

LECTURE XIII.

BEARING OF PROFESSIONAL PURSUITS ON A PASTOR'S STUDIES. — BREADTH OF RANGE IN SELECTION OF BOOKS.

(6) SOME of the remarks already made suggest another principle of selection in pastoral studies. It is that the true ideal of a pastor's reading must be regulated in part by his professional duties; in how great part, the good sense of each must decide. The principle is vital, that reading for the direct purpose of homiletic use is a necessity, and as such should be respected. It not only is not unscholarly, but a pastor's scholarship is radically defective, without it, and this for two reasons.

One is the necessity of such study to the dignity of other literary pursuits. That is a degrading definition of literature which excludes from it professional studies. We create effeminate conceptions of it when we isolate it from the tug of real life. It becomes the accomplishment of an idle character, if you limit it to the amusement of idle hours.

Professor Henry Reed notices the popular use of the phrase *belles-lettres* as indicating the tendency of a certain class of minds to this degrading notion. That phrase was the invention of an effeminate taste, which sought to hide its own feebleness under the guise of a

foreign tongue. Coleridge remarks it as one of the disastrous revolutions of England, that "literature fell away from the professions." For the earnestness, and therefore for the dignity, of our literary pursuits, we need to associate them with some regular and necessary avocation in life. The necessity of labor for a living is not a hinderance, but a help, to the depth of our scholarly life. Every important vocation in life has some literature of its own: at least, it has a history which a man is the wiser for knowing. The clerical profession has a literature which no clergyman can afford not to know.

A second reason for this principle of selection is its obvious necessity to professional success. There are two kinds of interest in the clerical office. One is the direct interest in its objects; the other, interest in it as a profession. Providence has benevolently arranged, for our assistance in life's labors, that we are so made as to enjoy, not only the results, but the process to results. Pleasure is imparted, not only at the end, but on the way to the end. This professional joy is as legitimate to a clergyman as to a lawyer.

Not that it is the highest motive to clerical fidelity, but it is an innocent and a stimulating motive. The highest success is never gained without it. The possession of it, however, leads necessarily to study of professional literature. This is as it should be. Our tastes in reading ought to be tinged with the peculiarities of our profession to a sufficient extent to make them tributary to it. The two may blend, so that the one shall never be a drudgery, and the other never effeminate.

(7) Our choice of authors should cover as large a

range of literature as can be read in a scholarly way. This as a theory seems self-evident; yet in practice it is at this point that the hopelessness of the scholarly life to a pastor appears most invincible. Yet, be it ever so limited in its practical application, the recognition of the principle is invaluable to a pastor's scholarly spirit.

Observe, in confirmation of this, the uselessness of variety, if gained at the expense of scholarship, in reading. Adults in years are often juvenile in culture. This juvenile period is characterized by three things, — reading is amusement, the choice of authors is fortuitous, and opinions about authors are either an echo of their reputation, or a wilful contradiction of it. No profound personal sympathy with authors is yet created, and no antipathies for which scholarly reasons can be given. Our collegiate curriculum does not commonly advance a student much beyond this juvenile period of culture, unless he is above the average age of collegians, and has read more than they commonly read.

In this juvenile period the first peril encountered is that of reading too much and too variously. We are in danger of skimming the surface of every thing that falls in our way, without penetrating any thing. One very soon wearies of such reading, if it is directed to any thing which deserves to be called earnest literature. To read such literature with any pleasure we must be ourselves in earnest; and to be in earnest in it we must penetrate it in spots. The mind, otherwise, is like a bird always on the wing. This is not scholarly reading. No man will pursue it long in the use of serious literature, unless he falls into an affectation of scholarly tastes.

A second peril to which the juvenile period of culture is exposed is that of literary affectation. Did you never see a freshman in college, in a fit of literary eagerness, carrying to his room a huge folio in Latin, or a set of the Greek classics, under the hallucination that scholarly culture must have some such unknown and unknowable beginning in order to *be* scholarly? Profuse and promiscuous reading often results from such affectation of literary aims.

