

LECTURE XXI.

THE PRACTICABILITY OF LITERARY STUDY TO A PASTOR. — PRELIMINARY SUGGESTIONS.

4th, I HAVE thus far endeavored to give you some ideal of the true study of literature in respect to its objects, the selection of authors, and the methods of the study.

The peril attending any such endeavor is, that it will only awaken in you a sense of the impracticability of the study to one who is immersed in the cares of a pastor's life. That is a profitless kind of advice which only impresses upon its recipients a sense of its uselessness to them. I wish to make the hints I have given you a real help to you, if possible. Therefore, before leaving this subject, I propose to add some suggestions upon *the practicability of literary study to a pastor*.

1. Let me ask you to observe several preliminary suggestions respecting a plan of scholarly reading.

(1) It is frankly conceded, as has been already remarked in the preface to this volume, that any scholarly plan of study must, to the majority of pastors, be, to a greater or less extent, an *ideal* one. The practicability of it is a matter of degrees, exceedingly variable at different times, as well as to different persons. The ideal element must enter largely into any plan that shall be largely useful. If there are any to whom it

can be only an ideal, it is not therefore useless, even to them. The *negative* value of a lofty ideal of scholarly life is not to be despised. It may act as a censor of a preacher's sermons, keeping alive a taste which will exclude unscholarly methods and material which he knows to be such, but which he will not avoid, except through a silent respect for his dumb library. The very sight of a library of a thousand volumes well chosen is a stimulus to a pastor who for months may not be able to read a volume. Says Bishop Hall on "The Sight of a Great Library," "Neither can I cast my eye casually on any of these silent masters but I must learn somewhat."

But the large majority of educated pastors *can* read something, if they will. Evidences abound that they *do* read very considerably. The charge can not be sustained against our American clergy, certainly not against the clergy of New England, that they cease to be scholars when they become pastors. Look at the reports of "ministers' meetings," and clerical "associations," and at the pastoral contributions to the weekly and quarterly press. The subjects there discussed show that our pastors are men of books as well as men of affairs. In the meridian of their labors, and at the head of large and exacting parishes, they do not turn the key upon their libraries. They are vigilant observers of the current of scientific and theological thought around them. The only question is, whether their reading is regulated by the wisest economy in choice and methods. One does not beat the air, then, who endeavors to give to youthful preachers a high and enduring ideal of a scholarly life. They are entering into a fraternity of scholars who find time and mental force for *some* ideal.

If further evidence is needed on this point, look to the pulpits of other lands and times.¹ Calvin was as laborious in the pulpit as out of it. He often preached, for weeks together, every day in the week; yet there are his immense folios to speak for him as a scholar. Bochart ministered daily while building his "Phaleg" and "Hierozoicon." Owen was incessant in preaching while his exposition of the "Hebrews" was in progress. Lightfoot was faithful to his pastoral duty while he was amassing his wealth of Talmudic learning. Lardner and Pye Smith and Hartley Horne had pastoral charges in London. Bloomfield was a vicar. Trench, Alford, and Ellicott were among the working clergy when they planned their learned works, and published a part of them. Stier was a pastor: so was Ebrard. Henry, Scott, Doddridge, Adam Clarke, were laborious and able ministers. Kingsley was a hard-working pastor: so, at one time, was Stanley. These men illustrate, by their union of pastoral duties with a scholarly life, that where there is a will there is a way.

But much is gained, if the presence of a scholarly ideal in the furniture of a pastor's mind achieves no more than to arrest the habit of reading at hap-hazard. This is the bane of the existing habit, probably, of the large majority of educated men. The time we spend in reading print of some kind is more considerable than the majority of us suppose. I once inquired of a hard-worked metropolitan pastor how much time daily, on the average, he spent in reading of all sorts, aside from that directly necessary to his preparation for the pulpit. He replied, "Not an hour." Then, correcting his hasty count, he said, "Two hours." Again reflecting, said

¹ See North British Review for 1860.

he, "I read the magazines. Yes: three hours and a half would cover it all." Well, a great deal can be done in three hours and a half a day. A distinguished commentator wrote five volumes of commentary in less than three years, working but three hours and a half a day. The Rev. Albert Barnes wrote sixteen volumes in less than an equal number of years, devoting to them only the hours before breakfast.

