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## ARTICLE VI.

## THE STRUCTURE OF A SERMON.—THE TEXT.

BY PROF. EDWARDS A. PARK.

§ 1 *Definitions of the words, "Sermon," "Preach," "Text."*

A SERMON is "specifically a discourse delivered in public, usually by a clergyman, for the purpose of religious instruction, and grounded on some text or passage of scripture."<sup>1</sup> To preach is "to pronounce a public discourse on a religious subject, or from a text of scripture; to deliver a sermon."<sup>2</sup> Dr. Wayland says: "When we preach we always take, ostensibly as the basis of our discourse, some passage of the word of God. This is called a text; and without it, our communication may be an oration, a speech, a lecture, or an essay, but it is never called a sermon."<sup>3</sup> We cannot say that a speech without a text is *never* called a sermon; for the word "sermon," is often used in other senses than the technical, and denotes not only any kind of religious or even serious, but also any kind of dull, remark. So the word "preach" is not uniformly employed with its distinctive meaning, but is applied to various forms of address, even to any style of conversation which is particularly stupid. The specific sense of the term, however, is well understood. When we say that Edward Everett was once a preacher, that Whitefield "preached more than eighteen thousand sermons,"<sup>4</sup> it is supposed at once that the specified individuals delivered discourses on texts of the Bible. In the present series of Homiletical Essays the words "preach," "preacher," "sermon," will

<sup>1</sup> Webster's Dictionary; word "Sermon."

<sup>2</sup> The word "Preach." Worcester in his Dictionary gives as one definition of this word: "To pronounce a public discourse on a religious subject, or on a text of Scripture."

<sup>3</sup> Letters on the Ministry of the Gospel. By Francis Wayland, p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> Memoirs of George Whitefield. By John Gillics, D.D. p. 221 (Hartford ed.)

be ordinarily used in their technical sense, and an address not introduced by a passage of Holy Writ will be regarded as a speech, discourse, oration, lecture, essay, or something other than a sermon. The statue of President Jackson on one of our American frigates was called the figure-head, after the head of the statue had been clandestinely sawed away. We read narratives of a headless man, and of a bird without wings. When, however, the occasion of our speaking does not qualify the meaning of our terms, we are understood to speak of objects in their normal, rather than their abnormal state.

The word "text" is used by writers on Homiletics in a strict sense. It "is technically applied to any passage quoted from the *text* of scripture as a subject of discourse or sermon."<sup>1</sup>

"How oft when Paul has served us with a text,  
Has Epictetus, Plato, Tully preached."

Etymologically, the text (*texere*, *textus*, *textum*) is a *composition*, a *tissue*, a *texture*, a *web*. The whole Bible is such a composition. A single passage of it is taken out, and, as one part of the web woven by supernatural skill, it is examined with appropriate care; its texture is explained, perhaps unravelled; this is the preacher's text.

## § 2. *The Advantages of Preaching from Biblical Texts.*

I. The practice tends to secure for the pulpit the reverence naturally paid to an ancient usage. In these times and especially in this land, there prevails a tendency to abandon the old because it is old, and to introduce the new because it is new. Ere long, perhaps, this love of novelty will prompt to a restoration of the ancient usages; a return from the new to the old will gratify the prominent desire for one more change. True men, however, retain their instinctive reverence for antiquity. This reverence tends to make them strong and keep them stable. "The past," says Alexander Smith, "is very tender at my heart." If there be no valid objection to the practice of discoursing from Biblical texts,

<sup>1</sup> Richardson's Dictionary; word "Text."

the antiquity of the practice is sufficient to recommend it. We do not pretend that the prophets of the Old Testament adopted the same style of discourse which prevails among the ministers of the New. But the modern style is a reduction of ancient usages to a system. It comprehends in itself the principles which were irregularly followed out by the teachers in the old dispensation. Ezra stood upon the platform "in the open space before one of the gates of Jerusalem," and read the Pentateuch to the assembled people, and he with the Levites at his side "gave the sense and caused [the people] to understand the reading" (Neh. viii. 1-12). The Jews in their synagogues read Moses and the prophets every Sabbath-day (Acts xiii. 27; xv. 21). After the reading of the Scriptures in the synagogue, came, at least occasionally, the *Derash*, the sermon, the "word of consolation." Both the Saviour and the apostles gave their sanction to this service by sometimes preaching the sermon (see Luke iv. 15 sq; Acts xiii. 15 sq). As the words of Moses, so the words of Christ and his disciples, were early made prominent in the Christian church. Jude says (vs. 17): "Remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> The Fathers of the church discoursed from the New Testament as well as from the Old;<sup>3</sup> sometimes from the Apocrypha, also from the Biographies of the saints and

<sup>1</sup> Ordinarily, perhaps, the prophet did little or nothing more than read the original Hebrew, and then translate it into the Chaldaic, the dialect which the Jews of that century were accustomed to employ. So now the Nestorian priests publicly read the Scriptures in the classical Syriac, and then translate it into the spoken dialect of the people.

<sup>2</sup> See Grundriss einer biblischen Keryktik: von Rudolph Stier. § 38.

<sup>3</sup> "St. Justin Martyr in his early account of Christian worship [A.D. 140]. says: 'When the reader [of what the apostles and prophets have written] has finished, he who presides (*προεστώς*, the bishop or president) admonishes and exhorts by word of mouth' (*διὰ λόγου*) to the imitation of their noble deeds.'"—Blunt's Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology; Art. "Preaching." Ostorvald says: "Formerly, when a particular subject was intended to be discussed, they [the Fathers] often took no text at all; which is a further proof that the sermon followed the reading. When a Father ascended the pulpit he simply said: 'My intention to-day is to address you on such and such a subject,' which he then announced."—Essay on the Composition and Delivery of a Sermon (American ed.), p. 54. Ostorvald here implies, but does not state

martyrs. In the fourth century preachers began to confine themselves with greater strictness to the canonical scriptures; in the ninth, to a system of Lessons from them.<sup>1</sup> At the Reformation the law requiring the use of texts became extremely rigid.<sup>2</sup> Thus it has been a common usage of preachers in all ages to discourse on biblical texts. He who departs from such a usage must give a good reason, or else take a merited blame for his departure. The presumption is, that a usage sustained by the wisdom of the ages is a wise one. If it be decidedly unwise, no blame is merited for departing from it.

II. The minister's practice of discoursing from biblical texts is itself appropriate. He is a preacher, a public crier, a herald (*κήρυξ*). If he be thus a proclaimer, what shall he proclaim? He is to proclaim the word of God (2 Tim. iv. 2). But can he proclaim the whole word of God on every Sabbath? He is to give every hearer his portion in due season; and how shall he give every one the fitting part of the divine word otherwise than by proclaiming at one time the truths involved in one passage, and at another time the truths involved in another passage? The language of a commissioned herald is: "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue"; "The Rock of Israel spake to me" (2 Sam. xxiii. 2, 3). John the Baptist preached the duty of repentance. Our Lord and his disciples went through

distinctly, that the subject was ordinarily one suggested by the scripture which had been read, and which thus formed the text of the sermon. Von Ammon says: "We find many among the Fathers of the Eastern and Western churches, and even among the orators of the Middle Ages, who in their religious discourses took either no text at all, or none from the Holy Scriptures. Examples may be found in Theodoret's Discourses on Providence, in Theodore Studita, Rabanus Maurus, Bernard of Clairvaux, Geiler von Kaiserberg, Luther (in his eight sermons against Carlstadt's Works, Part xx. 5. 5). Among the more recent preachers must be here named Ewald, in his sermons on Texts from Nature, Hanover, 1791; Greiling, in the new Practical Matter, drawn from the writings of Kant, for Pulpit Discourses on Sundays and Festivals, in two Parts, Magdeburg, 1810." See von Ammon's *Handbuch der Anleitung zur Kanzelberedsamkeit*. § 35. That the practice of discoursing on Biblical Texts has been without exceptions in the ancient or modern pulpit we by no means pretend.

<sup>1</sup> *Handbuch der Anleitung zur Kanzelberedsamkeit*, von Dr. Christopher Friedrich von Ammon. § 34.

<sup>2</sup> See Hampden's *Bampton Lectures*, pp. 387, 547, 548.

the land "preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God" (Luke viii. 1). The apostles "preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead" (Acts iv. 2). After the martyrdom of Stephen, the disciples "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts viii. 4). It is, therefore, eminently fitting that he who obeys the apostolical injunction: "Preach the word," should expound one text of it at a time.<sup>1</sup>

III. The practice of preaching from inspired texts fosters a spirit of reverence for the inspired volume. It is a perpetual memento of the fact that as the preachers, so the laymen, are to derive their religious faith from the word of God. The habit of *prefixing* to his sermon a biblical passage, is a more obvious token of the minister's veneration for the Bible than is the habit of citing various passages in the progress of the sermon. His *first* utterance makes the deepest impression, and his first utterance is a virtual announcement that it is not he who speaks, but it is the very Spirit who indited the text for the world's admonition. If the preacher read his sermon, he places it on the open Bible, as a sign that all which he says is founded on the divine message. He stands behind his discourse and behind the sacred volume, so that if he aim to project himself into the foreground his elocution belies him. His use of the text has a tendency to preserve in his mind the spirit of the gospel. If he be tempted to deliver scientific or political lectures instead of evangelical sermons, the necessity of beginning his lectures with the words of inspiration, operates as a restraint upon him. It is a perpetual memento of his duty to revere the divine word, and to preach nothing but that word. He may, indeed, attach a verse of scripture to his secular oration, but it will be like sewing a white piece of cloth upon a black garment: a violation of good taste. His use of a text in these circumstances, is regarded as a resort to a *pretext* (*praetextum*). Vinet compares it to a steeple surmounting a play-house.

