

Precepts in this section are relevant to people of every country. However, they must be adjusted to the viewpoint of the nationality of the reader. Especially concerning literature of one's own country.

LECTURE XII.

THE PLACE OF AMERICAN LITERATURE IN THE STUDIES OF A PASTOR.

(5) THE views thus far advanced suggest a principle in the selection of authors, by which the principles already named should be modified. It is, that, in our estimate of authors, the just claims of American literature should be recognized. The chief value of this suggestion is felt not so much in the practical selection of books as in the spirit in which a pastor's studies are conducted. Respect for the national mind of one's own country and for contemporaneous authorship is a prime factor in the preparation of a man to minister to his own countrymen. The same law by which a preacher's culture is impaired for professional service by an excessive fondness for the ancient rather than the modern, or the distant above the near, in literary development, holds good respecting a similar preference of the foreign to the national literature.

It must be conceded that one of the dangers to the reading of an American pastor is that he will read disproportionately American books. Our proximity to them, the ease with which they can be obtained, and the fulsome style of criticism in which American periodicals indulge, expose us to the peril of wasting our

mental force on works of ephemeral authority. An American library needs frequent weeding to rid it of books which do not wear well in the judgment of mature scholarship. One of the most eminent of our American scholars, at the time of his decease, had hundreds of such discarded volumes in his attic-chambers, where he had hidden them for years, that his eye might not be wearied by the sight of them, and, perhaps, that his vanity might not be wounded by the remembrance of his folly in purchasing them. During the civil war, when manufacturers gave large prices for waste paper, many libraries were reduced in bulk, but improved in quality, by the sale of American books to peddlers.

Still, in this as in more important things, it is a protection against the extreme to see and to trust the mean. The principle is a sound one, that an American scholar should recognize the growth of American mind. In books, as in affairs, that growth demands a scholarly respect. The literature of one's country does not deserve the pre-eminence which belongs to that of one's vernacular. The growth of a language is a more profound development of mind than the peopling of a continent, or the organization of a republic. But there is a literary justice which a preacher should not withhold from the literature of his country in his adjustment of proportions in his own reading. He can not do it without peril to the adaptations of his own culture to professional service.

Our American literature, be it observed, then, claims our recognition on three grounds. One is that of its intrinsic merits in some departments. In *poetry* it must in candor be admitted that we have nothing yet

America was a "young nation" at the time of the writing of this current textbook during the second half of the 19th century. Dr. VBK

to show which criticism places by the side of the great poets of England. The American is not yet a poetic temperament. Our civilization has not yet reached the poetic stage of its development. Our national history is not old enough to create for itself the poetic enthusiasm. We have, also, in the past of the English mind, so radiant a constellation of poets, that the taste of our own scholars delights in them without attempting to emulate their luster. "Like thee I will not build; better I can not," said Michael Angelo of the dome of Santa Maria in Florence. Such may be the instinct of the American imagination in visiting the "Poets' Corner" of Westminster Abbey.

Whatever be the cause of the phenomenon, we owe it to the integrity of our critical judgment to acknowledge the fact that our literature is not eminent in this department of production. We are a young nation. We have been living poems. Many events in our history are grand themes for poetic story. Says a writer in "The Edinburgh Review," "There is a poetry of the past, of the mountains, the seas, the stars; but a great city seen aright is tenfold more poetical than them all." A Pacific railroad is a poem in act. The State of Massachusetts is a poem. Old Governor Winthrop is a hero beyond Greek or Roman fame. The colonization of Kansas is splendid material for a great epic: so is the war of the rebellion. Magnificent materials have we in our history for poetry which shall by and by rival Wordsworth's sonnets, and Shakspeare's historical dramas. They will give birth to great poems when age has gathered around them the imaginative reverence of scholars. As Carlyle says of "The Mayflower," "Were we of open sense, as the Greeks were,

we had found a poem here, one of Nature's own, such as she writes in broad facts over great continents."

In several other departments, however, we have a literature already of which we need not be ashamed. In the department of history America is represented by authors whom European criticism does not hesitate to rank by the side of the great historians of England. Baron Alexander Humboldt thought that there was not in existence a finer specimen of historic writing than Prescott's "Ferdinand and Isabella." In the department of the *essay* we have writers representing in monographs nearly all the varieties of English style as perfectly as writers of the same class in Great Britain.

