

LESSON XXVIII.

THE

THEORY OF PREACHING

LECTURES ON HOMILETICS

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LECTURE XXVIII.

THE DIVISION : MATERIALS, FORM.

4TH, A fourth principle respecting the materials of divisions is that they should all be classified, if possible, upon the same principle of division.

(1) Materials are often arranged on different principles of division. A truth may be discussed subjectively by considering its nature, or objectively by considering its effects. It may be treated negatively or positively. It may be developed by argument, or by illustration, or by explanation, or by exhortation. It may be discussed under any one of a great variety of relations.

(2) Sometimes a mingling of different principles of division in one discourse is a necessity. You can not always develop a subject thoroughly on any one principle of classifying materials. The practical aim of a sermon may demand an eclectic division. Such eclecticism is no evil when its necessity is obvious.

(3) The needless mingling of diverse principles of division is an evil. This will be best illustrated by an example. The following plan of thought was once presented in this lecture-room for criticism. The proposition is "The character of St. Paul." The divisions are: 1. St. Paul's acuteness as a reasoner; 2. St. Paul's depth of sensibility; 3. St. Paul's love of his country; 4. St. Paul's fidelity to Christ; 5. St. Paul

in the closing scenes of his life. These are all salient points, in which the individuality of the Apostle's character is seen. Each one regarded singly is interesting. Each one can be impressively developed. Yet this can not be pronounced a good plan of the subject. Why? Because of the needless diversity of the principles of division. They are no less than five in number. St. Paul's intellectual character, his emotive nature, his social relations, his religious experience, the chronological order of his biography, — these five distinct principles are suggested in the plan, and each one stands alone. They give distinct patches of material cut from as many different species of fabric. What is the evil of such combinations of material? It is twofold. In the first place they tend to deceive the preacher. Such divisions often seem distinct in form when they are not so in reality. They covertly overlap; and the consequence is that the preacher unconsciously repeats himself. You can not make the three sections of a cone, and yet avoid their intersection somewhere. This is the difficulty to which divisions founded on different principles of analysis are always liable. Further: such cross-divisions tend to confuse the hearer. If the necessity for them is not obvious, the rhetorical instinct which is in every mind will in some minds murmur its sense of confusion, however bold the distinctions may be in form of statement. Here is a Gothic window. I describe it by saying that it is made of wood, and glass, and lead, and oak, and paint. I add that some of its panes are red, and some are circular, and some are blue, and some are larger than others, and that some are square, and some are green. I continue, that some are diamond-shaped, and some are opaque, and some are crescent, and some are

concave, and some are ground, and some are painted, and some are yellow, and some are cracked, and some are transparent, and some are patched, and some are missing. Taking breath, I conclude by observing that it was modeled by Michael Angelo, and is a memorial window, and that it is a venerable relic of Italian art, and that it still exists in the Church of Santa Maria in Florence, with a picture of a dove in the center, which has lost one wing. This may all be true. But is it a good description of a Gothic window?

5th, A fifth principle respecting the materials of divisions is that they should be susceptible of unity of development. We have remarked of the proposition, that it should be such that unity may characterize the discussion as a whole. The same principle applies to divisions. Each should be in itself a unit, and susceptible of compact development.

(1) Therefore a division should not comprise materials which are not one in their natural impression. For example, it is often unphilosophical to consider the nature and the cause of a thing under one division. The nature of sin and the cause of sin invite totally different processes of research, and suggest different materials of thought. They demand, therefore, separate divisions. Again: it is often unphilosophical to combine explanation and proof in one division, unless the one is but a brief preliminary to the other. To explain and to prove on equal terms in the same division invite divided attention. To explain what is meant by the perseverance of the saints and to prove the fact of the perseverance of the saints are processes so unlike, that they are not natural associates in discussion. Each must concentrate attention upon itself. For this, each requires a separate division. Still less philosophical is

it to discuss the conciliatory and the comminatory bearings of a truth in one division. Often it is not wise to do this even in one sermon. It is not natural to invite and to threaten in the same breath. Men do not yield to invitation and to threats at the same moment. It is a mark of an ill-trained mind to utter both in volatile succession. Colloquial excitement which vents itself in both excites laughter.