One of the humiliating confessions which we have to make for educated men is, that there is not a little of affected taste among them. This is of so great importance to a youthful scholar, that it demands notice by an *excursus* from the line of the present discussion. You will discover, as you extend the range of your reading, that there is a class of authors who at first awe you by their prodigious learning, by their glib use of the technical dialect of scholarship, and by their oracular opinions. But they are among the authors whom you most quickly outgrow. The conviction soon forces itself upon you that they are pretentious. Their dialect is not necessitated by their thinking: their reading has been discursive, not penetrative, and their productions are too heavily indebted to their common-place books. You find that other authors, less voluminous, with a less gaudy parade of the tackling of science, and with a more simple style, move you more profoundly, and their influence lives longer in your mental growth.

Religion and religious men suffer often, at the hands of the men of books, from the charge of cant. The charge is too often true. But it is my firm belief, that among any number of plain Christian men and women

chosen at random, there will be found less of that morbid affection than can be found among an equal number of literary and scientific authors and literary amateurs chosen at random. What is cant in religion? It is nothing but affectation of unreal virtue; not conscious hypocrisy, but unconscious self-deceit. As a mental phenomenon it is not confined to religion. The same thing essentially vitiates manners in society. It is witnessed in the enthusiasm of travelers, in the raptures of connoisseurs of art, in the patriotism of politicians, and in the conscientiousness of obstinate minorities. It infects as well the aspirations of authorship and the early enthusiasm of readers. It is a ubiquitous infirmity of human nature. Indeed, do we not distrust ourselves more in this respect, the more we know of ourselves? But a fragment of our experience, probably, is absolutely free from affected virtue. That fragment is commonly purified of this taint by the discipline of emergencies. Yet even death does not press it out of some natures. They die as they have lived, deceivers and deceived, or, to speak more exactly, deceived, and therefore deceivers. Authors who make the most showy parade of mental integrity are often guilty of some glaring sign of its opposite. Carlyle has been the severest censor of the English public for its insincerity in every thing; yet Carlyle's style in the very utterance of his invectives is one of the most disingenuous specimens of quackery in modern authorship.

It is no marvelous thing, then, if we find cant in books in which we least expect it. Critics who have an honest culture complain of it in all the great literatures of our day. Addison complained of it in his

contemporaries. It was the butt of Dr. Johnson's sarcasm; yet the old elephant was not free from it himself when he tried to dance. Menzel and Niebuhr stigmatize it in the German literature. Guizot has scorned it in one department of the French literature. Niebuhr flatly charges it upon some of his literary contemporaries, that whole pages of references to authorities were copied from others, a few here and a few there, with no attempt at verification, but purely to impose on the reader by a parade of extensive reading. Such is the jugglery of scholarship.

I could name two celebrated writers of this country who belong to the class of literary jugglers. In one case, if he ever read his footnotes in their original connections, he would have found some of them to be hostile, and some of them irrelevant, to his own positions. As I do not suppose him to have been consciously a knave, the most charitable construction of his error is that he borrowed them, and imposed them on his readers, trusting to their ignorance as he had to his own. In the other case, a theological controversialist was hard pressed by an opponent more learned than himself. He "read up," as we call it, for the exigency, and gave to the public a rejoinder in which were heaped together mediæval names which his readers had never heard of, and he probably had not heard of till then. As authorities, some of them were worth little more than the London "Punch." His opponent saw through the trick at a glance, and never answered what he doubtless deemed an affectation which was beneath him. That is a ruse which is never perpetrated without being discovered by somebody.

