
A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE II.

THE SOPHISTICAL ELEMENT IN CHRISTIAN PREACHING.

BY PROFESSOR CHARLES SUMNER NASH, D.D.

THE name "Sophist," first applied in a good sense to the Seven Sages, was especially given "to the educated men of ready speech who from about the year 450 B. C. used to travel through Greece from place to place and imparted what they knew for money." The leaders of the class were honorable and honored men. They were sincere, as even Plato concedes. They were highly educated. They were skilled instructors of youth. They rendered good service to literature and oratory. They were stylists, winning their success by skillful and effective exposition and having great influence in forming the style of their time. When they began, prose composition was hardly practiced in central Greece. They were leaders in literature and oratory when Plato wrote the "Republic," and had not lost their position and influence when Demosthenes spoke. "In fact," writes one concerning them, "it is not too much to say that it was the Sophists who provided these great masters with their consummate instrument." "It must not be forgotten," writes another, "that it was Gorgias who transplanted rhetoric to Greece, its proper soil, and who helped to diffuse the Attic dialect as the literary language of prose."

And yet, despite their educational value, the Sophists early fell into disrepute. There were false notes in their work, which, gradually becoming dominant, justified the censure still standing against them. A life devoted to

rhetoric, oratory, and dialectic is fraught with danger to both intellect and heart. The pursuit of form is fascinating; it is guilty and disastrous, when it usurps the throne which belongs to the pursuit of truth. The practice of persuasion may be as ennobling as it is captivating; but it is degrading, when, regardless of truth and righteousness, it drives at conquest and power. Into this pit the Sophists fell at the beginning of their class career. Their plight is described as follows: The sophistry of rhetoric led to that of politics. The sophistry of culture led to that of disputation. Hippias professed to teach all learning, to the end of culture. His successors "claimed to possess and to communicate not the knowledge of all branches of learning, but an aptitude for dealing with all subjects, which aptitude should make the knowledge of any subject superfluous. In other words, they cultivated skill in disputation. Now skill in disputation is plainly a valuable accomplishment. But when men set themselves to cultivate skill in disputation irrespective of the matter debated, when men regard the matter discussed, not as a serious issue, but as a thesis on which to practice their powers of controversy, they learn to pursue, not truth, but victory; and, their criterion of excellence having been thus perverted, they presently prefer ingenious fallacy to solid reasoning, and the applause of bystanders to the consciousness of honest effort. Sophistry was from the beginning a substitute for the pursuit of truth."

Men of such quality could not escape the lances of Socrates and Plato. The latter's antagonism is one of the chief features of their history. Professor Jowett summarizes it thus: "The Sophist in Plato is the master of the art of illusion; the charlatan, the foreigner, the prince of *esprits-faux*, the hireling who is not a teacher, and who, from whatever point of view he is regarded, is the opposite of the true teacher. He is the 'evil one,' the ideal repre-

sentative of all that Plato most disliked in the moral and intellectual tendencies of his own age, the adversary of the almost equally ideal Socrates."

Mr. Grote, in his labored controversy, fails to show Plato's opinion to have been unjust prejudice and Plato's mighty influence the one efficient cause of the Sophists' permanent dishonor. Mr. Grote cannot successfully dispute the statement that there is more than enough in the recorded history of these men to explain the odium in which they were held. Their ill-repute, adds Professor Jowett, "was a natural consequence of their vocation. That they were foreigners, that they made fortunes, that they taught novelties, that they excited the minds of youth," that the less noble were consciously insincere, that they confined their attention to form and style, that they cared little for truth and virtue; these "are quite sufficient reasons to account for the opprobrium which attached to them."

The later Sophists were lineal and degenerate descendants of those of Plato's time. Wholly devoted to form and style, they "did not think they needed even knowledge of fact to talk as they pleased about everything." Cicero's description of them as those who pursue philosophy for the sake of ostentation or of gain reveals their reputation just prior to the Christian era.

The revival of Greek eloquence in the second century after Christ brought new distinction to the Sophist class. The Greek world of that time was an educated world. Almost every town had its grammar-school. Many principal cities contained large universities, to which the graduates of the lower schools flocked in great numbers. Teaching was an honored and lucrative profession, supported in many cases by state endowments and by immunities from public burdens. Professors of literature, rhetoric, and philosophy were in universal demand and of much influence in social

life. The three main elements of the complex education were grammar or a knowledge of literature, rhetoric or the cultivation of expression, and dialectic or an acquaintance with the rules of argument coupled with a literary pursuit of philosophy. The whole system was literary, a study of the remains of a greater past, and for the sake of culture more than for the purpose of practical life.

In this soil there grew up what has been called "the new rhetoric," or literary rhetoric, or sophistic. This rhetoric became very widespread as a part of the education of a gentleman. It busied itself with the masterpieces of the ancients, absorbing their knowledge and especially copying their styles. It thus rested upon the study of literature, in which, however, it sought, not truth and wisdom for activity and virtue, but form and expression for idle culture and intellectual pastime. And the end of it all was the ability to speak impromptu in the artificial oratorical style of the day upon any subject whatever. "From the time of Vespasian," writes Dr. James Orr, "the Empire had been provided with a hierarchy of rhetoricians and grammarians, whose business it was to instruct the people in all liberal arts; and society was overrun with professional talkers, debaters, moralists, ready to supply oratory on any subject to whoever cared to pay for it. There was little in this sophistic declamation to make the world wiser and better."

