

LECTURE XXII.

A PLAN OF PASTORAL STUDY IN ENGLISH LITERATURE.

2. PASSING now from the preliminary suggestions already made, I wish to apply as far as possible the principles advanced in the preceding Lectures to a plan for the study of English literature. My aim here is to give you a method by which *substantially* the majority of pastors can *make* practicable, by dint of self-discipline, a lifelong study of the literature of our language, which shall be sufficiently productive of results to save them from intellectual decline.

(1) Run a line of professional reading through the history of the literature. A line of professional reading should be the backbone of every clergyman's literary life. I have not here in view the bulk of the professional literature, but a historic line of it only. The advantages of this may all be summed up in one,—its naturalness. It is natural for a professional man to make his profession the center of his culture. This is only adjusting your studies, in form and by design, to what they will be, and must be in fact. This is the principle of all wise methods in real life. Necessities must be first cared for. The spinal cord of real life is labor to meet necessities. So it should be with literary pursuits in the midst of professional avocations. A

pastor will obtain his most valuable knowledge of our literature by building it up gradually alongside of the clerical profession.

(2) Pursue collateral lines of reading as they are suggested by professional studies. Any great trunk of literature, like that formed by one of the professions, will be dense with branches running out from either side, into which study will diverge naturally. For instance, you can not familiarize yourself with the English pulpit of the seventeenth century without discovering that you must acquaint yourself also with that most creative period of English history. The Revolution, the Commonwealth, and the Restoration are in the heart of it.

By the law of literary association, collateral lines of reading will branch out in all directions. You will be surprised to find how large a portion of the entire body of the literature is covered by the immediate and obvious lines of collateral study. Let me illustrate this by a single example. At the first view it appears unnatural to associate the pulpit with the stage. How can a pastor's professional reading lead him naturally to the study of Shakspeare? I answer, No two things are more indissolubly connected in English history than the sermon and the drama. There are one or two periods in the history of the English pulpit in which we can not judge well of it without taking into account the taste of the people for theatrical displays. Whitefield and Shakspeare are thus brought hand to hand. The sermons of Bishop Latimer can not be appreciated otherwise.

(3) Portions of our literature which are remotely connected with the pulpit should be read by depart-

ments. Do not read the plays of Ben Jonson to-day, and Izaak Walton to-morrow, and Charles Lamb on Wednesday. Read continuously for a while by departments. English poetry, for instance, forms a department by itself. A few great divisions will classify the whole of it. A very few names should be its *nuclei*. Beginning with Chaucer (who died in A.D. 1400), advance two centuries, and you come to Spenser and Shakspeare, contemporaries. Proceed half a century, and you overtake Milton, and, a quarter of a century later, Dryden, who died precisely three hundred years after Chaucer. A century and a half farther on, you find Wordsworth, who died four hundred and fifty years from Chaucer. English poetry can all be gathered in clusters around these names; and it is of little moment with which of them one begins one's study of that department.

(4) Generally plan to occupy fragments of time with standard literature. In a pastor's life, fragments of time must be utilized, or the loss in the aggregate is immense. Do not be prodigal of Monday mornings: there is no need of it. We should keep at hand in our own libraries, on our study-tables, such authors as the four great poets, such prose-writers as Bacon, Hooker, Milton, Burke, Butler, Macaulay. The habitual intercourse of our minds with a dozen of the leading spirits of our libraries, in the freedom of fragmentary reading, will create innumerable little feeders to our culture, which will keep it full and rich and pure.

(5) Much of the light literature of the language may be naturally reserved for periods of relief from professional labor. English fiction has become a very

vital department of the national thought. Clergymen used to ignore it. That is no longer wise, if it ever was so. We must know it; but we need not give to it our most valuable time. It is wasteful to read Charles Dickens in the midst of a winter's campaign of professional toil. A healthy mind in a healthy body does not need such costly recreation: reserve it for vacations. More than economy of time is thus gained: we gain sympathy of daily pursuits. Seek mental recreation from change of mental labor. Do not unbend to the extreme every day. That is not natural relief to spring from extreme to extreme. A well-trained mind husband its strength most effectively by passing from a greater to a less degree of mental tension, not to no tension at all. Remember the physiological law of duality. We must dare to be ignorant of light literature till the natural time for it comes in our plan of life.

(6) I pass on now to give you a line of professional reading as illustrated from the history of the English and American pulpit, from which the most that I expect is, that it may be suggestive to you of some more minute plan, or some other, yet, for the purpose, an equivalent plan of your own.

In the following pages I attempt to combine four features; viz., to distinguish the most eminent of English and American preachers, to group these in historic clusters, to assist your memory of our literature as a whole by associating these clerical names with their secular contemporaries, and to arrange these groups in chronological order. I select only representative names, and from the most strongly marked periods in the history of our pulpit. Of course a multitude of eminent

The following pages are left in the text for the purposes of continuity and completeness and to present a list for literary study. However, in no way are we espousing the comments concerning the Church of England nor of any group or denomination from which the author chose the men included in this section. Some were heroes and some were heretics. God will judge who was which. Dr. VBK

names must be omitted. Of the names which I recite, I will ask you to underscore those which I shall designate as specially deserving of study, either as professional representatives or as literary standards.

The dates I arrange as nearly as possible in the center of the public life of the authors clustered around them, reckoning a quarter of a century on either side of the date specified. This method is sufficiently accurate. You will generally find it convenient, in your attempts to fix dates of authors in your memory, to associate the name with some central date of authorship, rather than the date of birth or death; unless one of these happens to synchronize with the beginning, or middle, or end, of a century, as is the case with Chaucer and Dryden and Wordsworth.

Beginning, then, with the earliest period of the British pulpit, the first date I name is A.D. 1350. This being long before the Reformation, the pulpit had scarcely an existence in England. But one name deserves mention in so condensed a catalogue as I am attempting to form. Within a quarter of a century on either side of this date lay the public life of JOHN WICKLIFFE. Underscore his name as the only representative of the infancy of the English pulpit. It may assist our mastery of the secular literature of the language to note that Wickliffe was contemporary with Geoffrey Chaucer; the one sustaining to English preaching the same relation that the other did to English poetry.

From this period nothing appears to our purpose for about two hundred years. Note the date A.D. 1550. Within twenty-five years of this date, before and after, lay the major part of the public life of WILLIAM TYNDALE, Miles Coverdale, JOHN KNOX, HUGH LATIMER,

THOMAS CRANMER, John Fox, and William Cartwright.

The most vital literary activity of the reign of Henry VIII. was concentrated upon the translation of the Bible. Upon that the revival of the pulpit hung suspended. It was a question of life and death to preaching. To very few men are the English and American churches so much indebted through all time as to Tyndale. The "blasphemous beast," as Sir Thomas More called him, gave to the church the chief model of King James's Bible. Underscore the name of Tyndale as the pioneer in the work of translating the Scriptures, that of Knox as the father of the Scottish Reformation, that of Latimer as one of the earliest martyrs to the liberty of the pulpit, and that of Cranmer as the founder of the Anglican Church.

It may assist us, in connecting the religious with the secular literature of this period, to remark the fact that these men were wholly, or in part, contemporary with Sir Philip Sidney, the author of the "Art of Poesy," and Roger Ascham, the father of English educators; and to this and the succeeding period belongs the name of Sir Walter Raleigh.

The next date of importance is A.D. 1600. The half-century of which this is the center covers substantially the public life of a very small group, of which RICHARD HOOKER, Dr. Donne, Bishop HALL, and George Herbert are the chief. Through the whole of the long reign of Elizabeth the pulpit had to struggle for leave to be at all. Brilliant as the age was in other departments, the literature of the pulpit was meager in the extreme. Queen Elizabeth did not take kindly to preachers: she said that two in a diocese were an

ample supply. In London many churches were closed for the want of preachers. Says Bishop Sandys, preaching before the Queen, "Many there are who do not hear a sermon in seven years, I might say in seventeen." In Cornwall, Neal says there was not one man capable of preaching a sermon. At one time the University of Oxford had but three preachers, and these were all Puritans.

This state of things was the inheritance which the Church of Rome had bequeathed to the Church of England. The depreciation of preaching in the Church of England which exists to-day had its origin then. Hence, also, arose the extreme poverty of the pulpit at the date before us. Hooker, the darling of the Church of England to this day, is declared, by one of the best-informed critics of English literature, to sustain to English prose somewhat of the same relation that Chaucer sustained to English poetry; he having written the first solid prose-work of logical structure, and clear, forcible style. Bishop Hall was one of the earliest writers of laconic and racy English: he has been called the "English Seneca." The gentle George Herbert, the humble country parson, will live long after his infidel brother, Lord Herbert, is forgotten. This little group of clerical writers were surrounded by Shakspeare, Spenser, Beaumont and Fletcher, Philip Massinger, and Ben Jonson, of dramatic fame; and Lord Bacon was their contemporary.

Passing on a little more than half a century, let us, for the convenience of the synchronizing with the Restoration of the Stuarts, select the date A.D. 1660. This year is in the heart of the most eventful period of English history, and of the golden age of the pulpit

as well. Within a quarter of a century of the Restoration, on either side, we find two parallel columns of great names. In the Established Church appear Archbishop LEIGHTON, JEREMY TAYLOR, ISAAC BARROW, Archbishop Tillotson, ROBERT SOUTH, Edward Stillington, and William Sherlock, all of them men of great power in their day, and some of them authors of standards in literature which will live as long as the language lives. Among the nonconformists we number Joseph Calamy, RICHARD BAXTER, John Owen, John Flavel, JOHN BUNYAN, STEPHEN CHARNOCK, and JOHN HOWE. England has not seen since their day an equal number of men of equal rank in her pulpits. Contemporary with these galaxies of clerical genius, it will help our memory of the period as a whole, to recall John Locke, Sir William Temple, Sir Thomas Browne, Abraham Cowley, Samuel Butler, John Dryden, and, *princeps inter pares*, John Milton.

A sad decline appears as we advance another half-century. The revolution of 1688, with the oppressions which preceded it, and the confusion which followed it, and the outbreak of infidelity in the persons of Hobbes, Shaftesbury, and Bolingbroke, greatly depressed the pulpit. Its ablest productions were controversies with infidelity. The close of the seventeenth century was a dark day for the spiritual vitality of both England and Scotland.

Adopting the year A.D. 1700 as the next center, we find before and after it Bishop Lowth, Bishop Atterbury, SAMUEL CLARKE, Bishop Hoadley, RALPH ERSKINE, Bishop BUTLER; and, on this side of the Atlantic, we note the first name which lifts the American pulpit to the level of that of the mother-country, in the person of Cotton Mather.

Contemporary with these, wholly or in part, were the essayists who founded "The Spectator," Addison and Richard Steele; the originators of the English novel, Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett; also Pope, Gay, and Prior, noted as the Jacobite wits of the day: Hobbes, Bolingbroke, and Shaftesbury, the trio of noted freethinkers; and Congreve, Sir Isaac Newton, and Bishop Berkeley. Isaac Watts deserves mention as the first man who redeemed English hymnology from doggerel, although he wrote not a little of it himself.

Advancing another half-century, we reach the date A.D. 1750. This was the age of tame politeness in the Church of England, and the secession of Methodism from it. Within twenty-five years of this date comes the public life of Dr. HUGH BLAIR, Bishop Horsley, Dr. WILLIAM PALEY, and, outside of the Establishment, Philip Doddridge, JOHN WESLEY, GEORGE WHITEFIELD, the senior EDWARDS, Joseph Bellamy, SAMUEL HOPKINS, and Samuel Davies.

These numbered among their contemporaries the club of which Dr. Johnson was the autocrat, including Goldsmith and Edmund Burke; the three great historians of the empire, Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon; William Cowper, who wrought a revolution in English poetry; Dr. Reid, the father of the Scotch philosophy; the elder Earl of Chatham, who stood at the head of parliamentary eloquence; and Benjamin Franklin.

Advancing to the beginning of the present century (A.D. 1800), we find not one man in the Church of England who deserves to rank with the following names out of it: Andrew Fuller, ROBERT HALL, JOHN FOSTER, THOMAS CHALMERS, and, in this country, Dr. TIMOTHY DWIGHT, Dr. NATHANIEL EMMONS, Dr.

Jonathan Edwards, Dr. John M. Mason, Dr. Edward Payson, Dr. Edward Griffin, and Dr. WILLIAM E. CHANNING.

To this period, for the most part, belong, in secular literature, Robert Burns and Samuel Rogers; the Lake Poets, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey; also the earlier group whose names commonly occur together, Walter Scott, Lord Byron, Shelley, and Keats; Charles Lamb, Thomas Moore, Thomas Campbell; and, in the Scotch philosophy Dugald Stewart, and Dr. Thomas Brown. The chief literary revolutions of the time were Scott's originating of the historical romance, and Wordsworth's simplifying and humanizing of English poetry. The latter movement has affected all the literature of the language since that day: Charles Dickens could not have existed but for the advent of Wordsworth.

Adopting one more date, A.D. 1850, we come into groups of names, some of which are fragrant in the memory of the living: William Jay; Dr. EDWARD PUSEY, the father of the ritualistic re-action in England; William Archer Butler; Archbishop WHATELY; Dr. Henry Melville; FREDERICK ROBERTSON; Dr. Thomas Guthrie; Mr. Spurgeon; and, in this country, ALBERT BARNES; Dr. Lyman Beecher; Dr. Nathaniel W. Taylor, the father of the so-called "New-Haven Divinity;" HORACE BUSHNELL; Dr. CHARLES FINNEY, the most noted revivalist of modern times; Dr. Gregory Bedell; Dr. Stephen Olin; Dr. FRANCIS WAYLAND; Dr. James Alexander; and Dr. James H. Thornwell, the most eminent pulpit orator of the southern half of our Republic.

Contemporary with these names should be associated

those of Alison, Mackintosh, Hallam, Prescott, and Motley, as historians; Macaulay, Carlyle, Jeffrey, Sydney Smith, Talfourd, De Quincey, and Washington Irving, as essayists; Cooper, Thackeray, Dickens, and Hawthorne, as novelists; Tennyson, Bryant, Longfellow, and Whittier, as poets; and Sir William Hamilton as a metaphysician.

This catalogue of clerical names, you will understand, I give you as only a representative one, with which it is desirable to be acquainted as far as possible. Of these, I have distinguished about thirty names of men whose writings and memoirs would give you a very fair knowledge of the entire history of the pulpit in our language, so far as that is extant in libraries. These thirty names a pastor at the meridian of his labors *can* make himself acquainted with, even if he will give to them only fragments of time. It is a kind of study which does not necessarily demand the severest, long-continued, and unbroken application. A man of affairs can make it a supplement to his professional life.

I would not be understood to limit our method of beginning the study of English literature to the study of the pulpit. I advise this only as the most natural one to a pastor in active life. It is natural to build the literature around the profession as its center. But some may find an equally suggestive help in an historic line of English philosophers from Lord Bacon downward. A similar line of suggestion might be framed on the history of the English essay. A very superior one might be drawn, making English poetry the historic center from Chaucer to Wordsworth.

The least valuable method, in my judgment, is that

which is, perhaps, the most frequently chosen. It is the basis of many abortive attempts to master the bulk of our literature. I allude to that which arranges the contents of English libraries along the line of political history, and associates the illustrious names with the royal dynasties of England. This method, plausible in theory, will be found cumbrous in the experiment. Better by far is it to follow some historic line drawn within the literature itself, and then make excursions from that laterally into other departments.