In *prose-fiction* Walter Scott and Charles Dickens are the only names which deserve to precede that of Cooper. Mrs. Stowe must be credited with having produced a romance which has had a larger circulation, in more numerous languages, than any other book ever published, except the Bible. In *forensic and parliamentary eloquence* the names of Webster, Clay, Calhoun, Sumner, do not suffer by the side of Burke, Pitt, Fox, Brougham. In the department of *demonstrative eloquence* I do not know the name in the annals of any living nation which should stand before that of Edward Everett. For that style of eloquence, Everett's orations are well-nigh perfect.

In the *literature of the pulpit* there certainly are names, of the living and the dead, which must be ranked as equals, at least, of the most powerful preachers of England. In no country in the world has the pulpit proved its power by its effects more conspicuously than in ours. The fear sometimes expressed of the decline of the American pulpit is not entirely un-

warranted ; yet, all things considered, the evidences of decline are offset by evidences of improvement. Our pulpit has a fluctuating history ; but on the whole it has never had a more docile, and at the same time intelligent, hearing than it has to-day. The decline of the pulpit in the sense so much boasted of by skeptical critics is disproved by the very impunity with which those critics proclaim their sentiments. They would be at the whipping-post, and their books burnt by the hangman, if the American pulpit had not assisted by its reasoning habits to enlighten and liberalize the popular faith. On the ground, therefore, of its intrinsic merits, American literature deserves to be recognized in our estimate of the resources of our professional discipline.

It deserves recognition, also, as an offshoot of the literature of England. This is at present its relative position. As we have no American language, neither have we an American literature, which is not a graft upon the English stock. Their literature is ours, and ours is theirs. In this respect our literature partakes of the same character with that of nearly all the institutions which lie deepest in our civilization. Those institutions are essentially English. Our religion, our jurisprudence, our educational policy, our periodical press, our tendencies in philosophy, in a word the make of American mind in all its great expressions of itself, are English at bottom. They are not German ; they are not French ; they are not derivatives from the ancient republics : they are English. No man understands the American mind who fails to appreciate this, or who does not act upon it in his public life.

Public speakers among us fail to reach the popular

heart, if their own culture is tinged with foreign and ancient literatures to such extent as to make those obvious in public speech. The chief defect in senator Sumner's speeches was the excessive freedom with which he indulged in quotations from the ancient classics, and allusion to the ancient mythology. He was at home in English literature and history. He was master of a solid English style. For durability and richness of material, no other speeches in the Senate, since Mr. Webster's day, were equal to his. Yet he did not seize and hold the popular mind. Even the United-States Senate sometimes wearied of him. This was in part because of the artificialness created by his freedom in the use of the learning he had derived from the dead languages. In the real affairs of life, and specially in the government of great nations, men demand an intensity, and a homeliness of aim at present realities, which forbid a very free and very obvious use of foreign and ancient lore. It chills their sympathies to quote from an author who has been two thousand years in his grave. Therefore it weakens a speaker's grasp of the popular mind.

It is a mystery to many that the English Parliament should tolerate so much as they do of that which seems like pedantic use of the Latin, and, to some extent, of the Greek languages in parliamentary debates. The English House of Commons is said to be the most prosaic body of men living. Any thing like "fine writing" they put down with their inimitable "Hear, hear!" in a tone of derision which a young speaker never ventures to encounter but once. The style of their debates is almost wholly conversational. The prime qualities which command their hearing, if not

their votes, are good sense in talking to the point, and stopping at the end. Yet some of their most eminent debaters interlard their speeches with classic quotations to an extent which seems inconsistent with the parliamentary taste as evinced in other things.

I have never till recently met with a satisfactory explanation of the apparent anomaly. But probably the truth is this, that the great majority of those quotations are relics of the school-days of the members of Parliament. They are almost all of them graduates of the two universities. In the universities, classical study is the central discipline. It overshadows every thing else. It takes largely the form of committing to memory favorite passages from Greek and Latin authors, and imitating their versification. A certain routine of such passages becomes as familiar as the English alphabet to the graduates of Oxford and Cambridge. To a great extent, they all know by heart the same extracts, and know the English of them. When, therefore, twenty years after graduation, they meet in Parliament, and harangue each other, an apt recitation from one of the old text-books of the university, given with the proper intonation and prosody, is instantly recognized and understood by four-fifths of the audience. It comes to them also with the golden associations of their youth. Hence the applause with which such a quotation, if apt, is often received. More than once a ministry has been unseated by the irresistible power of a piece of sarcasm clothed in the words of Juvenal or Cicero.