<sup>1</sup> See Blunt's Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology; Art. "Preaching."

IV. The practice of discoursing on passages of the Bible leads the preacher to explain them. It is thus useful to himself, as well as to his hearers—to himself, for he must know what he makes known, and in order to teach the divine word he must study it; to his hearers, for the word gives them light and life, many of them depend on the pulpit for the larger part of their biblical knowledge. From hearing two or three inspired paragraphs explained every week, attentive listeners may derive a mass of solid information during the year. They may be, as it were, inspired intellectually and morally, by the thoughts uttered at first by the holy men of old who were inspired miraculously. The whole spiritual nature of a people is quickened sometimes by the clear exposition of biblical phrases. These phrases enliven the entire discourse. The text is the head of the sermon, as the brain is in the head of the body, and starts the life and action of all the members.

V. The practice of discoursing on biblical texts serves to invest the preacher's word with authority. His word has been compared to a kernel protected by an envelope which cannot be crushed. Men have, in greater or smaller degrees, a distrust in themselves, and are thus inclined to lean on the assertions of others. They have a constitutional faith in testimony, and so far forth as the witness is unimpeachable, just so far is his assertion an authority. The Bible is the word of an omniscient and perfectly veracious witness. When a preacher unfolds a part of this word, he simply repeats what this authoritative witness bids him repeat. The subjects on which he rehearses this divine testimony are those which affect the eternal condition of men. On such themes men are peculiarly unsatisfied with their own unaided reasonings, and feel a peculiar demand for some testimony which shall be decisive and ultimate. The preacher gives them the authority which they need; and, being an appointed expounder of the divine word, he is fitly called the president or the ruler,<sup>1</sup> as well as the minister or servant, of his church.

<sup>1</sup> *Thess. v. 12*; *1 Tim. v. 17*; *Heb. xiii. 7, 17, etc.*

His arguments may not convince his auditors; but his citation of the Bible may control them.

The authority given to the preacher by his texts is particularly desirable in those discourses which contain or suggest a reprimand. The inspired word gives the reproof, and he is thus freed from the charge of personality. If he did not preface his address with a passage of scripture, he would often be awkward in stating his theme; but especially so when his theme has an objurgatory sound. Not only the most convenient, but altogether the most impressive, way of inculcating the virtue of hospitality is to introduce the text: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers," etc. (Heb. xiii. 2). A rich yet culpatory sermon on the decencies of social intercourse was delivered by a man who would not have ventured his criticisms, except under the intimations of the Great Teacher: "When thou art bidden—to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room,—but—go and sit down in the lowest room," etc. (Luke xiv. 7–11).

VI. The habit of discoursing on passages of the Bible serves to attract the attention of men to the truth, and awaken their interest in it. An important sentence uttered by an unaided orator will have far less power than that identical sentence uttered by a prophet or apostle. Men who will not listen to the voice of a human preacher will be aroused by the voice of God. There is something, too, in the Oriental style of the Bible which engages the interest of Occidentals. When Isaiah cries out: "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and say unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. xl. 2), the attention of hearers is aroused to the seeming incongruity of rejoicing in a double chastisement. When the preacher explains the idiom as denoting that Jerusalem has received abundance of favor, notwithstanding her desert of punishment, the hearers are surprised by a sudden thought of the divine grace, which returns unmeasured good for evil; and this thought, electrically entering their minds, retains

its power over them. Notwithstanding the latent infidelity of men, they are startled by a sound from heaven, and when they are amazed at its mysterious import, they are prepared to feel a new interest in its interpretation. Written in different ages, in different countries and dialects, the Bible is rich and various in its methods of giving instruction. If a preacher adapt his discourses to the diversified style of his texts, he may preserve the fresh interest of his auditors in his fresh and diversified remarks. Each verse on which he discourses may suggest some new train, or at least new shading, of thought; some variety of matter, or at least of manner. Where the substance remains the same, the form changes. Two verses, like two blossoms of a pomegranate, are seldom found exactly alike. When a scientist,<sup>1</sup> eminent for his acquaintance with geology, chemistry, botany, and various branches of zoölogy, as well as with the science of the Bible, was called to his reward, the sermon preached at his funeral<sup>2</sup> elicited the closer attention in consequence of the text, which gave it a novel character: "And he spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spake also of beasts and of fowls and of creeping things and of fishes" (1 Kings iv. 33).

VII. The practice of discoursing on passages in the Bible tends to fasten religious truth in the memory of the hearers. The Bible they may have always with them. The text on which they heard a sermon may be a remembrancer of the teachings which otherwise might have been forgotten. It suggests in a compressed, what was given in an expanded, form by their pastor. In private they read the words: "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph. ii. 8). This compendious sentence is an epitome of four great doctrines—our desert of punishment, our rescue by divine grace, our faith as the condition of our rescue, our dependence on the Holy Spirit for our faith. The readers now remember the method in which these four truths were interlaced with each other in

<sup>1</sup> Rev. President Hitchcock.

<sup>2</sup> By Rev. Dr. Tyler.

a sermon which had otherwise well nigh vanished from the memory. As the text is a memento of the discourse, so each of the truths unfolded in the discourse is a memento of the text, which interlinks them all. The very name of a doctrine is often a mnemonic sign of an inspired verse, as the verse is a mnemonic sign of the doctrines which have been seen to cluster in and around it. Still, it is true, as Bishop Burnet says, that "many will remember the text that remember nothing else. Therefore such a choice should be made as may at least put a weighty and speaking sentence of the scriptures upon the memories of the people."<sup>1</sup>

There are other advantages resulting from the practice of discoursing on biblical passages. These will be intimated in succeeding parts of this Essay.

### § 3. *Objections to the Use of Texts.*

Some of these have been happily stated by Voltaire,<sup>2</sup> in the following oft-quoted passage: "It were to be wished that Bourdaloue, in banishing from the pulpit the bad taste which disgraced it, had also banished the custom of preaching on a text. Indeed, to speak long on a quotation of a line or two, to exhaust one's self in subjecting a whole discourse to the control of this line, seems a trifling labor, little worthy of the dignity of the ministry. The text becomes a sort of motto, or rather enigma, which the discourse develops." Let us consider the particular forms in which the objections of Voltaire and others are presented:

I. A short text cannot afford matter for a long discourse.

The text need not be short, nor the discourse long, some will reply. Bishop Sherlock was wont to plead for "long texts and short sermons," much reading of the Bible, and little comment on it. Others will reply: "Genius makes its observations in short-hand; talent writes them out at length"; so inspiration has compressed into a narrow compass what the uninspired intellect must expand into a broad space. The text is the seed, and the sermon is the tree; a large oak

<sup>1</sup> Pastoral Care, chap. ix. p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> Age of Louis XIV.

may spring up from a small acorn. The very writers who think that a verse from the Bible cannot suggest thought enough for a half-hour's discourse are able to write lengthened chapters on a single apothegm of Goethe or Richter. They can devote a volume to the saying that "thorns and briers are but discouraged buds." There is a pregnant thought in the few words of Prov. xxvii. 1; Eccl. ix. 10; Ps. xc. 7, 8. This idea is expressed by Ben Ezra: "The day is short, and the work is much"; by the Latin version, "Ars longa, vita brevis"; by our own vernacular: "Art is long, and time is fleeting." The uninspired aphorism is said to condense the wisdom of the race upon the theme; why does not the inspired? "He who cherishes enmity throws ashes against the wind, and will be covered by them, as they are at once blown back upon him." Here is an apothegm of Buddha, and it is fruitful of admonition. Is there less of truth or power in the aphorism of Prov. xxvi. 27: "Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein, and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him"? There is the simple phrase: "God is love" (1 John iv. 8); the greatest ideas on the moral attributes of Jehovah are presented in those three words. There is the simple announcement: "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. xiii. 10); the entire system of ethics is suggested in those seven words.

II. In replying to this we are reminded of another objection which contradicts this, if it does not even neutralize it. We are told that if a man found his discourse on a verse of the Bible he will be apt to sacrifice unity of thought, or, in order to preserve a semblance of unity, he will resort to forced and unmanly connectives. When Voltaire objected to the common mode of preaching, he had before him many sad specimens of pulpit style. The sermons of the church Fathers, of the orators in the Middle Ages, of preachers in the seventeenth century, are, occasionally, attempts to exhaust the meaning of a biblical passage; are sometimes crowded with desultory remarks, often introduce artificial and puerile constructions, dissect words rather than discuss principles.