But the precious three hours and a half dwindle to a very small fragment, if one hour is given to the newspaper, and another to the magazine. They are largely wasted time, through the habit of reading without plan. More than time is wasted by it. Mental force is wasted, and mental debility is invited in the place of it. It is worth a great deal to a man's whole character as a man of culture, if that waste is forbidden by a scholarly ideal of what good reading is. Be it so that scholarly reading would restrict a pastor to few, some to very few, volumes in a year; better that than the wasteful and debilitating effect of reading at random. Be it that a pastor can read but ten, five, three volumes in a year: those few, well chosen and well read, may make all the difference between a scholar and a boor in his mental tastes and professional habits. A good ideal of scholarly reading is not useless, if it can regulate wisely an imperfect culture.

One good book is a great power in the making of a youthful mind. Is there not somewhere one *man* to whom you expect to be grateful for ever for his formative power over the development of your mind? What is one *book* but the mental being of one man? Why may not your obligations to the book be as incalculable as to the man? Reverently read the one book, then,

if you can do no more. Better this than none at all. Better this by far than the slipshod mode of life which befits only indolent minds, and invites an oblivion of libraries. Oblivion of libraries is akin to softening of the brain.

To bring to a definite point this vexed question, is it too much to claim that every educated pastor not disabled by disease can perpetuate in active life the amount, if not the kind, of literary culture *which his collegiate curriculum once created in him?* Is it not a decline from *that* level which commonly creates the "dead line of fifty"? And is that decline ever a necessity. "*Incredulus odi.*" In proof I could name to you an eminent pastor, for forty years in the city of New York, whose habit through all that time, with rare and brief suspensions, was to read daily at least ten lines in some Greek or Latin classic. That simple expedient drew after it, and *made* practicable to him, other expedients of culture which kept his mind rich and full and strong till the day of his death. At seventy years he had found no "dead line."

(2) The study of books need not be made impracticable by the study of men, which has been so earnestly recommended. The latter study does not require retirement and mental concentration. It is discursive. One may pursue it in the streets. Pastoral duty gives large opportunity for it. It requires chiefly the mental habit of professional vigilance. Let a pastor live in a *state* of alertness towards all resources of oratorical knowledge, and he will find them in every thing that he sees and every thing that he hears. That habit of literary lookout which led Walter Scott to pause in the street to make note of a new word, and which led

Stothard to travel with a pencil tied to his finger, with which he made a drawing of every apple-tree he met with in a journey, illustrates the state of professional watchfulness which a pastor needs in his study of men. Carry thus the image of your pulpit always with you. Never give way to an idle mind. Never vegetate. Hours of physical recreation aside, that is never necessary to a healthy man. Be for ever on the lookout for tribute to your pulpit. You will find it in every thing, everywhere. One preacher was once led to correct an ungainly posture in the pulpit by observing the crooked gait of a lame man in the street. Another was set upon a course of voice-building by noticing the resemblance of his natural tone to the quacking of a duck. Live in such a state of professional outlook, and you may pursue the study of men daily, and yet not take an hour from the time consecrated to your library.

(3) It should be remarked, further, that some plan of scholarly reading must be *made* practicable, if a pastor would save himself from intellectual decline. The chief peril of a pastoral office is that of a *busy* intellectual stagnation for the want of persistence in liberal studies. This was the peril which was so fatal, as Professor Tholuck thought a quarter of a century ago, to the Protestant clergy of Prussia. It can not be said to be unknown in this country. In my judgment, the existence of the "dead line of fifty" is not wholly but chiefly due to it.

It should therefore be a foregone conclusion, when a young man enters the ministry, that some plan of literary study shall be made practicable. Sacrifices must be made to it,—sacrifices of ease, sacrifices of needless recreation, sacrifices of notoriety, and sacrifices

of pecuniary interests. If a young man does not value it sufficiently to make such sacrifices to it, it is impracticable to him.

(4) The best culture for success in the pastoral office is not consistent with the appropriation of any large proportion of time to the miscellanies of the church.

