LECTURE VII.

THE STUDY OF LITERATURE FOR CLERICAL DISCIPLINE. — OBJECTS OF THE STUDY.

II. WE have observed in analyzing the sources of our oratorical knowledge, that, while there is but one original source, an auxiliary source is found in the study of models, and that in the term "models" we include all successful and permanent literature. This extension of the term is essential. Our primary notion of a model is limited. When a painter speaks of a model, he means by it a painting, or the thing which is to be transferred to canvas, and nothing more. When a sculptor speaks of a model, he means by it the human form, or a piece of statuary, and nothing more. In criticism of poetry a model is a poem, and nothing more. In military art a model is a historic campaign, or the plan of a battle, and nothing else. That is to say, a model has primarily a professional limitation.

When, therefore, a preacher conceives of a model, he is apt to think only of a sermon, or at most of an oration. Consequently he is in danger of limiting his reading for homiletic discipline to sacred or secular *speech.* The point, therefore, needs to be emphasized as a preliminary, that we should not restrict our idea of models to any such professional range. The advice often given to young preachers in respect to their reading is nar-

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row, in that their attention is directed exclusively to oratorical literature. In my judgment, that is not even the chief source of homiletic culture derivable from books. In the broader view, all successful and permanent literature is a collection of models to an educated mind.

The culture which a preacher needs from books is substantially that which any other professional man needs. Excepting the necessities of the profession, the less his culture is narrowed by professional affinities in its range, the better. Nearly the most meager preparation you could acquire for the pulpit would be the reading of the whole mass of English sermons, and nothing else. Every book which *is* a book is a model of something to an educated mind. By a preacher, every book he reads should be read as a model of something. Whatever has achieved success, specially whatever has been long-lived, we may be sure contains something, which, if intelligently studied, will be to a preacher's culture what the *torso* of Hercules is to sculptors.

Moreover, our conception of a model to a professional man should not be limited to literature as distinct from philosophy or from science. There is a distinction here; but it is not so important to a professional man as to one whose life is made up of literary pursuits. A mind moving in the orbit of a great practical profession must be open to culture from any thing in our libraries which represents the world's past or living thought. Every such volume is a model to such a mind, in the sense that it contains something helpful to its discipline or its furnishing for its life's work. One young preacher I knew, who found the most effective awakener

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of his own mind to original production in the study of La Place's "Mechanique Celeste." Such are the occult affinities between literature and science, that there is a mental appropriation of them both by an alert mind, in which the distinction between them vanishes.

Bearing in mind, then, the principle that the range of a preacher's possible study of models opens to him all standard libraries, the remarks I wish to make upon the subject arrange themselves naturally under the objects of the study, the selection of authors, and the methods of the study.

1st, The Objects of the study of books: what are they? I answer, in the general, The object is discipline as distinct from accumulation. Its results, when properly conducted, will never be the mere conglomeration of knowledge. Its aim is discipline; its process is discipline; its result is discipline. A certain mental growth is the sum and substance of it. A man knows nothing of the rudiments of the culture to which it belongs who has not begun to be conscious of mental growth under that culture. One of the first and most profound impressions which the study of books should make upon a man is that of the distinction between literary labor and literary leisure. No habits like those of a literary amateur can accomplish the object in view. The aim is never a luxury, except in that stage which mature discipline at length reaches, in which labor is itself luxury. But, in particular, the chief objects of a pastor's study of literature are four.

The first is a *discovery* of the principles of effective thought, and its expression in language. We all come to the study of books with minds uninformed as to what is excellence, and what is not. No man's lit-

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erary instinct is at the first a sufficient guide to his literary judgment. What are the principles of effective literature is a question to be answered by an after-process to that of feeling the power of literature. It is a process of reflection upon a previous experience. It is as purely a process of discovery as a search in a gold-mine.

Novalis said that painting was "the art of seeing." So the true study of books is the art of seeing what is and what is not there. You read, for instance, an author who moves you. He stimulates your intellect; he arouses your sensibilities; he delights you, fascinates you, elevates you to an unwonted height of mental and moral excitement; he becomes therefore a favorite with you; you feel grateful to him for his disclosure to you of a new world of thought and feeling. At first you have no disposition to any process of reflection. You only feel, as Dr. Franklin felt his first hearing of Whitefield. But by and by the time of reflective study comes. You ask, What is it in my favorite author which makes him what he is to me? What are the roots of his productions which make them such a vital and vitalizing power to me? The answer, unless your experience has been factitious, will disclose to you one or more of the elements which make all vital literature a power to all minds.