The text may be poetical, but the prosaic sentiments of the sermon are twisted into a correspondency with the Oriental poem. The text may comprehend a large variety of thought; a sermon swells itself out of all proportion in attempting the same comprehensiveness.

The objection is plausible but unnecessary. The preacher need not follow the order of the inspired words, when in order to follow it he must sacrifice the unity of his discourse. He may announce at the outset that he will confine himself to certain suggestions of his text, and may omit its other suggestions. If a passage be too general or discursive for the fit impression of a sermon, it need not be taken as the text; other and parallel passages may be found to supply its place. If in some exceptional instance this cannot be, then in such an instance a desultory sermon may be allowed. This may be one variety in the Sabbath services which ought to be somewhat diversified. There are times when a minister may discourse on a passage which wanders at its own sweet will through rich and various scenes; his homily may wander with the text, and may be as natural and easy as an *Essay* of Elia. Charles Lamb was a careful student of Jeremy Taylor's discourses, and some of these discourses, while they correspond with their texts, are as unconstrained in their flow as are the writings of the *Essayist*.

III. An objection kindred to the preceding is, that a minister is tempted by the phraseology of his text to overlook the principle of it. As soon as he recites the biblical words he is induced to comment upon them, and neglect the main thought suggested by them.

The reply to the objection is obvious. The temptation must be resisted. The minister need not hide the grand idea under the circumstantial intimations of his text. He may unfold this idea in as scientific a method as if it were unfolded independently of the Bible. True, he need not always discuss a subject in its logical relations; he must diversify his methods of preaching; but he is never obliged, even if he be tempted, to sacrifice a great and sacred thought

to the forms in which the thought may be presented in the Oriental paragraph on which he discourses. While describing the drapery we may be tempted to withdraw all attention from the form and expression of the statue; but in so doing we overstep the limits of propriety.

The objection which we thus answer, is like that which precedes it, a serious one. There is no doubt that a minister instead of using his text often abuses it, by neglecting the main idea which it suggests. "For instance, a man might take for his text Luke xiii. 3: 'Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.' He might commence with a recital of the various opinions which have been entertained concerning the event which gave rise to this saying of the Saviour. Who were these men whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices; and did this event occur at Jerusalem, or in Galilee; and for what cause was this cruelty inflicted? This naturally leads to the history of Pilate; his appointment as procurator of Judea; his general character for cruelty, meanness, and cupidity; his deposition by Vitellius, and his subsequent death by suicide." "Now if this were clothed in a style of unexceptionable rhetoric, interspersed with illustrations from science and history, and the occurrences of every day life, and delivered with animation and zeal, who doubts that it would pass with a large part of many a congregation for what is called a splendid effort? The style was polished to a hair; the history of Pilate exhibited research; the illustrations, drawn from a large range of knowledge and observation, were apposite; and what could any one ask for more? The sermon may be laid away in a safe place, and become one of the stock discourses of the author."<sup>1</sup>

IV. By founding his addresses upon ancient, especially Oriental sayings, a minister introduces a mannerism into the pulpit. He becomes peculiar, singular. The classic authors of antiquity did not write essays on phrases culled from the writings of their predecessors; lawyers and statesmen of mod-

<sup>1</sup> Letters on the Ministry of the Gospel. By Francis Wayland, pp. 67, 69.

ern times do not found their remarks on selected apothegms or distichs. Our essayists are not bound to any such rule.

To this we reply: The great speeches of old and recent times have at their basis definite propositions, and these are virtually texts; it is common for political orators to speak on resolutions, motions, etc., which are essentially texts. When they address an assembly their precise topic is often pre-announced, their text is placarded in the streets. True, the announcement which they make of their theme is not exactly like that which the preacher makes. They have no inspired volume which presents authoritative statements of their subject. It is meet for the men who *have* an inspired volume as their directory, to make that volume prominent by discoursing upon it. They have a peculiar office, and are therefore justified in adopting a style somewhat peculiar. Besides, many essayists, like Addison and Coleridge, have chosen to preface their compositions with some aphorism of a departed sage; they have not made this aphorism a directory of their composition, but have used it merely as a motto. It is right that a preacher distinguish his sermon from a secular essay. He is a minister of the word; is thus "made to differ" from other men; the speaking from a passage of this word is a fitting badge of his office; it puts him into a line of apostolical succession. It suggests an argument for the divinity of the gospel. Pagan sages had no gospel, of course did not found their discourses upon one; they aimed not to instruct a populace in the principles of virtue, but to convince educated men of certain abstract truths, or to gain from the people a temporary verdict. The sacred orator aims to instruct the masses, not merely to give them great ideas, but to stimulate both the ignorant and the learned to a life of virtue; not to secure a vote on a single question, but to fix a living principle in the minds of men, women and children. When he stands up as a herald, and proclaims a message from the Master of the assembly, he stands as a living exemplification of the truth: "To the poor the gospel is preached." The preaching of the gospel, instead of

the writing about it, for the benefit of the poor as well as the rich, forms one distinction between the office of a minister and that of a philosopher, statesman, or advocate. The use of a biblical text illustrates this distinction.

V. We will name only one more objection to the use of texts: It is said that Christ and his apostles often discoursed without them. Reply: How often, we do not know. They came to furnish texts for us. The ministry of the New Testament was not fully defined in their day. We certainly conform to the spirit of these addresses, even if we are more regular than they in discoursing on the inspired word. The very fragmentary remarks of Peter in Acts i. 15 and Acts ii. 14-36 are as much penetrated with the teachings of the Old Testament as if these teachings were the texts of these remarks.

#### § 4. *Different Methods of Selecting Texts.*

I. Some ministers confine themselves to the order of texts prescribed by the authorities of their church. These authorities have arranged various passages of the Bible in a manner adapted to the Sabbaths and the festivals of the year, and require, more or less rigidly, that the pastors select their topics from the established Lessons. It is possible to make such an arrangement of Biblical passages as will be attended with some good results. When the choice of his themes is left to the minister himself he may be one-sided in his selection of them; he may have a small class of favorite subjects, not the most important, nor the most appropriate; he may lose the richness and freshness, perhaps also the dignity, which befit the ministrations of the Lord's house. The partizans of one theological school have been noted for the frequency of their preaching from the words: "Make you a new heart and a new spirit"; the partizans of another school have preached from the words, as their counter-sign: "Not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." The favorite theme of one class has been, "Live peaceably with all men"; of another class, "First pure, then peaceable." If a minister

select his own themes he may form a habit of choosing such as will hit the faults of some obnoxious hearer. Even if he do not intend to practise as a sharp-shooter, he may be suspected of such a design. But when he is obliged to take the theme prescribed in a Lectionary, he may be saved from the habit of making personal assaults, and from the suspicion of assorting his texts as a gunner assort his bullets. His own individuality is hidden behind the rubric which prescribes his themes. When hundreds or thousands of ministers use the same Pericope, and discourse at the same time on the same topic, they may catch a new life from this symbol of their unity in the faith. Their concert of thought gives them strength. They may also be inspired by the reflection that on the same Sabbath, the first or the last, the fifth or the fiftieth of the year, when they are speaking of an attribute of Jehovah, or the resurrection of Christ, their forefathers were speaking of that identical subject on that identical part of the year one, two, three, or more centuries gone by. Thus are the preachers of the present age linked with each other and with their ancestors. These and similar advantages are enough to recommend the habit of a minister's familiarizing himself with the various Lectionaries which are presented for various denominations of Christians.<sup>1</sup>

II. Some ministers choose their own texts without regard to any prescribed formulary. The permanent system of lessons for the pulpit is fruitful of some good, but the free choice of texts is fruitful of more. There are exigencies in the condition of the pastor, there are signal peculiarities in the state of his hearers, there are in the nation as well as in

<sup>1</sup> The use of a Pericope is well defended in Schott's *Theorie der Beredsamkeit*: Zweiter Theil. Kap. 1. Absch. 2. The most radical objections to the ordinary Lutheran Lessons are given by Thies in his *Anleitung zur Amtsberedsamkeit der öffentlichen Religionslehre des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Theil 1. Absch. 2. Professor Thies proscribes, almost entirely, the selection of texts from the Old Testament and from the Epistles, but justifies a selection from the words of Christ as recorded in the Gospels. He recommends the publication of a Biblical Chrestomathy for the use of laymen as well as clergymen, and would confine it to certain seed-thoughts in the writings of apostles and prophets but nearly altogether to the teachings of Jesus.

the church, sudden occurrences which require the selection of texts whose pertinence could not have been foreseen.<sup>1</sup> The necessity of choosing his own themes is an habitual stimulus to the pastor's inquiries into the needs of his parishioners, and the fitnesses of the Bible to meet them. He may preach more earnestly from a text suggested by his own investigations than from one suggested by ecclesiastical authorities. A skater has a more graceful movement without a skater's chair than with it. The preacher *may* be less, but he *can* and *should* be more, various and appropriate in his teachings, if he may have a free range through the Bible, than if he be required to discourse on the same texts every successive year, be it a year of plenty or famine, of rain or drought, health or pestilence, peace or war.

