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THE  
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

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ARTICLE I.

THE VALUE AND USES OF THE IMAGINATION IN  
PREACHING.

BY PROFESSOR ALBERT HENRY CURRIER, D.D.

THE most successful preachers of the past and present have been and are, almost without exception, distinguished for their power and use of the imagination. Their sermons glow with light, life, and beauty. The truths they enforce are made clear, attractive, and pungent by appropriate illustrations. The reasons for this are not far to seek. Most people are best taught by object-lessons. Pictures interest alike grown people and children. While abstract propositions and bald statements of truth leave a congregation, generally, dull, listless, and unresponsive; all faces light up with interest and show themselves wide-awake and attentive, when the preacher gives to them an apt illustration. Like an enchanter's wand, this opens dull ears and arrests careless attention. Only a fraction of the congregation, and the smallest fraction, too, can follow a train of close reasoning; but all of them can appreciate and enjoy a good story, or a simile which happily illustrates the thought. In the one case the preacher appeals to a faculty possessed in different degrees by a limited number; in the other to one that is universal, at least in its receptive capacity. Though one declare and think himself destitute of imagination, this state-

ment is not strictly true of any one. He may lack the poetic faculty, be incapable of the novelist's art or story-teller's power of invention, but not the vision and the faculty divine, which sees and delights in pictorial representations of truth when presented.

This will become more evident upon consideration of the nature and work of the imagination.

What is the imagination? What things are included in the range of its operations? It is the creative, picture-making faculty of the mind. "The imagination," says Dr. C. C. Everett, "is the power of mental vision, a power which creates that which it beholds." Its simplest operation is where the mind reproduces for itself the forms which the senses have presented to it before,—as when one recalls the scenes of childhood, or walks along a familiar street in a very dark night. The darkness is so great that his eye sees nothing,—not the houses on the street, nor the breaks and inequalities of the sidewalk; but his mind sees them,—their shape, color, location, and he walks on without hesitation or perplexity, and turns in at the right door. Travelers and artists habituate themselves to this use of the imagination. The summer tourist who has visited Switzerland or England, on his return recalls the striking and sublime mountain scenery of the one, and the cathedrals, palaces, historic monuments, and cities of the other, and describes to listening friends what interesting things are stored in his mind as in a picture-gallery.

It is said that the faces in the pictures of Raphael are but reproductions, many of them, of faces he had seen. Walking the streets of Florence or Rome, he saw these people, noted their features, expressions, attitudes, and gestures, and went home and depicted them on his canvas. This well-known fact has suggested to the teachers of schools of art a most valuable

practice for training their pupils. They show them an object to be copied, and, permitting them to look at it awhile, withdraw it and require them to copy it from memory alone. Thus their pupils are taught to observe, to note accurately the form, pose, color, and other particulars observable in each of the objects studied, that these may be recalled to the imagination, and this may reproduce the mental pictures thus secured. Happy is that student, whatever be his subject of study, who has thus been trained to *observe* what his eyes behold. After a while his mind becomes stored with pictures of memory, subject to the call of the imagination, such as no gallery of art is large enough to contain.

But the imagination does more than accurately reproduce the things actually seen. It analyzes them into their elements, and recombines these elements into creations of its own. If the objects seen are defective, their defects are repaired by adding what is lacking to their perfection, as the faults of a face seen by Raphael were sometimes corrected by the great artist by substituting for the actual features whatever might be needed to make it ideally perfect. The imagination then appears as the idealizing faculty. It discerns in the familiar objects of the outward world analogies and resemblances to things spiritual, and it exhibits these things to the mind in similes and metaphors that make them more tangible and impressive to it. In all cases alike, it takes the things encountered in nature and human experience, and, perceiving in them a deeper and more glorious significance, finishes them up to its dream. It dreams or imagines better and fairer things than it finds in the outward world and in human life, because man is a child of God, and the Spirit of God inspires him with these ideas and conceptions of better things that have failed to be perfectly realized in nature and life; and it is the function of

the imagination to receive these ideas and give more complete expression to them.