Until our minds go through that reflective process of discovery, we know nothing of books as an object of criticism. We have no intelligent tastes in literature. We have no culture of scholarly judgment. We are, in respect to libraries, in that inchoate state in which a man often is in respect to painting, or sculpture, or music, in which he honestly confesses, "I do not know

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what is artistic excellence, I only know what I like." Exactly thus we might express our state of culture in literature before the critical taste is formed in us by an introversion of mind upon our own instincts, and by thought upon the objects which have pleased or roused them. We do not know what is excellent in literary creation: we only know what we like. Whether our taste is true to any lofty ideal we do not know: we only know what we like. A savage knows as much when he struts around in his adornments of beads and peacock feathers. A child knows as much when his tears are dried at the jingle of nursery-rhymes.

On the other hand, the faculty of good taste under high culture becomes one of superlative excellence. It is an instance in which an acquired faculty rivals original endowments of mind. We should not be deceived by our associations with the word "taste." It is the only single word by which our language expresses the thing in question. Yet the word is unfortunate in the multiplicity of its uses. We connect it so much with millinery and upholstery and *bijouterie*, if not with the pleasures of the table, that we often carry it into literature with degrading associations. We need there to enlarge and ennoble it. It expresses there one of the last and noblest results of mental discipline. I can not call it virtue: usage calls it taste. "Virtue" is reserved for a class of conceptions totally distinct.

Yet taste does express lofty intellectual character, not moral character, but a development of intellect which stands over against moral character, and corresponds to it in dignity. By it we distinguish what is true from what is factitious in letters. We penetrate by it to that which is deepest in thought. We reach

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that which, in literary expression, corresponds to integrity in morals. We discern, therefore, that which is and must be long-lived. Taste under high culture gives to a scholar, not only knowledge, but foreknowledge, of literary history. He learns to look into the future with as much confidence as he feels in his knowledge of the past. He pronounces judgment on certain works with the confidence of an oracle. He says of them, "These must fade: there is in them that which dooms them to decay." Of other works he says as confidently, "These will live: these express the soul of man and the voice of God in forms which the world will not willingly let die."

This finished taste represents a state of mental conquest. A man's own insight into the life of literature becomes a law to him. He is an independent thinker, reader, scholar, author, preacher. His own insight, if it conflicts, as it sometimes will, with a popular taste, gives him repose, while that taste lasts, in the assurance that it will be ephemeral. He can work on calmly in his own way. He is like an eagle in his eyrie: he knows that he sees farther than his contemporaries. he knows as surely that he must succeed in the end. Wordsworth expressed grandly this vision of the literary future, when he replied to the outburst of hostile criticism with which "The Excursion" was received at the first. "This will never do," said Jeffrey in "The Edinburgh Review." "It must do," responded the poet, as if inspired. "I very well know that my work will be unpopular; but I know, too, that it will be immortal."

The second object of a preacher's study of literature is that *familiarity* with the principles of effective

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thought and expression which gives one a working knowledge of those principles as distinct from a critical knowledge. We need such an inwrought possession of them, that, in our own productions, we can apply them unconsciously. In the act of composing, the mind can not pause to recall by sheer lift of memory a principle of good writing, and then apply it by conscious choice. This is specially true of select hours of composition. All writers have such hours. Our best work is done in such hours. The mind then is lifted by the impulse of original invention. Thought is ebullient. An act of creation is going on. The creating mind then must seize involuntarily upon the forms of language which lie nearest, and which come unbidden. Lawlessly, rudely, arbitrarily, it uses those forms, so far as any conscious selection is concerned.

If, therefore, we have not so learned the principles of power in speech as to be able to apply them unconsciously, we can not apply them at all. Therefore we need to acquire such familiarity with those principles, that our command of them shall be what the unconscious skill of the athlete is to muscle and sinew.

In this view it is obvious that the familiarity of unconscious use of principles of literary expression marks a high state of mental discipline in respect to executive skill. We have observed that the object of literary study is discipline, not accumulation. We have observed also that a full discovery of the principles of taste marks a high discipline in respect to criticism. The point now before us indicates an advance upon the discipline of criticism. It contemplates discipline in respect to executive skill. Such possession of the principles of effective writing as that involved in the unconscious use of them marks power of execution.

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No man can have listened to Edward Everett or Rufus Choate, for example, without being sensible of the fascination of some of their prolonged and involuted passages. They are marvelous phenomena of executive discipline. Pages could be selected from their writings in which the processes of reasoning, of judging, of analysis, of comparison, of combination, of imagining, of memory, of abstraction, and of invention, all interlace each other in one marvel of expression. The mental strain of producing the wondrous network seems like torture to a critic who is looking on; yet those processes embrace each other with a kindliness which makes them seem, to one who feels only the naturalness of their evolution, like the play of spiritual beings at their ease. We obtain a new conception of the susceptibility of discipline which is in every mind from such specimens of high art in discourse.