Still, here as elsewhere, liberty may merge itself into license; and as the advantages, so the perils, of freedom may be greater than those of restraint. Here, too, as well as elsewhere, a strong man may overcome the evils of an inferior system, and a weak man may lose the benefits of a superior one. Reinhard, discoursing on prescribed texts, is far more various in his teachings than many a pastor who chooses his own themes. There is many a preacher who, whatever his text may be, discourses on a small number of topics. A former president of a New England college remarked, that he had sat seventeen years under the preaching of a very good man, and yet never heard from him more than four distinct sermons; one thanksgiving sermon, one fast sermon, one funeral sermon, and one general sermon.

III. Some preachers habitually select their text before they determine their precise theme, some habitually choose their theme before their text, and some alternate between the selection of their text first and the determination of their theme first.

1. If a minister habitually choose his text first, he will be apt to make his discourses more biblical, more distinctively

<sup>1</sup> Abraham Lincoln was assassinated on the evening of Good Friday, while hundreds of pastors were preparing their jubilant sermons for Easter Sunday.

*sermons* instead of essays ; to familiarize himself more closely with the divine word, to accustom his hearers to regard that word as a peculiar treasure, *the book* among books. He will have a new motive for searching the Bible with his eye upon its moral intimations, and to keep for himself a *repertorium* of texts which have suggested to him a course of profitable thought. If he make his own selection of suggestive paragraphs from the Bible, he will be far more richly furnished for his work, than if he use a selection made by another man.<sup>1</sup> He will feel a new impulse to offer the prayer of Jeremy Taylor : " Holy and eternal Jesus, whose whole life and doctrine was a perpetual sermon of holy life, a treasure of wisdom, and a repository of divine materials for meditation, — give me grace to understand, diligence and attention to consider, care to lay up, and carefulness to reduce to practice all those actions, discourses, and pious lessons and intimations, by which thou didst expressly teach, or tacitly imply, or mysteriously signify, our duty." He will have a new inducement to study those biblical commentaries which bring out the spiritual meaning of the inspired words ; also those devotional memoirs and meditations which unfold in pithy language the hints of the Bible. Thus noticing the words, Exodus xxxiv. 29 : " When he came down from the mount Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him," McCheyne writes : " Oh for closest communion with God, till soul and body — head, face, and heart — shine with heavenly brilliancy ; *but oh for a holy ignorance of our shining.*" Evans, meditating on 1 Sam. iii. 9 : " It shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord ; for thy servant heareth," writes : " Oh to be willing to hear what the Lord is speaking to us, speak what he will, how he will, when he will, and by whom he will." Suggest-

<sup>1</sup> " If I make a Chart of History for myself," said Professor Niedner, the successor of Neander at Berlin, " I find it of great service to me ; but a Chart made by another man is to me of but little use." So the multitude of books like " Themes for the Pulpit," the Five Volumes of Simcon's *Skeletons of Sermons*, will aid a preacher far less than a collection of texts which he has prepared himself, and accompanied with his own sketches of thoughts upon them.

tions like these may easily start trains of thought which will be epitomes of sermons. Let the pastor's memory be stored with such intimations, and he may quickly bring forth from his treasure-house things new and old. Let him be familiar with the Bible as a repository of spiritual thoughts, and he will never be perplexed by want of a theme for a sermon.

2. If a minister habitually choose his subject first, he will be apt to make his sermons more logical, and more conducive to unity of impression, and, perhaps, more distinctively appropriate to his auditors. "A subject being chosen," says Dr. Campbell, "the next thing to be sought is the text."<sup>1</sup> Robert Hall stated to Dr. Olinthus Gregory, "that he never proceeded even to think of adopting a specific text as fitted for a sermon until the matter of it stood out in the form of a particular, distinct, and precise topic; he would then take it up and lay it down as he pleased."<sup>2</sup> When a clergyman reads a system of theology or of ethics, he may be impressed by the moral bearing of a truth, and may detect a simple plan of unfolding that one truth, without its irrelevant adjuncts in a sermon. That truth has its proof texts; any one of them, or all of them may be used as the basis of the sermon; and thus the sermon, although in the technical sense a logical rather than a biblical one, may be in its substantial character eminently biblical. Mr. Cecil says: "The meaning of the Bible is the Bible;" and a discourse on a doctrine or duty may be a condensation of what the scriptures mean, even when it does not give an exegesis of a single passage. If a minister desire to impress upon his hearers a conviction of the unity in God's works, the correspondency between the book of nature and the book of revelation, he may accustom himself to a reverent study of the sciences, may detect moral suggestions in the skies, the fields, the woods, and these suggestions he may embody in discourses, for which the fitting texts will present themselves. He may find "sermons in stones, books in the running brooks," and

<sup>1</sup> Lectures on Systematic Theology and Pulpit Eloquence, p. 401.

<sup>2</sup> Works of Robert Hall (American ed.), Vol. iii. p. 39.

these may remind him of numerous scriptures which turn the eye from the works to the Great Worker. If he desire to depict the special condition of his hearers, he may gather the themes of his sermons from his parochial visits. The substance of several paragraphs in a popular German work is this: 'I do not seek for my themes; they come to me. I do not read books in order to determine what subjects I should discourse upon, for if I depend on books my subjects become too general, I am inclined to preach on "the Duty of Thankfulness," "the Nature of Benevolence," "the Workings of Faith," "the Evil Results of Sin." But my hearers have their specific forms of sin, their individual phases of virtue, and I ought to preach on these rather than on generalities. Hence I find my themes in the daily life of my parishioners, in their expressions of spiritual weakness or want, their complaints about themselves, or about each other, their methods of conducting their daily work, the spirit and results of their amusements, their style of conversation in the field, the street, the parlor. My themes suggest themselves to me as I listen to the words of my servants, my children, my wife: as I watch the current of my secret thoughts. The mental condition of my own household intimates various duties which belong to all my parishioners.'<sup>1</sup>

3. If a minister vary his method, sometimes finding his themes in the perusal of the Bible, sometimes in the systematic examination of theological treatises, or in the field of natural theology, or in his daily walks among his people, or in the study of his own heart, he may gain the good results, and avoid the evil results, of confining himself to either one of the two preceding methods. When he preaches a course of doctrinal or ethical sermons, he naturally selects his topic first. When he preaches a course of expository sermons he, of course, chooses his text first. Alternating from the topical to the textual method, he introduces variety and freshness into his services. One man is better fitted to start from the Bible and stop with practical maxims; another to begin with

<sup>1</sup> Andeutungen aus dem Gebiete der Geistlichen Beredsamkeit von Dr. Johann Karl Wilhelm Alt. Erstes Heft. ss. 1-8. 17-28.

practical maxims and end with the Bible, which is the epitome of true wisdom. When all preachers lie on a bed of Procrustes the parishioners are wearied of the uniformity, and go to sleep.

§ 5. *The Fitnesses of Passages of the Bible for Texts of Sermons.*

The fact that a single advantage results from the use of biblical texts does not imply that this advantage results especially, nor in an equal degree, from the use of every text. We have seen that the reasons for founding our discourses on biblical paragraphs are diverse: one of the reasons is conspicuous in a sermon founded on one paragraph, another of them in a sermon founded on a second paragraph; two or three reasons are prominent in a sermon founded on a third passage; all of them are combined in a sermon founded on a fourth. This fourth is the corner-stone, most admirably fitted to the edifice which rests upon it and is adorned by it. The expression of the woman of Samaria: "Come see a man which hath told me all things that ever I did" (John iv. 29), does not combine all the good qualities which may belong to the text of a sermon; is not a divinely inspired assertion of Christ's superior knowledge; it is, however, a divinely inspired record of the influence which the words of Christ exerted upon the woman, and like the cognate expression: "Never man spake like this man," it has a divine sanction in proving that he taught "with authority, and not as the scribes."

I. Those passages which involve a moral principle are, in that one particular, fitted for texts.

The biblical record of facts is sometimes regarded as a mere historical statement, and a sermon is sometimes devoted to it, not as to a moral lesson, but as to an interesting narrative. There is a kind of pedantry which may be mistaken for a love of biblical preaching. Not a few sermons *approach*, we do not say that they *reach*, the degree of secularity which President Wayland characterizes thus:

"Suppose we take for our text Luke xxiv. 13: 'And behold two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs.'