The materials upon which the imagination works are those actually furnished by nature and human experience. In its idealizing constructive work it adheres strictly to facts; it is loyal to the truths of nature and experience, and does not deviate from the lines they faintly disclose. In this, imagination differs from fancy, which is a frolicsome faculty conceiving things not found in heaven or in earth; as centaurs, satyrs and other creatures of fable, which combine features and qualities that are incongruous and unnatural.

It is this strict adherence of the imagination to the facts of experience that has made it, in the progress of knowledge, the useful handmaid of science, as set forth by Professor Tyndall in his famous essay upon "The Scientific Uses of the Imagination," published about the middle of the last century. In that interesting essay, the writer shows that the most eminent men of science, instead of carefully avoiding, as often supposed, all use of the imagination and absolutely excluding it from any share in their investigations,—confining themselves to observed and proven facts,—have sometimes taken it into their service as a guide, and been conducted by it to their most brilliant discoveries. Kepler, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Benjamin Franklin, Fraunhofer (discoverer of the lines in the solar spectrum), and others may be mentioned as doing this. Their brilliant and important discoveries were, in the first place, but lucky guesses or conjectures of truth made by men who were familiar with certain facts whose import had previously puzzled and baffled many observers until it flashed upon their minds what these facts signified, and they leaped to the conclusions published to the world. This leap of the mind to conclusions suggested by the facts and phenomena of

nature and experience is the work of the imagination. In a similar way it aids the inventor, and the architect, and the successful man of business. Each and all of them have beforehand visions or intuitions of the completed work, and are guided by these to the successful achievement of it.

But the imagination is the special handmaid of religion. Religion concerns largely, though not chiefly, the unseen world. Three-fourths of religion, some one says, is conduct. But the remaining fourth is where we get the motives and inspiration to right conduct. We derive them from our knowledge of God, from our apprehensions of duty and human possibility, from our belief in the destiny that awaits us as individuals and as a race, if we live according to the divine will.

Now the great question is, How can we come into vital relations with God? We all of us may say, with Job:—

“Oh that I knew where I might find him!  
That I might come even to his seat!”  
“Behold, I go forward, but he is not there;  
And backward, but I cannot perceive him;  
On the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him;  
He hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.”

To this bewildered cry of Job, followed by the declaration of trust,

“But he knoweth the way that I take;  
When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold,”

add the words of the Apostle Paul to the Athenians,—

“The God that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is he served by men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; . . . that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being; . . . For we are also his offspring. Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the God-

head is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and device of man."

The power that pierces the veil of mystery behind which God is hid—that feels after him, and finds him, and at length arrives at the tranquil assurance reached by both Job and the Christian apostle—is the idealizing power of imagination. It is by this that we apprehend his presence, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. It is by this that we perfect and maintain our conceptions of him, and renew and restore to freshness and power our fading ideals of character and conduct.

The gulf that separates ignorant, sinful man from God sometimes seems impassable. But it has been, and evermore may be, bridged. The bridge rests upon four sustaining piers: The revelations of God in nature, the revelation of God in human experience, the revelation of God in the gospel, and human testimony concerning the victories of faith and the actual salvation of men from sin when ready to obey and live in harmony with him.

The beginnings of religion are laid in God's disclosure of himself in nature and human experience. The call of Abraham, the growth of his faith under God's providential leading, and Jacob's experience at Bethel, by which he was roused from sleep to a vivid realization of God's existence and unseen presence and led to consecrate himself to his service, are examples. These experiences of primitive religion are repeatedly given to men. Men are often brought nigh to God by the works of nature, and by their experiences in life, and they would often be so, if attentive to the disclosures God makes of himself in them. Well were it for us, if, in this respect, the childhood of the race were perennial, and we were always

susceptible to the impressions of nature that hint the presence of God, like the Scotchman, of whom Hamilton Mabie tells, who "for forty years was accustomed to take off his bonnet before the rising sun" in adoring homage to the beauty of the world and its Creator.

