

LECTURE VIII.

OBJECTS OF A PASTOR'S STUDY OF LITERATURE, CONCLUDED. — THE ADJUSTMENT OF SELF-ADAPTATIONS.

To the three objects of literary study already considered should be added a fourth, which is to facilitate a man's knowledge of his own powers and adaptations to professional labor.

It is unsafe to trust incautiously the early fascinations of books or men over a young mind. Our earliest tastes may give us false ideas of our own capacities. Specially do we need to study our favorite authors with reference to our adaptations to our life's work. We are not supposed to be mere *literati* by profession. We do not study literature for its own sake and that only: we have a laborious profession in prospect. Our studies must fit us for that, or they may become a hinderance to our life's work. We need to know our own adaptations; and that literary enthusiasm is a woful blunder which misleads us in that self-knowledge.

The theory of Jesuitism in one respect is most instructive. The whole Jesuit policy turns upon the adaptation of men to work, and work to men. The Jesuit theory is, that every man is better fitted, or may be made so, to one thing than to another; and that every work requires one man more imperatively than

another. It assumes to fit the man to the work, and the work to the man, as precisely as Nature fits together the brain and the skull. Jesuitism is wise so far as this, that it lays the study of adaptations at the basis in building an order of public men. That study must lie at the foundation of the liberal professions, if they are to be powers in the world.

The study of adaptations must form the clergy. Under a free system, every clergyman must perform that study for himself. For the want of it men have often entered the ministry under a mistaken self-estimate. Is it not one of the most obvious and painful facts of clerical life, that men have entered the ministry who would never have done so if they had known seasonably their own natural qualifications? Such men fight the air, through life it may be, because they do not understand their own mission.

The importance of the error here indicated justifies a consideration of it at some length, at the expense of an *excursus* from our main-line discussion. The peril of a wasted life in the ministry, through errors in self-estimate, will be best illustrated by a case in hand. A graduate of this seminary once came to me asking advice respecting his abandonment of the ministry for some other profession. He had been a pastor two years. He was pleasantly and usefully settled. He made no complaint of his people, nor they of him. He did not wish for a different parish. But he thought he had better leave the pulpit. Why? The reason lay wholly in the mental make and culture of the man. He had inveterate tastes for a different line of mental activity from the one which the ministry opened to him. By natural constitution those tastes were pre-

dominant in him. His collegiate training and his reading had intensified them. He had denied them, and chosen the ministry as a profession from convictions of religious duty, as Pascal did under similar circumstances, but with no such mental rest in his choice as Pascal experienced. He found that the practical duties of the pulpit were a drudgery to him. He felt no intellectual elasticity in them. To be a guiding mind to others in the office of a religious teacher did not draw out his aspirations. He seemed unable to make himself what the Scriptures call "apt to teach." He had struggled with himself two years in silence to force his mind and body to do the bidding of his conscience, and to do it joyously; but the effort was undermining his health. A nervous headache had become the invariable consequence of a morning's work in the writing of a sermon, and an afternoon given to chemistry or floriculture was the only remedy. He dragged himself through another year of purgatorial fidelity to his ministerial vows; and then his health was so seriously affected as to leave no question as to the path of duty. He left the ministry, studied for three years another profession, and is now contented, healthy, happy, and useful in it, and as a layman is pronounced by his pastor to be the most devoted and useful member of his church.

One thing is certain of this case: it is that a woful mistake was made at the outset for the want of a thorough study of the man's own aptitudes. At least six years of his early manhood were, not lost indeed, but extravagantly expended on an experiment which a more thorough self-knowledge would have prevented.

A similar experience, I think, in less degree, befalls

some men who remain in the ministry. Are they not found in all denominations? They work at cross-purposes with Providence, because it is a long while before they accept themselves for what they are. They attempt things which they can not do, or as often they fail to do things which they might do, because they dare not attempt them.