"We might begin by a learned discussion on the length of the Jewish furlong; we might compare it with the Roman measures of distance, with the Persian parasang, with the furlong in use among us; and thus determine, with apparent accuracy in miles, rods, and yards, how far Emmaus was from Jerusalem. We might then inquire where this village stood whether east, west, north, or south from Jerusalem, and inform our audience of all the places now existing which have been taken for this locality, with the reasons which have been adduced in favor of each. If, as might be the case, the preacher himself had visited Jerusalem, he might tell us of the labor he had spent in the personal investigation of this subject: how carefully he had paced the distance between Jerusalem and the various localities which claimed to be the village of Emmaus. He might describe the nature of the soil; the loveliness of a summer morning in Judaea; the face of the country; the conversation of his Arab guides, and their incessant call at every turn of the road for additional burksbeek. Finally, he might return to the point whence he commenced, by confessing that, with all this laborious inquiry, he had been unable to ascertain the locality of Emmaus, and that probably the very foundation of the little village had been erased from the face of the earth. He might close by inquiring who the two disciples were to whom reference is made in the text; imagine their feelings as they ascended the hill that gave them a full view of Jerusalem, and their feelings as they descended it, and the wicked city was hidden from their sight."<sup>1</sup>

In the forty-six or forty-seven volumes of Reinhard's sermons there is not seldom an artificial and forced interpretation of his text. The design of it is to educe a spiritual lesson from words which appear to state a mere historical fact. On the whole, however, he deserves high praise for his skill in drawing out the moral truth which was hidden in his text, as a statue lies in a block of marble. Discoursing on the cure of the leper, and on the command of Jesus: "See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded," etc. (Mat. viii. 4), the German preacher reminds us, not only of our obligation to be thankful for the gift of health, and to express our gratitude in forms of public as well as private worship, but also of many such facts as these: Christ intended to

<sup>1</sup> Letters on the Ministry of the Gospel, pp. 65, 66.

abolish the Mosaic economy, still he insisted on the observance of it during his lifetime, he waited for the fitting hour, and in this way he teaches us that we should not be overhasty in executing our benevolent purposes; we should employ wisdom and forecast in our arrangements for usefulness; we should observe a due order in our use of even the most extraordinary opportunities for doing good; we should temper zeal with discretion. Christ never gave "advice unsafe, precipitous, and bold." Discoursing on the story of the centurion (Matt. viii. 5-13) Reinhard reminds us that Christ praises the Roman officer while he blames the Jews; hence comes the duty of freeing ourselves from a partizan spirit; of reproofing sin in our friends, and of praising virtue wherever found in strangers and national enemies; of loving all the members of our race, for some of them surprise us by their developments of moral worth; of cherishing a confidence in the future of Christianity, for this is to be, as it is fitted to be, the religion of the world, and every new convert should prompt us to exclaim, as our Lord was inspired to say: "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (vs. 11). In the general the discourses of Reinhard deserve to be studied as illustrating the importance of searching for the moral principle which is enveloped in the text, as the kernel is concealed within its integuments. That principle is the real text, and is woven into the whole texture of revealed truth.

II. Those passages are best fitted for texts which, when so employed, most aptly represent the spirit of the Bible; make the impression most faithful to the intent of the inspired word *as a whole*.

Half of the truth is often a falsehood. There may be times when the *law* has been proclaimed so continuously, that the most fitting texts are those which illustrate the freeness of the *gospel*. On the other hand, there may be times when the freeness of the *gospel* has been discoursed upon so often, that the most fitting texts are those which exhibit the nature of

the law. The gospel presupposes the law. The former cannot be understood without the latter. The New Testament cannot be comprehended without the Old, and the Old Testament is obscure without the New. "The difference between the law and the gospel does not lie in their precepts, but in their promises." One rhetorician tells us, "You must not preach on any texts except the words of Christ"; another, "You must preach only on the Gospels"; another, "Only on the writings of the original disciples"; another, "Only on the New Testament." The truth is, we should preach on the Old Testament and the New, just as the mental state of our hearers may require; on the Old Testament as inclosing the New, on the New as developing the principles of the Old; on the New and the Old as exhibiting the whole truth of God. Many of our elder divines have preached disproportionately, and thus unfitly, on the Old Testament. Many of our modern divines have rushed into the opposite extreme.<sup>1</sup> One of

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to notice the peculiar characteristic of preachers, as it is developed in the texts which they have chosen. A popular writer says that of nineteen hundred and twenty-five sermons preached by John Calvin during two decades of his ministry, thirteen hundred and thirty-seven were on texts from the Old Testament, five hundred and eighty-eight from the New, but not one from the Gospels. In the Old Testament, three hundred and forty-three were from Isaiah, two hundred from Deuteronomy, one hundred and seventy-four from Ezekiel, one hundred and twenty-three from Genesis, ninety-four from the Psalms, ninety-one from Jeremiah, sixty-five from Ezra, fifty-nine from Job, forty-seven from Daniel, forty-three from Amos, twenty-eight from Micah, twenty-five from Lamentations, seventeen from Joel and Zephaniah, each; six from Jonah, and five from Obadiah. In the New Testament, one hundred and eighty-nine were from the Acts, one hundred and ten from First Corinthians, sixty-six from Second Corinthians, fifty-five from First Timothy, forty-eight from Titus, forty-six from Thessalonians, forty-three from Galatians, and thirty-one from Second Timothy.

I have not attempted to verify this statement, but I find that in eleven volumes of the sermons of Dr. Samuel Clark, who is well-known to have had no sympathy with Calvinism, there are forty sermons on texts from the Old Testament, and a hundred and twenty-four on texts from the New. Of those from the Old Testament eight are from the Book of Job, seven from the Psalms, five from the Proverbs; three from Ecclesiastes and Isaiah, each; two from Genesis, Deuteronomy, Daniel, and Malachi, each; and one from Exodus, Leviticus, First Samuel, First Kings, Second Chronicles, and Jeremiah, each. Of those from the New Testament twenty-three are from Matthew, fourteen from First

them, designing to prove that God will not hear a sinful prayer, chose for his text John ix. 31, rather than Isaiah i. 11-15, although the passage from the New Testament contains the words of only an uninspired man, and the passage from the Old Testament contains the words of Jehovah himself.

III. The fact that a biblical passage has a divine authority gives it a fitness to be used as the text of a sermon.

A true minister does not utter "for doctrines the commandments of men," for to him, in a special degree, "are committed the oracles of God." He speaks "as the oracles of God"; he preaches "the word." All this implies that he does not derive his texts from the Apocrypha, nor from the writings of Greek and Roman sages. Thiess recommends the collecting of suggestive sentences from the works of ancient and modern authors: the publishing of a volume which will be a moral anthology, a new evangel for the discourses of the pulpit.<sup>1</sup> The "Friends of light" have been wont to discourse in the pulpit on aphorisms selected from the writings of Goethe, Richter, Shakespeare. If, however, the canonical scriptures were "given by inspiration of God," and if a minister has received the command: 'Preach the preaching that I bid thee,' he should distinguish the Bible from all other books by preaching upon it alone.<sup>2</sup>

Corinthians, twelve from Luke, ten from Romans; nine from John, Hebrews, and Revelation, each; six from Galatians, five from First John, four from Acts, three from Mark, Ephesians, and Colossians, each; two from Second Corinthians, Philipians, Second Timothy, Titus, and First Peter, each; and one from Second Thessalonians, First Timothy, James, and Jude, each.

In a volume of sermons by Rev. Henry Melvill, there are twenty-three sermons on texts from the Old Testament and thirty-two from the New; seven are from the Psalms, three from Genesis; two from Deuteronomy, First Chronicles, and Job, each; and one from Second Samuel, Nehemiah, Esther, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Micah, and Zechariah, each; six from Matthew; four from John and Hebrews, each; three from Luke; two from Acts, Romans, Galatians, Philipians, and Revelation, each; and one from Mark, First Corinthians, Ephesians, Second Timothy, and Second Peter, each.

<sup>1</sup> Anleitung zur Amtsberedsamkeit der öffentlichen Religionslehrer des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, von Johann Otto Thiess. § 109.

<sup>2</sup> Even Von Ammon, in his Handbuch der Anleitung zur Kanzelberedsamkeit,

1. Here arises a question: Shall we preach from the words of an uninspired person as they are recorded by the inspired writers? Ought we not to found our discourses exclusively on such *inspired* sayings of *good* men as are treasured up in the Bible? Do we not degrade a sermon by preaching on the uninspired words of bad men?

In answer to this question, it may be said:

A. We should never use the words of an uninspired person as if they had in themselves a divine authority. There are certain remarks made by Simon Peter, and over which he wept, and on which, as if they were inspired, no minister would found a discourse. "It was a most absurd choice which one made of a text for a sermon on the future glory of the saints in heaven. This sublime doctrine he chose to treat from these words of the serpent to our first mother Eve (Gen. iii. 5): "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." For, though the words taken abstractly might be apposite enough, we know that as they stand in scripture they have no relation to the heavenly happiness. But what renders them still more exceptionable as a text is, they are the words of the father of lies, and, in the sense in which he used them, contain a lie, and were employed but too successfully for the purpose of seduction."<sup>1</sup>

B. We may preach on the words of an uninspired person as they are recorded in the Bible, and as illustrating the nature, relations, or power of truth. It has pleased the original Author of the scriptures to detail the expressions of uninspired men, and thus to exhibit the essence and the workings of the doctrine which he was revealing to the race. Multitudes of discourses have been founded on the words (incorrectly explained, however) of Agrippa, Acts xvi. 25, on such remarks of Pontius Pilate as are found in John xviii. 38, on the sayings of Judas Iscariot, Ahab, Adam,

§ 36, says: "The objective divinity of the contents of the Bible receives from the subjective divinity of its origin a credibility which strengthens the religious conviction of the educated man, and serves instead of full proof for the uneducated."