Further: it is unphilosophical to apply a truth to Christians and to the impenitent in the same division, unless the application is one. Many truths are applicable to men indiscriminately; but many others are not. The Lord's Supper is not the same to the godly and to the ungodly alike. Its practical bearing upon the two classes requires separation into different sections. Often it is unphilosophical to present argument and appeal in the same division. This is not always true. But often argument may be abstract, or it may be incomplete; and in either case the mood for appeal may not have been created. If not created in the hearers, it ought not to exist in the speaker. The unity of the division is sacrificed, if the appeal be forced.

You will perceive from these illustrations, that the principle involved in them is not arbitrary nor trivial. It is grounded in the nature of certain processes of mind which are concerned both in constructing and in receiving a communication of thought. Certain processes can not naturally be intermingled. They may succeed each other; but they can not be blended. This is only affirming, that, in constructing a sermon, a preacher should attend thoroughly to one thing at a time. Yet you will often detect the absence of this unity as the secret cause of the self-contradiction of a division in your struggle to develop it. The defect

lies in the materials of the division itself. Though not self-contradictory logically, it is so in rhetorical impression. It is bifurcate. You have two grooves to follow at once, which are not parallel.

(2) Yet the unity of a division may admit of obvious distinction of materials. All that unity requires is a certain sympathy in the resultant impressions. This does not conflict with diversity in the instruments of impression. For instance, unity of division admits the combination of mental processes, which, though distinct, lie in one line of thought. Thus a division may propose to illustrate and to prove a truth. Illustration and proof are very closely allied in rhetorical character. They assist each other. To a certain extent they interchange offices. Proof often illustrates a truth; and illustration often proves a truth. As mutual allies, they may aim at one result, and make one impression.

In like manner, unity of division admits the statement of qualities of a thing, which, though distinct, have close resemblance. A division may treat of the depth and the breadth of a principle. You are to show that it is profound in its nature, and far-reaching in its applications. These are distinct qualities, yet in unison. Depth and breadth are both measures of magnitude. The impression, therefore, is one. No mental strain is required to develop it, and none to receive it. On the same principle, unity of division admits the mention of graces of character, which, though distinct, have an obvious sympathy. You may consider in the same division injuries as demanding both forbearance and forgiveness. These graces lie in the same line. Not only is no confusion produced; but no effort is necessary, if we consider both simultaneously.

Furthermore, unity of division permits the discussion

of duties and of sins, which, though distinct, naturally accompany each other. You may propose to treat in the same paragraph the duties of godly sorrow and repentance, or the sinfulness of falsehood and hypocrisy. The duties here named are distinct in character, yet never separate in life. The sins here specified are not synonymous, yet they are always co-existent. No violence, therefore, is done to the natural connections, if such diversities are covered by one division.

Once more, unity of division allows even the combination of certain opposites of material. Opposites are not always contradictories, as facts are not always truths. Some opposites in thought are complements to each other. Beneath the surface a hidden current unites and intermingles them. One of the early preachers of New England published a sermon on "Flattery and Slander." A keen judgment of character disclosed to him the fact that these two sins, though seemingly at antipodes, are one in sympathy. They are the fruit of the same mental vice, and are very apt to co-exist in the same person. The flatterer to your face will probably slander you behind your back. These opposites, and others like them, might be properly treated, not only in one discourse, but even in the same division of a discourse.

These illustrations are ample to show that unity of division admits of very great diversity of materials. It demands no iron rigidity of exclusion; but is ductile, rather, to the utmost extent of natural combinations of thought. Specially is the dual division often the natural unit. To one who is accustomed to minute criticism of discourse, the phenomenon becomes a curiosity from the frequency of its occurrence, — that things live and move by twos. It almost seems as if the

double structure of our brains created duality of thought. The point to be watched, therefore, in adjusting the materials of divisions, is not the fact, but the degree, of diversity. Any degree is natural which leaves room for natural oneness of impression. All that criticism can say is that the diversity should not be such as to impair that unity.