It is to the honor of poets that through their imaginations they preserve in undecaying freshness this susceptibility. Wordsworth gives us an example of it in the familiar lines:—

"I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man."

There are four great defects in the religion of most people:—

1. They have no worthy ideas of God. Their ideas are belittling and dishonoring to him, and powerless to produce in them any effect of reverence and true worship. Instead of thinking of him as "the High and the Holy One" that he really is,—and such as the Creator and Preserver of the world must be,—they think of him, as their narrow, unspiritual thoughts conceive of him, and as the idols of the heathen represent him.

2. Most people have no adequate, influential conception of God's presence. Though "not far from each one of us," "closer than hands or feet," for in him we live and move and have our being, practically, in effect, he is remote and our hearts are seldom stirred and thrilled by the realization of his presence.

3. Most people have but a faint notion of God's unfailing, infinite love for faulty, sinful men.

"The love of God is broader  
Than the measure of man's mind,  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind."

This love embraces all sorts and conditions of men. None are excluded from it, however humble and unworthy. None need despair of its benefits, however black the record against them. The only condition of receiving it is a penitent heart ready to turn from its sinful courses, and live henceforth in obedience to God. "Let the wicked forsake his way," says the prophet, "and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon."

4. Most men have but little practical faith in God's active interest and controlling agency in human affairs. "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice." This declaration of the Psalmist should be the comfort and stay of every religious man. However dark the prospect may seem to human sight and judgment, his hope and courage and faith should remain unshaken.

"I say to thee, do thou repeat  
To the first man thou mayest meet,  
In lane, highway, or open street,  
  
That he, and we, and all men move  
Under a canopy of Love,  
As broad as the blue sky above:  
  
That weary deserts we may tread,  
A dreary labyrinth may thread,  
Through dark ways underground be led;  
  
Yet, if we will our Guide obey,  
The dreariest path, the darkest way  
Shall issue out in heavenly day."

—R. C. TRENCH.

The preacher should address himself continually and un-

weariedly to the effort to correct these defects. By a skillful use of the imagination he will be greatly helped to do this. He will dwell on the idea of God, and feed his imagination upon the intimations of his love, glory, and greatness, found in nature and the pages of Scripture, until, like Robert Hall, he shall say:—

“The idea of the Supreme Being has this peculiar property, that, as it admits of no substitute, so from the first moment it is formed, it is capable of continual growth and enlargement. God himself is immutable; but our conception of his character is continually receiving fresh accessions, is continually growing more extended and effulgent, by having transferred to it new elements of beauty and goodness; by attracting to itself, as a centre, whatever bears the impress of dignity, order, or happiness. It borrows splendor from all that is fair, subordinates to itself all that is great, and sits enthroned on the riches of the universe”;

and men shall go from hearing his sermons transported with the thought of God; saying with St. Paul, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” or with Charles Kingsley in the rapture of his spirit, “How beautiful God is!” or with Faber, as his heart utters itself in the hymn,

“My God, how wonderful thou art,  
Thou everlasting friend!  
On thee I stay my trusting heart,  
Till faith in vision end.”

A preacher also needs the help of a sympathetic imagination to adapt his gospel message to the various conditions of men. It has been truthfully said, that “one half of the world does not know how the other half lives.” The temptations, trials, and miseries of that unknown half are never suspected by the other half. If they were, men would be more charitable in their judgments, more patient with their fellow-men’s faults, more pitiful, and more active and strenuous to assist, relieve,

and comfort one another. The preacher's imagination gives him a real insight into the situations of those variously tortured souls, guides him in his application of Christian truth, shows him how blind to their own welfare and how much they lose when men reject the grace of God of which he constantly speaks. As George Herbert says: "The thrusting away of his arm makes us only not embraced."