<sup>1</sup> Lectures on Systematic Theology and Pulpit Eloquence. By George Campbell, D.D., pp. 419, 420.

Eve. Several noted, some very ingenious, sermons have been written on the words of the demoniacs, as in Mark i. 24,<sup>1</sup> and on those of the prince of devils, as in Gen. iii. 4.<sup>2</sup> Are not the sayings of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle as dignified and affluent as the words of Cain and Esau? This is not the question. The question is: Are we not bound to treat with special veneration the narratives of "holy men of God," "who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," and who have detailed the operation of divine truth upon the hearts of the wicked and the weak, as well as of the virtuous and the strong?

Besides, there are words uttered by uninspired, and recorded by inspired, men which are peculiarly effective as texts of sermons. We are not authorized to acquiesce in all the sentiments ascribed by the sacred penman to Job; but we should be loath to be interdicted from preaching on his words: "There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest" (Job iii. 17). We are not bound to approve of all the opinions expressed by Eliphaz the Temanite; but we should be sorry to be prohibited from discoursing on his truly sublime saying: "In thoughts from the visions of the night," etc. (Job iv. 13-19). Zophar uttered the sentences: "Canst thou by searching find out God?" etc., etc. (Job xi. 7-9). These form an admirable basis for a sermon; yet some of Zophar's thoughts failed to

<sup>1</sup> One of the most pungent sermons ever preached in (a town noted for pungent sermons) Franklin, Massachusetts, was on Mark v. 6, 7, 17. The proposition was: The demoniac among the Gadarenes worshipped Christ as the Son of God, and the Gadarenes themselves besought him to depart out of their coasts. "The men of this world form the only ignorant and stupid part of the intelligent creation."

<sup>2</sup> An ironical discourse, singularly adapted to attract attention, was preached (afterwards published) from the words: "Ye shall not surely die," by Rev. Lemuel Haynes, a revolutionary soldier of African descent, whose personal history added a fresh interest to his originality of thought. See Drake's Dictionary of American Biography; also Lippincott's Biographical Dictionary, Art. "Haynes." This discourse was professedly ironical, and therefore radically unlike the sermon to which Dr. George Campbell objects. The text is cited as *false*, and is employed to illustrate the falsity of the doctrine that sin will not be punished in the next life.

meet the approval of him who declared at the last: "My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me what is right" (Job xlii. 7). Both the correct and the incorrect opinions ascribed to the interlocutors in the book of Job are ascribed to them by inspiration; and some of these opinions are expressed in a way which indicates that, whether they be right or wrong, they were divinely imputed to the interlocutors. The manner in which they are expressed fits them to be suggestive and formative introductions of sermons.<sup>1</sup>

C. Whenever we preach on the words of an uninspired man, we should state, frankly and honestly, their title to our regard. The Pharisees uttered some truths, as well as some errors; the men who participated in the act of crucifying our Lord made some important confessions. When the centurion exclaimed: "Truly, this was the Son of God," he uttered words which, although not an express revelation of Christ's peculiar sonship, yet have fitly formed the basis of many a sermon. But we should always explain such utterances, not as an immediate testimony from heaven in favor of their correctness, not as the direct and inspired proof-texts of a doctrine, but rather as evidences that the doctrine was commonly received as true when the biblical record was penned, or as indications of the influence which inspired men had exerted on the uninspired, or as examples of the virtues or vices which the prophets and apostles have delineated. "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Gen. iv. 13); "But I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil" (1 Kings xxii. 8); "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke xix. 14); "Never man spake like this man" (John vii. 46); "I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matt. xxvii. 4); — scores of sentences (true or false) like these are graphic exhibitions of

<sup>1</sup> Besides the texts already alluded to, see all or parts of Genesis xlii. 36; xlvii. 9; Matt. ii. 8; xx. 30, 31; Mark ii. 7; ix. 24; Luke vii. 20; xi. 1; vii. 19; xix. 38; xxiii. 47; xxiv. 32; John i. 45, 46, 49; vi. 68; vii. 15; xvi. 30; xvii. 14; xxi. 17; Acts v. 38, 39. Some of the most powerful sermons in the language have been delivered on these themes.

doctrine, and may be easily explained as illustrating what the Author of the Bible has inspired men to teach. Although the Holy Ghost did not indite those sentences, yet he did move holy men to record them for our admonition.

2. Another question arises, similar to the preceding: Should a minister preach on a text which he believes or suspects to be improperly inserted in the sacred canon?

There are, for example, three verses which were formerly discoursed upon as proofs of the divinity of Christ: "The church of *God* which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts xx. 28); "*God* was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. iii. 16); and "*There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one*" (1 John v. 7.). These passages are now regarded as interpolations, in whole or in part. If a minister dissent from the critics, and if he consider the words here italicised to be not interpolations, but the genuine words of inspired men, his conscience may allow him to make them the basis of his discourse. If he disbelieve in their genuineness, he has no more right to preach upon them, than to preach upon the chapters of the Apocrypha. Perhaps he has less right; for these three passages, as they stand in King James' translation, would appear to have more authority than any three passages in the books of Esdras or Judith; therefore to preach upon the spurious words as having this authority may be more deceptive than to preach upon the Apocryphal words which do not appear to have it. Similar remarks may be made on the closing sentence of our Lord's prayer in Matt. vi. 13: "For thine is the kingdom," etc.; on the saying in John v. 4, that "an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water," etc.; on the last twelve verses of Mark's Gospel; on the verses between John vii. 52 and John viii. 12; on John xxi. 25, and on various other parts of the received text. They are rejected by the most recent critics; we ought to examine the reasons for the rejection; if we believe or suspect that the reasons are valid, we diminish the authority of the sacred office by preaching

on the interpolated or doubtful passages. On the same principle, if the time should ever come in which the book of Daniel, the last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah, the Second Epistle of Peter, or any other considerable part of the Bible can be proved to be spurious, it ought not then to furnish the texts for sermons. We presume that the time will never come; but even if it should, the scriptures will remain a rich storehouse of themes for the pulpit.

We must have the precaution, however, to remember that all the genuine readings of the Bible are not yet determined; and that a phrase which is abandoned in a critic's last edition of a Gospel may be re-instated in his next edition. Tischendorf, in his seventh edition of the New Testament, gave as the reading of John i. 18, "No one hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten *God*, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." This amended text was made the theme of at least one discourse in proof of the divinity of Christ. In Tischendorf's eighth edition he returned to the old reading: "the only-begotten *Son*, who is in the bosom of the Father." Here we perceive that the old rule respecting pure words may be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the preacher's use of improved readings:

"Be not the first by whom the new are tried,  
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside."

3. Still another question arises: In order to recognize the authority of the Bible, should a minister always cite his text as it stands in King James' translation?

A. He should not misrepresent the English Bible. He should repeat his text in a way to promote in himself and others a love of accuracy. He should be correct in things little as well as great; should practise *exegesis* rather than *eisegesis*. Careful laymen have said of more than one minister: "He preached from a text which is nowhere in the Bible"; "He makes his own texts." Many a sermon has been delivered on the words: "neither *hath it* entered the heart of man *to conceive*," etc. (1 Cor. ii. 9); "I know *in* whom I have believed" (2 Tim. i. 12); "Ye do show *forth* the Lord's death until he come" (1 Cor. xi.

26). The better mode is to read the text as it stands in our translation ; then, if need be, to give the true version. For example, after the text Philippians ii. 6 has been recited as King James' translators have left it, let the more approved version be read : " Who, though existing in the form of God, esteemed not his being on an equality with God a prize to be seized on." The rule which we are now considering condemns the careless or reckless change of the commonly received translation, but does not condemn a change which the preacher distinctly acknowledges, and for which he gives his reasons. Dr. Orville Dewey introduces one of his sermons thus : " ' He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be condemned ' (Mark xvi. 16). I have translated the last word in the text ' condemned ' in conformity with the best English versions and all the foreign ones, and with the undoubted sense of the original ; but the change does not materially alter the meaning of the passage. I think it best to relieve the text from a word, which, from its association with the language of the profane, shocks us ; but still this passage teaches us, undoubtedly, that with faith are connected God's favor and our safety and happiness ; and with unbelief, condemnation, rejection of heaven, and the soul's perdition." <sup>1</sup>

B. If a text do not mean *really* what it does *apparently*, a minister has no right to discourse upon it as if it did. Truth is better than falsehood. The real import of a scripture is of more worth than the acceptance of any particular

<sup>1</sup> *Controversial Discourses*, p. 318. Mr. Albert Barnes made it a rule, during one period of his life, to write his text with great care on the first page of his sermon, not only in English, but also in Hebrew, if it were from the Old Testament ; and in Greek, if from the New. His object was to encourage in himself a habit of accurate citation, and also a nice regard to the meaning of the verse on which he discoursed. Julius Augustus Hare, in his first volume of " *Sermons to a Country Congregation*," pp. 289, 305, 321, has three discourses, one on the whole text : " Thou art gone up on high ; thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men ; yea even for *thine enemies*," etc. ; the second, on one part of the same verse : " *Thou hast received gifts for men* " ; the third, on another part : " *Thou hast received gifts for men, yea even for thine enemies*," etc. See the text, in King James' Translation, Ps. lxxviii. 18.

