

THE
BIBLICAL REPERTORY.

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No. I.

ART. I.—*Melancthon's Letters.**

WHOEVER feels an interest in the Reformation, feels an interest in Melancthon; and yet, to judge others by ourselves, he is comparatively little known. The noble edition of Luther's correspondence, published by De Wette, which is, in fact, the best biography of Luther, made us wish for something of the same kind, to bring us personally acquainted with *Magister Philippus*. We supposed, however, that the epistolary remains of Melancthon would probably not prove so illustrative of his history and character, as those of his more ardent and open-hearted colleague. We even doubted whether there existed a sufficient mass of his letters, to form a collection of tolerable size. We are, therefore, both surprised and pleased to see three goodly quartos, filled with the miscellaneous papers, chiefly letters, of Melancthon. While we gratify our own curiosity respecting them, we propose to take our readers with us, for the purpose of affording them a glimpse at Master Philip, through the faithful glass of his own private correspondence. Before doing this,

* *Corpus Reformatorum* ed. C. G. Bretschneider. (Philippi Melanthonis Opera quae supersunt omnia.) Vol. I.—III.—(Epistolae, Praefationes, Consilia, Judicia, Schedae Academicae.) 4to.

family circle, let your recollection of the children in prayer be as pointed, affectionate and paternal as you can make it.

11. In one word, be it your study to treat all the children and young people of your charge under the solemn impression that they are one day to be men and women, to be a blessing or a curse to the church and the world, and heirs of an eternal heaven or hell; and that your mode of treating them may have a governing influence in making them the one or the other.

ART. III.—*Remarks on the Disuse of Expository Preaching.*

THE pulpit discourses of Roman Catholics as well as Protestants, during several centuries, have been for the most part founded on short passages of scripture; commonly single verses, and oftener less than more. This has become so prevalent, that in most treatises upon the composition of sermons all the canons of homiletics presuppose the treatment of an isolated text. We are not prepared to denounce this practice, especially when we consider the treasury of sound doctrine, cogent reasoning, and mighty eloquence, which is embodied in productions formed on this model, and call to mind the instances in which such discourses have been signally owned of God in the edification of his church. But there is still another method, which, though less familiar to ourselves, was once widely prevalent, and is recognised and approved in our Directory for Worship, in the following words: "It is proper also that large portions of scripture be sometimes expounded, and particularly improved for the instruction of the people in the meaning and use of the sacred oracles."* And it may not be out of place to mention here, that in the debates of the Westminster Assembly, there were more than a few members, and among these the celebrated Calamy, who maintained with earnestness, that it was no part of the minister's duty to read the scriptures in public *without exposition*.†

It is not a little remarkable that in an age in which so much is heard against creeds and systems as contradistin-

* Directory for Worship, Chap. vi. § 2.

† Lightfoot's Works, Vol. xiii. p. 36.

guished from the pure text of Scripture, and in which sacred hermeneutics hold so high a place in theological education, we should have allowed the methodical and continued exposition of the Bible to go almost into disuse.* What our predecessors practised under the name of lectures is almost banished from the pulpit. It is against this exclusion that we now propose to direct our argument. And in what may be offered in the sequel we ask attention to this statement of the question as limiting our purpose. Far be it from us to decry the mode of discoursing which prevails in our churches. We freely acknowledge its many excellencies and rejoice in its gracious fruits; but we plead in behalf of another and an older method, which we lament to see neglected and forsaken. With this preface, we shall proceed to give some reasons why a judicious return to the expository method of preaching seems to us to be desirable.

1. The expository method of preaching is the most obvious and natural way of conveying to the hearers the import of the sacred volume. It is the very work for which a ministry was instituted, to interpret the scriptures. In the case of any other book, we should be at no loss in what manner to proceed. Suppose a volume of human science to be placed in our hands as the sole manual, text-book, and standard, which we were expected to elucidate to a public assembly: in what way would it be most natural to go to work? Certainly not, we think, to take a sentence here, and a sentence there, and upon these separate portions to frame one or two discourses every week. No interpreter of Aristotle, of Littleton, of Puffendorf, or of Paley, ever dreamed of such a method. Nor was it adopted in the Christian church, until the sermon ceased to be regarded in its true notion, as an explanation of the scripture, and began to be viewed as a rhetorical entertainment, which might afford occasion for the display of subtilty, research, and eloquence.

2. The expository method has the sanction of primitive and ancient usage. In the Israelitish, as well as the Christian church, preaching was an ordinary mode of religious instruction. In both it was justly regarded as a means of conducting the hearers to the knowledge of revealed truth. As early

* Although the subject of this essay may, in certain particulars, run very naturally into that of critical interpretation, the writer begs leave to disclaim any special right to dwell upon this topic, as his pursuits have not led him into the field of hermeneutics, any further than the performance of ordinary ministerial duty required.

as the time of Ezra, we find that the reading of the law was accompanied with some kind of interpretation. In the synagogues, after the reading of the law and the prophets, it was usual for the presiding officer to invite such as were learned to address the people. Our Lord Jesus Christ availed himself of this opportunity to deliver one of his most remarkable discourses; and this was an exposition of a prophetic passage. The apostle Paul seems also to have made portions of scripture the basis of his addresses in the synagogues. But it is not to be expected that the preaching of the apostolic age, when the speakers were divinely inspired, should be in all respects a model for our own times. It was their province to communicate truth under inspiration; it is ours to interpret what has thus been communicated. The early Christian assemblies naturally adopted the simple and rational methods of the Jewish synagogues; in conformity with which it was an essential part of the service to read the scriptures. Manuscripts were rare, and the majority of believers were poor; and hence the church assemblies must have long continued to be the chief, if not the only, sources of biblical knowledge. Justin Martyr, who is one of the earliest authorities on this subject, informs us that the public reading of the text was followed by addresses, adapted to impress the subject on the minds of the hearers.* According to Neander, who may be considered as an impartial judge on this topic, it was at first left to the option of the bishop what portions of scripture should be read; though it was subsequently made necessary to adhere to certain lessons, which were judged appropriate to times and seasons. Bingham also concedes that the lessons were sometimes arbitrarily appointed by the bishops at discretion. Augustin declares that he sometimes ordered a lesson to be read which harmonized with the psalm which he had been expounding.†

As this is a point of history concerning which there is little room for question, we shall content ourselves with the diligent, and, as we believe, impartial deductions of Bingham and Neander. It is not to be denied, that there were, even in the early ages, several different modes of preaching, and that some of these approached very nearly to that which now prevails; yet there was no period during which the expository method was not highly prized and extensively practised.

* Apolog. 2.

† Aug. in Psalm 90, Ser. ii.—Bingham, Antiq. B. xiv. c. iii. § 3.

These discourses were very frequent and often flowed from the intense feeling of the moment. Pamphilus, in his *Apology for Origen*, represents this great teacher as discoursing extempore almost every day. The same frequency of public address is recorded of Chrysostom, Augustin, and other fathers. Their sermons were taken down by stenographers, and in such of them as are extant we have repeated evidences of their familiar and unpremeditated character. Chrysostom, for instance, thus breaks forth, in one of his homilies on *Genesis*: "I am expounding the scriptures; yet you are all turning your eyes from me to the person who is lighting the lamps. What negligence! to forsake me, and fix your minds on him! For I am lighting a fire from the holy scriptures, and in my tongue is a burning lamp of instruction." Augustin also tells us, in one of his homilies, that he had not thought of the subject on which he actually preached, until the Reader chanced to read it of his own accord in the church.*

The two greatest preachers of the Greek and Latin churches, respectively, afford striking examples of the value set upon exposition. Augustin has left homilies upon the *Psalms*, the *Gospel of John*, and other whole books of scripture. Chrysostom, in like manner, expounded at length the book of *Genesis*, the *Psalms*, the *Gospels of Matthew and John*, and all the *Epistles of Paul*. His homilies consist usually of a close interpretation, or running commentary, followed by an *Ethicon*, or practical application. That biblical exposition was recognised as the end of preaching seems clear from such declarations as the following: "If any one assiduously attend public worship, even without reading the Bible at home, but carefully hearkening here, he will find a single year sufficient to give him an intimate acquaintance with the scriptures."† And indeed this is so natural a result of the catholic belief that the scriptures are the great storehouse of saving truth, as to leave us in some surprise at the neglect into which this direct exposition of the authentic records has fallen.

When we look into the history of England during the thirteenth century, we find that two modes of preaching were in use, neither of these being that which we now employ. In the first place, that of *Postillating*, which was identical with the expository method; secondly, that of *Declaring*, in which the discourse was preceded by a declaration of the

* Bingham, *Book xiv. chap. iv. § 4.*

† *Hom. 28. in Job.*—Neander, *Der heilige Chrysostomus.*

subject, without the citation of any passage of scripture. When, about the beginning of the thirteenth century, the method of preaching from insulated texts, with subtile divisions of the sermon, was introduced, it was zealously adopted by the younger clergy, and became extensively popular; while it was as warmly opposed by some of the best theologians of the age, as 'a childish playing upon words—destructive of true eloquence—tedious and unaffecting to the hearers,—and cramping the imagination of the preacher.' Among others, it found an able opponent in the great Roger Bacon; a man whom we can never mention without amazement at his philosophical attainments, and veneration for his character. "The greatest part of our prelates," says he, "having but little knowledge in divinity, and having been little used to preaching in their youth, when they become bishops, and are sometimes obliged to preach, are under the necessity of begging and borrowing the sermons of certain novices, who have invented a new way of preaching, by endless divisions and quibblings, in which there is neither sublimity of style nor depth of wisdom, but much childish trifling and folly, unsuitable to the dignity of the pulpit. May God banish this conceited and artificial way of preaching out of his church; for it will never do any good, nor elevate the hearts of his hearers to any thing that is great or excellent."*

"The opposition to this new method of preaching," says Dr. Henry in his *History of England*," continued through the whole of the fourteenth and part of the fifteenth century. Dr. Thomas Gascoigne, chancellor of the university of Oxford, tells us that he preached a sermon in St. Martin's church, A. D. 1450, without a text, and without divisions, declaring such things as he thought would be useful to the people. Amongst other things he told them, in vindication of this ancient mode of preaching,—'that Dr. Augustine had preached four hundred sermons to the clergy and people, without reading a text at the beginning of his discourse; and that the way of preaching by a text, and by divisions, was invented only about A. D. 1200, as appeared from the authors of the first sermons of that kind.'"

It is no part of our business to enter further into this investigation, or to determine critically at what point of time the method of preaching from insulated verses became exclusively prevalent in the church. Whatever excellencies it possesses,

* R. Bacon, apud Henry's *Hist.* iv. 366.

and there are many, can derive no additional dignity from the origin of the method, which is referable to a period by no means the most glorious of Christian history. When the light of divine truth began to emerge from its long eclipse, at the Reformation, there were few things more remarkable, than the universal return of evangelical preachers to the expository method. Book after book of the scriptures was publicly expounded by Luther, and the almost daily sermons of Calvin were, with scarcely any exceptions, founded on passages taken in regular course as he proceeded through the sacred canon. The same is true of the other reformers, particularly in England and Scotland.

To come down to the times of the Nonconformists; while it is undoubtedly true that they sometimes pursued the textual method even to an extreme; preaching many discourses on a single verse; it is no less true, that exposition in regular course was considered a necessary part of ministerial labour. Hence the voluminous commentaries on single books with which the press groaned during that period. Let us take a single instance, as late as the latter half of the sixteenth century, in the person of Matthew Henry, whom it is difficult to refer exclusively to the era of the elder or the later Nonconformists. We may suppose his practice in this particular to be no extreme case. Mr. Henry was an able and laborious preacher from single texts, but it was by no means to the exclusion of the expository plan. On every Lord's day morning, he read and expounded a part of the Old Testament; on every Lord's day afternoon a part of the New; in both instances proceeding in regular order. During his residence in Chester he went over the whole Bible in this exercise, more than once.* Such was the custom of our forefathers; and in the prosecution of such a plan, we need not wonder that they found the body of their hearers constantly advancing in scriptural attainments. The sense of change, and change without improvement, is unavoidable when we come down to our own times; in which, within our immediate knowledge, there are not a dozen ministers who make the expounding of scripture any part of their stated pulpit exercises. Nay, although our Directory for Worship declares expressly that 'the reading of the holy scriptures in the congregation, is a part of the public worship of God, and ought to be performed by the ministers and teachers;'—that the preacher, '*in each service*

* Williams, *Life of Henry*, c. x.

ought to read, at least one chapter, and more, when the chapters are short, or the connexion requires it; yet it is undeniably the common practice to confine this service, which is treated as something almost supererogatory, to the Lord's day morning. Now while we are zealous in maintaining, that the Christian minister should not be bound down by any imperative rubric and calendar as to the portion which he shall read, we cannot but blush when we compare our actual performances in this kind with those of many sister churches, who have chosen to be guided by more strict liturgical arrangements.

3. The expository method is adapted to secure the greatest amount of scriptural knowledge, to both preacher and hearers. It needs no argument, we trust, to sustain the position that every minister of the gospel should be mighty in the scriptures; familiar with the whole text; versed in the best commentaries; at home in every portion of both testaments; and accustomed to grapple with the most perplexing difficulties. This is the appropriate and peculiar field of clerical study. It is obvious that the pulpit exercises of every diligent minister will give direction and colour to his private lucubrations. In order to success and usefulness in any species of discourse, the preacher must love his work and must have it constantly before his mind. He must be possessed of an enthusiasm which shall never suffer him to forget the impending task. His reading, his meditation, and even his casual trains of thought must perpetually revert to the performances of the Sabbath. And we take pleasure in believing that such is actually the case with a large proportion of clergymen.

Now it must not be concealed that the popular and prevalent mode of sermonizing, however favourable it may be to professional zeal of this kind, and to the cultivation of mental habits, does by no means lead in any equal measure to the laborious study of the scriptures. The text, it is true, must be a fragment of the word of God; and it may be confirmed and illustrated by parallel or analagous passages. But where no extended exposition is attempted, the preacher is naturally induced to draw upon systematic treatises, philosophical theories, works of mere literature, or his own ingenuity of invention, and fertility of imagination, for such a train of thought as, under the given topic, may claim the praise of novelty. We are aware that with many it is far otherwise, and that there are preachers who are wont to select such texts

as necessarily draw after them a full interpretation of all the foregoing and following context; and such sermons are, to all intents and purposes, expositions. But we also know, that to compose a sermon upon a text of scripture, with very little reference to its position in the word of God, and very little inquiry as to the intent of the Spirit in the words, is a thing not only possible, but common. The evil grows apace, wherever the rhetorical aspect of preaching attracts undue attention; and the desire to be original, striking, ingenious, and elegant, supersedes the earnest endeavour to be scriptural.

This abuse is in a good degree precluded by the method of exposition. The minister who from week to week is labouring to elucidate some important book of scripture, has this kept forcibly before his mind. It will necessarily be the chief subject of his studies. Whatever else he may neglect, he will, if he is a conscientious man, sedulously peruse and ponder those portions which he is to explain; using every auxiliary, and especially comparing scripture with scripture. Suppose him to pursue this regular investigation of any one book, for several successive months, and we perceive that he must be acquiring a knowledge of the very word of truth, vastly more extensive, distinct and profound, than can fall to the lot of one who perhaps for no two discourses together finds himself in the same part of the canon. Two men practising upon the two methods, each in an exclusive manner, may severally gain an equal measure of intellectual discipline and real knowledge, but their attainments will differ in kind. The one is driven from the variety of his topics to a fitful and fragmentary study of the bible: the other is bound down to a systematic and unbroken investigation of consecutive truths. Consider, also, how much more of the pure teachings of the Spirit, accompanied with suitable explanation, necessarily occupies the mind of the preacher in one method, than in the other.

If such is the influence, with respect to the preacher himself, who, under any system, is still free to devote his mind to scriptural study; how much greater is it not likely to be with respect to the hearers, whose habits of investigation almost always receive their character from the sermons to which they listen. Perhaps none will deny that every hearer should be made as fully acquainted with the whole word of God, as is practicable. But where, by the mass of Christian people, is this knowledge to be obtained, except at church? The truth is, the scriptural knowledge possessed by our ordi-

nary congregations, amidst all our boasted light and improvement, bears no comparison with that of the Scottish peasantry of the last generation, who, from very infancy, were taught to follow the preacher, in their little bibles, as he expounded in regular course. If long habit had not prepossessed us, we should doubtless agree at once to the proposition, that all the more cardinal books of scripture should be fully expounded in every church, if not once during the life of a single preacher, certainly once during each generation; in order that no man should grow up without the opportunity of hearing the great body of scriptural truth laid open. And considering the bible as our only authentic document, this method seems so natural, that the burden of proof may fairly be thrown on such as have well nigh succeeded in excluding it. There is something beautiful in the very idea of training up a whole congregation in the regular study of the holy scriptures. And if we were called upon to devise a plan for inducing people to read the bible more diligently, we could think of none as likely to attain the end. When hearers know that a certain portion of scripture is to be explained on the ensuing Lord's day, they will naturally be led to examine it during the week, and will thus be prepared to listen with greatly increased advantage to what may be offered. This is precisely the exercise which Chrysostom recommends to his hearers in his first homily on Matthew.* The same Father seems also to have sometimes thrown out to his hearers, difficult questions, in order that they might be stimulated to inquiry. "Wherefore," he says, "have I presented the difficulty and not appended its solution? Because it is my purpose to accustom you, not always to receive food already prepared; but often to search for the explanation yourselves. Just as it is with the doves, which as long as their young remain in the nest, feed them from their own bills; but as soon as they are large enough to be fledged and leave the nest, cease to do thus. For while they bring them corn in their bills, they only show it to them; and when the young ones expect nourishment, and draw nigh, the mother lets it fall upon the earth, and the little ones pick

* "Ὡστε δὲ εὐμαθέστερον γενέσθαι τὸν λόγον, θεόμεθα καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν, ὅπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων γραφῶν πεποιήκαμεν, προσλαμβάνειν τὴν περικοπὴν τῆς γραφῆς, ἢ ἂν μελλῶμεν ἐξηγεῖσθαι, ἵνα τῇ γνώσει ἢ ἀνάγνωσι προσοδοποιῦσα, (ὁ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ εὐνῦχου γέγονε) πολλὴν παράσχοι τὴν εὐκολίαν ἡμῖν.

it up.”* If scripture difficulties are in our day often started in the pulpit, and often left unresolved, we are not prepared to say whether it is exactly with the motive avowed by this great preacher. Certain it is, that the able elucidation of dark places, and the reconciling of seeming contradictions, occupy far less room in the sermons which we now-a-days preach, than they did in those which have come down to us from a former age. Not many clergymen adopt the method of bishop Horsley, who was accustomed to select difficult texts, in order that his preaching might be, in the highest possible degree, an aid to the inquiries of his hearers. And unless scriptural doubts are resolved from the sacred desk, it is plain that the great body of our congregations are likely to remain in darkness, as long as they live. But he who proposes to analyse and interpret any considerable portion of the bible, in regular order, cannot evade this labour, but must repeatedly confront the most difficult passages, and prepare himself to make them intelligible. It would be easy to expatiate on this topic, but enough has been said to awaken some doubt as to the expediency of banishing formal exposition from the church-assembly.

4. The expository method of preaching is best fitted to communicate the knowledge of scriptural truth in its connexion. The knowledge of the bible is something more than the knowledge of its isolated sentences. It includes a full acquaintance with the relation which every proposition sustains to the narrative or argument of which it is a part. This is particularly true of trains of reasoning, where every thing depends on a cognizance of the links which connect the several truths, and the order in which those truths are presented. Large portions of holy writ are closely argumentative, and can be understood in their true intention only when the whole scope and sequence of the terms are considered. This logical connexion is no less the result of inspiration than is any individual statement. In some books of scripture the argument runs from beginning to end, and the clue to the whole is to be sought in the analysis of the reasoning. As instances of this we may cite the epistles to the Romans and to the Hebrews; of which no man can have any adequate conception who has not been familiar with all their parts as constituting a logical whole. This however is so universally conceded as a first principle of hermeneutics,

* Vol. iii. p. 103.

that it is needless to press it further. But it is not so generally perceived, that in the other methods of preaching this great advantage is sacrificed. It is true that a man may announce as his text a single verse or clause of a verse, and then offer a full and satisfactory elucidation of the whole context, but so far as this is done, the sermon is expository, and falls under the kind which we recommend. But this species of discourse is becoming more and more rare. In the sermons of the nonconformists this was usually the plan of proceeding. In modern sermons, there is, for the most part, nothing which resembles it. A text is taken, usually with a view to some preconceived subject; a proposition is deduced from the text; and this is confirmed or illustrated by a series of statements which would have been precisely the same if any similar verse, in any other part of the record, had been chosen. Here there is no interpretation, for there is no pretence of it. There may be able theological discussion, and we by no means would exclude this; but where a method merely textual or topical prevails, there is an absolute forsaking of that which we have maintained to be the true notion of preaching. We can conceive of a hearer listening during a course of years to every verse of the epistle to the Hebrews, laid open in connexion with as many sermons of the popular sort; without obtaining thereby an insight into the grand scope and intricate contexture of that wonderful production. Now we say that the method which makes such an omission possible is unfit to be the exclusive method.

As a remarkable instance of what is meant, we may adduce the sermons of the Rev. William Jay, who is justly celebrated as one of the most fascinating and instructive preachers of Great Britain. In these sermons we find many valuable scriptural truths, many original and touching illustrations, much sound argument, pungent exhortation, and great unction. In themselves considered, and viewed as pulpit orations, they seem open to scarcely a single objection; yet as expositions of the scripture, they are literally nothing. They clear up no difficulties in the argument of the inspired writers; they give no wide prospects of the field in which their matter lies; they might be repeated for a lifetime without tending in the slightest degree to educate a congregation in habits of sound interpretation. The same remark applies to the majority of American discourses, and most of all to those which conform to the prevailing taste of New England. In occasional sermons, and monthly collections, where we have ac-

cess to a number of printed discourses, we are often forcibly struck with the absence of all logical concatenation. The text is a sign or motto, after announcing which the preacher glides into a gentle train of common-places, or a series of thoughts which, however ingenious and interesting and true, have no necessary connexion, 'continuous in their discontinuity, like the sand-thread of the hour-glass.'

The mental habits of any Christian community are mainly derived from the preaching which they hear. It is fair to ask, therefore, from what source can the Christians of our day be expected to gain a taste and ability for interpreting the scripture in its connexion? Certainly not from the pulpit. Among the ancient Scottish Presbyterians the case was different. Every man and every woman, nay almost every child, carried his pocket-bible to church, and not only looked out the text, but verified each citation: and as the preaching was in great part of the expository kind, the necessary consequence was, that the whole population became intimately acquainted with the structure of every book in the bible, and were able to recall every passage with its appropriate accompanying truths. The genius of Protestantism demands that something of this kind should be attempted. Where the laity are not expected to search the scriptures, or in any degree to exercise private judgment, it may answer every purpose to give them from the pulpit the mere *results* of exposition; but more is needed where we claim for all the privilege of trying every doctrine by the word of God; and sermons should therefore be auxiliaries to the hearers in their investigation of the record. And we earnestly desire a general return on the part of our preachers to a method which will necessarily tend, from week to week, to open the scriptures, and display, what is by no means their least excellency, the harmonious relation of their several portions.

5. The expository method affords inducement and occasion to the preacher to declare the whole counsel of God. No man who selects his insulated texts at random has any good reason to be satisfied that he is not neglecting the inculcation of many important doctrines or duties. This deficiency is prevented in some good measure, it must be owned, by those who pursue a systematic course of doctrines in their ordinary ministrations. But usually, the indolence or caprice which renders any one averse to the expository method, will likewise withhold him from methodical series of any kind in his discourses. There is perhaps no man who has not an

undue fondness for some one circle of subjects : and this does not always comprise the whole of what he is bound to declare. But the regular exposition of a few entire books, well selected, would go far to supply every defect of this nature.

It is the province of the minister to render plain the difficulties of the bible, and this is not likely to be done extensively, as we have elsewhere hinted, in an exclusive adherence to single texts.

There are some important and precious doctrines of revelation which are exceedingly unwelcome to the minds of many hearers; such, for instance, are the doctrines of predestination, and unconditional election. These, the preacher is tempted to avoid, and by some they are never unfolded during a whole lifetime. It is obvious that no one could expound the Epistle to the Romans, without being under the necessity of handling these points.

Moreover, it is unquestionable that many doctrines are abhorrent to the uninstructed mind, when they are set forth in their naked theological form, which are by no means so when presented in their scriptural connexion. Here, again, is a marked superiority on the side of exposition.

There is, we suppose, no pastor, who has not, in the course of his ministerial life, found himself called upon to press certain duties, or inveigh against certain sins, which it was exceedingly difficult to dwell upon, either from the delicacy of the theme itself, or from its relation to particular classes or individuals in his congregation. Now when such topics naturally arise in the regular progress of exposition, all hesitation on this score is removed at once. The most unpopular doctrines may be stated and enforced, the most prevalent vices denounced, and the most daring offenders chastised, while not even the censorious or the sensitive can find room for complaint. For these, and similar reasons, we conceive the expository way of preaching to supply a grand deficiency in our common pulpit ministrations.

6. The expository method admits of being made generally interesting to Christian assemblies. We are aware that the vulgar opinion is just the reverse of this, and that there are those who refrain from this way of preaching, under the belief that it must necessarily prove dry and repulsive to the hearer. To this our reply is, that the interpretation of the scriptures *ought* to be interesting to every member of a Christian community : if it is not so, in fact, the cause of this

disrelish is an evil which the church should not willingly endure, and which can be remedied in no other way than by bringing the public back to the assiduous study of the bible. It is not every sort of exposition, any more than every sort of sermon, which is interesting. He who hastily seizes upon a large portion of the text, in order to furnish himself with ample material for an undigested, desultory, and extemporaneous address, cannot expect to awaken and maintain attention. With all their blindness, in certain matters, the public are very sagacious in discovering when the minister gives them that which costs him nothing. But let any man devote equal labor to his lectures as to his sermons, and unless he be the subject of some idiosyncrasy, the former will be equally interesting.

The observation is very common, that expository preaching is exceedingly difficult. Yet the writers on homiletics, as if it were the easiest thing in the world, and taught by nature, almost without exception, dismiss the whole subject with a few passing remarks, and lay down no rules for the conduct of a regular exposition. We are persuaded that if equal pains were taken to prepare for one as for the other, and if the one were as often practised as the other, this complaint would have no place.

As a matter of fact, we have observed no lack of interest in such exercises, on the part of intelligent hearers. The truth is, the bible is made for the common mind, and as it is the most interesting book in the world, so its interpretation, well conducted, is always found to be highly and increasingly agreeable to the majority of hearers. On the other hand, there are few instances of any man's interesting large congregations, for any length of time, by discourses which were void of scriptural statements, however elegant they might be in a rhetorical point of view. The effect of mere ethical preaching has been sorely felt in Germany, where in the greater number of places, the ancient services of the Sunday afternoon, and during the week, have gone into desuetude, and there are whole classes of persons whom one never expects to see in church, such as merchants, military officers, and savans. Teller once preached a sermon to a congregation of just sixteen persons, the intent of which was to warn them against setting too high a value on going to church. "Let any man," says Tholuck, "imagine a modern preacher—as was common in former days—to direct his congregation to bring their bibles with them, and that they might be assured

that he declared, not man's word, but the word of God, at every important point, to look out the passage cited: the remark of all elegant gentlemen and ladies would be, 'Oh! this is too simple!'—*Dies ist doch allzu naiv!*" But in the days when this simple practice was in vogue, every one was interested in exposition; and it will be so again, whenever the public taste shall have been reformed by a return to what was good in the ancient methods. We rejoice to know of at least one instance, even in Germany, serving to show that ordinary Christians may, with proper care, be led back into the old paths, and that highly to their satisfaction. "I know but one preacher," says a writer in the *Evangelical Church Journal*, "in my native country, where there are more than four hundred churches, who practises biblical exposition with success. In his country parish, which comprises several hamlets, he is accustomed to visit each of these in turn once a month, (perhaps oftener in winter) and to lecture in the school-house. The hearers bring their bibles, and even aged and infirm persons, who cannot go to church, repair hither with eagerness and delight. They receive, neither mere fragmentary and superficial remarks on single words or clauses, nor a merely edifying address on a scripture passage, but the connected exposition of some whole book, developing as well the specialties of language and matter, as the entire scope according to its contents. The lecturer begins, at every meeting, where he left off at the previous one. In the next hamlet he interprets another book, as large numbers come in from the neighboring villages, to enjoy the additional privilege." Would that we could witness the same thing in every congregation in America!

There is one advantage of expository lectures, in respect to interest, which must not be omitted. Nothing is more evident, than that the attention and sympathy of an audience are best ensured by a rapid transition from topic to topic. This cannot always be secured in the common method. The preacher, from a sort of necessity, hammers with wearisome perseverance upon some one malleable thought, in order to keep within his preconceived task. But where he has before him a number of connected scriptural propositions, he is not only allowed, but constrained, to make precisely such quick transitions from each point to the next, as gives great variety to his discourse, and keeps up the unwearied attention of the hearer. With faithful preparation, and assiduous practice, there is probably no minister who might not find this happy effect from weekly lecturing.

7. The expository method has a direct tendency to correct, if not to preclude, the evils incident to the common textual mode of preaching. It is an ordinary complaint that the sermons of the present day, as compared with those of the seventeenth century, are meager, and often empty of matter; we think the charge is founded in truth. No one can go from the perusal of Barrow, Leighton, Charnock, or Owen, to the popular writers of our time, without feeling that he has come into an atmosphere of less density. In the mere form of the pulpit discourse, in an æsthetical point of view, we have unquestionably improved upon our model. The performances of that day were too scholastic and complicated. "The sermons of the last century," says Cecil, "were like their large, unwieldy chairs. Men have now a far more true idea of a chair. They consider it as a piece of furniture to sit upon, and they cut away from it every thing that embarrasses and encumbers it." But we have gone on to cut away until we have, in too many cases, removed what was important and substantial. The evil is acknowledged, but it is worthy of inquiry, how far the superficial character of modern sermons is derived from the exclusive use of short texts. We certainly do not assert that the Puritans themselves did not carry this very method to an extreme, by preaching many sermons on the same text; but it is well known that they almost universally pursued some variety of regular exposition in conjunction with this. Still less do we contend that all the evils of sermonizing are to be imputed to the exclusive use of brief texts; the source of the evil is more remote, and must be sought in the spirit of the age. But still, there is good ground for the position, that the prevailing method gives easy occasion to certain abuses, to which direct exposition is not liable; and hence we argue that the exclusion of the latter mode is greatly to be deprecated. This is the extent of our demand. Some of the abuses to which we refer may be indicated.

It is by no means uncommon to hear sermons which are absolutely devoid of any scriptural contents. The text indeed is from the bible, and there may be interspersed, more for decoration than proof, a number of inspired declarations; but the warp and the woof of the texture are a mere web of human reasoning or illustration. Sometimes the subject is purely secular; and often, where it is some topic of divine truth, it is maintained and urged upon natural grounds, independent of the positive declarations of the Word. It is not

merely among the Unitarians of Boston that this style prevails. There are various degrees of approach to it in many orthodox pulpits of New England. The expository method renders this exceedingly difficult: being professedly an explanation of the bible as the ideas are there set forth. In point of fact, this evil seldom occurs in exposition; as it is both natural and easy for the preacher to open clause after clause in its true sense and its revealed order. Expository discourse can scarcely fail to be largely made up of the pure biblical material.

A still greater abuse is that of wresting texts from their genuine meaning by what is called accommodation. This is the extreme refinement of the modern method. As if there was a lamentable paucity of direct scriptural declarations, to be used as the subjects of discourse, we have proceeded to employ sacred words in a sense which never entered into the minds of their inspired writers. This is the favourite trick of many a pulpit haranguer, and deserves to be classed with the sesquipedalian capitals of play-bills, and the clap-traps of the theatre: in both cases the object is to attract attention or awaken astonishment. There can scarcely be found, on the other hand, a single man, however unbridled his imagination, who could fall into such a fault in the process of formal and professed exposition. Common reverence for the word of God must needs forbid any one, while in the very act of interpreting its successive statements, to exhibit as the true intent of any passage, sentiments which no fair exegesis can extract from it.