This view is confirmed by the fact that exquisite taste often exists without executive skill. Eminent critics are often not superlative writers. This is only saying that they know more than they can do. The reason is found in the distinction before us, between a discovery of the principles of effective speech, and such a possession of them as would secure unconscious obedience to them in one's own productions. It has been said of Lord Brougham, that in his own writings he violates nearly all the rules which in his criticism of others he prescribes. The critical study of books tends to prevent such anomalies as this, by giving us the principles of good writing in illustrated forms. We most readily become familiar with them, if we have them exemplified. The example which we enjoy will tend to fix in our taste the principle which otherwise

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it would be a drudgery to remember. Like all other knowledge, that is most homelike to us which comes through the medium of an experience.

This attractive knowledge of rhetorical principles comes to us but very slightly from rhetorical treatises. Some minds, it is true, may be fascinated by rhetoric in its scientific forms, and for their own sake. Dr. Arnold could honestly speak of Aristotle, after years devoted to a study of his works, as "that dear old Stagyrite." But very few minds are so affectionately constituted. Few, therefore, attain to such passionate love of abstract science in their studies. The large majority become fascinated by such studies only through the medium of example in favorite authors.

A fine illustration of this is found in the literary discipline of Dryden. Dryden is one of the acknowledged masters of the English language. In his day he was an autocrat in criticism. Nobody presumed to question a decision by Dryden. Yet he says of himself, "If I have gained any skill in composition, I owe it all to Archbishop Tillotson, whose works I have read many times over." One can not but marvel at his choice of a model; but it illustrates the power of any choice which a man makes with enthusiasm, and therefore enjoys.

The same truth is illustrated in an interesting fact in the literary history of Edmund Burke. I know of no fact which furnishes a more instructive key to the structure of Burke's mind. When he was about seventeen years old he conceived a passionate fondness for the works of Milton. In a debating-club of which he was a member, in Dublin, his Miltonic taste still exists on record. Among other examples of it the record

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states that Burke rehearsed the speech of Moloch in the "Paradise Lost," and followed it with his own criticisms upon it. Thus it is that literary models which attract us fondly to themselves plant within us the principles of effective speech which underlie those models, and make them what they are. We much more cordially, and therefore successfully, aim at resemblance to a living character than at obedience to an abstract law. This is as true in literary as in moral discipline. An example is worth more than a rule. An illustration has more authority than a command.

This view suggests a third object of a pastor's study of books; viz., *assimilation* to the genius of the best authors. There is an influence exerted by books upon the mind which resembles that of diet upon the body. A studious mind becomes, by a law of its being, like the object which it studies with enthusiasm. If your favorite authors are superficial, gaudy, short-lived, you become yourself such in your culture and your influence. If your favorite authors are of the grand, profound, enduring order, you become yourself such to the extent of your innate capacity for such growth. Their thoughts become yours, not by transfer, but by transfusion. Their methods of combining thoughts become yours; so that, on different subjects from theirs, you will compose as they would have done if they had handled those subjects. Their choice of words, their idioms, their constructions, their illustrative materials, become yours; so that their style and yours will belong to the same class in expression, and yet your style will never be merely imitative of theirs.

It is the prerogative of great authors thus to throw back a charm over subsequent generations which is

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often more plastic than the influence of a parent over a child. Do we not feel the fascination of it from certain favorite characters in history? Are there not already certain solar minds in the firmament of your scholarly life whose rays you feel shooting down into the depths of your being, and quickening there a vitality which you feel in every original product of your own mind? Such minds are teaching you the true ends of an intellectual life. They are unsealing the springs of intellectual activity. They are attracting your intellectual aspirations. They are like voices calling to you from the sky.

Respecting this process of assimilation, it deserves to be remarked, that it is essential to any broad range of originality. Never, if it is genuine, does it create copyists or mannerists. Imitation is the work of undeveloped mind. Childish mind imitates. Mind unawakened to the consciousness of its own powers copies. Stagnant mind falls into mannerism. On the contrary, a mind enkindled into aspiration by high ideals is never content with imitated excellence. Any mind thus awakened must above all things else be itself. It must act itself out, think its own thoughts, speak its own vernacular, grow to its own completeness. You can no more become servile under such a discipline than you can unconsciously copy another man's gait in your walk, or mask your own countenance with his.