Springing mainly out of rhetoric, sophistic rooted back also in philosophy. For themes suited to the courts it substituted moral and religious subjects; and for the forensic method of debate and controversy it adopted continuous discussion. Poetical readings gave way to "rhetorical ostentations." Speeches were made deriding heroes and sages, and eulogizing most contemptible themes, such as idleness, fever, gout, dust, the fly, the ass. By the second century every element of reality had disappeared. Dr. Edwin Hatch, in his Hibbert Lectures, says the utterances

of sophistic "were not exercises (μελέται), but discourses (διαλέξεις). It preached sermons. It created not only a new literature, but also a new profession. The class of men against whom Plato had inveighed had become merged in the general class of educators; the word 'sophist' remained partly as a generic name and partly as a special name for the new class of public talkers."

Very interesting notes concerning the habits of these men are scattered through the literature of the time. Some of them had fixed residences and lectured regularly; some traveled from place to place. They often collected their audiences by personal invitation. Rivals strove for supremacy in public verbal contests. They spoke in private houses as well as in all sorts of public places. They often wore a pulpit gown. They were disappointed if not interrupted by liberal applause, and would solicit approving criticisms at the close of the discourse. They acquired wealth and won high reputation. Some were among the most eminent men of their time, senators, ambassadors, governors. As a class they were conceited, avaricious, and licentious. "Effeminate in mind, extravagant in purse, they are perhaps the most contemptible of all those who have set themselves up as the instructors of mankind." Even more than in former centuries, apparently, they provoked the antagonism of true men. Of course the Christians were unsparingly hostile to them, an example of which may be seen in the "Stromata" of Clemens Alexandrinus.[1] Among other choice figures is prominent his comparison of them to "old shoes, when all the rest is worn and is falling to pieces, and the tongue alone remains." But some of the most scathing criticisms came from their fellow-heathen and even from their own number. Dion Chrysostom, one of the best of them all, likened them to "peacocks, showing off their reputation and the

[1] Book i. chapters 3 and 8.

number of their disciples as peacocks do their tails." The common epithet for them was ἀλαζών, "a word," says Dr. Hatch, "with no precise English equivalent, denoting a cross between a braggart and a mountebank."

All the charges against these "professional talkers" fell under two principal heads: (1) making a trade of knowledge, and (2) unreality. The commercial value of their wares was steady, alluringly large in the leading cases, and enormous in the aggregate. The objection lay, not against the volume of trade, but against its being made a trade at all. This charge was prominent in Plato's indictment and was equally pertinent throughout the succeeding centuries. The commercial spirit was characteristic of the class. From the resulting ill-repute none but the noblest could extricate themselves. The charge of unreality was the more serious. Genuine men knew then as well as now that preachers of morals and religion must speak through their own obedient experience with the disinterested purpose to improve their hearers. And nothing could be worse than speech on such themes by men who failed, and made light of failing, to relate the truth to their own or their fellows' lives. Here again there were superior men, whose reputations took no smell of fire. But the profession was lost. It held truth, so far as it had truth at all, a degraded prisoner grinding out supplies for its own lustful indulgence and ambition, performing in public for the intellectual amusement and derision of the multitude.

In the fourth century, Greek sophistry made its formal entrance into Christian preaching, or, as some prefer to say, completed its conquest of Christian preaching. Its influence had been felt ever since the time of Paul, as one of the chief modifying forces upon preaching, carrying it steadily in the direction of elaborated thought and form. Christianity moved out to the conquest of the Greek world, and found itself compelled to take permanent factors from

the life of its foe. In contact with the complex Greek culture the simple forms of Christianity could not sustain themselves. Informal recitals from Christ's life and teachings were inadequate to the demands of Greek thought. Christian truth must show profound depths to be explored, or the Greek intellect would not be interested; it must offer both matter and motive for splendid, fascinating oratory, or the Greek heart would be indifferent. Such resources of thought and speech Christianity had, and was increasingly aware of. And it was bent upon winning the Greek world unto its Lord. It pushed forward therefore, and took the unavoidable and abiding consequences. Ever since its meeting with Greek rhetoric, Christian preaching has been a very different thing. Its subject-matter has remained the same; its form it took from the Sophists. The change began, so far as appears, in Origen, whose large audiences compelled him to use more rhetoric and oratory as time went on; it culminated in the great preachers of the fourth century, Chrysostom, "the Cappadocian Cloverleaf," and others, who had been trained under the greatest Sophists of the day and had themselves taught rhetoric. Henceforth the Christian addresses were called, not ὁμιλίαι, homilies, but λόγοι, διαλέξεις, *disputationes*, discourses, disputations. By adopting these forms Christian preaching won the oratorical throne. Never was Sophist more in demand and in fashion than were Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzen and Basil. And the reason was that theirs was Greek oratory at the highest culture of the best Sophists, playing mightily the key-board of morbidly emotional souls, upon more vital and grappling themes than heathen sophistry ever knew. In the sense thus indicated, and in this sense only, Greek rhetoric "created the Christian sermon."