I refer here to that department of clerical labor which is made up of executive affairs. A certain amount of this is necessary to the fellowship of the churches: therefore every pastor must so far supervise it. It would be dishonorable to shirk it. But, outside of the individual church and its immediate sisterhood, there is an amount of executive duty, which, as many practice it, becomes a profession by itself, to which the pulpit and its tributary studies are subordinated. The management of institutions, the direction of societies, the care of the denominational press, leadership in ecclesiastical assemblies, membership of innumerable committees, of boards of trust, of special commissions, all inflicting an endless amount of correspondence, — these form a distinct department of clerical labor, and create a distinct class of clerical workers. There are men, as you well know, whose chief usefulness is in this line of service. Their pulpits are secondary to it, and their libraries are more distant still from their chief ambition. If one of them were called to account for the neglect of his library, he could only plead, as did the ancient prophet of Judæa, “Thy servant was busy here and there.”

It need not be said that this class of clerical workers are performing a very useful and necessary labor, which somebody must do. Those who drift into it are commonly men whose tastes and tact enable them to do it

well. They deserve commendation unqualified. But the point I press at present is this, that this department of our profession is not intrinsically congenial with the genius of a preacher and the tastes of a scholar. As a rule, therefore, it must be conducted at a loss of the highest clerical discipline. Eminence in it can not be combined with eminence in the pulpit. Some of its duties can as well be discharged by laymen.

Exceptions to the rule occur, as in the case of Dr. Chalmers, who, both as a preacher and as an executive, was a genius. But such cases are not numerous enough to affect the rule. Every young pastor, therefore, should canvass and decide for himself the question whether his mission of usefulness to the church lies in seeking or accepting any large amount of this kind of work. The inquiry should be answered early in his professional career. I very well remember the form in which it presented itself to my own mind in my early manhood. I trust to the freedom of the lecture-room in referring to it for the sake of the glimpse it will give you of the opinions on the subject entertained by a considerable class of the older ministry.

The question lay between my immediate entrance upon a pastoral charge, and my taking a fourth year of study. The ecclesiastical body under whose direction I was studying so kindly interested themselves in my plans as to appoint a committee to express to me their judgment that I should accept the pastoral service without delay. The argument of the committee was, that a certain moderate average of power in the pulpit, subordinated to a large inventive faculty in miscellaneous labors, was a more useful ideal of the clerical life than that of a more able pulpit to which learning

and studious habits should pay tribute. Letters from several very estimable pastors confirmed that counsel. Said one, "The church needs workers, not students." A judge of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts sent a message to me, saying, "It does not require many books to convert souls." Of them all, but one man dissented from the general drift of opinion. He advised a fourth year of preparatory study. "Lay a broad foundation," said he, "and then build high."

I saw that the problem covered, not merely one year or two, but the whole character of my ministry; in fact, it was whether I should be a preacher, with the tastes and the studious habits which a preacher's life requires, or should make the pulpit an appendage to a life of miscellaneous activities. I chose the pulpit and the study. The fourth year at the seminary was a fraction of a life's plan. I have no inducement to speak of the results of my choice any further than to say that I should repeat it if the same alternative were again before me.

The same question will force itself upon you substantially, though the form may vary. The miscellany and the study will array themselves before you as rivals, and you must choose between them. The board of directors, the board of trustees, the ecclesiastical council, the prudential committee, the managers of this, and the delegation to that, will stand before you as competitors of your pulpit, and you must make your selection. Will you be a committee-man, or will you be a preacher? Will you be a man of affairs, or will you be a scholar? Will you be in demand as the ubiquitous delegate to councils, or the executive leader of your presbytery, or will you be a prince in your

pulpit, with the accessories of culture which that implies? Every pastor should decide the question with an enlightened policy, knowing what he gives up, and why. Mediocrity, I admit, can be gained in both departments of service. But ought any young man to *plan for* mediocrity? The world is not suffering for the want of that commodity.

I think I have seen more deplorable waste of ministerial force in needless dissipation of time upon executive miscellanies than in any other form which has come under my notice, which did not involve downright indolence. For one thing, you will soon discover, if you go into this kind of work to any great extent, that it costs a large amount of time for ten men to do the work of one. When did ever a committee of ten men on any thing work fast? William Jay, the celebrated pastor at Bath, once said, that, if Noah's ark had been intrusted to a committee for the building of it, it would still be on the stocks. It is inherently difficult to secure unanimity among an able committee, so that work can go on rapidly. Remember always that your most brisk and efficient work must be solitary work. One hour in your study is worth three in the committee-room. You do this miscellaneous work, if at all, at this enormous cost of time.