6th, The sixth principle respecting the materials of divisions is that those of the body of the sermon should not anticipate those of the conclusion. Here, again, as in the structure of the introduction, the locality of materials is a prime object of study. The "where" is often as vital to impression as the "what." Certain materials in every discourse naturally belong to the conclusion. To anticipate them is to impair their force. It is like reading a book backwards.

(1) Obedience to this principle is often essential to the logical symmetry of a discussion. In an argumentative sermon, for instance, the development of the proposition, and the applications of it, are totally distinct processes. The one belongs, in the nature of the case, to the body of the discourse, and the others belong to its ending. You have no logical right to apply a truth before it is proved. That is not compact argument which is suspended in the middle to give place to an appeal. The divisions of the body of the discourse must in such a case keep to the necessities of logic.

(2) The observance of the principle in question is often necessary to rhetorical force when not essential to the symmetry of logic. There is an order of rhetorical force which can no more be violated with impunity than the laws of perspective can be in painting. In an illustrative discourse, for example, it may be that no necessities of logic locate the materials here or there;

yet they may be weak here, and powerful there. Locality may determine every thing about them which is worth determining. The point of culmination in the interest of a sermon may turn on the question whether you shall present a certain illustration early in the discussion, or reserve it for the close. Even in a sermon made up mainly of exhortation, the succession of the materials may be the vital feature of the whole. Which first? which last? Hope, love, fear,—which shall begin, and which end, the appeal? Rhetorical force depends specially on cumulative impression. Some materials are more intense than others. Those of the body of the sermon should be so selected and adjusted as to leave the most intense for the conclusion.

(3) Preaching is exposed to peculiar peril of premature applications of truth. No other themes of public discussion are so prolific of practical application as are those of the pulpit. No others have such intense applications. No others are commonly so urgent in point of time. "Now," "now," is the applicatory symbol always present to a preacher's mind in the flush of his eagerness to reach his object. Therefore a pressure of applicatory thought often crowds upon the process of discussion. The materials for an appeal accumulate as the discussion advances. The impulse is to give way to them. At a felicitous turn of thought the application comes to view so luminously and so grandly, that you feel impelled to use it then and there. "Now or never" says the impulse of your sensibility. It often requires intellectual self-denial to restrain that impulse.

If you have ever ascended Mount Rhigi or Mount Washington on a clear day, did it not cost you an effort to refrain from a first look at the scenery below you, till you reached the summit, and could take in the

whole in one immense panorama? Side-looks at patches of the valley were tempting you all the way up. So it is often with homiletic experience in the handling of intense subjects. We are tempted to frequent pauses for an applicatory use of our materials in fragments. Hence proceeds that structure of discourse in which the conclusion is inferior in applicatory power to certain fragments in the body of the sermon. The first and overwhelming look was halfway down the mountain. Nothing subsequent bears comparison with that in its impression. Hence, also, comes that structure of discourse in which the applicatory impression is dissipated before the conclusion is reached. The whole bulk of the conclusion proper has been stolen in parcels, a little here, and a little there. By petty distribution of impression all impression is lost. The practical impression of discourse may be squandered by excessive distribution. The conclusion can only repeat what it might have been, if the preacher had practiced reserve and concentration.

7th, A seventh principle is that the materials of the conclusion should not return upon the foregoing parts of a sermon, except by way of intentional recapitulation.

(1) The divisions of a conclusion may return thus improperly upon previous parts of the sermon by the suggestion of new materials which belong to those previous localities. Qualifying statements which should have been in the introduction; explanatory remarks on the text which should have preceded the announcement of the subject; new proofs of the proposition which should have been divisions in the discussion, — are examples to the point. Rhetorically they are like the postscript to a letter.