This I have called the formal entrance of the sophistical into the Christian pulpit. In truth it was already there,

being a universal constituent in sinful human nature. When Mr. P. T. Barnum justified his business by the remark, "The American people like to be humbugged," he might have added, And they like to humbug. The remark is merely modern American for a truth as old as the race. The unreal, the formal, the commercial, work their corruptions in every literature and every religion. You have the Mohammedan or Hindu fakir, who has given his name to swindling and humbuggery of a trivial sort. You have oriental priesthoods through whose insincerity and imposture and revenue-religion you can drive a coach and four. Says Canon Kingsley in his "Roman and Teuton," "The over-civilized, learned, false, profligate Roman was the very counterpart of the modern Brahmin." Even in Judaism and Christianity this has been a constant factor. The Christian pulpit, whether before or since Chrysostom, has never been free from it, and our end-of-the-century pulpit is not showing itself the first exception.

With reference now to our own time, the multiform and many-voiced indictment of the pulpit shall be given in Dr. Hatch's severe words. He writes: "If you look more closely into history, you will find that Rhetoric killed Philosophy. Philosophy died, because for all but a small minority it ceased to be real. It passed from the sphere of thought and conduct to that of exposition and literature. Its preachers preached, not because they were bursting with truths which could not help finding expression, but because they were masters of fine phrases and lived in an age in which fine phrases had a value. It died, in short, because it had become sophistry. So has it been with Christianity. It came into the educated world in the simple dress of a prophet of righteousness. Around it thronged the race of eloquent talkers, who persuaded it to change its dress and to assimilate its language to their own. It seemed thereby to win a speedier and completer victory.

But it purchased conquest at the price of reality. With that its progress stopped. There has been an element of sophistry in it ever since; and so far as in any age that element has been dominant, so far has the progress of Christianity been arrested. Its progress is arrested now, because many of its preachers live in an unreal world. The truths they set forth are truths of utterance rather than truths of their lives."

To the champion of the Christian church these words are a challenge. The gist of the complaint is that there is enough of the sophistical in the pulpit to account for the church being as recreant to duty, and the Kingdom being as much behind its scheduled time, as they are declared to be. It would be interesting to try to sum up the modern situation, in order to discover the measure of truth in the charge. The present undertaking, however, is more modest,—to notice some of the forms of the sophistical in modern preaching.

The Greek insight discovered the very soul of sophistry. It ran its analysis and condemnation into the two main categories already noted,—the commercial and the unreal. Knowledge and morality were reduced to a money-making profession. Truth and the real uses of life were ignored. Now, just as the Greek said that the second fault was much the worse, so we may call unreality the very essence of sophistry. All its growths, even the commercial, can be traced back to this root; and all outcroppings of unreality may properly be denominated sophistry, using this word in its large historic sense inclusive of its specific application in logic.

Unreality, in this use of the term, is want of correspondence between a representation and the thing represented. That expression only is real which reports correctly the hidden substance. The gravity of the matter is found in the realm of voluntary, responsible beings. Here unreality

is more than mere deficiency. To fail to present the truth is to present error. Nor is the trouble simply that erroneous utterance does rhetorical injustice to truth and reality. To reduce the pursuit and employment of truth to the literary level at all is to descend into the unreal. Truth is for the uses of life. It must be kept in vital relations, active in living souls. The Sophists' intellectual holdings were not according to truth, and did not care to be. Their own souls were insubordinate and derisive. Their utterances were no more deeply born than of dialectical skill and rhetorical fluency, and were given no more vital mission than to the hearer's capacity to be entertained and readiness to pay for it. If their deliverances represented real truth, if they passed vitally through the speakers' character and conduct, if they reached the hearers' obedient wills and wrought ethical effects, these features were incidental. The profession could be practiced successfully and often more prosperously without them. And the section which incorporated them and the section which even regarded them essential could not deliver themselves, and never yet have delivered themselves completely, from the mischievous toils of unreality. The sophistical still remains in the Christian pulpit.

In this sphere of personality, want of correspondence between the inner and the outer, between the subjective and the objective, may be either conscious or unconscious, deliberate or involuntary. There is in the Christian pulpit unreality which is also insincere. We have in the ministry ἀλαζόνες, *concionatores gloriosi*, *esprits-faux*,—in naked English, braggarts, charlatans, mountebanks, false hearts, hypocrites, untruthful, immoral, "holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof." The truth does not pass through their life and their love; it is merely truth of utterance, secretly meant to be no more, openly offered as genuine coin of the realm of character. The

"scribes and pharisees, hypocrites," of Jesus' day fall into this category. The motives of such men for being in religious work form an interesting inquiry. Their number is a most serious matter. Sweeping into view the whole world-wide body labeled "the Christian ministry," including depraved Continental and oriental clergies, co-representatives with us of Christianity before the world, we must, I fear, pronounce the insincere section a large one, perhaps sufficient to justify Dr. Hatch's remark that the sophistical is the great barrier in Christianity's path. Of the Protestant clergy, however, the statement is true that the impostors are so few as to be lost in the ranks of honest men, save for the fact that "one sinner destroyeth much good" and createth a disturbance out of all proportion to his rights.

