauper children of St. Andrews. Such respect is never, in the general, misapplied. And never is it more completely justified in the result, than where a preacher manifests it by giving to the argumentative element a predominance in the policy of the pulpit.

Even in the French Pulpit, which has honored this theory of preaching less than the pulpit of almost any other nation, unless it be that of modern Germany, those preachers have witnessed the most powerful practical effects of their discourses, who have sustained the earnestness of their appeals, by the greatest severity of argument. Saurin was called, in his day, by that very dubious title, "a metaphysical preacher." He often displayed metaphysical subtlety in his discourses; yet it has been said of him, that "his preaching resembled a plentiful shower of dew, softly and imperceptibly insinuating itself into the minds of his hearers, till the whole church was dissolved, and all were in tears, under his sermons."

The second suggestion by which the view now before us, of the true theory of preaching, is defended, is the necessity of it, *to preserve truthfulness in the speculative theology of a people.* Even creeds and confessions are not secure, under any other administration of the pulpit than that which is here advocated. It has been often observed that the most important of human rights must be frequently exercised, or they will slowly but surely die out of possession. This is eminently true of the Protestant principle of the right of private judgment. The security of the right itself, and of all the forms of belief which it has resuscitated in the world, depends upon its being preserved, as not only an acknowledged but an exercised right. The fact may be regarded as a collateral sign of man's depravity, or it may be regarded as only a sign of a peculiarity in the plan of man's probation; but it is a fact, that even a *true* religious faith, when once established, does not long perpetuate itself uncorrupted, on the mere strength of traditionary reverence. The human mind has no irresistible affinities for such a faith. A creed which is nothing but a creed, becomes corrupt as soon as it has had time to become so. Belief inevitably becomes questionable, so soon as it ceases to be questioned. The monotony of uninquisitive faith, is the most insidious foe to purity of faith. Stagnation is the beginning of corruption. The fathers cannot live for their children, in the construction of religious confessions. There is no federal

headship of faith. Every generation must work out its own system of theology. Even if language were not subject to constant mutation, so that the true creed of one age does not express the same truth in a subsequent age, — there is that in the very necessities of mind, which necessitates constant discussion, constant revision, to prevent a creed however sacred, from dying out of the popular theology. There seems to be an almost conscious pride in the spirit of a great truth. It will not remain within the embrace of an indolent believer. It will not abide with an inobservant, uninquiring, unreasoning people. It feels itself insulted, if it be stored away in dusty libraries, or buried in unquestioned creeds and catechisms. It is a living spirit. It longs for communion with living minds. It *will have* such communion—else, it will take to itself the wings of the morning. Now, this relation of a popular *creed* to a popular *faith*, lays the necessity on the pulpit, of incessant theological discussion. The life of the popular theology depends on this. It is a work which no other instrumentality than the pulpit can perform effectually. The press cannot do it. The catechetical instruction of children is not adequate to the work. Our schools of theology cannot do it. It is the special province of some instrumentality that can bring theology home to the convictions of strong minds, and the sensibilities of warm hearts, with all the facilities which are furnished by the best forms of oral address — and that instrumentality is, the Pulpit.

It deserves specially to be noted, that a popular theology cannot be saved from corruption, by a discussion of its merely scholastic forms. It must be discussed also, in its rhetorical forms; that is, in those forms in which it is susceptible of presentation to the popular reason, and susceptible of use as a motive power upon the popular conscience and heart. It will never do to argue upon the doctrines of theology, merely because they are our creed and are in our catechisms. It will never do to defend them merely for the sake of defending a creed, or to make them fit a given place in a creed, and to adjust antique phraseology to modern signifi-

cation. An important work of this sort may be needful, in the study of theology as a science, which, like every other, has a history. But this discussion of the schools will not, of itself, preserve the theology of a people. They need the discussion of the pulpit. They need discussion which shall breathe the spirit of a preacher, as distinct from the spirit of a scholar. A preacher, in this work, cannot be timidly cautious about the technicalities of schools. His must be a reverent, and yet a free and bold discussion. An age of such inquisitive discussion in the pulpit, is never an age of the birth of great heresies. Great heresies spring up under silent pulpits. Their seed is sown in times of authoritative teaching, and unquestioning faith. Often, a popular creed is in the most imminent peril, when it is most popular; when all authority supports it, and institutions have grown venerable around it; when all respectable opposition to it has been put down, and the necessity of argument in its defence seems to have gone by. Then the general mind rests upon it, and the land has peace. But just then, in the hour of conquest and conscious strength, is started the train of causes which lead to disaster, and perhaps to ruin. Inquiry ceases, thoughtfulness dies out, authority slips into the seat of reason, tradition takes the place of investigation, and the Church, perhaps under a radically democratic form of polity, assumes the prerogative of God. While the voice of apostles is yet audible, the mystery of iniquity doth already work. Many times over, has this principle been illustrated in sections of ecclesiastical history. The very crustwork over which, yesterday, the traveller trod securely, up the sides and around the crater of Vesuvius, had even then been undermined far and wide, and to-day there rolls the stream of fire down upon the olive groves and vineyards. Nothing can prevent the constant repetition of such disasters in the history of the church, but constant soundings of the popular faith, by the reasonings of the pulpit.