In this dissuasion from excessive labor upon the miscellanies of the church, you will understand that I speak of the policy of pastors in old and organized settlements, to which the majority of you will minister. Missionary labor, and work on the frontier, must, of course, come under a different *régime*, because they must meet different necessities. One such frontiersman I could name to you, who is a hero beyond all earthly

fame. He might have been the man of whom the preacher said, "One man among a thousand have I found."

The conclusion of the whole matter, then, is this: if in God's providence you are called to the charge of a well-established church in the midst of such churches, and if you are led by God's teaching to believe that the pulpit is the throne of power for you, give yourself to that pulpit. From it you may speak to less than a hundred souls. Remember that Jeremy Taylor did that at Golden Grove. Dr. Chalmers did that at Kilmany. President Edwards did it at Stockbridge. You may have as clear a self-knowledge in this respect as Richard Hooker had when he wrote to his ecclesiastical superior, Archbishop Whitgift, "I am weary of the noise and oppositions of this place. God and nature did not intend me for contentions, but for study and quietness." And he proceeds to pray that he may be removed to "some quiet parsonage, where," he says, "I may see God's blessings spring out of mother-earth." It was this modest but true self-knowledge which put it into his power afterwards to write the "Ecclesiastical Polity," which has brought his name down to our times.

I repeat, therefore, if it is given you to see that the pulpit is your throne, give yourself to it and to the scholarly life which is essential to it. Ally your study with it, and make your home there. Leave executive bishoprics of the church universal to other hands. There are men enough who can do that service, whose tastes develop genially towards it, and whose success shows that they were created for it. It will never suffer for the want of aspirants. When did ever an office of executive duty in the church go begging? If

you have been created for the other thing, *do that thing*. Preach; let other men govern. Preach; let other men organize. Preach; let other men raise funds, and look after denominational affairs. Preach; let other men hunt up heresies, and do the theological quiddling. Preach; let other men ferret out scandals, and try clerical delinquents. Preach; let other men solve the problems of perpetual motion of which church history is full. Then make a straight path between your pulpit and your study, on which the grass shall never grow. Build your clerical influence up between those two abutments.

(5) Any plan of clerical study will fail which is not founded upon a stern physical discipline. You must know the laws of health, and must observe them, if you would succeed in a lifelong plan of literary effort. High culture, like high attainments in piety, depends largely on a subordination of the body to the mind. The body needs a gentle training to the endurance of brain-work. By patient training we can educate the body to endure double the amount of intellectual labor which is generally possible to it at the age of twenty-five years. I need hardly say that no great intellectual success can be attained by a man whose body is in subjection to *any* appetite.

(6) Any plan has little probability of success which is not assisted by certain moral virtues. You can not work well with your brains and your heart in conscious conflict with each other. Especially your intellectual aspirations must have the approval of your conscience. If questions of conscience about any thing in your intellectual life are yet unsettled, settle them as the very first duty you have to perform. Agree with thine

adversary quickly. Your chariot will drag more heavily than Pharaoh's in the Red Sea, if your conscience blocks the wheels.

Of the special virtues necessary to a pastor's success in literary pursuits, the chief are, reverence for literary work as religious work, persistence in your own work as that for which God created you, patience with yourself, incessant prayer for success, and trust in divine promises of success. The whole business of ministerial culture needs to be thus baptized in the religious spirit as absolutely as the administration of the Lord's Supper. Do not begin it till you can see the truth of this.

Without such moral auxiliaries as these, you must become an ungodly man in order to succeed. You must gain unity of soul in one direction or the other. One reason for the brilliant success in literature of some intensely irreligious men is that they had rid themselves of all religious scruples. Their whole being was a unit in literary pursuits. Goethe and Byron and Lord Macaulay seem to have been instances of this: hence their marvelous literary acquisitions, and power of execution. One reason for the success of Satan in the dominion of this world is the absolute intellectual singleness of his being. He concentrates power, with no drawbacks caused by conscientious relentings, doubts, scruples. In a moral being, intellectual force pure and simple, unregulated by moral sensibilities, is Satanic force.