Far more troublesome is the unreality which does not amount to insincerity, but impairs a character and service mainly honest. Here we deal with the great body of our Protestant clergy; for most ministers, if not every one of us, have some forms and measures of the sophistical unexpelled. Within the bounds of sincerity, therefore, another division. The want of correspondence is first between the preacher and the truth, and secondly it is between the preacher and the people. In both these classes sweeping statements must be avoided. Sophistry is not dominant here. The trouble is often secret, insidious, a dark thread running in and out intricately in the strong and bright strands, an alloy cheapening the nobler metal though seeming to render it more circulable in this wearing world.

Take first the cases where the lack of correspondence is between the preacher's utterance and the truth itself, with his possession of the truth lying midway and vitally related in either direction. It is not simply an honest report of his inner self that the preacher should give; it is an honest report of the truth itself substantially unsoiled and

undistorted in passing through the medium of a submissive and sanctified life. In this department sophistry takes a number of recognizable forms.

The unconverted honest, but mistaken, men in the ministry fall here, of whom the state and ritualistic churches must acknowledge the most. The late Bishop Hannington of the Uganda Mission is an example of the young men who follow somebody's counsel or expectation into the gospel ministry as ignorant as a pagan of needing a spiritual experience. They choose the church just as naturalistically and professionally as other young men elect careers in philosophy or literature or commerce or the army. The preaching of such men is Greek sophistry speaking Christian English. They put forth truth of utterance rather than truth of life. No unconverted man can be a proper Christian minister. If he preaches a spiritual experience through faith in Christ, he misrepresents his own inner state; if he correctly reports himself, he misrepresents the gospel message. In either case he is unreal, a sophist, albeit an honest, moral, and philanthropic one. Except he turn and be converted, he should retire from the pulpit; and being sincere, he will do this when he discovers the falsity of his position.

Rising a step, we come in among the genuine followers of Christ, all of them true ministers in the article of conversion. Centrally they and their work are real. The unreal is not their determining quality, but an admixture. They are not sophists; they are sophistical. One form, perhaps a chief one, of their sophistry is found in the use of the logical faculty. A paper on expository preaching in the *Biblical World* of February, 1898, quotes Dr. Hatch and adds, "Dr. Hatch declares that Greek Rhetoric created the Christian sermon, and that many a modern preacher is a lineal descendant of the old-time sophist, who boasted of his ability to take any side of any subject and by the art of

the orator please, persuade, and carry the people. The meaning of Dr. Hatch is very clear to any one brought up on the average New England sermon of fifty years ago. The object of that preaching was to present a theme in logical order and rhetorical dress. The sermon did not come, 'like the volcano's tongue of flame, up from the burning core below,' but it came from the text-book of theology and the treatise on sacred oratory. It had more of Demosthenes and Cicero than of Isaiah and Paul. It had more affinity with the orations against Catiline than with the invectives of Hosea against Israel. In other words, it was theologically Christian, but in form and method pagan. The weakness of old New England preaching was that it gave the most space to that which in the Bible occupies the least attention. It made prominent what is logically important, but practically of little value. It set forth with ponderous rhetoric that which would be all-essential if we were expounding a theodicy, but that which may be well-nigh neglected if we are seeking to save men."

Concerning this representative utterance, two or three remarks. We acknowledge of course a danger and damage along this line. There is preaching so framed as to glorify the logical powers and processes and to proclaim a system rather than the truth. Students of God's revealed truth are always in danger of becoming scholastic, vain of their reasoning power, apt to spread it into view with an easy, habitual motion as peacocks do their tails—recalling Dion Chrysostom's stroke at the Sophists. The reasoning process is not for its own sake, and must not get in front of the truth. For it to do so is characteristically sophistical. The article quoted states the chief ill effects. One of them is distorted proportion, another the preaching of abstract truth.

The main fault in this critic and many others is found in the sweeping character of their criticism. They are not

content to warn of a danger; they cry that we have already fallen. They are not satisfied to say that the ministry is liable to this sophistry and is more or less tinged with it; they assert that a whole body or age of the ministry is corrupted, or that a certain method is naturally and always so. The writer implies in the foregoing quotation that no utterance appearing in logical order can have come "up from the burning core below," and that no utterance from that source will present itself in logical form. Or, if he means this of the New England ministry of fifty years ago, and of that only, the charge is equally overdrawn. Eminent names need not be called in reply. That New England ministry, though a bit sophistical after this fashion, subjected their reasoning powers to the kindling heart of God, before whom they habitually fell upon their faces. And the kind of Christian character they made by means of, not in spite of, that preaching, is scarcely improved upon by the preaching that scorns reasoning. The criticism is too superficial. Sophistry lodges, not in methods of action, but in the heart of man. The sophist finds certain methods more facile and fruitful, and the sophistical in the honest man gravitates toward those methods. But he becomes a man of strength in proportion as he triumphs over the evil elements in himself, and masters the methods for holy uses. Sophistry is not escaped by running from one method to another. The expository preacher is as likely to be unreal, untrue to truth, in his own way. So is the illustrative preacher. So is the exhorter. We must agree that it is the Bible that we are to preach, divine truth as it actually came in the forms of the great revelation, not a series of abstractions. But we must demur to the implication that such presentation bars out or represses consecutive thinking. The men of strength in the world's life are the thinkers, not the annalists, not the story-tellers. Dr. Austin Phelps has put in his striking