version. The authority of the Bible is the authority of its ideas, not its English phraseology. "Does it not conflict altogether with the evangelical spirit of our [Lutheran] church to use, as the basis of our religious service, words of the Bible which do not at all belong to it?"<sup>1</sup>

The objector asks: Did not the writers of the New Testament quote such passages of the Septuagint as are incorrect translations of the Hebrew? We answer: The Oriental style must not always be interpreted by Occidental rules. The apostles were understood to cite these passages as illustrations, not as previously inspired declarations of the truth; or else to cite them as involving the same principle with that involved in the teachings of the New Testament, or else to cite them as conveying their own idea in words which were most happily suited to commend it to their readers. They may have been sometimes looked upon as inspired to use for *one* purpose language which had been originally used for a *different* purpose. A modern theologian may cite the words of Shakespeare as peculiarly felicitous for expressing a truth which perhaps never occurred to the mind of the dramatist. Men who are supernaturally inspired may be authorized to speak as ordinary men may not be; they may have known meanings of the Old Testament which ordinary men do not now detect. Besides, the design of a quotation, made incidentally by the apostles in their writings, was not always the same with the design of a text chosen by a pastor for his sermon. One chief aim of the latter is to honor the Bible as an authority for our faith; one aim of the former was to express a truth in words which would ingratiate it into the hearts of men. The rules for fashioning the cornice, are not the same with the rules for shaping the corner-stone, of a temple.

Again the objector asks: Did not our Lord and his apostles adopt the *argumentum ad hominem* and the *argumentum ad ignorantiam*? Do not such passages as Matt. xii. 28, Mark x. 17-31 contain a process of reasoning from premises which the speaker neither affirmed nor denied to be true, but which

<sup>1</sup> DeWette's Preface to the second edition of his Translation of the Bible, p. v.

were reasoned from mainly for the purpose of convicting his hearers of inconsistency with themselves, and thus inducing them to abandon their error? May there not, then, be a dilemma in which a divine may reason in behalf of a doctrine from a text to which his hearers attach a particular, but a wrong signification, and may he not convict them of inconsistency with themselves, if they reject his doctrine, and if they still attach that particular signification to his text? We reply: There may be occasions on which a reasoner may resort to the arguments *ad hominem* and *ad ignorantiam*.<sup>1</sup> These occasions, however, are not such as a clergyman meets in selecting his text. There is a perceptible distinction between the use of such arguments in the beginning of a discourse which is understood to be authoritative, and the use of them in the progress of a discussion which is understood to allow them in an exceptional way, and as a kind of diversion from the main process of reasoning. If a preacher resort to these arguments, he should make it plain to his hearers that he is not expressing his own opinion; but even then his process will be circuitous; he can far more easily, as well as more safely, reach his goal by a straight path.

Once more, the objector asks: Will not the hearers be shocked if their pastor give up their favorite interpretations of a text? We reply: He must be discreet. There are emergencies in which he may refuse to *take up*, before he proceeds to *give up*, the popular interpretations. He should prepare men as rapidly as possible to receive the truth, for this is always better than falsehood. He may surprise the unthinking, if he do not allow their inaccurate renderings; he will grieve the judicious if he do. He is to honor the Bible by commenting on its paragraphs; and the Bible is dishonored by being misinterpreted.

IV. One fact which tends to fit a passage to be a text for sermons is the fact of its referring, as it stands in the Bible,

<sup>1</sup> See this mode of reasoning stated and defended in Watts' Logic, Part iii. chap. ii. § 8. v., and Watts on the Improvement of the Mind, as cited in Gilbart's Logic, pp. 123, 124.

to the same object which it refers to in the sermons. So far forth as it has this correspondency, just so far has it one peculiar fitness to be used as a text, and so far forth as the use of the passage in the Bible does not correspond with the use of it in the sermon, just so far does it lose *that one* peculiar fitness. If the minister applies the text to the same thing which the Biblical writer applied it to, he may be said to use the text with directness; if he applies it to a different thing, he may be said to use it in the way of accommodation.

1. When used with directness the text is specially adapted to make the sermon solid and authoritative. This is perceptible in didactic and doctrinal, but more particularly in controversial discourses. The discourses of such men as Dr. Samuel Clark and Dr. Joseph Butler would, in some degree, lose their apparent soundness and instructiveness, if they were prefaced by Biblical passages diverted from their original application.

2. Although an accommodated text is deficient in one kind of fitness to a sermon, it may have another kind, and that in a marked degree. The rule requiring directness should not be pressed to an extreme. It is not an exclusive rule. Different texts have different adaptations. We must remember that there are some duties, as that of family prayer, which are not expressly named in the scriptures. There are some exigencies which cannot be met exactly by any scriptural paragraph. There are states of modern society so different from the states recognized by the prophets and apostles, that we must either accommodate our texts to them, or not preach distinctively upon them at all. When thus accommodated, a biblical epigraph, while it wants some, possesses other and the following, fitnesses for a text: It suggests a new analogy. It discloses a previously unnoticed resemblance. Thus, like a species of wit, it may excite and fascinate the mind. It may give a special liveliness to the sermon. The correspondence of the inspired words with the new and present subject is often solemn and impressive. The farewell sermon, delivered to his weeping church by a

pastor on the Sabbath before his anticipated, and, as the event proved, his actual decease, was on the words: "It is expedient for you that I go away" (John xvi. 7). "How old art thou" (Gen. xlvii. 8) has been the text of many a New Year's sermon, in which the life of Jacob has been held up as a mirror to the audience. So on many a New Year's Sabbath have preachers discoursed on the words: "This year thou shalt die" (Jer. xxviii. 16), and have felt safe in predicting that the prophecy would be fulfilled on some one, at least, who listened to it.<sup>1</sup> Scores of sermons have been preached on Psalm lxxx. 8-13 as applicable to the churches of the Pilgrims and Puritans in New England. The learned Professor George Lawson, hearing that on the day previous to that of his discourse one of the beams that supported the gallery of the edifice in which he was to preach had fallen, and had seriously injured some of the persons who were sitting under it, spoke on the text: "And David was displeased because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah" (2 Sam. vi. 8). At another time a wall fell down near his own church, and injured several of his parishioners. On the following Sabbath, he preached from 1 Kings xx. 30: "But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and there a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men that were left."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps

<sup>1</sup> It is recorded of President Jonathan Edwards the father, and President Jonathan Edwards the son, that "both were settled in the ministry as successors to their maternal grandfathers; were dismissed on account of their religious opinions, and were again settled in retired country towns, over congregations singularly attached to them; where they had leisure to pursue their favorite studies, and to prepare and publish their valuable works. Both were removed from these stations to become presidents of colleges; and both died shortly after their respective inauguration, the one in the fifty-sixth, and the other in the fifty-seventh year of his age, each having preached on the first sabbath of the year of his death on the text, "This year thou shalt die." — Works of President Edwards the younger, Vol. i. p. xxxiv.

<sup>2</sup> The Memoir of Dr. Lawson (who is supposed to be the Rev. Josiah Cargill of Walter Scott's St. Ronan's Well) records various instances of his accommodating general texts to special occasions. In these accommodations he sometimes forgot the dignity of the pulpit. Called to preach in a vestry which was filled with smoke, he suddenly chose for his text Ps. cxix. 83: "For I am become a bottle in the smoke: yet I do not forget thy statutes."

the celebrated Dr. John Howe had as great a facility as any one in accommodating his texts to the exigencies of his times. "In the year 1690, Howe published his funeral sermon for Esther, the wife of Dr. Henry Sampson (physician), who was a member of his church. The lady died on a *Sabbath*, after a lingering illness of *eighteen* years—a circumstance which suggested to Howe the following appropriate text for the funeral sermon: "Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan hath bound, in these eighteen years, to be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath-day" (Luke xiii. 16)?<sup>1</sup>

3. There are various rules which ought to be observed in the accommodation of biblical texts.

A. If it be practised at all, it should be practised in a rational and manly way. It should not descend to the puerility of a mere verbal resemblance between the original and the accommodated use of the biblical passage. "I was charmed with my preacher," says one of the interlocutors in Fenelon's Dialogues. "The text was this: 'I have eaten ashes like bread' [Ps. cii. 9]. Now, could any one make a happier choice for a text for *Ash Wednesday*?" When John Sobieski (John III.), the Polish warrior and king, had in 1683 defeated the army of the Grand Vizier, Kara Mustafa, and had made his triumphal entry into Vienna, there was a religious celebration of the victory in the principal church of Vienna, and the sermon of the day was on John i. 6: "There was a man sent from God whose name was John."<sup>2</sup>

B. The text as accommodated should involve the principle which characterizes the passage as originally spoken. At the basis of each there should be seen to lie the same good thought. There are three noted verses the accommodation of which, although justified by some eminent preachers, has been condemned by many critics.<sup>3</sup> One is Judg. v. 28:

<sup>1</sup> Rogers' Life of John Howe, p. 388.