This explanation, which I have from a trustworthy source, is plausible, to say the least. But it is obvious that an American senator who should imitate in that

respect an English leader in the House of Commons would have no such prepossessions in his audience to protect him from the charge of pedantry. In this country, audiences scarcely tolerate a Greek or Roman tinge in the style of public speech. But they bear any thing belonging to our vernacular. With all our hereditary antipathy to English aristocracy, and our rivalry with English prestige, we are still English at heart. We feel in every throb our English origin. We confess our kinship to English modes of thought. We love the old mother-country. We can not help this till we cease to *think* in the mother-tongue.

American literature has furthermore a special claim upon the clergy, in the fact that the theological thinking of this country has been to a certain extent original. In no part of the world in modern times has theological discussion been more vigorous, or more unique in its character. Some of the ablest minds of the last century spent their lives in it. It has also commanded a respect among the laity which it has not received in England or in Continental Europe. Men who in Europe would have been foremost as philosophers and statesmen have here been found among our theologians. The ablest contributions of this country to mental philosophy have been made at the instance of theology, and chiefly in direct connection with theology.

The Puritan type of theological thinking in this country, even as compared with the corresponding type in England and in Holland, was largely original. The inquiry is often made, by those who are not familiar with the theological history of New England, whether or not it has developed any thing new in theological science. The controversy between the "Old School"

and the "New School" in the religious thought of this country has retired into the shade in consequence of the re-union of the Presbyterian Church. It has given place to a totally different class of discussions. It is worthy of consideration, therefore, in a brief *excursus* from the main theme before us.

Is the orthodox theology of New England an advance upon that of the older confessions? A glance at the character of the early clergy of New England will go far to answer this inquiry. They were remarkably self-reliant men, made such by the force of their origin and condition. They wore no man's livery. They were not predisposed to recognize uninspired authorities in matters of religious faith. It is impossible to read the history of the four New-England Colonies, before their separation from Great Britain, without observing, that, from the very landing at Plymouth, the idea of independence had possession of the colonial mind. In government, in religion, in social civilization, our fathers scented subjection to human authority a great way off. Probably the world has never seen a more intense development of individualism.

In religion, especially, the New-England mind was a law to itself. In religious affairs they saw the extreme of peril to all men's liberties, and their vigilance against authority was sleepless accordingly. It was with difficulty that they recognized the necessity even of the fellowship of churches. A scheme for a "consociation" of churches, which was laid before the Massachusetts Legislature in 1662, never got further than the order that it be printed "for the consideration of the people." The people have had it in safe "considera-

tion" ever since. Independence was in the air. It pervaded every important subject of colonial interest. It was the last thought of a true Pilgrim when he retired to rest at night, and the first that sprang to the birth in his mind in the morning. No body of men were ever more faithful illustrations of that "eternal vigilance" which is "the price of liberty" than the people of these Colonies.

This feature in the make of the New-England Puritans has given character, down to this day, to the whole drift of New-England theology. They knew no right more sacred, and no duty more imperative, than that of private judgment. At the same time they did not have the means of forming their theology as a derivative from other standards than the Bible. They had not access to large libraries. They were isolated from frequent correspondence with the old countries. There was no such intimacy of correspondence between the American clergy and their Scotch and English brethren as that which fed the English Reformation from the fountains of the Dutch and Genevan schools. No such volume, for instance, as the "Zurich Letters," grew out of the relations of the colonial ministry of this country, or their immediate successors, to their brethren in Great Britain. They had no ecclesiastical ties binding them as a body to authorities and standards on the other side of the Atlantic. If they acknowledged the standards of the European churches, they did so feeling at entire liberty to modify them, or to attach to their formulæ an interpretation of their own.

In New England, as matter of fact, the right and the duty of private judgment were a right and a duty *exercised*. Separate creeds for separate churches were

the rule. Each church changed established formulæ at its own pleasure. Even individuals, by the ancient usage of New England, were at liberty to frame their own creeds in their own language; and their fitness to be admitted to the communion of the church was judged of, so far as doctrinal tests were concerned, by the soundness or the unsoundness of such private creeds. Originality in theological literature was the necessary outcome from the conditions of colonial life here from the very first. If this country was to have any theological thinking at all, it was a foregone conclusion that it must be original. It was predestined to be home-made, like the rye bread upon their tables and the homespun cloth in their looms.

Moreover, the early theologians of America were preachers. Many of them were eminent preachers. Their theology has come down to us largely in the form of sermons. They constructed their theology for the pulpit. It was suggested to them by the demands of the pulpit rather than by the demands of the school as represented in any current system of philosophy. No other type of theology since apostolic days has been so purely the product of the pulpit, aimed at the objects of the pulpit, breathing the spirit of the pulpit, and actually preached in the pulpit, as the theology of New England.