way the thought that the scrappy, anecdotal preacher may fill his auditorium, but when great issues are pending that call for stability and momentum, for safe guarding of interests and advance upon new positions, then the preacher who is a reasoner is like one blast upon Roderic Dhu's bugle horn, "worth a thousand men."

A second principal form of sophistry in men essentially sincere is found in the use of the rhetorical faculty. The essayist just quoted links this with the preceding form, and naturally, for they are found together historically. This is the other main source of Greek sophistry, which has been defined as "rhetoric philosophizing." And here is another valid indictment against Christian preaching. The preceding one was excessive devotion to philosophical form, or form of thought; this is excessive devotion to rhetorical form, or form of expression. Looking back upon the Greeks and out into present life, we readily discover several phases of this sophistry. They all misrepresent the truth. They are also untrue to the preacher's apprehension of the truth.

Cultivation of the rhetorical art may produce this fault The preacher who strives after the most perfect forms of language and delivery, in honest desire to make the truth as significant and effective as possible, is in this danger. Before he knows it, he may be seeking to perfect his art rather than to wield mighty truth. Then the minister of truth becomes a stylist.

Closely akin to this is effort to conceal poverty of thought under the pleasing drapery of many-colored speech. It is easier for some indolent men to let flow running brooks with no books in them than to pack weighty results of downright thinking into equal speech. These stylists are most ignoble, perhaps *the* most ignoble. If they correctly report their own holdings of truth, they disclose the distance those holdings fall short of the truth's reality and richness.

There is a very illusive and elusive phase of this rhetorical sophistry, which is not greatly harmful in its sincerer possessors. The earnest preacher desires to effect the utmost with every sermon. He knows that the truth is purer than he can see it and mightier than he can render it. He often comes to his pulpit throne too dull and weak for kingly action, if he is to be no more than true to his present self. He longs to feed the hungry flock generously. He knows the people wait for great influences. He must exert himself beyond the action of the truth within him to make them see it clearly and feel it deeply. He is orator enough to do it. He does it. And he is a sophist thus far. By the arts of the orator he makes the truth mightier upon them than it is upon himself. This is a frequent phenomenon in men who honestly think, or more properly speaking feel, that they are truer to truth by being untrue to themselves. This may be so in individual instances and isolated occurrences. But here, as elsewhere, we "sow an act and reap a habit." That one can carry others beyond his own mental state is a perilous discovery. It is at least one step toward the Greek Sophist's boasted "ability to take any side of any subject and by the art of the orator please, persuade, and carry the people." President Tucker was right, when he said in his Yale Lectures, "Preaching consists in the right correspondence between the apprehension and the expression of a given truth. The morality of preaching lies at this point, just where also its effectiveness lies. Preaching becomes unmoral, if not immoral, when the expression goes beyond the apprehension. This is unreality in the pulpit. Doubtless some unreal preaching is effective, but never for long time."

Beyond this lies sensationalism. The same in principle, it is lower because its object is base, viz., immediate and fleeting effect, emotional response to oratorical arts. Though a Talmadge can be true to himself, true to the truth in

him, in such preaching, Talmadge "done small" in half a thousand lesser pulpits cannot. He can produce such emotional response only by simulating fiery feelings, by palming off magnetism for love. The thing is certainly sophistical and forever reprehensible. And the wonder is that honest men can do it ignorantly and not self-convicted.

Such rhetorical sophistries are certainly to be condemned. Earnest men from Plato to the present day are right in striking at them. But the appeal is not well taken from rhetoric and oratory to the Bible. The splendid oratory of Deuteronomy and the surpassing imagery of Isaiah have put the divine stamp upon the finest action of the rhetorical powers in holy things. A preacher has biblical warrant for going out upon the people in the might of his inspired personality; biblical warrant, therefore, for taking such an oratorical panoply as he can wield honestly and effectively.

In passing now to the lack of correspondence of the actual with the real between the preacher and the people, it should be remarked that his two relations, to the truth and to men, are intricately interwoven. Each constantly affects the other for weal or woe. The relation to truth is principal; but it immediately modifies, and is at once modified by, his relation to the world. False toward the truth, consciously or unconsciously, false toward men; and *vice versa.* Accordingly the foregoing forms of sophistry throw their victims out of joint also with their fellow-men. No congregation would attempt to get relations of religious reality with a minister believed to be at heart a sophist with reference to the truth.