Finally, the preacher must have imagination, that he may duly estimate the value of the souls he tries to win, and the dignity of his ministerial office, as he preaches publicly and from house to house. There come times in his life when his work drags and his enthusiasm for it falters, and such complaining thoughts as these arise within him: "Who, and what are these people for whom I am toiling, and upon whom I lavish without stint all my wealth of heart and mind, all my time and service? Few and small are their personal attractions, destitute of grace and social charm, narrow-minded, unappreciative and unresponsive, poverty-stricken in mental resources and worldly goods, they tire me and I am tired of visiting their poor homes, which my pastoral office obliges me to enter."

When such unworthy thoughts as these come, what is needed to rebuke his unchristian mood? The faculty of Ruskin, who, hearing one say, "What a dreary prospect you have here," replied, "Do you think so? When I look out I always see the sky." The vision and faculty divine of such an imagination makes the minister in his work tread in the footsteps of Christ and his apostles. He sees in these humble people those for whom Christ died; every one of whom is an object of his redeeming love, and has the possibilities of saintly character; whose humble dwelling God himself does not refuse to visit with his presence and blessing. As George

Herbert says of his ideal parson, "He holds the rule that nothing is little in God's service; if it once have the honor of that name it grows great instantly. Wherefore neither disdaineth he to enter into the poorest cottage, though he even creep into it, and though it smell never so loathsomely; for both God is there also and those for whom God died."

Seeing that the imagination is so potent a faculty, and has such an important function in the preacher's work, what are its specific methods of operation? It has, like the sunlight, three distinct and well-recognized uses: *it illumines, it glorifies, and it vitalizes.*

1. *It illumines truth.* It thus aids the understanding to comprehend truth. It does this by the use of simile, metaphor, story, and other forms of illustration employed for this purpose. "Illustrations," says Thomas Fuller, "are the windows that let in light." When one rises in the morning and descends to the rooms below, where most of the day is spent and the work of the house is done, those rooms are dim because of the drawn curtains and closed shutters which gave privacy to the family the previous evening. A twilight invests almost everything, so that one with imperfect vision can scarcely see and is liable to stumble over things that stand in the way. What an illuminating effect is produced by lifting the curtains and opening the shutters! Everything then is clearly revealed in all its distinctive features of form and color. No difficulty then in making one's way and seeing at a glance whatever objects of utility or ornament may be contained in those rooms. Such is the effect, according to Fuller's metaphor, of appropriate illustrations. "They are the windows of speech; through them truth shines, and ordinary minds fail to perceive truth clearly unless it is presented to them through this medium."

Men are often puzzled by questions like the following: Why did not Christ and his apostles eradicate immediately the social evils they found existing? Why did they not smite slavery and other forms of social wrong, as with a tornado overwhelming them in instant destruction? Why did they not lash the world to do it in the spirit and after the manner of those Jehus of modern reform who wish to drive on its chariot furiously? It is not easy to tell. The method of Christ and the apostles of Christianity was not the method of the common zealot of reform,—not one of lightning and quick destruction, but rather of slow death without violence.

Open a volume of the Sermons of Maclaren, and see how he lights up and makes clear these dark things of God. The two examples I take are found in the first sermon of the third series of "Sermons Preached in Manchester."

"Paul never said a word to encourage any precipitate attempts to change externals. He let slavery, he let war alone. . . . He believed in the diffusion of the principles which he proclaimed and the mighty name which he served as *able to girdle the poison-tree and take the bark off it, and that the rest—the slow dying—might be left to the work of time.*"

A little further on, in the sermon, the preacher thus explains the potential good in things painful, and how all things may work together for good to them that love God:—

"A true appreciation of all outward good and a charm against the bitterest sting of outward evils are ours, . . . when we have learned to look upon our work as primarily doing His will, and upon all our possessions primarily as means for making us like Himself. Most men seem to think they have gone to the very bottom of the thing when they have classified the gifts of fortune as good or evil, according as they produce pleasure or pain. But that is a poor superficial classification. It is like taking and arranging books by their bindings. . . . The only question worth asking in regard to the externals of our life is—how far does each thing help me to be a good man? . . . How far does it make me capable of larger reception of greater gifts from God? What is its effect in preparing me for that world

beyond? . . . To care whether a thing is painful or pleasant is as absurd as to care whether the bricklayer's trowel is knocking the sharp corner off a brick, or plastering mortar on the one below it before he lays it carefully on its course. *Is the building getting on? That is the one question that is worth thinking about.*"

The illuminating effect of good illustrations is best shown, perhaps, in the convincing effect they give to arguments. The undisciplined minds of common, uneducated people are soon wearied by endeavors to follow and appreciate the force and pertinency of arguments. After a little their attention flags and they give up the effort, unless the preacher can relieve their attention and brighten the obscurities of the way by apposite stories and pleasing figures of speech which they readily understand and enjoy.