In this respect of its homiletic origin, the New-England theology was widely diverse from the patristic and mediæval confessions. Those were largely the product of the schools. They grew out of the abstract relations of philosophy to a revealed faith. They were in some degree subservient to the philosophies of the respective ages in which they crystallized into

creeds. The Puritan theology, on the contrary, and specially that type of it which grew up in New England, was the theology of the pulpit. The men who framed it were preachers, and, either consciously or unconsciously, they aimed to produce a theology which should preach well. The pulpit was their throne, not the school, not the chair of philosophy, not that of ecclesiastical dominion.

Theirs was a theology, also, which was molded by powerful religious awakenings. These, in the peculiarities of their development, were intensely American. As time passed away, they became almost an idiosyncrasy of American religious life. Not in their ultimate spirit, but in many of their external phenomena, they were American. So peculiar were they in some respects to this country, that for a long time they have been regarded in Great Britain and in Germany as the result of some peculiar diathesis of American temperament. Under the dominant influence of religious awakenings, the theology of New England has grown up to its maturity.

All these facts in the history of our theological literature tended to give it originality. It is the work of men who were, by the force of circumstances without and of tendencies within, thrown back upon their own resources. They recommenced theological inquiry *de novo*. They laid new foundations, and erected new structures. For good or for evil, such was the fact. We have no occasion to blink it, and no right to deny it. We unconsciously falsify history, if we try to secure for the New-England theology the prestige of unswerving conformity to the more ancient standards by conceiving of it as a mere reproduction of them. It

claimed to be, and it was, an advance upon them. In the direction of truth or of error, according to the prepossessions of the looker-on, it was a *progress*. Its authors claimed for it the title of an improvement in theology as a human science. They called it Calvinism, but Calvinism *improved*. In my judgment, they committed a mistake in theologic policy in clinging so pertinaciously to the name of Calvin. The system they framed was *not* Calvinism, as Calvin taught and preached. They started with the assumption that theology is an improvable science, and they ended with the claim that they had improved it. They claimed thus to have evolved, more completely and symmetrically than Calvin had done, the spirit of the Scriptures, and to have made the scriptural faith appear more reasonable, and more accordant with the necessary beliefs of the human mind.

Yet this fact has been almost wholly ignored by the opponents of the popular theology. Scarcely a trace of its recognition can be found in the writings of Dr. Channing. He almost invariably aimed the shafts of his argument and invective at the theology of Calvin, not at that of his own contemporaries. The same is true of the whole history of that side of the debate which he represented down to our day.

Specially is the originality of New-England theology true of it, as represented in a succession of theologians extending over nearly a century and a half backward from our own times. The leading theologians of New England during this period—beginning with the elder Edwards, and ending with one still living—have done more, in the way of original thinking, for the advance of strictly theological science, than any other equal

number of men, within an equal space of time, since Augustine's day.

The theological work of the reformers, as I understand it, was mainly the recovery of a lost theology: that of this *catena* of American theologians has been the establishment of an advanced theology. They have been originators in a sense which can not properly be affirmed of the great bulk of their contemporaries in this country or in Europe. We do an injustice which history will eventually undo, if we try to throw a suspension-bridge over their heads, and to attach our own work to that of the theologians who preceded them, as if nothing new in theological thinking had been done in the interval. They certainly were originators, if any man ever was. As such they will stand in the final version of theological history. If opprobrium is attached to the fact, New England must bear that; if dignity, she is entitled to this.

The German theologians recognize the same thing whenever they inform themselves of the history of American theological thought. As a rule, I am told, they know very little of it. A solid and useful work remains yet to be done by some American student in Germany, to publish in the German language a history of the American development of theological opinion. But, so far as our most eminent theologians of the last century and a half are known at all in Germany, German scholars detect in them an original vein of thought. The same is true of English scholars. When such a man as Frederick Robertson reads President Edwards, he finds in him the germs, as he says, of an original style of thinking. It strikes him not as a reproduction, but as a discovery.

Resuming the line of suggestion from which we have deviated, let the fact be noted, that this originality of our theology furnishes a peculiar ground of claim for American literature upon the studies of a preacher. You do not know the full development of theological science, if you study it only in the older European standards. The American development, and specially that of New England, as being the earliest and the most adventurous and the most unique, is needed to fill out the programme of the course which theology has actually taken in the history of opinion.