A striking confirmation of the view which has been here presented, is found in the state of the modern pulpit of Germany. The study of theology is in Germany separated, in

a remarkable degree, from the labors of the pulpit. German theologians are not generally pastors of churches; nor are German preachers generally able theologians. Theology is studied chiefly as a science, and as nothing else. It is regarded as merely a branch, or the root, of Philosophy. The German theory of preaching does not contemplate the use of theology, as the theme of argumentative discussion in the pulpit. A system of theology constructed like that of Dr. Dwight, in the form of sermons for a popular audience, is probably a thing unknown in the practice of the German clergy. They regard the doctrines of religion as truths to be assumed in the pulpit, among a nominally Christian people, as truths established by the standards of the church, as truths confirmed by the discussions of the schools, as truths to be taught authoritatively in the catechetical instruction of children, and then to be assumed, generally without argument, as the basis of the labors of the pulpit. This is the theory; and perhaps beyond this, opinion does not exist among them, in the form of explicit theory. But what is the result in practice? A traveller, upon entering the German Protestant churches on the Sabbath, will be generally surprised by the meagre numbers in attendance, and by the fact that a very large proportion of these are females and aged men. The young and middle-aged men are not there. He will observe also, that the sermon is commonly an exhortation, excessively diluted in thought, destitute of anything that can be called argument, exclamatory in its style, and, to an American ear, offensively technical and unnatural in its modes of appeal; a sermon, in short, which no earnestness of spirit, and no arts of delivery, can save from being dull and unsuggestive. As a specimen of preaching, it would provoke the criticism of the humblest rural congregation in New England; and no pastor in New England would venture often to pronounce such a discourse, except in the unpremeditated exercises of the meeting for religious conference. Such is the general character of the German pulpit; although the rule has here and there, and especially in the capital cities and at the universities, a rare and bril-

liant exception. One who has no superior in Germany, in his qualifications to judge of this matter, has pronounced the pastoral clergy of Prussia, as a body, to be men of inferior influence, not studious in their habits, and stationary in point of intellectual growth, from the moment they receive their appointments to the pastoral office. On the one hand, they are not reaching the mental strength of the nation, as represented by the more intelligent classes. The change has long since taken place in Prussia, which Coleridge deplored as one of the disastrous revolutions of England, the change in which "the liberal professions fell off from the church." Yet on the other hand, the clergy of Prussia are no more successful in reaching the masses of the people. Down to the rudest peasantry the people are, to an alarming extent, alienated from the church, and a gross materialism, it is believed, is settling down upon them, in point of religious character, if not of faith. Chevalier Bunsen has been heard to utter the pregnant remark: "The established church of Prussia has no future. She has only the past."

Now, it would be unjust to regard this state of things as attributable wholly to the prevailing theory of preaching in the German pulpit. Other causes are perhaps equally potent, but this surely must be regarded as one. And it is a fair inquiry, whether other causes have not been essentially nourished, if not created, by this. Is it not probable that the rationalism of the schools, which has been so disastrous to the Protestantism of Germany, is the fruit, in part, of the separation of theological discussion from the conservative influence of the pulpit? Is it not probable, too, that the subjection of religion to dependence upon political changes, is owing, in part, to the want of a vigorous pulpit? This might have given, even to an Established Church, a more stable vitality. The truth is, that no institution of society has a broader reach of influence, for good or ill, than the pulpit. Fill the pulpit with a devoted, learned, manly clergy, who are theologians and reasoners, and let them be governed by a theory of preaching which shall make the pulpit the place where their strength shall be expended, and that

pulpit becomes ubiquitous in the versatility of its uses. A nation may more wisely part with the trial by jury, than with such an institution. It throws an influence backward, upon schools of learning; and forward, upon the popular faith in everything that is sacred; and around, upon all venerable institutions which the Past has bequeathed; and downward, into the great heart of a nation, stirring up aspiration for the future. It is conservative; it is progressive. It is aggressive; it is defensive. It tends to consolidation; it tends to diffusion. The ages are its possession. All great powers of good are its allies.

The theory of the pulpit which has been here represented, has other elements which might be named; but these are sufficient to indicate a definite style of preaching, which is distinguishable from others mainly by these peculiarities. It is a style of preaching which has existed not in theory only. It has found representatives in every earnest age of the church. It might properly be designated as the Apostolic theory of preaching; for, the most accomplished exemplar of it that the world has seen since the ascension of our Lord, was the apostle Paul. It might as significantly be termed the Protestant theory of preaching; so uniformly has it characterized the pulpit, at the great epochs of resuscitation and Reform in the history of the corruptions of the church. It might as truthfully be named, without invidiousness, the Calvinistic theory of preaching; so vigorous have been the mutual affinities between it and the Calvinistic type of theology. It might, not unsuitably, be called the Saxon theory of preaching; so large and generous sympathy has it received from all the families of the Saxon mind. It might, with rare fitness, be denominated the Puritan theory of preaching; for, it created the Puritan Pulpit, and, through the pulpit, it gave character to the whole Puritan development of theology. It might, still more appropriately, be claimed as the New England theory of preaching; for, in no other portion of the world has it held such undivided sway, as it has possessed in the formation of the New England pulpit, and thus in the creation of the New Eng-

land theology. This theory finds no small support in the fact that it has such associations as these in history.