<sup>2</sup> Von Ammon's Handbuch, u. s. w. § 38.

<sup>3</sup> The remarks which follow are designed to meet the general objections against

“Why is his chariot so long in coming?” This is sometimes made the basis of a funeral sermon. An intense sufferer, waiting on his death-bed for the coming of his Lord, utters the same exclamation which the mother of Sisera uttered while waiting for the coming of her absent son. The words in their original and in their accommodated application develop the same principles. They are such as these: The influence of love to excite a desire of seeing the beloved person, and of being ‘with him where he is’; the tendency of such a desire to make the delay in gratifying it appear long, and to prompt the seemingly impatient cry: “Why *so* long?” The objector says: Take for your text the direct words: “Having a desire to depart and to be with Christ” (Phil. i. 23). The reply is: These are not the words actually uttered by the saint whose funeral is solemnized; they are not the words which fit the excited imaginations of the mourners. There is a solemn poetry in the occasion. If a preacher introduce a hackneyed text, the hearers will *feel* the question: “Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?” The “direct” words are more instructive in a calm discussion; they are not always so graphic in an impassioned appeal.

The accommodation of another text has been criticised: (1 Cor. xiii. 11) “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” This passage has been made the basis of discourses, and is frequently repeated in familiar converse, on the duties of the middle aged. It was originally applied to the fact that the heavenly state is superior to our present apprehensions of it. Still as first written, and also as accommodated, it infolds the principle that a more advanced condition leads the mind to look above the objects that engross it in a less advanced condition. The text is a symbol of a heavenly truth; we may dilate upon

the accommodation of those three texts, not the particular objections offered by critics like Campbell and Porter against *particular sermons*, as those of Dr. Hawker and Dr. Blair.

the symbol in illustrating the duty of a full-grown man to rise above the pursuits of a small child. But why not choose some such text as Eccl. iii. 1 sq.: "To every thing there is a season," etc.? We reply: Such a text does possess some fitnesses which the criticised one does not; but on the other hand, the criticised text has special fitnesses of its own; it is more vivid, attracts more attention, will be more durable as a memento of the duties of manhood.

Another accommodated text is Ex. xiv. 15: "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." One idea imbedded in this command is: The duty of men to make progress, in despite of difficulties and dangers. As first spoken it announced the duty of the Israelites, when hemmed in by the mountains on either side, and by the Egyptian army in the rear, to march on although the Red Sea was in their front. But several ministers have discoursed on it as proclaiming the duty of Christians to press forward in the service of their Maker, even when they are pursued by spiritual foes, and dismayed by seas of trouble before them. The objector asks: Why not discourse on the text "Grow in grace" (2 Pet. iii. 18)? We reply: There are occasions when we need a text which is like the voice of a trumpet.

C. If you accommodate a biblical text, let it be apparent that you intend to do so. A quaint rule is: If you blunder, let your hearers see that you blunder knowingly. Never quote a text as if it were designed by the prophet or apostle to prove a particular doctrine, or enforce a particular duty, when it was not so designed. If you intend to guard your hearers against their danger of grieving away the Holy Spirit, do not preach on the text: "My Spirit shall not always strive with man" (Gen. vi. 3), unless you explain it as involving the same principle with that involved in the Holy Spirit's abandoning sinners forever. If you preach on the piety of children, and select Prov. viii. 17 for your text, explain it as diverted from its original meaning: "Those who seek me *earnestly* shall find me."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Several sermons have been preached on Ps. xlix. 8: "For the redemption of

V. Completeness is a quality which gives to a biblical passage one kind of fitness to be the basis of a sermon.

1. The text is especially felicitous if all its suggestions be correspondently noticed by the preacher; if its complete idea be the complete idea of the sermon. Some rhetoricians, as Claude, are inclined to prescribe that every text have this peculiar felicity. But such a prescription is too strict. It would exclude from the preacher's use some of the most important passages of the Bible, or else would condemn him to dispense with unity and logical order in his sermons.

2. The text is a sufficiently felicitous one if it be complete in its grammatical construction, and express the idea of the sacred penman, even although it fail of expressing his *complete* idea. It should be a full sentence, having a subject, predicatè, and copula; one which without any reference to the sentences preceding or succeeding it, suggests a definite thought. If, standing by itself, it has no precise meaning, it fails to serve one of the purposes of a text. An obituary notice of an office-bearer in the church states that at his funeral a sermon was delivered from Job "without any order."

Some rhetoricians are not satisfied with the remark that an incomplete sentence wants *one* kind of fitness, they say that it is *altogether* unfit, for a text of sermons. They condemn Robert Hall for preaching his beautiful discourse at the interment of Dr. Ryland on the words: "That disciple whom Jesus loved"; they condemn more than one eminent clergyman for preaching a discourse at the funeral of a venerable Christian on the words: "An old disciple";<sup>1</sup> they

their soul is precious and it ceaseth forever," and have been devoted to the proof that the eternal salvation of believers has been purchased at great expense! A sermon on 2 Tim. ii. 25: "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves" is devoted to a statement of the different methods in which men oppose their own interests, etc. Such blunders show the importance of the rule that the preacher examine his text in the original Hebrew or Greek.

<sup>1</sup> A member of Robert Hall's "church died in one of the almshouses at Leicester, at the extraordinary age of a hundred and seven, when he selected for the motto of his discourse the appropriate words in Acts xxi. 16, 'an old disciple.'" A gentleman who heard the discourse wrote: "It was a funeral

condemn several splendid sermons on "The power of an endless life," also on "The glorious gospel of the blessed God." *Ne resecandum ad vivum*. Clauses like those are so well known that they suggest at once, while they do not directly express, a complete and definite idea. The infelicity of some such texts should, indeed, be mitigated by the minister's reciting, in connection with them, the whole passage in which they occur. "Past feeling" is a clause on which many a sermon is founded. The clause may be twice read—once by itself, and once as it stands in the entire verse: "Who, being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Eph. iv. 19). "Without natural affection" is a common text. Immediately before or after its announcement, the whole verse Rom. i. 31, may be recited. In a similar way the infelicity in verses beginning with a relative may be relieved; as, "And were by nature children of wrath," etc. (Eph. ii. 3); "Which were born not of blood," etc. (John i. 13). For the one defect in the use of incomplete sentences as texts for sermons, there may be some compensation in the pith and point which the brevity of the sentences gives them.

3. The text is not allowable, if by means of its failing to form a complete sentence, or to express the complete idea of the inspired penman, it become undignified. Sensational preachers are apt to degrade the pulpit by texts which, when insulated from their contexts, lose their sobriety. For the sake of replenishing the empty seats of a Scotch kirk, the minister placarded, every week, such texts for the coming Sabbath as: "What fear! yea, what vehement desire!" "Nine and twenty knives," "A time to dance," "Alas, Master, for it was borrowed," etc., etc. It is recorded that, oration; the subject of it was an obscure old woman. Here the splendor of his poetical imagination burst forth, and he poured out such a torrent of eloquence on the head of indigent worth, as delighted all who could hear and understand him. The chapel was full, but not crowded, and the preacher was extremely animated. I thank you for sending me thirty miles on foot out of my way to hear him." — *Morris's Recollections of Rev. Robert Hall*, pp. 237, 238.

on a Sabbath forenoon during our last war with Great Britain, a minister, eminent for his genius and learning, was engaged in his pulpit services, and was informed that three ships of the British navy were coming near the port where he resided, and imperilling one of our own men-of-war. He instantly suspended the morning worship, left the pulpit, hastened to the neighboring fortification, offered his military services to the commander, was ordered to stand by one of the guns, remained at his post until the three ships of the British line had sailed away; then he returned to his church in season for the afternoon sermon, which he delivered extempore from the triumphant words: "There go the ships" (Ps. civ. 26). The text as quoted is entirely different in its meaning from the text as first written. The sentence was complete, but when severed from its adjuncts became ludicrous, though patriotic.

(To be continued).

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## ARTICLE VII.

### JOHN REUCHLIN, THE FATHER OF HEBREW LEARNING IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

BY REV. SELAH MERRILL, ANDOVER, MASS.

THAT was a most interesting period in history when Germany was awakened from a long mental sleep. She seemed to become suddenly conscious of her condition and needs, and at once set herself resolutely to work to remedy her defects. It was within the period of deadness and darkness that Reuchlin was born at Pforzheim, in 1455,— when Germany lacked libraries and books, learned men, efficient teachers, and respectable schools, and, most deplorable of all, the consciousness that such things were at all necessary to the completeness of national life and character. But all this was changed; and when Reuchlin died, in 1522, in his sixty-seventh year, the national mind was characterized by a passionate eagerness for truth in both education and religion. Learned men had arisen; character had been given to the schools; education had been established on a sound basis; printed books had accumulated; Latin, Greek, and Hebrew had come to be studied according to scientific methods; a fair critical spirit had been developed; and, withal, light had begun to dawn