The preacher's right relation to the people is that of a self-sacrificing, independent, influential leader, to the end of individual and social salvation. Failing at any one of these points, he declines into unreality and becomes sophistical. A chief failure in this domain occurs when

the preacher drives at lower ends. The Master has prescribed the aim of preaching; it is salvation, everlasting life, "reconstructed manhood," the kingdom of heaven in souls and society; and however phrased, it is in and through Jesus Christ. Reality in the preacher's relation to men requires this aim to be kept distinct and dominant. Subordinate details must come to the front in turn, but always bearing definitely on the great consummation. Christian preaching never can be content with a general aim at humanity, nor even at general improvement in character and environment. The Greek Sophists failed here without caring. And the Christian pulpit reveals the same failure, even in men not guilty of self-seeking. Purpose and effort may be set upon their fellow-men, and yet the effects sought be less than really Christian.

Intellectual nurture may be the object aimed at. Preaching must carry a larger measure of instruction and conviction than any other public speech. Men must be taught transcendent truth. Christians must be established in independent and progressive faith. The failure of historic Pietism is repeated by every pulpit that confines itself to the initial and emotional Christian experiences. Instruction and conviction, however, though usually considered objects of preaching, are only method. The intellectual is the smaller element in that knowledge of God which is eternal life. Mental culture can neither be left general nor made an end. Christianity is both dogma and life, more life than dogma. It is life by means of dogma; it is dogma as the food of life. The pulpit must teach the specific Christian truths, not in order that they may be known, but that, being known, they may produce spiritual brain and brawn. The moral and spiritual value of doctrine is a phrase worthy to hang above the preacher's study table. Nor may the preacher leave the application to the hearer, as is too often done. Not in this world is knowl-

edge virtue. The preacher's business is precisely with people who know and both cannot and will not do. Instruction is the simplest part of his labor. If he pause there, he is shirking, consciously or unconsciously, the major part of his task; he is depriving the people of the chief values of the true preacher's presence. He is but a teacher. And a teacher in a preacher's shoes is so far a sophist.

Or, emotional impression may be the limited object. Feeling has a proper, but not the final, place in the procession of spiritual effects. The sensibility is but the approach to the will. Emotion is but motive power to assault resolve. Impression has no value whatever, if it fail to secure action. And beyond a certain shifting point emotion and resolution, feeling and consequent action, may easily be in inverse ratio. Religious feeling must not become so reasonless and magnetic as to be transitory, so pathetic and soothing as to be a luxury, so intense and extravagant as to drown all thought of action, so aimless and theatrical as to carry no practical interest and lead no whither. Ideal argumentation has been defined as a combination of complete convincingness and just enough excitement of the right emotions to produce the desired action. In these terms ideal preaching may be described as causing just enough excitement of the right emotions to produce the desired action.

Every preacher of any power at all is in danger of this seductive sophistry. Emotional effect is immediate reward of labor. It is instant response to appeal. It is prompt submission to power. It recruits the preacher's exhausted feeling, encourages and exhilarates him, charms his best endeavors from him, testifies to his divine attendance. The sensationalist is the leading sinner here. Schleiermacher lay in this trap, for his primary object was not to instruct, not to incite to action, but to awaken feel-

ing. This is the actor's object, not the preacher's. The latter must ignore the reward of emotional response, guard his hearers from emotional waste, adapt and direct all emotional force toward carrying the citadel of the will by complete and victorious persuasion. Stopping anywhere short of that, he is unreal. The actor in a preacher's shoes is a worse sophist, because usually more immoderate, than the mere teacher.

Or, the aim may be at real improvements in character and social conditions, but those too low for the pulpit. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, preaching reached its nadir. Whatever served ordinary morality and social happiness had place. There were "nature sermons and field sermons." There were "preachers on health, and potato preachers with their popular directions on rational agriculture." The plight of preaching is clearly seen from a remark made when the reaction was setting in, that preaching ought to have the character of a discourse on religion, though not necessarily on the Christian religion.

Many of the new themes crowding the modern pulpit are entirely proper, arising out of the applications of the gospel to our complicated life, and meaning no less than salvation through Christ. But the unreality of themes, which, though not worthless to human life, are beneath the pulpit, is unusually threatening to-day. Religion is now expected to help men live well here; hereafter also, and so much the better, but here primarily. This emphasis upon the present world throws open the door to troops of themes and purposes entirely alien to the pulpit's mission. An English leader of the working classes voiced the very general demand of his followers in all lands, when he declared that "industrial reformation" should be "the aim and work of religion." The preacher of culture is constantly commended, and so is the preacher of ethics, and the preacher of the rights of the common people;

these products are immediately marketable. Yet these speakers must be very sophists in oratorical power to make their themes as welcome as the old topic, "Christ and him crucified," is in its everyday dress. A recent chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales was pertinent and timely when he gave his official address upon "the secularization of the pulpit," and said: "It is always easier to preach about man than about God, because a man must be living very near to God to speak effectively about God. In the broader humanity and larger culture of the present day a cultivated intellect can always find many subjects of literary or intellectual or artistic interest in the Bible to preach about, and these for a time may attract an audience, may instruct and refine them, but there will be something, perhaps a nameless something, absent from such sermons." Professor Phelps has put the gist of the matter in classic language thus: "Select the choice themes for discussion, and only those. Of important themes choose the most important. Deal only with superlatives. Accept only the aristocracy of thought. Not every useful theme is sufficiently useful to deserve a place in the pulpit. Not every useful theme is religious enough for the pulpit. Not every religious theme is important enough for the pulpit."