A fine example of assimilation as distinct from mannerism is furnished by the literary history of Coleridge's "Christabel." That poem on its first appearance produced a profound impression. It was circulated in manuscript among the scholars of England several years before its publication. It is believed by good

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critics to have exerted a powerful influence upon the subsequent writings of Byron and Shelley and Scott. A casual reading of it in a little circle in which Shelley was present affected him so deeply that he fainted. Some of his poems published afterwards bore traces of the poetic stimulus which his imagination then received. Mr. Lockhart says that it was the hearing of "Christabel" from manuscript which led Scott to produce the "Lay of the Last Minstrel." It gave to all those poets a conception of the possibilities of the English language in freedom of versification, and specially in the expression of supernatural imagery, which was new to them. Their minds drank it in, and appropriated it, as flowers do light. Yet what critic has ever thought to charge them with imitating "Christabel"? Assimilation of it in their poetic culture rendered mannerism in copying it impossible.

Further: it should be observed that identity of opinions with those of a great author is no evidence of assimilation to his genius. It no more follows that a man has a Platonic or an Aristotelian mind because he adopts Platonic or Aristotelian opinions than that his body belongs to one or another of the molluscan species because his digestion craves a molluscan diet. Assimilation goes deeper than the plane of opinions. In any broad culture it will be generous to diverse models. From the fountains of conflicting opinions it will derive the fluids of its own life, and they shall be all the more pure and the more vital for the mingling.

It is a mark of a narrow culture that a man feels no sympathy of resemblance to widely different characters in the history of thought, even to those whose opinions are in flat contradiction. Great minds are more nearly

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alike in their genius than in their opinions. Great and sincere minds tend always to unanimity in their final influence. A student of their works may become more sensible of this than they themselves were. You may derive from them a more generous growth than they had. You may feel the identity in spirit of the very works in which, perhaps, they fought each other as champions of rival factions.

Among the recent discoveries in Athenian architec ture, it has been found that the lines of a Doric column, which have for ages been supposed to be vertical, and parallel to each other, are almost imperceptibly con vergent as they ascend from the pedestal; so that, if projected to an immense height above, they would meet in a point. It is believed that the Greek artistic mind adopted this model, not fortuitously, but with design, to express thus the ultimate oneness of all ideas of beauty.

So it is with the aspirations of great minds as ex pressed in their works. They seem to run in grooves of eternal parallels, in which they can never come together. They might traverse the universe apparently, and come around to the point of their starting, as defi-ant of union as ever. But the great Architect of mind has not so constructed them. An appreciative student of their works may discern, what they could not, — a point in the upper firmament of thought in which the lines of their influence converge, and they become as one mind in their projection upon the world's future.

Do not all generous minds already judge thus of the two great lines of thought represented by Aristotle and Plato? Do not such minds feel the same ultimate

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sympathy between the life's work of Leibnitz and of Bacon? Do we not often catch glimpses of the same destiny of union between Kant and the Scotch philosophers? Let a scholarly mind keep itself open and receptive in its study, and it can not fail to experience this consciousness of the convergence of the great thinkers through the blending of them in its own culture.

One advantage, therefore, of literary study, is that it tends to liberalize mental culture in those lines of thought in which culture is most profound. By such discipline we become disinthralled from partisanship. Be it in philosophy, in theology, in æsthetics, in art, a partisan spirit is sure to be outgrown. Positive as our opinions may be, we spurn bondage to schools of opinion. One of the most striking evidences often of a young man's growth under such discipline as I am advocating is, that he outgrows a school of something in which he was once an enthusiast, and unconsciously a servitor. As we approach maturity of culture, we become conscious that we have a culture which lies deeper than our opinions, and which runs under opposing schools.

Our expressed opinions may often be governed by the wants of our own age or the business of our own profession. They may represent but a fraction of the entire circle of our beliefs. But a perfect culture might master the beliefs of all ages, so as to hold all the truth that was ever in them. Assimilation to the loftiest in literature may give us a vision of truths which minds of narrower discipline will ignore. Thus expanded in its culture, a scholarly mind becomes eclectic in its opinions in every thing. It becomes

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calm also in the utterance of them. It will be generous to opponents in proportion to its trust in itself. It can afford to cherish both these qualities of a liberal mind.

One other remark upon this point of assimilation to the genius of literature is that from its nature it must be the work of time. All mental discipline is such, but this peculiarly: no man reaches it at a bound. A sudden appearance of it in a man's professions is suspicious. He is probably self-deceived. His enthusiasm for the great authors is probably not a genuine growth into their likeness, but an upstart fancy for them, — for their defects, it may be, rather than for their excellences. It may be even so poor a thing as an affectation of sympathy with their reputation, instead of a genuine reverence for their character. In the nature of the case, like all other enduring growths, a true assimilation to the noblest ideals is the process of a lifetime. A collegiate and professional education can do little more than to plant the germ of it, and fertilize the soil which shall nurture it through life.

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