Returning, now, from the excursion we have taken

from the point in hand, let us observe, that, if grave and mature authorship is capable of such affectations, the taste of youthful readers, till it is chastened by breadth of culture, may be at least in equal peril. We need, therefore, to guard ourselves against extent of reading which would be gained at the expense of scholarly reading. Variety is not scholarly, if it is not so thorough as to result in symmetrical culture, so far as it goes. It is unscholarly, for instance, ever to read a book for the sake of talking of it, or to be able to say that one has read it, or to be able to quote from it in one's own production.

The real culture of a man shows itself in his original thinking, not in that which he prates about, and puts on parade. Give us your thought, man, your thought! That is the proof to us of what you have *lived* in your own mental being. That tells us what you are. Who cares for any thing else you have to give? Sly hints of prodigality in the use of books go for nothing. Do not be awed by them when you encounter them in the authors you read. You can provide all such pabulum for yourself, and then you will know what it is worth. Do not allow an author to impose it upon you for any higher worth than it would have if it came from your own pen.

A noteworthy fact in this connection is, that one's reading, and one's use of reading in one's own productions, will act and re-act upon each other. What the one is, the other is apt to be. Therefore, freedom from affectation in your use of books in sermons will tend to secure the same freedom in the reading of books. Make no display of learning or of varied culture. The loopholes through which a hearer can look into your

library should be made as few as possible in your preaching. A thorough-bred traveler does not boast of his travels. He is mindful of Lord Chesterfield's advice to his son, not to begin every fragment of his conversation with, "When I was in Japan." So a genuine scholar does not pry open the crevices through which the extent of his reading can be seen.

A young man has gained one of the prime elements of scholarship, when he has learned the worth of artlessness in his literary dealings with himself. Play no tricks upon yourself. Do not be hoodwinked into an imitation of the tricks of authors. Be honest in your secret literary habits. Keep yourself always on the safe side of plagiarism in your sermons. Be assured that you *will* plagiarize unconsciously quite as much as is consistent with the rights of authorship. As a specimen of the care which should be practiced in this respect, if you quote in your sermon, see to it that you put the signs of quotation into your delivery as well as into your manuscript. In a word, be yourself in literature as in religion. Let your reading be, and appear to be, in your use of it, the symbol of a real life. There is such a thing as intellectual integrity. The price of it is above rubies. If you will plan your reading, and use it with this kind of truthfulness to yourself, the range of your reading and the symmetry of your culture will be exponents of each other. The variety of your reading will grow to meet the wants of your culture. Beyond that, it is of no imaginable use to you or to others.

But, while protection against affectation of literary culture is the first need of a youthful writer, there is, on the other hand, an obvious value in that variety of study which is a genuine index of symmetry. Let the

fact be observed, therefore, that all the excellences of literature are not to be found in any narrow group of writers. Every great mind is great by virtue of some sort of individuality. That individuality represents a power. But no mind represents all such individualities. The universal genius is a fiction: it can be realized only in a mind of infinite capacities. We speak of Shakspeare as if he were such a genius; but it is hyperbole. If he is the first of poets for his excellences, he is the first, also, for his faults. Intensity in authorship generally exhibits itself, in part, by violations of taste.

Only by varied reading, therefore, can we combine in our own tastes any very wide range of excellences. We must achieve our object as a bee gathers honey. Apiarists tell us that no two honeycombs have precisely the same flavor. A bee can not concoct the most delicate honey from any one species of flora. Diversities of the saccharine element must be distilled from species which are opposites, some of which are even antidotes to each other. So the finest culture is the transfusion of the greatest breadth of literature. Opposites and antidotes in thought may blend in mental character, and produce a flavor which no other compounds can imitate.

The principle involved here is not impaired in value by any degree of richness which one may find in a few favorite authors. There is a virtue in variety for the sake of variety. The illustrious Literary Club, to which Dr. Johnson belonged, included, besides him, Sir Joshua Reynolds and Edmund Burke, the latter the most profound thinker of the age. But Goldsmith expressed a practical want, even in the society of such

men, when he advocated the enlargement of the club by the introduction of new members, "because," he said, "the original members had traveled over each other's minds so often and so thoroughly." So it is with our culture from books, even the wisest and most quickening. We appropriate from them in time all that our affinities can appropriate. We must have fresh food to keep the mind new and progressive in its tastes.