A second sophistry as between the preacher and the people occurs whereinsoever he preaches as a matter of routine. Few ministers could apply to their pulpit labors the words of the late Dr. N. J. Burton of Hartford, who affirmed at one time that he never had seen the day when he did not take up his intellectual work as eager as a war-horse. Even Dr. Finney sometimes lost his consciousness of the fullness of God. At such a time the preacher has not the relation of reality with his congregation. Duty holds him to a task from which relief would be welcome. To do the best he can is better than to desert the appointment. But that sacred hour calls, and the people wait,

for something far more grateful and zestful than his weary brain and dull heart. A man in such a case often flings himself desperately upon God Almighty and is lifted out of his depression, crowned and furnished for kingly action then and there. If not thus recovered, he spends an unreal and unhappy hour. It is worse if he grows used to the rut and does not greatly care; then his sophistry is ponderable and guilty.

Another unreality appears when the preacher falls behind the people's advancing life. To this failure he is more exposed than any other man. By the very force of circumstances he is in many cases not a man of affairs. Great influences carry him away from everyday, out-of-door life, to live in the things of the mind and of God. The themes in which he must dwell profoundly are transcendent. His gospel is in a certain real sense closed. Its main truths took their classic form nineteen hundred years ago, and come to him printed in a book. It is easy to forget that each generation and every man must learn that Book afresh, and that the preacher's business is to adapt it to ever-changing thought. Twenty years ago, when the world was twenty years slower than to-day, a conservative leader declared that a live preacher must replenish his exegetical library every ten years, and exclaimed, "Is it not easy to see how fatally a pastor may be left in the rear of biblical scholarship?" A preacher's habits of thought get fixed, and his mental action, like his eyesight, slows down with age. This is surely, and more surely, a young man's world. It is as true that the "dead line" is a reality as that it is not. Many men find that line long before death. Well for them, if they take from it an awakening shock, and find themselves still limber enough to be readjusted to the general environment. In some this deliverance is wrought by a searching spiritual experience, as it might be in multitudes more.

Saul of Tarsus was a conspicuous instance of such an escape. There was an honest man moored to the past. The divine revelation had swept around and past him unperceived in its most glorious movement. He would thrust it back within its old narrow bounds, even at cost of the tears and blood of martyrs. His perceptions and employment of truth, though still real to his sincere soul, had become unreal to revealed truth and to the wakening world. The great discovery broke upon a still adaptable soul, and carried him in three Arabian years to the front rank of truth's progress and the world's advance.

No charge is more frequent, if any more ignorant and untrue when made sweeping and universal, than that the ministry is behindhand and out of touch with life. To this charge heed must be given. To stop with denying it will leave it standing in full vigor. It contains truth. The danger is universal. The Greek Sophists could not make their old forms of truth morally and religiously effective upon the new forms of life. There are many clinging to the active ministry, who are stumbling along farther and farther in the rear. As saints they are priceless treasures, whom we would hold in our counsels to the latest moment. But as leaders they are belated and outdated, and should make room for men of the present moment, men of reality, men in throbbing touch with the life which leaps to be gone out of to-day into to-morrow and can hardly wait to do the next and larger thing.

Still another sophistry is found in a failure of independent and influential leadership. The preacher ought to be free and fearless, a positive force in the community. Seldom does a church tolerate a minister seen to be under any man's hand. He must be an independent student of truth, able to form instructed opinions of his own by the help, but not under the dominion, of the world's best scholars. Then he must be equally at liberty as a speaker.

Whatso he finds true, that he should speak, not without tact and discretion, but without respect of persons. And his trained manhood should make itself felt and followed, taking men captive for his Lord and leading them heavenward in triumph. The charge is sneeringly made that the pulpit is under the thumb of wealth and culture, that it dare not speak its mind on burning themes, that it is not strong enough to champion the interests of the modern day against their intrenched adversaries. That this is generally true may be earnestly denied. But no more than other public servants can the minister of religion escape the selfish assaults of power against liberty.

This form of sophistry is often due to weak personality in men not tainted with self-seeking. Preachers are not always the strongest men either by nature or by training. In a social system where the stronger win, they often lose. They bend under the influence of persons potent enough to modify their thinking and to color their message. Thus are produced unreal relations. The case is sophistical, especially when the preacher is uneasily conscious of it. He should regain his independence and leadership. Whether he is ignorant of his bonds, or ignores the divine anointing which can empower the naturally weak, he is an unreal leader. The call is ever timely for men of the first personal power in the pulpit, since the victories of the gospel are in real part "achieved by the very same means and methods of speech by which men are moved by eloquent address on other than religious subjects of human thought."