The late Dr. Griffin used to say that he thought Providence designed him for a metaphysician. I suppose it is very certain that no other man who knew Dr. Griffin, thought that Providence would have been wise in any such designation of a man who was so eminently an orator by nature and by training.

Dr. Chalmers expressed the opinion, that, as he said, "Nature had cut him out for a military engineer." In the public life which he afterwards led, he, too, thought that his specialty of talent for public influence lay in the department of intellectual philosophy. He probably stood alone in both those opinions to the day of his death. Chalmers was by nature a statesman. In the Church his great power lay in the discovery and the use of administrative principles. The reach of his mind in this respect was marvelous. He was in the Church the counterpart of Edmund Burke in the State. The thing in which consisted the greatness of both would have prevented either from taking the first rank as metaphysicians.

Professor Stuart believed, that, when he began his public life, he had no special taste or aptitude for sacred literature, or any department of philology; but no one else believed this of him after it was found that the youthful pastor in New Haven, though crowded by the care of the old "Center Church" in a powerful

revival of religion, still kept his Hebrew Bible within reach of his dinner-table, that he might devote to it the fragments of time stolen from that meal.

Providence is often very kindly in pressing men into a service which they would never have been wise enough in self-knowledge to choose for themselves. Yet often the wisdom of Providence is not regarded, or the finger-point is not seen. Perhaps, like Nelson, men turn their blind eye to the telegraphic order. Then comes a long history of wasted ministerial energy.

Ministerial energy, when it is not all a waste, is often most extravagantly expended on the results it achieves. Do you not know men in the ministry who have been sailing obliquely all their lives? All that some accomplish in the ministry is accomplished laterally to their conscious aims. In their deliberate aims they fail; in incidentals to those aims, which Providence always seems to be on the watch for in ill-regulated lives, they succeed. The sum total of their work, when it shall be tried as by fire, may be this, — relative uselessness in the things they have aspired to, and relative success in the things they have undervalued. To them is fulfilled the promise: "Thou shalt hear a voice *behind* thee, saying, This is the way; walk ye in it." "The door into life," says a living writer, "generally opens behind us. A hand is put forth which draws us in backward." This is eminently true of the professional life of a certain class of ministers.

Here, for example, is a man who honestly thinks that poetry is his birthright, while in fact his very make is prose personified. The Muses were slumbering at the hour of his birth. He wastes himself in rhymes which

are "published for the author," — that rose-colored gauze by which is covered the polite negative of publishers. This is literally true of one of the early graduates of this seminary. Rather, it *was* true; for I am grateful, for his sake, that he has found rest in a world where even he can aspire to no such poetry. He had a wasted ministry here, so far as man could judge of it, because he was for ever puttering at verses which could command no circulation except by the anxious assiduity of a blind man who made a pittance by their sale. Another man for several years sent to me by mail, as often as about once a quarter, his poetic deliverances, printed on tinted sheets at his own expense. Of their quality what shall I say? The old couplet in the Primer —

"In Adam's fall
We sinned all" —

is a gem in the comparison.

There is a man, who, like Dr. Griffin, because he knows the difference between metaphysics and psychology, imagines that intellectual philosophy is the *forte* of his brain and the end of his creation; while in fact the elements of a popular orator are the constituents of his nature, and those he despises. He wastes himself in attempts to settle the problems of the ages. His book — the labor of his prime, and the darling of his soul — is for sale at the bookstalls, on that shelf which is so sad a monitor to aspiring authorship, the shelf placarded with "Fifty Cents." Yet the pulpit, if he would but lift his downcast eyelids to see it, would be a throne to him.

One of the most successful preachers now laboring in a city of the interior, when he left this seminary,

endeavored earnestly to convince me that philosophical study and authorship were the department in which lay prospectively the design of his creation. Not one of his instructors shared that opinion. His scholastic life had thrown a glamour around that group of studies, so that, for the time, he saw nothing else. He did not begin to be himself till the spell was broken by a religious awakening among his people.

Again: a man conceives that literary criticism, or the study of languages, is his *forte*; while in fact his most valuable talents are colloquial. He wastes himself in struggling after a place in reviews, or pining for a professorship, when the place of honor for him, because the place of richest usefulness, would be the pastoral routine of a parish.

Another is persuaded, that, if he has any specialty of fitness, it is to advance the Christian culture of the more thoughtful and educated classes; while in fact he is only on a level with such classes. This deserves to be noted as the most frequent error in self-estimate by a certain minority of educated clergymen. Many such preachers have culture enough, backed by natural force enough, to go into classes of society below them, and make their power felt there like a hydraulic engine. But some of them waste themselves by aims at that which they suppose to be the standard of pulpit eloquence in cities. They do not understand why they are not more thoroughly known by Providence, and by committees of vacant metropolitan pulpits. It is astonishing how many secret enemies such men have. Great is the mystery of their life's trial. But the truth is, that the church of a factory-village or a farming-town would be more than the temple of Jerusalem to them in an

eternal estimate of their lives; because, working on a level below them, they could work with *downright* power.

The mistake here indicated is one of the perils peculiar to an educated clergy,—peculiar in degree, if not in kind. No judgment is more hollow, none betokens more ignorance of the philosophy of ministerial success, than that sometimes cherished by a youthful preacher, that, because he is an educated man, therefore he must minister to educated men; because he has acquired cultivated tastes, therefore his parish must consist of families of cultivated tastes; because he has become familiar with refined society, and has acquired the manners of a gentleman, therefore his pastoral charge should be in refined society, and his manners should have gentlemen to appreciate them. If Providence does not order his lot by the law of intellectual and social affinity, the cause of Christ suffers a mysterious waste of ministerial usefulness, and he suffers a mysterious eclipse. The man has not found his place, nor the place its man, till each is adjusted to the other by the satisfaction of mutual similitude. Like must minister to like. This is what it amounts to when we put it into the most charitable form of plain English.

I speak of this as a frequent error among young preachers, the most frequent of all that concern the topic before us. I am glad that my observation enables me to testify, that, with rare exceptions, it is but a youthful folly, outgrown in the tug of real life and under the pressure of eternal things. I have known but one instance in which it extended into a preacher's middle life.

The truth is, that the error is oblivious of one of the

plainest principles of ministerial success; viz., that, to achieve any thing worthy of the clerical office, a minister must work from above downward. The ministry is something more than a profession in which a man is struggling for a living, and a position among his equals. It is a grander thing than all that,—a thing of God's making. It is a power from God, or it is nothing to the purpose. Its work is that of a superior on an inferior mind. The law of gravitation bids a laboring man to work down hill with his spade and his wheelbarrow, if he can. That law is not more imperative than the spiritual law which bids clerical influence to flow from above downward. Thus regulated, all culture is available in a preacher's work. Nothing else is like it in the range which it gives to the worker. The highest culture finds its use in the lowliest labor. Often the richest fruits of culture will be discovered in despised spheres of effort. Mental discipline of the rarest finish will find its reward in the exhaustion of its resources upon ignorant and debased materials.

One of the most accomplished of our American missionaries spent her life in Africa. Her education, her refinement, her tastes, her manners, would have graced and elevated any metropolitan society. Yet her testimony was, that she found use for them all in the Christianizing of savages. She was not conscious of one wasted gift. She had no regrets over useless acquisitions. Not a single accomplishment of her beautiful youth—her drawing, her painting, her music—ever lay idle. She was right in her judgment of herself and her life's work. It will bear the test of eternity, whatever this world may say of it.

The same principle applies to ministerial labor every-

where. Locality and surroundings have very little to do relatively with its prospect of results. No other work is so absorbent in its power to appropriate to itself all the resources which culture can bring to it, even in its rudest and most unpromising forms, provided only that culture be wise enough to be humble, and to labor on something below its own level. The clerical hand, if it is a cunning one, will be always reaching downward in its activity. There is an infinite sadness in the sight of a minister of Christ turning from the level he stands on to lift himself into the air above him, or struggling horizontally on a stream that is level with his lips, instead of being content to stand where he is sure of his footing, and to work down upon the strata beneath him. Any ignorance of himself which leads a man to this inversion of his life's work may doom him to a barren and disappointed ministry. If in exceptional cases this result does not follow, it is because the providence of God sometimes compassionately provides an inferior work for the man when it is impossible to develop the man to the best work of his opportunities. But such adjustments are adjustments to the man's infirmities, not to his strength. He is never all that he might have been. He is like the patriarch Lot, to whose whining over the risk of climbing the mountain his guardian angel gives way.

Details might be specified, if it were necessary, in the work of the pulpit, in which there is sometimes a certain proportion of waste, because energy is expended in methods of preaching and styles in preaching (sometimes imitated methods and styles) which the preacher can not execute well. It is a great thing for a man to know what *he* can do. It is a greater thing to do *that*,

and not something else, to aspire to it if a man is self-distrustful, to come down to it if he is self-conceited, to be content with it and grateful for it when he finds it out. To have done *any thing* in such a service is a thing to be grateful for for ever. "Permitted to preach the gospel seven months" is the epitaph on the tombstone of an alumnus of this seminary, who died before he had a parish of his own. It was placed there at his dying request.

It is not always, I do not think it is generally, any unusual defect of piety which leads to these distortions of clerical life. It is chiefly the want of self-knowledge. I mean that this is the weight which turns the scale adversely to a man's usefulness. Whatever be his moral delinquencies, if he is a man of genuine consecration at heart, they will give way if they are not protected by honest intellectual misjudgments. The moral growth, on the other hand, is greatly expedited by the mental rectitude, when once gained. Therefore I say, that, in respect to the point before us, the chief want is the want of a correct self-estimate. No matter how it is gained, whether through the heart or through the brain, the critical need is that of a full measurement of self in comparison with other powers in the world, like that which life in the business of the world very soon forces upon a man of sense in reference to capacities for success in the business of the world. For the want of this gauging of one's self skillfully, the early years of ministerial life are often like those of a young landsman before the mast.

Returning, now, from this *excursus*, and applying these views to the main topic before us, let us observe the bearing of a study of books upon the discovery of a

man's own adaptations. We have already given ample space to the study of men as one expedient for a minister's culture. We have now to observe, as tending to the same result, the self-discipline which comes from literary pursuits. Until a man knows a certain amount of the work of the great minds in literature, he has no adequate standard by which to gauge himself.

It has become a truism, that self-educated men are but half educated. They are apt to blunder into errors which the educated mind of the world has long ago exploded. They announce as original discoveries that which the history of opinion long ago recorded and as long ago refuted. They seem to themselves to be original in processes of mind which a better knowledge of libraries would teach them are the common property of thinkers. Much as a man gains from actual conflict with living minds, he may gain much even of the same kind of knowledge, though different in detail, from the accumulated thinking of the past. No living generation can outweigh all the past. If books without experience in real life can not develop a man all around, neither can life without books do it. There is a certain dignity of culture which lives only in the atmosphere of libraries. There is a breadth and a genuineness of self-knowledge which one gets from the silent friendship of great authors, without which the best work that is in a man can not come out of him in large professional successes.

Disraeli says, "The more extensive a man's knowledge of what has been done, the greater will be his power of knowing what to do." He adds substantially, that those who do not read largely will not themselves deserve to be read. This is doubly true in view of the

effect of reading upon a man's criticism of himself. The whole class of romantic ambitions which have been illustrated will almost surely disappear from a young man's mental habits, if he gains the consciousness of thorough scholarship in even one line of study. The juvenility of such ambitions is discovered in the process. The cost of their indulgence to a man's executive force in a great practical profession takes its proper place in his estimate of them. He learns the magnitude of that which must be done to realize them by adding any thing to that which has been done. One of the unerring signs of this mental growth in a young man is a certain sobering of tone in his judgment of himself, which springs from an expansion of his studies. It is to character what the ripening of colors is to painting. The character is enriched by the very process which subdues its exuberant confidence. This view is too well known among educated men to need further expansion.

But there is another view, not so often recognized, which deserves more attention than it receives. It is that the study in question stimulates self-appreciation, as well as represses self-conceit. You may learn for the first time of the existence of certain powers within you, from the awakening of those powers in response to the similar gifts of other minds distinguished in literature. Your own enthusiasm awakened by good models may disclose to you susceptibilities and powers which you never conjectured as existing within you.

Sir James Mackintosh gives it as the result of his experience as an educator, that, with all the evils of self-exaggeration among young men, the evils of self-depreciation are greater. Among Christian young men this certainly is true. Many young men are not suffi-

ciently aspiring. They do not aim at labors which are within their reach, because they are not immediately conscious of power to perform those labors. Nor will they be conscious of it till some inspiration from without awakens it in them. That inspiration often comes from a simple extension of literary study. Give to yourself a hearty, affectionate acquaintance with a group of the ablest minds in Christian literature, and, if there is any thing in you kindred to such minds, they will bring it up to the surface of your own consciousness. You will have a cheering sense of discovery. Quarries of thought original to you will be opened. Suddenly, it may be, in some choice hour of research, veins will glisten with a luster richer than that of silver. You will feel a new strength for your life's work, because you will be sensible of new resources.

There is no romance in these assertions. The only peril in making them is, that the class of minds who need them, and of whom they are true, are not the class who will most readily appropriate them to themselves. Still they express a truth, which, with all its perils, we do right to accept, and apply with inspired adroitness, saying, "Let him that readeth understand."

A very striking illustration of this kind of mental awakening, on a large scale, from the study of literary models, is found in the transition of European mind from the middle to the later ages of the Christian era. The dark ages, as we call them, followed the entire loss of the Greek and Latin classics. The effect of that loss was an almost entire oblivion of good models of literary expression. The mind of the middle ages strove to work alone: it began *de novo* the history of letters. The consequence was the suppression, for the time, of the

natural genius of those ages. It never rose from that depression till the ancient literatures were recovered.

Gasparin of Barziza, one of not more than three or four minds to whom is due the credit of starting the revival of the ancient classics, says that he gave himself to the study of Cicero till his own instinct was developed within him, by which he could judge of the Latin language, and till his own power to use the language grew to maturity under that single discipline. The study of one author developed him to his maturity. It was the recovery of the Greek and Roman treasures which stimulated the awakening of the genius of the middle ages, as it was the loss of them which had originally depressed it, and enslaved it to vitiated tastes. What is true of national minds is as true of individuals and of orders of public men. Let the ministry be ignorant of the best authors of the past, and their own powers will lie undeveloped in proportion to the depth of that ignorance. Lift them out of such ignorance, and their own powers receive an original impulse in proportion to the extent and the depth of their scholarship.

It is one object, then, of a pastor's study of literature, to reduce and to elevate his estimate of his own powers. The object is to restrain and to stimulate, to check and to cheer. If a man is inclined to see himself at either end of the telescope, the right study of models of literary excellence will act as a corrective, and give him his natural eyesight. I know of nothing else that is better fitted to give temper to a young man's criticisms of his own productions, so that his judgment shall be calm and clear, as keen as steel, and yet as true, than a large acquaintance with those works which have become monumental in Christian literature.

To recapitulate, and to distinguish clearly the four objects which we have now considered, I observe that the first, the discovery of the principles of taste, will tend to make a correct writer; the second, the familiarity with those principles, will tend to make a natural writer; the third, assimilation to the genius of the best authors, will tend to make an original writer; and the fourth, a just estimate of his own powers, will tend to make both a modest and a courageous writer. In other words, the first develops a man's literary perceptions; the second, his literary skill; the third, his literary genius; the fourth, his good sense in literary aims.

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