Further: a certain variety of knowledge is necessary to the perfection of any one species of knowledge. An old book often receives a new power to enlighten or to quicken us from our perusal of a new one. Still more is diversity of mental character necessary to perfection in any one quality. Culture is sensitively sympathetic: it is a compound of sympathies. Diseased culture in one respect generates disease in other respects. Amaurosis in one eye may cause the other eye to weep itself blind: so a contracted culture is, for that reason, a shallow one. Of two authors, for instance, we appreciate one the better for appreciating the other justly. Of two departments of a library, we penetrate the one the more profoundly for every glimpse of insight which we obtain into the other. Of two national literatures, we have a mastery of the one in some degree proportionate to our conquest of the other. In all nature every thing helps every other thing. In the ultimate products of mind there are no rival literatures nor antagonist departments: they are mutual auxiliaries. The history of human thought is a history of great alliances. Breadth of reading, therefore, promotes depth of descent in any one spot.

Again: it is a calamity to a public speaker to subject

his culture to the exclusive influence of any one author, or group of authors. Mental servitude often follows
✓ extravagant enthusiasm for one writer, or for the writers of one school. Individuality of character, then, is sacrificed. Not merely is independence of opinion lost: indeed, that may not be sacrificed perceptibly, and, because it is not, the student may imagine that his mental freedom as a whole is unimpaired. Not so:
× culture is literally *sub-jected*. It lies under the hoof of a contracted authorship. Such a mind has no catholicity of taste. It reveres nothing which does not come within the vision of the few minds to whom it looks up as oracles.

Cicero tyrannized thus at one time over a class of Italian scholars. Erasmus describes, in a dialogue which he satirically calls "Ciceronianus," a man who for seven years read no book but Cicero. He had only Cicero's bust in his library, and sealed his letters with a seal engraved with Cicero's head. He had composed "three or four huge volumes, in which he had criticised every word of Cicero, every variation of every sense of every word, and every foot or cadence with which Cicero began or closed a sentence."

Dr. Johnson tyrannized over a class of educated minds in England. Even so robust a mind as that of Robert Hall confessed to having worked through a period of servitude to Johnson in his early discipline. Coleridge has more recently swayed another class of readers with an authority which no man should consciously submit to for an hour.

In the pulpit, Dr. Chalmers, for a time, was an autocrat over a large class of admirers. Few men have appeared in the modern pulpit whose faults and virtues have

more frequently been copied entire. I do not say reproduced, but copied; for the spirit of a great mind is never reproduced in us till we have either lived through or overleaped a servile admiration of him, and become consciously independent. Soon after Chalmers published his "Astronomical Discourses," a swarm of little Chalmerians, if I may coin the word, appeared in the pulpits of Scotland and America. The pulpit of Scotland has not entirely recovered from that influence to this day.

Carlyle has given a similar lurch to a class of minds in our own literature. Twenty or thirty years ago American taste, as represented by a considerable group of writers, reeled under the blow of Carlyle's tyranny, from which it has never yet fully righted itself.

In this country one man is to-day exercising autocracy over a class of youthful writers and scholars. Scarcely a year passes in which I do not find evidences of this in manuscript sermons. It is difficult to convince a man by criticism of his subjection to a contemporary author. I often make such criticism when I know that it will be rejected now, but that the subject of it will surely see the truth of it eventually. This is true of the present sway of the author in question over a certain class of minds. Few things appear to me so sure in the future of American literature as that the educated mind of this country will outgrow its adulation of him and his works. His is a diseased mind, and the world is sure to find it out. Some of you will live to witness a change of literary opinion of him not unlike that which has overtaken the literary fame of Byron. In both cases you are safe in assuming the existence of distorted literary tastes from the distortion

of religious faith. It was not possible for Byron to be a true literary guide while his rebellion against religious restraint was what it was. A worse than any literary bondage enthralled him. So of the author I have in mind: pure as his private life is, it is impossible for his intellect to be a great and true literary seer so long as he hesitates whether or not to apply to the being of God the personal pronoun.

Sometimes servitude to authors takes the form of subjection to one school in philosophy. Then a young scholar trusts nothing, reveres nothing, knows nothing, sees nothing candidly, which conflicts with the school in which he has been tutored. He looks at every thing under the shadow of the school. He apes the dialect of the school. The truths of common sense, which other men can express in the language of common sense, he puts into the formulæ of the school. The most simple elements of belief he must transmute in the laboratory of the school. Nothing seems literary to his taste, nothing puts on the glamour of literary associations, so as to excite his respect, till it has been fused in the alembic of the school.

Such subservience to one or to few models of thought is a sad folly, an enormous folly. But one book in the world deserves such submission of the intellect, and that book never claims it in respect to literary taste. A young man should check the beginnings of such a folly in his own consciousness. An amateur in the cultivation of orange-trees tells me that the fruitage of the tree depends on the size of the box in which you pack its roots when it is young. Cramp them then, and you can never make other than a dwarf of it. Give them large room to expand, and the quality, as

well as abundance, of the fruit, will reward your forethought. So it is with a young scholar's early tastes. By an agile effort of good sense he can rid them of a narrow prejudice when it is new. Later in life he can only live it through at the expense of a great deal of contraction of usefulness, and alloy of pleasure.

Some minds never do live through their self-subjection to a one-sided authorship. In the weaker class of minds the effects of such a period of enslavement sink deep, and become a second nature. They become as inevitable and involuntary as the distinction between the right and left hands, — a distinction which physiologists now declare to be entirely unnecessary, if the physical mechanism could only be started into voluntary use without it. It is said that our right-handed habit of body has the effect, upon a man lost in a forest, of insensibly twisting him around to the left, to the extent of eventually moving in a circle, through the mere instinct of the right side to take the lead of the left, and that the circle, other things being equal, will always be described in one way, — from right to left. Such a monotonous circle does the life's culture of some men become, who are never emancipated from a one-sided twist received in their early discipline. They never learn to do even-handed justice, in their literary judgments, to any broad fraternity of authors. They never learn to enjoy any wide range of scholarship. They never become, therefore, men of generous culture in their own development. They are always lost in the forest, and always tramping in a spiral. Ruskin says that a false taste may be known by its fastidiousness. "It tests all things," he says, "by the way *they fit it.*" But a true taste, he contends, is

“reverent and unselfish,” for ever learning, for ever growing, and “testing itself by the way it fits *things*.” This is as true in literature as in art.

Let us, then, be jealous of the influence of schools in any thing. Be watchful of the power of favorite authors over you. Professor Reed says he has known a man “late in life to lose the power of sound literary judgment and enjoyment,” through “bigotry in the choice of books.” It seems, at the first sight, to be an ungenerous caution to a young writer; but it is a very necessary one. Beware of your favorites in any thing,—your favorite author, your favorite preacher, your favorite instructor, the head of your sect, the originator of your school in philosophy, the leading expounder of your type of theology, the representative man in your *beau ideal* of culture. Stand off, and measure them all. Wait a while: let your judgment of them take years in the forming. Receive trustfully and gratefully whatever they give you which satisfies the varied cravings of your nature, and helps your culture to an even balance, but hold in suspense for a time any influence from them which surfeits some tastes, and leaves others to starve.

There must come, in the lives of us all, a period at which we revise our early enthusiasms, and smile sadly at some of them. A blessing to us are those authors and those men, whom, after that ripening period, we find that we have not *outlived*. The blessing will be proportionate to their number and to the range of culture which they represent.