Yet, it is not upon the strength of any human authority that this or any other view of the work of the pulpit, is to be chiefly founded. Evil is often done by representing all improvement in the administration of the pulpit, as a return to ancient and even obsolete types, rather than as a simple application of the principles of effective speech to new exigencies created by the lapse of time. Those principles are invariable, yet their application is infinitely versatile. They take to themselves, as their own, modifications which spring out of the world's growth and the maturer developments of Divine plans. We should not be betrayed, therefore, into short-sighted criticism, through an amiable attachment to the past. We should not fall into a compassionate patronage of models which the world has stored away, and will never reinstate, to be imitated with Chinese exactness. The truth is, that the best style of preaching in any age, cannot be repeated with unvarying precision in any subsequent age, without loss of power in the pulpit. Such sameness would be a sign of relative retrogression. It would be a premonition of a decay of life. American preachers cannot wisely reproduce the preaching of Calvin and Knox, in a spirit of military conformity. We might as sagely hearken for the echoes of the cathedrals of Geneva and Glasgow, in our meeting-houses. Even our own Fathers in the ministry of New England, if they could rise from their graves, and again enter the pulpits hallowed by their memory, would not now preach precisely as they did, when they lived and wrought mightily for us. The true inheritance which they have transmitted to us is their noble theory, which they themselves illustrated but imperfectly. This theory, in ever-changing applications of it, the present and coming generations of the ministry of the Gospel, are to realize.

No man should enter the ministry who is not prepared thus to magnify his office. Let no man enter the ministry, who does not stand in awe of the work. Let no man enter the ministry as a transitory service, which shall aid him, by

its dignity, to a nobler office which, in the days of his vanity, he imagines to lie behind it. Let no man enter the ministry, who does not, with all his soul, choose it above any other position to which the service of God invites him. Let no man enter the ministry, to whose sympathies the intense individuality of the Gospel in its application to the souls of men is not congenial. Let no man enter the ministry, who has no theological enthusiasm in the discussion of the doctrines of religion as the chief themes of the pulpit. Let no man enter the ministry, whose professional ardor will not, through the grace of God, sustain him in a lifelong labor of elaborate, argumentative, and yet earnest, heartfelt preaching.

Let no man, however, enter the ministry, faint in spirit, because of the greatness of the aims he must cherish, if he would illustrate in his life's work the power of the Gospel. A preacher's work is one which contains within itself, the power to invigorate the hand of him who gives himself devotedly to it. By the presence of One who said: "Lo! I am with you always," it is made, in itself, an inspiring work. A youthful painter was once directed by his master, to complete a picture on which the master had been obliged to suspend his labors on account of his growing infirmities. "I commission thee, my son," said the aged artist, "to do thy best upon this work. Do thy best." The young man had such reverence for his master's skill, that he felt incompetent to touch the canvas which bore the work of that renowned hand. "Do thy best," was the old man's calm reply; and again, to repeated solicitations, he answered: "Do thy best." The youth tremblingly seized the brush, and kneeling before his appointed work, he prayed: "It is for the sake of my beloved master, that I implore skill and power to do this deed." Then, with suppressed emotion, he commenced his work, and he caught from it an inspiration. His hand grew steady as he painted. Slumbering genius awoke in his eye. Enthusiasm took the place of fear. Forgetfulness of himself supplanted his self-distrust, and with a calm joy he finished his labor. The "beloved mas-

ter" was borne on his couch into the studio, to pass judgment on the result. As his eye fell upon the triumph of Art before him, he burst into tears, and throwing his enfeebled arms around the young artist, he exclaimed: "My son, I paint no more." That youth subsequently became the painter of "The Last Supper," the ruins of which, after the lapse of three hundred years, still attracts annually, to the refectory of an obscure convent in Milan, hundreds of the worshippers of Art. So shall it be with a youthful preacher, who stands in awe of the work to which his Master calls him. Let him give himself away to it as his life's work, without reserve; let him do his best. Let him kneel reverently before his commission, and pray "for the beloved Master's sake," that power and skill may be given him "to do this deed." And the spirit of that Master shall breathe in the very greatness of the work. It shall strengthen him. His hand shall grow firm and his heart calm. His eye shall not quail in the presence of kings. He shall stand undismayed before those who in the kingdom of God are greater than they. Years of trust and of tranquil expectation, shall follow his early struggles. Or, if emergencies thicken as he advances, and one after another of those on whom his spirit has leaned for support falls from his side, he shall be as the young men who increase in strength. He shall learn to welcome great trials of his character. With a holier joy than Nelson felt at Trafalgar, he shall look up and say of every such crisis in his ministry: "I thank Thee, O my God, that Thou hast given me this great opportunity of doing my duty."