One of the best examples we know of is given by Moses Coit Tyler in his "History of American Literature" as an extract from the writings of Roger Williams. The subject was "Religious Toleration," one of the most difficult that the mind of man can handle so as to make it appear reasonable and right in practice. So to treat it, that the practice of it shall not seem to be disloyalty and treason to the truth Christians hold, men have labored in vain age after age to do. Though they have seemed to succeed, as did Jeremy Taylor in his excellent and convincing argument upon "Liberty in Prophesying," and John Stuart Mill in his eloquent and powerful "Essays on Liberty," yet when those who have pleaded for it regain their power, and the passion of controversy revives and the false zeal of religious intolerance flames up under the influence of churchly pride and arrogance, then they pursue dissent with the old relentless persecution, which when sufferers from it themselves they deprecated, and when breathing the tolerant spirit of charity created within them by a rational mind they had thought they never would practice again. Roger Williams's

plea for religious toleration was concisely put by him in the following illustration:—

“It hath fallen out sometimes that Papists, Protestants, Jews and Turks may be embarked in one ship: upon which supposition I affirm that all the liberty of Conscience I ever pleaded for turns upon these two hinges, that none of the Protestants, Papists, Jews or Turks be forced to come to the ship's prayers or worship,—nor compelled from their own particular prayers or worship, if they practice any. I further add that notwithstanding this liberty, the commander of this ship ought to command the ship's course, yea, and also command that justice, peace and sobriety be kept and practiced both among the seamen and all the passengers. If any refuse to obey the common laws and orders of the ship concerning their own peace and preservation, if any shall mutiny and rise up against their commanders and officers—in such cases the commander may judge, resist, compell and punish such transgressors according to their deserts.”

Professor Tyler says: “Here we have the final result of ages of intellectual effort presented without effort,—a long course of abstract reasoning made transparent and irresistible in a picture. It fixes for all time the barriers against tyranny on the one side, against lawlessness on the other.”

Such illustrations give convincing force as well as clearness to truth. “Vividness,” says Hoyt, “is an element of strength. We feel strongly only as we see vividly”; and, we may add, we grasp and hold with tenacious conviction only the truths that we have been made to see clearly and feel strongly.

2. A second use of the imagination is to *give an attractive splendor to truth*. Truth needs not only to be made clear but beautiful and glorious. Recurring to our own illustration as to the illuminating power of imagination, how its touch is like that of the hand which opens the shutters of a darkened room in the morning, we recall the story of Sydney Smith,—how, when he came down from his chamber in the morning to the sitting-room below, he used to say as he opened its shutters to

admit the sunlight, "Let us glorify the room!" So the preacher should try to exhibit truth in all its attractiveness. Often men have such misconceptions in regard to it, or such inadequate notions of it, that, instead of being drawn to Christ and the life he calls them to, they are repelled from him and the Christian life. It was the high distinction of Phillips Brooks as a preacher that he made Christianity appear glorious. In his sermons, as Professor Hoyt observes, Christian truth "is presented in its manifold relations, in the divineness of its meaning and power. The gospel is seen to be the most splendid thing in the world. The most heavenly motives are brought to bear upon the humblest duty, and not a fact or duty of life but is glorified by this heavenly light." Listen as he preaches on the text, "The truth shall make you free," and endeavors to show men that Christianity calls them to freedom and dignity and worthy living instead of bondage, and a contracted, undesirable life:—