A more serious sophistry is caused by self-seeking. It was a main count against the ancient Sophists that they made a trade of religion. The same charge is daily flung at the gospel ministry. The emoluments of his profession are said to affect and even determine his action. A recent writer, reporting the rapid growth of liberal theology, says,

"There are men in pastorates who may actually hold these newly discovered beliefs and keep still, realizing that to make them public they would lose their pastorates and living." Such perhaps was the preacher whose parishioner praised him in the words, "He sends me home feeling that I am as good as any man." No requirement is so persistent and imperious as that the ministry of religion be clear of all trace of self-seeking. But critics should discover the impossibility of it. Pure unselfishness is perfection, unattainable in this world even by its devotees. The Christian ministry is straining toward this perfection. The few hypocrites cannot be suffered to give reputation to the honest majority.

The minister is trained to appreciate and dispense the current values of Christian civilization. Books bring him his necessary food. Social privileges rest, invigorate, and instruct him. Travel enlarges and enriches his nature and multiplies his resources. Commendation for honest labor heartens him. Honor and reputation are real rewards. Influence is, speaking humanly, his efficient power. Gratitude is sweet. Love is life itself. Such returns and resources, expressed and conveyed largely by money, it is impossible to despise or refuse. People grateful for religious help will not be restrained from making some recompense. And the agreement is well-nigh universal that religion must have a class of men devoted exclusively to its service, and therefore dependent wholly upon it. The rule in the religions of the world has been, that "they which minister about sacred things eat of the things of the temple, and they which wait upon the altar have their portion with the altar." This was true of the Jewish priesthood. And the custom was introduced into Christianity in the words, "Even so did the Lord ordain that they which proclaim the gospel should live of the gospel."

But in so far as this commercial element affects the min-

ister's motives, he falls to the sophistical level. Any thirst for applause, or hunger for approval; any striving for high place and honor, any service rendered for its money value, any move for larger income, any partiality for the wearers of fine clothing and gold rings,—such things keep green the memory of the Greek Sophists. It is all sinful, and cannot be palliated. It must be conquered by whatever discipline. Self-sacrifice must destroy self-seeking. And while few preachers are totally indifferent to remuneration, few also are they in whom the motives of love and sacrifice do not conspicuously triumph.

Greek sophistry made a valuable and permanent addition to Christian preaching. The philosophical and rhetorical elements grew into preaching; they were not hung upon it. The changes which passed over it in the first four centuries were inevitable. Prophesying must become preaching. Prophesying was spontaneous utterance by any one who felt moved by the divine breath. Dr. Hatch declares that the two forces which transformed prophesying into preaching were organization and the fascinations of rhetoric. Church organization was "inconsistent with that free utterance of the Spirit," and gradually confined preaching to the official class and to appointed services. "Prophesying died when the Catholic Church was formed." And then the captivating oratory of the Sophists impressed its artificial forms upon preaching. "It was not only natural but inevitable that when men who had been trained in rhetorical methods came to make such [Christian] addresses, they should follow the methods to which they were accustomed."

This explanation stops short of the profoundest truth. The changes in preaching were called forth by developing life. Spontaneous, irregular utterance could feed only incipient life. Growth depended upon strong food, thoroughly prepared and regularly furnished. And the win-

ning of a cultured and godless society, and the enthroning of Christianity over the world's manifold life, forced upon the church the means and methods involved in organization, philosophy and oratory. That which reached its first climax in the great Greek preachers of the fourth century was not essentially a departure from the Bible and a grieving of the Spirit of Christ. John Chrysostom's biblical and spiritual quality was up to the level of his oratory. So was Paul's, and Augustine's, and Luther's, and Bourdaloue's, and Robert Hall's, and Thomas Chalmers', and Richard Salter Storrs'. And there are thousands of great and small men along the way whose rhetoric was handmaid to their spirituality. Nor could their spirituality have wrought so grandly, rejecting this handmaid of sometimes excessive zeal. Those early developments of preaching have not lost their vitality. The same necessity still lies upon the church. Nor is it unreasonable to believe that the conditions will remain substantially the same while souls and society are being perfected. Meanwhile Dr. Hatch's lament is as dolorous as it is unjust to earnest preaching: "If Christianity is to be again the power that it was in the earliest ages, it must renounce its costly purchase. A class of rhetorical chemists would be thought of only to be ridiculed; a class of rhetorical religionists is only less anomalous because we are accustomed to it. The hope of Christianity is that the class which was artificially created may ultimately disappear: and that the sophistical element in Christian preaching will melt, as a transient mist, before the preaching of the prophets of the ages to come, who, like the prophets of the ages that are long gone by, will speak only 'as the Spirit gives them utterance.'" The return, it may be replied, cannot be to irregular, unappointed utterance, void of philosophical and rhetorical elements, void, too, of the financial ingredient of earned and honorable support. The return of preaching

must be simply unto God, bearing all these legitimate and valuable elements, subjecting them to the indwelling Spirit, who will fuse them all together into that sanctified, opulent, and eloquent manhood by which it has ever been "God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe."