

we must all support that which God assigns to us, but friendship can lighten the weight of that which we are required to bear.

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HOMILETICAL FEATURES OF THE EPISTLE TO
THE ROMANS.

IT is not from the brief notes of his sermons in the Acts that we get our best idea of the preaching powers of St. Paul. Some of his epistles are emphatically sermons, the words of a living man to living men, obviously written with a most vivid sense of his audience, aglow with the inspiration which a sympathetic audience brings, and dealing with men at close quarters, as only impassioned preachers can. The Epistle to the Romans is by far the best example of these qualities. It does not exhibit such a death struggle as the Epistle to the Galatians; it is not so much preaching *à outrance*, as was said of the sermons of Bossuet; but it presents a more thorough combination of the various properties that make up a highly effective discourse. It is in most respects what the Apostle would have preached at Rome if he had had an hour to spend with the Christians there. It is of course much more closely packed than would have been suitable in any ordinary sermon. But in this respect it is only the counterpart of the Sermon on the Mount. Its concentration does not hinder it, any more than it hinders the Sermon on the Mount, from reflecting the great homiletical features of its author's mind. It is directed to the two great objects of homiletical discourse—instruction and persuasion; and these two objects are prosecuted in the proportions suitable to a sermon. First addressing himself to the intellect of his audience, the

Apostle passes on to rouse up their springs of action, and presses on these with the skill and the vigour of a master. Grand though his expositions of truth are, he is not satisfied with expounding, his great aim is to persuade. He does not huddle up the persuasive part in a few general remarks, or a formal exhortation at the close. All through the epistle he keeps it in view, but here and there he bends his whole powers to the business, determined to leave to his hearers no loophole of escape.

The introduction serves the double purpose for which this part of a discourse is designed ; it excites interest, and it throws light on the subject which is to be discussed. It is based on the Apostle's personal relation to the Roman Church, and it exemplifies the bright, cheerful spirit in which he usually wrote, and probably also spoke ; it brings before us the wistful expression, the look of manly interest and affection which he would cast on his congregation when he began to address them. The personal consideration was, that he felt himself to be in their debt ; people prick up their ears when a preacher tells them he comes to them to discharge a debt. And this in Paul's case was no unmeaning catchword. It was his profound conviction that, through the mischief which he did in his unconverted youth, he was debtor both to Greeks and barbarians, both to wise and foolish, for he had laboured then to tear the blessed gospel from them. That debt could be cancelled only by unusual earnestness now in preaching that gospel to them in all its richness and glory, and pressing it on their personal acceptance. It was a most glorious subject, and a most precious boon ; for the gospel of Jesus Christ was the power of God unto salvation to every one that believed, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. It was a blessing for the whole world, and by far the most glorious gift of Heaven.

He then proceeds at once to business ; following a plan

which, though not announced beforehand, is clear, simple, and comprehensive. That plan is, 1st, to show that all men need the gospel, Jew and Gentile alike; 2nd, to unfold the provisions of the gospel, first for pardoning, and then for purifying; 3rd, to make some explanation respecting points of difficulty that have arisen in the previous discussion; and, 4th, to make an ethical application of the whole. In the last few chapters of the epistle the character of a letter predominates; he speaks to his correspondents in a plain, easy way of some things that he would have them attend to; while in the last chapter of all we find a peculiarly interesting feature of a letter—personal remembrances and salutations to many of the good people at Rome, whose devotion to Christian work was most refreshing to his soul.

What may be called the sermon proper is confined to the first twelve chapters. Taking a general survey of this part in a homiletical point of view, the feature that at the first glance strikes us most is the great variety of level which it presents. It brings up to us an Alpine scene, with a remarkable combination of precipitous paths, dark gorges, and smiling valleys. Our guide is equally at home in them all. He has little mercy on us as regards the necessity for violent intellectual exercise; it needs a very hard pull to follow him up those craggy heights of argument, and through the objections that bristle like *chevaux de frise* against his course; but he is very considerate for us, inasmuch as, after every hard struggle, he leads us to some quiet resting-place, where we lie down to recover our breath, till, being rested, we are summoned anew to a higher climb. This succession of periods of tremendous mental effort and calm repose is one of the most notable features of the writing. Thus, after following him through his elaborate proof in the first three chapters of the sinfulness of man, we lie down beside green pastures and still waters

at chapter iii. 24, to enjoy the beautiful picture of redemption, "being justified freely by His grace." Then after a severe logical proof in chapter iv. of God's way of justification, we are invited to rest, and to look out calmly on the glorious privileges of salvation by grace (chap. v. 1)—"we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." After further intellectual exercise, as we follow his proof of the way of sanctification by grace, we enter that delightful arbour, the eighth chapter, the central gem of the epistle, of which it has been said so well that it begins with no condemnation, and ends with no separation. But as soon as we quit that charming arbour we are summoned to a harder and stiffer climb than ever—the discussions of the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters. At the top of the climb another grove of Elim awaits us, with its palm trees and refreshing wells, in the glorious vision of a restored Israel and a completed kingdom of God, drawing from our ravished hearts the exclamation, "Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" Then we are summoned to a different exercise, to grapple with the high duties and graces of the Christian life; but after so rich an exposition of Christian privilege there is no sense of incongruity in the exalted standard of Christian duty which he imposes, even though he enjoins us, if our enemy hunger to feed him, and if he thirst to give him drink.

There can be little doubt that it is the sweet passages of complacent enjoyment, rather than the stiff passages of argument preceding them, that to most readers form the charm of the Epistle to the Romans. Indeed, if they were to confess the truth, many, but not all, would call the arguments somewhat hard and dry. But the argumentative parts are to the meditative as the granite chains in an Alpine country to the beauty that smiles in the valley below. The one could not exist without the other. The combination of

the two is the triumph of homiletical skill. One will sometimes hear logical discourses of great power, fitted to make a great impression on trained intellects; but if they are all in one key, on one level, the attention even of the best trained intellects is somewhat strained, and others are unable to attend at all. On the other hand, one will sometimes hear emotional discourses, bringing out very sweetly the joys and glories of redemption; but the quality is too soft and sweet, as if a feast should consist of the sweet course only. Very different from either is the Apostle's discourse. He knows how to mingle all the ingredients of interest and instruction; he knows how to work on all the faculties of the human soul. Like a musician who is master of his instrument, he knows how to evoke every chord. Now he deals with the reason, challenging it to receive the truths so clearly established; now he appeals to the conscience, evoking its witness against its very owner; anon he refreshes the whole soul with the consolations of the gospel; yet again he evokes the imagination, especially to dwell on the glory yet to be revealed. This, we say, is the triumph of the homiletical art. No good preacher will be content with a monotonous level; he will mingle intervals of repose with periods of exertion, and enliven the grave utterances of the reason with the livelier touches of feeling and fancy.

So much for the most outstanding homiletical feature of the epistle. We now advance to point out some of the minuter features to which it owes much of its impressiveness.

We do not dwell here on what has been so often pointed out—the abrupt and sometimes involved and elliptical character of the Apostle's logical processes. Some one has compared his mind so full of his subject to a bottle full of water, from which, when it is inverted, the water issues in irregular gushes, not in a flowing stream. He was one of those busy men whose lives are spent at high pressure, and

under the influence of this high pressure most of his epistles were written. If this impaired his logic, it increased his power; it gave to his letters a rush and momentum which cannot be attained by the leisurely writer. It were well for those who carp at his logic if they could rival the intensity and the glow with which he pours out his soul, and which serve so well to kindle the souls of his hearers into corresponding fervour.

Nor is it necessary to dwell on the manifestly Hebraistic structure of some of his arguments. His reasonings on the law, in the Romans and elsewhere, could have fallen in full force only on Jewish minds. We may, with some care, be able to spell out the meaning; but they come to us with the disadvantage of a translation compared with an original writing. Even when writing to the Romans it was obviously Jews whom he had chiefly in view (see ii. 17, iii. 9, iv. 1, vii. 1, etc.). At one place (xi. 13) he limits his remark to Gentiles, but this is an exception to the ordinary tenor of the epistle.

It is of more importance practically to point out some of the features by which he relieves and brightens his processes of logic.

1. Among these we note his habit of putting questions. The point of interrogation is more in demand in printing the Romans than (in proportion to its size) in any other book of the Bible. In the first twelve chapters (if we have counted correctly) there are no fewer than eighty-three questions; and, for the most part, it is in the argumentative portions that they occur. They are useful in a course of argument in keeping up attention, for a question fitly put always sets a hearer's mind in motion; without such a device attention might flag, and the effect of the argument might be lost. The Apostle's argument may be sometimes intricate, but his mode of arguing is never dull.

2. A similar purpose is served—the quickening of atten-

tion—by his frequent use of familiar Old Testament incidents. In the compass of the epistle there occur thirty-two quotations from the Old Testament, and upwards of twenty other allusions to matters connected with the Jews. As we have already remarked, it was the Jews who were mainly in his mind in writing the epistle. Such quotations and references to what must have been familiar to them quickened attention while they confirmed the argument; analogies are always stimulating, especially when by means of them light is thrown from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from the obvious to the obscure.

3. A more characteristic and interesting feature is the occasional out-flashing of beautiful gems of thought in the very midst of somewhat intricate discussions. This is a fruit of genius, and is more easy to admire than to imitate. A hard argument is brightened by a wonderful spiritual coruscation, as at night a dark sky is relieved by the flash of a lighthouse. Thus the somewhat gloomy picture of the law magnifying and multiplying our offences is suddenly brightened by the out-flashing of the truth, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The despair which hovers so near him in his discussion of indwelling sin is scattered by the blessed thanksgiving, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." The dreary spectacle of Israel falling away, and their table becoming a snare and a trap and a stumblingblock, is gloriously relieved by a ray of comfort flashed on the sad present from the glorious future, "If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?"

Perhaps we may find in other epistles even finer instances of this practice. In 1 Corinthians vii. occurs a prolonged discussion on questions of casuistry relating to marriage. The point of view is suddenly changed, a trumpet note falls on the ear, and we find ourselves in the midst of the

most stirring realities of life and death: "This I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not: for the fashion of this world passeth away." Very striking too, in Galatians ii., after a discussion on the law and the relations of the believer to it, is that glowing picture of the spiritual life: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." In the same epistle (chap. iv.) when the matter under discussion is the bondage or pupillage of the Jewish economy, there breaks in like a sunbeam the glorious truth, "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." That "gem of purest ray serene," the description of charity in 1 Corinthians xiii., comes in during a discussion of "the gifts"—healing, prophesying, tongues, interpretations, and the like: transitory topics that have lost much of their interest for other times and other Churches; suddenly we come on that incomparable picture, of which we may say, as of its great subject, that it "never faileth." It is a proof at once of the splendid endowments of the Apostle's mind, and of his familiarity with the brightest aspects of the truths which he discusses, that he cannot handle them, even for the most ordinary purposes of logical discussion, without being borne upwards on their wings to the highest regions of thought and feeling. To an ordinary man of science it would seem as if he were only muddling his subject, if, while describing the structure of a plant, he should leave the realm of prose, and talk poetically of the beauty of its flowers or the

fragrance of its fruit ; or the geologist, if, in explaining the structure of the rocks in an Alpine valley, the shadow of the picturesque should come fitting over his mind : but the genius of St. Paul could embrace in one view both the prose and the poetry of truth, and could bring the flashes of the one to brighten and intensify the demonstrations of the other.

4. A homiletical feature common to the Apostle with nearly every homiletical mind is the use of analogy and contrast. In some of the analogies which are worked out with some detail in this epistle there are obvious traces of the haste and pressure under which he wrote. The analogy in chapter v. between the imputation of Adam's sin and of Christ's righteousness, beautiful and instructive though it be, and giving us such a grand conception of the vast scope of saving grace, is subject to this drawback, that while all men have been plunged into ruin by the one, all men are not, in point of fact, extricated by the other. Again, the figure by which, in chapter vi., we are represented as "buried with Christ by baptism," derived from the practice of baptism by immersion, is not altogether happy, inasmuch as the momentary dip of the baptized person under the water has but a slight resemblance to the slow, deliberate process of burial. And again, the analogy in chapter vii. between the release of the widow from the law of her husband through his death, and the release of the believer from the law through his union to Christ, is neither a very direct nor a very clear illustration of the point under discussion. On the other hand, nothing can be more happy than the figure by which, in chapter xi., the Jews are compared to the natural branches of the olive, while the Gentiles are only grafted branches. Equally felicitous is the analogy denoted by the potter and the clay. In other writings he introduces other analogies, able, beautiful, and appropriate. The change which the body undergoes

at the resurrection resembles that which a grain of wheat undergoes in giving life to the new creation that springs from it. There are various kinds of flesh, as there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars. The comparison of the human body to the tent, to be superseded by a more enduring building; of the same body to the temple of the Holy Ghost; of the Christian ministry to the workers in a field or garden where one plants and another waters, but God gives the increase; and of the retribution of the last day to a harvest-home, at which "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"—all show what an effective handmaid to homiletic impressions analogy was in the hands of the Apostle, as indeed it has proved to every one who has sought in earnest to move the human soul.

5. So also the principle of antithesis or contrast was often called to his service. Many instances are found throughout the epistle; but the climax is reached in that noblest chapter of the whole, the eighth. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the spirit the things of the spirit." "To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." But the force of antithesis in vivifying and intensifying the thought is seen best in a succession of clauses, like those of 2 Corinthians iv. 8-10. "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." Such felicitous forms of expression, especially when projected with much earnestness, are usually listened to with breathless attention. We need but recall with what effect antithesis is

used by Augustine and many other of the Latin Fathers, and how efficiently it was turned to popular account by many a Puritan, like Thomas Adams or Matthew Henry.

6. Not unlike the effect of antithesis is that of accumulation. We all know that there are two ways of accumulating words. There is a careless way of heaping words of similar meaning together without any reasonable motive, which marks an uneducated speaker, and enfeebles rather than strengthens. But the effect is different when the speaker becomes excited. Accumulation then has the effect of a superlative degree, it gives momentum to the sentence, it often lends an overwhelming force. Cicero's "abiit, excessit, evasit, erupit," or Burke's "a heart dyed deep in blackness, a heart blackened to the very blackest, gangrened to the very core," are cases in point. Such too is the effect of that terrible heap of epithets under which the Apostle crushes all idea of a pagan righteousness: "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." Not less notable is the accumulation in the eighth chapter, where the object is to hurl defiance at every enemy of Christ's people: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

7. Of the same class is the form which links words in a chain or series. The clauses of a lengthened sentence are evolved out of each other like the drawers of a telescope. The idea which this form brings out is that of fulness, vitality, great productiveness, in some cases the clauses rising higher and higher till the climax is reached. Such is Romans v. 2-5: "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed: because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Again in chapter viii. 29, 30: "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified."

8. In moments of excitement, personification and apostrophe come directly to hand. Nothing could be more effective than the turn he gives to the sad sounds of nature, the groans of creation—creation becoming a living being, a mother in labour, travailing with the new heavens and the new earth. The groans are transitory, but the new life is eternal. In the depths of his depression he apostrophises himself: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" In the height of his triumph he personifies great abstractions, space and time, height and depth, things present and things to come, protesting their impotence against the children of God. In arguing for the sovereign rights of God, he turns suddenly on his opponent to demand of him, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Everywhere we see proofs of that wonderful vitality, that life-power which raised the Apostle so high. Nothing is dull, sleepy, heavy;

whatsoever his hand findeth to do, he does it with his might.

Before closing, let us glance at his management of the ethical application, chiefly in the memorable twelfth chapter, which in the region of ethics is as much a gem and a masterpiece as the eighth chapter is in the region of doctrine and experience.

If, disregarding the division into chapters, we read the whole epistle continuously, we shall more readily see how the preceding discussions and demonstrations have brought his readers to a point which makes ethical application comparatively easy. The temperature is much higher at the end of the eleventh chapter than it was at the beginning of the first. The feeling at the close of the eleventh is that of ecstatic wonder at the infinite grace of God. In practical Christianity there is no more powerful factor than the element of wonder, and any soul possessed by it may be worked on very powerfully by exhortations to practical godliness. A heated soul is like heated iron—the blows of the hammer are tenfold more effectual. The whole force of what has been brought out and brought home in the previous discussions is gathered up in the “therefore” of the first verse: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God.” First, he makes some general but very comprehensive exhortations—“Present your bodies a living sacrifice,” “Be not conformed to this world: be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds.” Next, he urges fidelity in Church duties; then returning to personal obligations, he goes into detail, drawing out from the one master-spirit, love, its various manifestations, and by a series of rapid strokes sketching a beautiful picture of Christian living. And whereas in many places he has shown himself a master of the art of expanding truth, he now shows himself master of the art of condensation. He packs into little clauses of two or three words the very

essence of Christian morality. "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality." No better lesson could be found in the art of combining the general with the specific in practical exhortation. There are times when congregations, like individuals, are more susceptible of practical counsels than in their ordinary moods. A wise preacher takes advantage of such opportunities, strikes boldly into the practical vein, and strives to engraft new habits upon them, reaching even to very little things. It is easy to exhort men to be holy; but the earnest pastor will not be satisfied without line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little.

With such an example as St. Paul's before us, we may surely see how foolish it is to despise the homiletical features of discourse, or to speak as if style and structure were of no appreciable value. But it would be equally foolish to imagine that improvement in these respects is to be gained by a mechanical imitation of the Apostle or of any one else. The great charm of his style is its perfect naturalness. Never had writer or speaker less of self-consciousness. The gifts of genius came to him without effort, and they shaped for him methods of expression of their own. Ordinary men can have no fellowship with him there. Yet they need not deem the study of his methods utterly useless. The first step towards any attainment is consciousness of the want of it. The second is appreciation of it in those who possess it. The third, admiring study of their work. By such means, with God's blessing, preachers may learn to correct some of their faults, and to attain to more efficiency. Some may think that we belittle the noble Epistle to the Romans by dwelling on its homiletical features. We readily grant that it is not the highest aspect, but for those who are, or are to

be preachers it is an important aspect. And should it be said that to fix attention on an inferior aspect of a subject is to withdraw it from the principal, we reply that the risk of doing so is reduced to a minimum when the writing is the Epistle to the Romans, and the writer the Apostle Paul. It must be a very perverted mind that, in the midst of such a study, can forget the great and solemn ends to which the epistle is directed. It must be a pitiable soul that amid all the tokens of spiritual power that made his words so effectual, can deem matters of form and style and structure as anything more than the outward frame of the living organism. But form and style and structure have surely a definite place among the objects to which the preacher of the gospel is bound to direct his thoughts. And if we make the example of St. Paul in these, as in higher matters, the subject of appreciative and admiring study, we may gradually acquire for ourselves more of his methods, and by God's blessing more of his power.

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THE THANKS OF AN APOSTLE.

THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

IN the Epistle to Philemon, we saw the way in which an Apostle asks a favour; in the Epistle to the Philippians, we see how the same Apostle returns thanks. We know that St. Paul refused to take any payment from the Churches which he founded, and over which he watched. It was not that he did not feel he had any right to this mark of gratitude, but he abstained from using this right from personal reasons which he explains in 1 Corinthians ix. Not having entered freely, like the Twelve, into the apostolic ministry, but having been, as it were, forced into it by Divine