"A man puts aside some sinfulness. He has been a drunkard, and he becomes a sober man. He has been a cheat, and he becomes a faithful man. He has been a liar, and he becomes a truthful man. He has been a profligate, and he becomes a pure man. What has happened to that man? Shall he simply think of himself as one who has entered upon a course of self-denial? Nay, it is self-indulgence that he has really entered upon. He has risen and shaken himself like a lion, so that the dust has fallen from his mane, and all the great range of that life which God gave him to live lies before him. This is the everlasting inspiration. . . . Oh! how this world has perverted words and meanings that the mastery of Jesus (which one accepts when he becomes a Christian) should seem to be the imprisonment and not the enfranchisement of the soul! When I bring a flower out of the darkness and set it in the sun, and let the sunlight come streaming down upon it, and the flower knows the sunlight for which it was made and opens its fragrance and beauty; when I take a dark pebble and put it into the stream and let the silver water go coursing down over it and bring forth the hidden color that was in the bit of stone,—opening the nature that is in them, the flower and stone rejoice. I can almost hear them sing

in the field and in the stream. What then? Shall not man bring his nature into the fullest illumination, and surprise himself by the things that he might do? Oh the way in which we fail to comprehend, or, when we do comprehend, deny to ourselves the bigness of that thing which it is to be a man, to be a child of God!"

Such a preacher casts a transfiguring light upon the religion of Christ and makes men feel in regard to it like Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, happy to be there and desirous of abiding there in lasting tabernacles of peace and joy.

3. The third use of the imagination is to invest with *fresh, perennial* interest old, familiar, time-worn truths, to preserve them from the deadening effect of triteness and familiarity. Truth is affected by much repetition and talk about it, as a gold or silver coin by much handling. It becomes in this way defaced and tarnished, and its brightness dimmed. It needs to be *reminted*, so to speak, and renewed, that its value and beauty may be clearly seen and appreciated. The imagination, quickened by a fresh experience of its worth, renews it, and reminds it, and utters it to the delight and satisfaction of the world. In the course of time the most precious truth grows dull and despoiled of its original power. Its quickening force decays until its utterance ceases to stir the heart and move to action. Embodied in hymns, it thrills the soul, at first, but by and by the music loses its charm and becomes a weariness. Made the theme of the pulpit, the sermons uttered there attract and delight large congregations, hold them in rapt attention as if spell-bound, and produce wonderful conversions from lives of sin and transformations of moral character. But soon the sermons pall on the hearing and cease to attract or move. These phenomena of religious interest are only too common. They create for the minister, as his stay with his people continues year after year, a perplexing problem. How shall he maintain their interest in his preaching, how shall he

preserve his own interest and enthusiasm in his work of ministering to them God's truth? There is only one way. The experience of the ministry in the past abundantly proves it. He must live near to God through prayer and constant unwearying study and meditation of his word. He must feed upon it as his necessary daily food, and so keep piety alive, and he must, by the constant exercise and use of his imagination, seek to *vitalize* and preserve in undecaying spiritual power and significance the truth which he ministers. A vital Christianity never loses its power,—it is like the beauty of the morning and the springtime, of which men never grow tired, and to the charm of which their souls respond, no matter how often they have seen them or how old they are. As Wordsworth says :—

"So was it when my life began;  
So is it now I am a man."

Among preachers we find notable examples and illustrations of this; in Bushnell, Maclaren, Beecher, and Phillips Brooks. They were eminent for their piety and spirituality fed continually from the celestial springs of Revelation, and for their poetic imaginations. You can scarcely open to a page of their sermons without finding evidence of it. The very titles of their sermons show it. We want to emphasize the fact that their imagination, as well as their piety and spirituality, imparted a perennial charm to their preaching. Without imagination, by bare statement and earnest iteration of Christian truth they might have interested men for a while, and done much good, as does many a Salvation Army exhorter, or worker in the Young Men's Christian Association; but their ministry to their churches would have been short-lived instead of continuing year after year with unabating power and interest and profit to their congregations. We think, therefore, that we are

warranted in recommending to the theological student and the young minister to cultivate the imagination by every means possible, that it, as the ally of his piety and evangelizing zeal, may impart to his preaching lasting interest and vitality. "It is," as a distinguished English bishop says, "the power by which dullness or baldness is avoided,"—"the power by which the truth of God may be arrayed in undecaying attractiveness.