(7) No plan will probably succeed which is not in some important features your own. You can not wisely import whole into your culture the literary advice of another mind. Take the advice, but take it for what it is worth *to you*. Scarcely two men can execute well the same plan of a scholarly life. Some men

have more carburet of iron—the stuff that steel is made of—in their blood than others. Their mental constitution is affected by it. Each man, therefore, must, in some respects, frame his own plan. All that an instructor can do is to give you hints, principles, facts from the experience of others. The question is not what is absolutely the superior plan, but what is the best for you, with your health, with your power of mental appropriation, with your amount of time for literary work, in your parish, and at your age.

The yeomen of the Carolinas framed out of their own experience and common sense a better plan of civil government than John Locke framed for them with the most profound philosophy of the age, and a thousand years of European experiment in government at his command. So you are in some respects wiser than the most learned of your teachers concerning what *you* can do in literary culture. You need also the discipline of forming your own plan to qualify you to execute any plan.

(8) No plan will be likely to succeed which is founded upon a scholastic ideal alone. The scholastic mind can not be, without amendment, a model for the professional mind. Yours, from the nature of the case, must be the professional mind. It must be scholarly, yet not scholastic. Leibnitz, Gibbon, Descartes, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, were by profession *literati*. They were nothing else. The experience of such men needs to be tested by the professional judgment, before they are applied to men in a profession to which literary pursuits must be but an appendage. A pastor should frame a plan adapted to professional necessities, and then he should respect that plan as profoundly as if it had the imprint of a score of universities.

(9) You should so arrange your plan of study as to secure as much concentration of effort as is practicable. It is not wise to have more than one or two great lines of study planned and in operation at one time. A day can not be of much value for studious labor, if it is whittled up into shavings of time. Different departments of study must be pursued in succession, time enough being allotted to each to secure the benefit of continuity. The details of such a plan every man must devise for himself; but the principle is invariable,—that the plan be so adjusted as to obtain mental concentration; and for concentration you must have time for continuity of impression.

Recent psychological investigations into the conditions of brain-force disclose the fact, that the most effective force of the brain in continuous labor requires *duality* of objects of pursuit. Rest of brain does not require cessation of work, but change of work. Change is more restful than idleness. This indicates that the true economy of power in study is found in having two lines of study between which the mind may interplay.

(10) You should so form your plan of study that it can sustain interruptions. Any plan of study in pastoral life must be interrupted. Times will occur when it must be suspended. Awakenings of the popular conscience may absorb all the mental energy of a pastor in perpetual production. Our profession is one which abounds with emergencies. These must be anticipated. A power of sustained purpose must be cultivated, which can hold study in reserve when study is impracticable, and not be demoralized by the suspension. We must plan for interregnums, so that they shall not result in anarchy.

(11) Your courage in pursuing any plan you may devise should be sustained by the certainty of your mental growth. You will not always be what you are now in point of intellectual strength. Growth is your destiny. Your professional labors will compel growth. They are more productive of mental enlargement than the life of a literary man without a profession. The kind of growth which they will necessitate in you will re-act with a power which will surprise you upon your efficiency as a reader. Your power of mental appropriation will increase marvelously: hence will come the faculty of rapid reading. Nothing is more sure to disclose itself as a result of years of scholarly reading, and professional composing in alternation, than the gift of rapid mastery in both. As you will write sermons rapidly, so you will appropriate books to your stock of thought rapidly. Some volumes which now would cost you a second reading you will by and by master with one. Some which now require a full and cautious study, by and by you will appropriate by their tables of contents and their prefaces only.

This destiny of growth should be largely trusted by a youthful preacher. Without it, his life would be hopelessly overladen. I well remember, that, when I began my ministry, a good doctor of divinity said to me, "Be content to work hard for ten years, and then you can take it easy." His advice was on a level with his grammar. He should have said, "Be content to work hard for ten years, and then you can begin to work harder; but it will be with more cheering results." No other work of God in creation was so grand as the creation of a *man*: so nothing else in life is so grand a thing as the *growth* of a man.

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