But even where the text is understood in its literal and primary sense, the avidity for some thing new, and a regard for the 'itching ear' of modern auditories, seduces the preacher into such a mode of treating his subject, as renders the sermon too often a mere exercise of logical or rhetorical adroitness. Where the æsthetics of sermonizing have been cultivated with overweening regard, and the exquisite partition of the topics has been exalted to the first place, we see every thing sacrificed to ingenuity. The proper basis of every discourse is some pregnant declaration of the scripture. But in the elegant sermons which are occasionally heard, the real basis is an artificial division, or 'skeleton,' commonly tripartite, and frequently of such structure as to offer a pretty antithetic jingle of terms, and at the same time to remove out of sight the true connexion and scope of the text. When this is the case, far too much stress is laid upon the division,

however ingenious. This abuse has grown from age to age. It was the natural consequence of exclusive textual preaching. Among the French divines it may be said to have prevailed, but it has reached its acme among the Germans; who have almost defeated our object in these remarks by playing the same tricks of fancy with long passages. Thus the excellent Tholuck, in the ninth of his second series of University Sermons, has contrived from Acts i. 1—14, to produce a division not merely in forced antithesis, but actually in rhyme! The partition being as follows:

1. Die Stätte seines *Scheidens*, die Stätte seines *Leidens*;
2. Verhüllet ist sein *Anfang*, verhüllet ist sein *Ausgang*;
3. Der Schluss von Seinem *Wegen* ist für die Seinen *Segen*;
4. Er ist von uns *geschieden*, und ist uns doch *Geblieden*;
5. Er bleibt *verhüllet* den Seinen, bis er wird klar *erscheinen*.

But as a discourse is not made expository by having prefixed to it a connected passage of scripture, we still maintain, that genuine exposition removes in great measure the temptation to these refinements. It deserves consideration that we treat no other subjects but those of religion in this way. In all grave discussions of human science, all juridical arguments, and all popular addresses, the logical or natural partition of the subject commends itself to the common sense of mankind. Such is the judgment of unbiassed men on this point. It may not be improper here to cite the opinion of Voltaire himself, because through his sneer we discern something like the aspect of reason. "It were to be wished," says he, "that in banishing from the pulpit the bad taste which degraded it, he (Bourdaloue) had likewise banished the custom of preaching upon a text. Indeed, the toil of speaking for a long time on a quotation of a line or two, of labouring to connect a whole discourse with this line, seems a play unbecoming the gravity of the sacred function. The text becomes a species of motto, or rather an enigma, which is unfolded by the sermon. The Greeks and Romans had no knowledge of this practice. It arose in the decline of letters, and has been consecrated by time. The habit of always dividing into two or three heads subjects which, like morals, demand no partition whatever, or which, like controversy, demand a partition still more extensive, is a forced method, which P. Bourdaloue found prevalent, and to which he conformed."

But there is another evil incident to the modern method of preaching which is still more to be deprecated; namely,

emptiness. Next to the want of truth, the greatest fault in a sermon is want of matter. It is not the province of any mere method, as such, to furnish the material, but the ordinary mode of handling scripture in the pulpit affords great occasion for diffuseness, and has brought leanness into many a discourse. A man of little thought, it is true, whether he preach from a verse or a chapter, will necessarily impress the character of his mind upon his performance; yet the temptation to fill up space with inflated weakness is far greater under the modern method; and where this method is universal will overtake such as are undisciplined in mind. We conceive it to be no disparagement of the word of God to say that it is not every verse even of sacred writ upon which a long discourse can be written without the admixture of foreign matter. In too many instances, when a striking text has been selected, and an ingenious division fabricated, the preacher's mind has exhausted itself. Perhaps we mistake, but our conviction is, that far too much stress has been laid upon the *analyses* of sermons. Essential as they are, they are the mere plotting out of the ground. The *skeleton*, as it aptly called, is an unsatisfactory object, where there is not superinduced a succession of living tissues; it is all-important to support the frame, but by no means all-sufficient, and they who labour on this, in the vain hope of filling up what remains by extemporaneous speaking or writing, 'quite mistake the scaffold for the pile.'

We regard the diffuseness of many ministers, however perspicuous, as even worse than obscurity. The labour of the preacher's thought is too often intermitted upon the conception of a good analysis. Our fathers of the last century used to throw out masses, sometimes rude, and sometimes fastastically carved and chased, but always solid and always golden; we their sons are content to beat the bar into gold leaf, and too frequently to fritter this into minute fragments. Defect of thought is a sad incentive to laboured expansion, when a man is resolved to produce matter for a whole hour. In such cases, the effort is to fill up the allotted number of minutes. Too many moments of sacred time are thus occupied in adding water to the pure milk of the word. The dilute result is not only wanting in nutritive virtue, but often nauseous. Under an admirable partition, we find sermonizers offending grossly, and this in a two-fold way. One preacher will state his topic, and then, however plain it may be, pertinaciously insist upon rendering it plainer. In this

instance, the heads of discourse may be likened to milestones on a straight and level highway, from each of which, the traveller is able to look forward over a seemingly interminable tract. Another will, in like manner, announce his topic, and then revolve around it, always in sight, but never in proximity, until the time of rambling being spent, he chooses to return and repeat his gyrations about a new centre. There is little progress made by the haranguer, though his language or his embellishment be unexceptionable, *qui variare cupit rem prodigialiter unam*. This paucity of such matter as is germane to the subject in hand is sometimes betrayed in the attempt to indemnify for the meagerness of the argumentative part, by an inordinate addendum in the shape of improvement, inference, or application.

The expository method, if judiciously intermixed with the other, offers a happy corrective to this fault. Here the preacher is furnished with abundance of matter, all-important, and fertile of varied thought. He is placed under compression, and compelled to exchange his rarity of matter for what is close and in the same proportion weighty. We could give no better recipe for the cure of this tympany of sermonizers, than a course of expository lectures.

One word must be added before we leave this copious topic upon the avidity with which both preachers and hearers seek for novel and striking texts. The most common and familiar texts have become such, for the very reason that they are the most important. It is unworthy of the minister of Jesus Christ to be always in search of fragments which have never before been handled. The practice militates against the systematic and thorough developement of the whole counsel of God. We need not pause a moment to show that this is an evil that cannot exist under the method which we are solicitous to recommend.

It forms no part of our plan, in these remarks, to lay down rules for the conduct of an expository discourse, though the subject is quite as deserving of being treated in detail as any other connected with homiletics. No mistake could be more injurious to the character of such exercises, than to suppose that they demand less method or less assiduity than the most finished sermons of the ordinary kind. They are not to be used as a means of retreat from the labours of the closet, and he who thus employs them will soon find his pulpit services empty and unsuccessful. In the present state of society, when the public mind, especially in our own country,

is trained by the discipline of reading and hearing the highest specimens of forensic and deliberative eloquence, it is vain to expect that any congregation can long be interested in unpremeditated addresses. We may apply to this whole subject the words of our Directory for Worship: "The method of preaching requires much study, meditation, and prayer. Ministers ought, in general, to prepare their sermons with care; and not to indulge themselves in loose, extemporary harangues; nor to serve God with that which cost them nought."* We have met with no instance in which permanent usefulness has followed the practice of delivering unstudied sermons. The preacher who attempts this is sure to fall into empty declamation, objurgatory invective, or tedious repetition. Undigested discourses are commonly of tiresome length, and proportionate dullness. Wherever we hear frequent complaints of a preacher's prolixity we assure ourselves that he leaves much of the filling up of his outline to the hour of actual delivery. Without being himself aware of it, such a preacher falls into a routine of topics and expressions, and is perpetually repeating himself, and becoming more and more uninteresting to his charge; while, at the same time, he is perhaps wondering at the diminution of his hearers, and attributing his want of success to any cause but one within himself. The assiduous study of the bible, with direct reference to the services of the pulpit, is indispensably necessary, whatever species of preaching may be adopted.

We plead, at present, for no more than a discreet admixture of biblical exposition with the other methods of discourse. In entering upon such a course, it is not necessary that the minister should introduce his first experiments into the principal service of the Lord's day: he might make trial of his gifts in less frequented meetings, or in some more familiar circle called together for this special purpose. And even where the expository method is exclusively adopted, as some may see cause to do, the pastor is to beware of that extreme which would always present very long passages. The expository plan, wisely conducted, may be said to include the other. Where, in due course, a verse, or even a part of a verse occurs, so important in its relations and so rich in matter as to claim a more extended elucidation, it should be taken singly, and be made the basis of a whole sermon, or even more.

* Chap. vi. § 3.

As a model of familiar exposition we would cite the Lectures of Archbishop Leighton on the First Epistle of Peter. The great excellency of these is their heavenly unction, which led Dr. Doddridge to say that he never read a page of Leighton without experiencing an elevation of his religious feelings. "More faith and more grace," says Cecil," would make us better preachers, for *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*. Chrysostom's was the right method. Leighton's Lectures on Peter approach very near to this method."—"Our method of preaching," says the same writer, "is not that by which Christianity was propagated: yet the genius of Christianity is not changed. There was nothing in the primitive method set or formal. The primitive bishop stood up, and read the gospel, or some other portion of scripture, and pressed on the hearers with great earnestness and affection, a few plain and forcible truths, evidently resulting from that portion of the divine word: we take a text, and make an oration. Edification was then the object of both speaker and hearers; and while this continues to be the object, no better method can be found."*

Such a mode of preaching is less adapted than its opposite to make the speaker a separate object of regard, and might be selected by many on this very account. It is now some years since we enjoyed the privilege of listening to the late pious and eloquent Summerfield, the charm of whose brilliant and pathetic discourses will never be forgotten by those who heard them. After having, on a certain occasion, delivered a deeply impressive sermon on Isaiah vi. 1—6, he remarked to the writer of these pages, that, in consequence of having been pursued by multitudes of applauding hearers, he had been lead to exercise himself more in the way of simple exposition, as that which most threw the preacher himself into the shade, and most illustriously displayed the pure truth of the Word.

The same idea was expressed by the late Dr. Mason, in circumstances which no doubt drew from him his sincerest convictions and most affectionate counsels. The words are found in a sermon preached in Murray Street Church, December 2, 1821, on the occasion of resigning the charge of his congregation; and we earnestly recommend to every reader this testimony of one who, it is well known, was eminently gifted in the very exercise which he applauds.

* Cecil's Works, vol. iii. p. 312.

In suggesting to his late charge the principles upon which they should select a pastor, he says: "Do not choose a man who always preaches upon insulated texts. I care not how powerful or eloquent he may be in handling them. The effect of his power and eloquence will be, to banish a taste for the word of God, and to substitute the preacher in its place. You have been accustomed to hear that word preached to you in its connexion. Never permit that practice to drop. Foreign churches call it *lecturing*; and when done with discretion, I can assure you that, while it is of all exercises the most difficult for the preacher, it is, in the same proportion, the most profitable for you. It has this peculiar advantage, that in going through a book of scripture, it spreads out before you all sorts of character, and all forms of opinion; and gives the preacher an opportunity of striking every kind of evil and of error, without subjecting himself to the invidious suspicion of aiming his discourses at individuals."*

With these remarks we may safely leave the subject, commending it to the careful and impartial investigations of all who are interested in the propagation of divine truth, and particularly to ministers of the gospel, who, of all men living, should be most solicitous to direct their powers in such channels as to produce the highest effect.

ART. IV.—*Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petræa, and the Holy Land.* By an American, with a map and engravings. In two volumes. Second edition: Harper & Brothers, N. Y. 1837.

It has become very customary for young Americans to take the tour of Europe; but few of them hitherto, have ventured far to the East, except our enterprising merchants. The writer of these volumes appears to possess, in a high degree, the qualifications of a successful traveller. His curiosity is unbounded. His intrepidity is such as to be intimidated by no dangers, and turned aside from his purpose by no common obstacles. He seems also to possess the power of conciliating those with whom it is important for the traveller to be on good terms. He appears to have travelled extensively

* Mason's Works, vol. i. p. 366.