(2) The same defect may arise from sheer repetition of material. The proposition may be reproduced in the form of an inference. For example, the proposition is, "The stability of the Christian Church." The sermon illustrates or proves this; then the preacher observes in conclusion, "1. We see from this subject that the Church of Christ can never be destroyed." Such discourses recall the Irish legend of St. Patrick going on a pilgrimage, carrying his own head under his arm.

8th, An eighth principle respecting the materials of divisions is that they should be as suggestive as possible of the main thoughts of the proposition.

(1) No single quality of good divisions is more valuable than this. The idea of it is that the materials of each division should be so related to the proposition as to be a reminder of it. The two should be connected by a something, perhaps an indefinite *je ne sais quoi*, like the indefinable resemblance which we often detect between parent and child.

(2) The opposite of this is a division constructed in abstract form, which relies on its development to make its relation to the proposition obvious. Have you not heard sermons which set you upon the inquiries, "What was the subject? what was the text? what has this division to do with either?" It does not remind you of the theme. You have to search for that, and then to carry it by the dead-lift of memory. The central thought of the discourse is mined out from the depths of each division as its development proceeds, instead of being visible on its surface; while usually, in a well-constructed plan, every division is an "out-crop" of the proposition. You are not at any moment in doubt as to what the subject is.

(3) Yet this incessant reproduction of the proposi

tion in the divisions can not be achieved by forms alone. The thoughts of the divisions must produce the effect. Things, not forms, must create it. Here, as elsewhere, that style only is good which springs into being at the command of thought. But, when the very substance of a division demands the form which embodies this suggestion of the proposition, no audience is so uncritical as not to feel the excellence. It lies in the instinct of good hearing to catch such sympathy between subject and division, and to feel the tribute of it to powerful discourse. When you approach the monument on Bunker Hill, you observe that the very fence which incloses the grounds is made to act as a reminder, one might almost say a historian, of the event commemorated within. It is massive in size; it is made of cast-iron; the posts are images of cannons. At a glance, you interpret them in a double sense. They are more significant than hieroglyphs. Similar to that is the effect which we should aim to create by the very frame-work of a sermon, as related to the subject which it incloses.

(4) Yet it should be observed that this quality is a matter of degrees. Not every proposition is susceptible of being thus represented with vividness in the structure of divisions. The best materials may not admit of statements which shall act as exact mirrors to the proposition. It is in illustrative sermons chiefly that we find the most striking examples of this excellence. But all sermons admit of some degree of it. It lies in the very nature of good divisions, as a growth from the root of a good proposition. If it is not possible, either the proposition or the division is to be suspected of some radical defect.

IV. The fourth general topic in the discussion of divisions is that of their form of statement.

1st, All those principles which have been observed as requisite to the construction of the forms of propositions apply as well to the forms of divisions. The practical objects aimed at are three,—that the forms of statement be intelligible without being hackneyed, that they be interesting without being fanciful, and that they be easily remembered. Divisions, however, have facilities for attaining these objects which propositions have not, and they are exposed to defects to which propositions are not so liable. I offer, therefore, some additional suggestions on this topic of the forms of divisions.

2d, The forms of divisions should be adjusted as forcibly as possible to the design of the proposition. A division may be assimilated to a proposition, not merely by its materials, but also by its verbal structure. A plan of a sermon was once delivered here for criticism, of which the proposition was, "To consider the qualifications requisite to a public profession of religion." The first division was, "The Church should be composed of regenerate men." The critic suggested this as a superior form, "The first qualification requisite to a public profession of religion is a regenerate character." "But," said the preacher, "that is the same thing."—"True," was the reply. "I did not mean to interpolate a different *thing*, but to suggest a different *form*. You propose to discuss qualifications: why not enumerate qualifications? Why approach results by inference, which can as well be taken in hand by direct assertion? Why not thus make your division a direct auxiliary to your proposition?"

(1) Yet this formal assimilation of divisions to the proposition is of no value, if it is in form only. Architects tell us that high art tolerates no painted woods.

So, in sermonizing, we want no fictions. But resemblances in fact can be used as such most effectually through resemblances in form.

(2) But visible resemblance to a proposition in the form of a division is not always practicable. The proposition may not invite such forms of divisions. It may be a doctrine to be proved by arguments, the natural statement of which is not directly suggestive of the doctrine. Very well: do not, then, force the resemblance. The oratorical instinct must decide when this excellence of form is practicable. All that criticism can say is, Recognize it as an excellence, and use it whenever it is a natural expression of the sympathy between proposition and division.

3d, Divisions should be constructed, if possible, so as to suggest each other. When they can not resemble the proposition, they may often resemble each other. If similarity of thought exists, resemblance in form may express that similarity. Interrogative divisions may often have such a resemblance. Such divisions very directly suggest each other. A series of antithetic divisions may do the same. Even a series of declarative divisions may so resemble each other in brevity as to be mutually suggestive. Said one preacher, "Let us consider the chief elements of the spirit of prayer. They are: 1. Desire; 2. Submission; 3. Trust; 4. Constancy." The resemblance here in brevity of expression makes these divisions expedients of suggestion to each other. What advantages has this resemblance in the forms of divisions? Chiefly three. The resemblance is pleasing in itself considered; it assists intelligent progress through a discourse; and it aids the retention of a discourse in the memory. The Rev. William Jay was so studious of this quality, that his

hearers used to quote entire plans of his sermons many years after they were preached.

It should be observed, however, that resemblances in the forms of divisions are not worth the seeking them by the use of fanciful expedients. Professor Tholuck, in one of his "University Sermons," has the following series of divisions:—

- “ 1. Die Stätte seines Scheidens,
die Stätte seines Leidens :
2. Verhüllet ist sein Anfang,
verhüllet ist sein Ausgang :
3. Der Schluss von seinen Wegen
ist für die seinen Segen :
4. Er ist von uns geschieden,
und ist uns doch geblieben :
5. Er bleibt verhüllet den Seinen
bis er wird klar erscheinen.”

This is ingenious; but it is ingenious caricature. The forced antitheses and the rhyme are both out of keeping with persuasive discourse. The danger always attends the cultivation of an excellence of this kind, that some minds will crowd it into caricature.

4th, Divisions should be so constructed that they shall not be easily confounded with each other.

(1) Resemblance in the sound of certain significant words may confound divisions which are really distinct. "Conscience" and "consciousness" express different ideas. But two contiguous divisions, in which those two words should be the emphatic words, would almost certainly be confounded by some hearers. The "humility" of Christ and the "humiliation" of Christ express distinct things; yet divisions con-

structured around those words as centers would inevitably be fused, and would run together, in the minds of many hearers.

(2) Distinct divisions may be confounded by the predominance of resemblance over difference of thought in the forms of statement. The sermons of the Rev. Albert Barnes sometimes illustrate this error. His mind was marvelously prolific of practical reflections on sacred themes. As he expanded them, they would be seen to be distinct; but as he stated them they sometimes appeared to be repetitions. His "Notes," which were largely sermons in their original form, exhibit many instances to the point. His practical remarks on a passage are usually plans of sermons; and in some cases a reader finds it difficult to see distinctions in the absence of the homiletic developments which made them plain. He composed with great rapidity; and his divisions were sometimes carelessly framed, as those of other pastors are apt to be, from the same cause. Confusion is tolerated, because the development removes it. Yet the superior taste would admit no confusion to be removed.

5th, Divisions should be so constructed as to be truthful in the connections in which they stand. A principle may in itself be true; a given statement of it may by itself be true: yet in the connection in which it stands in a sermon it may make a false impression. Something may precede, or something may be omitted, which renders the statement practically untrue. Error of statement may thus arise from mere position of statement.