It is of less importance than at first appears, what specific line be made central. I have chosen that of the pulpit. But our profession suggests others of perhaps nearly equal value. Theological science is splendidly developed in our language. An historic line drawn in that department would command the professional enthusiasm of many pastors, for the purposes of study, more powerfully than the homiletic line. The history of churchly organization may be more stimulating to another. The liturgic development in the history of English thought may be attractive to some. The line of English commentary on the Bible may be the more awakening to others. The sway of the English Scriptures over our entire literature is very marked. The very structure of our language has been in part modeled by them. It matters little what be chosen as the central line of research, except that it should, in the majority of cases, be within the natural range of the profession, so as to command the zest of professional enthusiasm, and the unity of mental life, which the labors of the profession create. Find such a line of central development in something. Such are the natural affiliations of all great departments of thought,

that any one will be found to be suggestive of every other one. There have been no isolated developments of the national mind: therefore there are no isolated representations of it in books. A book which *is* a book is kindred to every other book. Even two such diverse expressions of genius as English poetry and English art are in close sympathy with each other. We have before remarked the natural affiliation of the English pulpit with the English drama. George Whitefield and David Garrick were mutual helpers. Build a nest, therefore, for your thought anywhere in an English library, and the flight from it to the whole circumference will not be unnatural, or on weary wings.

I add in closing, without extended remark, several auxiliary suggestions.

It is not necessary for your purpose to read very largely in any one author, except those of inspired authority.

It is not necessary to read an equal amount in all.

It is not necessary to read in chronological order. A beginning can be made in the middle. One method recommended by some critics is to begin with the present time, and read backward.

The more distant an author is from our own times, as a general rule, inspiration aside, the less important is that author to modern culture. This is the reason why, in the list given in the foregoing pages, the most recent group is the most numerous.

In some instances, the preachers named in this catalogue have not left a large collection of sermons in print. This is true of Whitefield and Tyndale. Our knowledge of their public ministry must be obtained from their memoirs, and the history of their times.

Their influence on the history of the pulpit is too important to permit the omission of their names.

In the reading of sermons, a few specimens thoroughly criticised are more valuable to our culture than volumes read for purposes of literary refreshment.

For mental quickening in the act of composing sermons, one should follow eclectically one's own tastes. If the forty-seventh proposition of Euclid starts your mind upon a track of original invention, study that proposition. Find out by experiment what *will* arouse your thinking power, and make it articulate, and then study that. The range of your mental affinities, as I have before remarked, will surely widen. The floriculturist sets a geranium to sprout in a very small receptacle; but it soon outgrows its birthplace. So an intellectual taste will expand beyond the scope of its germ. Nothing is more sure to grow.

Pursuing literary study by any plan equivalent to the one here recommended, you will not fail of a very encouraging success. Progress will be slow at the first, but it will increase in speed as you advance. Your power of mental appropriation will grow immensely as you approach middle life. It is no cause for discouragement, if its full growth is long delayed. Some of the richest fruits of autumn are the late fruits. So are there minds which are richly endowed by nature, but which develop slowly. Whenever your maturity does appear, be it late or early, you will be able to read rapidly. Many valuable books you will be able to master without a plodding pace through the whole of them. Fragmentary reading of them will suffice. In the maturity of a man's culture, if it has been wisely regulated, and vigorously nurtured, very few books

demand of him a reading entire. That which he brings to a book will often be so large a proportion of what he finds *in* it, that he has only to give a glance of recognition to many pages, and pass on.

Even a little of such reading as is here advised, though sadly unsatisfactory to your growing tastes, will still keep alive, as nothing else can, a scholar's vigilance over your sermons, and make them worthy of a scholar's hearing. One of the most eminent of the Presbyterian pastors of New York, of the generation just now passing away, was once inquired of how he could have made his habits of argument in the pulpit so uniformly exact, without even a momentary slip in his logic; for such was the reputation of his masterly pulpit. He replied, that he was accustomed to imagine a legal mind, like that of Daniel Webster, among his hearers, and he aimed never to present in his pulpit a train of reasoning to which the great jurist could object. Every preacher needs such imaginary critics of his sermons. We can find them in the silent friends who throng our libraries. Make a friend of every good book you own. "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

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