Incidentally it serves the important use of assisting men to remember the truth they hear, so that it shall not seem to go into one ear and pass out through the other. Good illustrations in sermons are a preserving salt to keep them long in remembrance. It was the discovery of this fact, when a young preacher, that led Guthrie to cultivate the pictorial style of preaching for which he became distinguished.

Still another use of imagination is to develop in men the idealizing habit, which enables them to rise above the cares and depressing circumstances which more or less vex and oppress all mankind. The preacher who kindles and keeps alive in the souls of his hearers the ideals of religion, makes religion the solace and inspirer of their souls in times of special discouragement. The influence of true, vital religion on men's minds is analogous to that of poetry. "Poetry," says Emerson, "is the consolation of mortal men." But religion more than poetry is fitted to console men. The sorrows, trials, and vexations of life, with the disgust they produce in the mind, often make life a dreary possession. It is then like a shell, whose exterior is rough, corrugated, weather-stained, of which one may say, "There is no beauty in it that we should desire it!" But as such a shell may be lined with pearl tinted with the colors of the sunset, and its concave appear like an image of the sky, so life has a hidden under-side that

may yield something like heavenly delight, and it is the work of religion, far more than of poetry, to discover that beautiful side of life, and turn it to the view of men and make them insensible or superior, through the inspiration and joy it gives, to the unlovely, repulsive side. How many illustrations we have of this in the Bible, and in the constant experience of God's people! When Elisha and his servant were encompassed by a hostile host, with horses and chariots at Dothan, the servant cried, "Alas! what shall we do?" "Fear not," the tranquil prophet said, "for they that be with us are more than they that be with them"; and when at his prayer the Lord opened the young man's eyes, he too became calm, seeing the "mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen," the apostle Paul says. He lived in the visions of his imagination. Therefore he could say, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." Christ made a little child the type of a Christian disciple, because his disciples should have the vision and the faculty divine characteristic of children. In the midst of most forbidding circumstances children are persistently happy. Their homes may be cheerless and poverty-stricken; they may be clothed in rags and have scarcely anything bright and pleasant about them, and yet their joy abounds. It is because they do not live wholly in the actual world about them, but largely in an ideal realm. Observe the occasional dreamy look on their faces. Their eyes may fall upon things dark and repulsive, but it is as if they saw them not. They seem to look *through* them to some glory beyond. Through this imaginative faculty and their helpfulness they rise superior to the dreariest situations, and

live in a world of light and beauty. It works greater marvels than the magician's wand.

"It makes them rich in greatest poverty ;  
Makes water wine ; turns wooden spoons to gold,  
The homely whistle to sweet music's strain ;  
Where'er it comes it seems from heaven sent,  
Filling the heart with song,—banishing discontent."

So with those who wait on God. By their faith-quickened imaginations and beatific visions they are transported out of themselves and away from their troubles.

It was one of the distinctions of Dr. C. L. Goodell, as a pastor and a preacher, that he had the prophet's and the child's imaginative insight to make him cheerful and tranquil, and that in his ministry he had the prophet's power of opening men's eyes to spiritual realities and of calming their fears and disquietude in the midst of life's worry. The same thing may be even more strongly affirmed of Phillips Brooks, as appears from the remarkable sermon on "Unseen Spiritual Helpers" in the volume entitled "New Starts in Life."

Some may think that the subject has no pertinence to them because they think their natural gift of imagination is so small that it is vain for them to cultivate it or try to use it. No doubt the natural gift of some is larger than that of others, but even these have it in sufficient degree, we think, to warrant them in making the most of it. Thus doing, they are certain, we think, to surprise and delight themselves and those who know them by the gratifying results of their endeavors. This was the case of Dr. William M. Taylor, who in the beginning of his ministry thought he had no faculty for it and seldom attempted an illustration in his preaching, but, being led by Sydney Smith's witticism that "the sin of the pulpit against the Holy Ghost is dullness," and by his own

observation that his preaching was ineffective, he cultivated the art—persistently and perseveringly cultivated it—until he became remarkable for his power of apt, varied, and impressive illustration.

It is a power which grows with use, and after a while becomes affluent in its store of illustrative riches. The testimony of Henry Ward Beecher, the Shakespeare of our American pulpit, is suggestive and encouraging. He says in his Yale Lectures on Preaching:—

“While illustrations are as natural to me as breathing, I use fifty now to one in the early years of my ministry. I developed a tendency that was latent in me and educated myself in this respect; and that, too, by study and practice, by hard thought and by a great many trials, both with the pen, and extemporaneously by myself when I was walking here and there. Whatever I have gained in that direction is largely the matter of education.”<sup>1</sup>

A few words need to be said as to the fields where the preacher would best seek his illustrations. Not in books, or compilations of illustrations, such as circulars of some enterprising publishers try to tempt us into buying. To buy them with the expectation of pleasing with them is like supposing that men would prefer to drink the stale water of a catch-rain barrel to quenching their thirst with the sweet water of a living spring. A minister's purchase and use of them is like a man who is blest with good legs for walking buying a pair of crutches and hobbling on them instead of using his own legs. We indorse with entire approval Dr. John Watson's satire upon this folly:—

“It is said that there are ingenious books which contain extracts—very familiar as a rule—on every religious subject, so that the minister, having finished his sermon on faith or hope, has only to take down this pepper caster and flavor his somewhat bare sentences with literature. If this ignominious tale be founded on fact and be not a

<sup>1</sup> First Series, p. 175.

scandal of the enemy, then the Protestant Church ought also to have its *Index Expurgatorius*, and its Central Authorities insert therein books which it is inexpedient for ministers to possess. In this class should be included 'The Garland of Quotations' and 'The Reservoir of Illustrations,' and it might well be if the chief of this important department should also give notice at fixed times that such and such anecdotes, having been worn threadbare, are now withdrawn from circulation. The cost of this office would be cheerfully defrayed by the laity."<sup>1</sup>

Abjuring, then, all such ready-made illustrations, let the minister endeavor to invent or find his own. He will find these as a rule more pertinent to his need, and they will be more pleasing to his hearers from having a flavor of his personality. This flavor of personality, given by a minister to his thinking and preaching, is usually one of the minister's best qualities. He cannot afford to lose it by borrowing from others assistance which he would do better without.

As to where the preacher shall seek his illustrations, this will depend largely upon his personal tastes and predilections and the field of his labors. "The world is all before him where to choose." He may wisely be advised to draw his illustrations from many sources—the Bible, History, Travel, Literature, Science, the Arts, and the Trades. Thus the truth will receive a manifold explanation, and all classes of people be likely to be interested in turn, and impressed and benefited by it, from having it interpreted and enforced in so many different ways. And let him remember that some of the most impressive and telling illustrations are still to be found where Christ and his apostles found them, among the homely, common things of life. These are not to be despised because homely and familiar, for, as vehicles of truth, they are all the more effective with common people on this account. "Doubtless the Holy Scripture," says an old English divine, "intends

<sup>1</sup> *The Cure of Souls*, pp. 50-51.

thus much when it condescends to the naming of a plow, a hatchet, a bushel, leaven, boys piping and dancing, showing that things of ordinary use are not only to serve in the way of drudgery, but to be washed and cleansed and serve for lights even of heavenly truths."

One may be wisely cautioned not to overdo the matter. Let him keep his illustrations strictly subordinate to the truth, not using more of them than is needed for his purpose, nor dwelling too long on any single one, lest he seem to be lacking in seriousness and to care more for the entertainment of his hearers than for their religious instruction and persuasion to right living. Giving heed to these counsels and cautions, he will find the imagination most helpful to his aim as a preacher of truth and righteousness.