



# THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

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## REVIEW SECTION.

### I.—A SYMPOSIUM ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

NO. III.

BY PROF. TIMOTHY DWIGHT, YALE COLLEGE.

A RECENT writer on the Epistle to the Romans has declared it to be in reality an inspired system of theology. This view has been held, substantially, by many theologians, and, under their influence, by very many private and unlearned readers. Accordingly, the formal and full statement of doctrine in all parts of the Christian system has been sought and found in it; if not indeed in the terms of theological science, at least with such distinctness as to be easily convertible into those terms. The Apostle has thus been conceived of, as it were, as sitting down, with the comprehensive survey of all religious truth and the calm outlook upon the ages which are supposed to characterize philosophers in the schools, to prepare a treatise upon Christianity as it had been revealed to him for the instruction and guidance of mankind. I cannot regard the Epistle as having any such character or purpose as this, or its author as having been in any such condition of mind. The Pauline writings are letters, not treatises. They are instinct with the life and thought of the time at which they were written. They set forth truths and duties, indeed, which bear equally upon men of all generations. But they are as individual and special in their relations, as directly occasioned by the demands of the hour and the circumstances of particular churches, as closely connected with existing controversies in which the author was involved, as truly affected in their phraseology and course of argument by the thoughts then interesting and occupying the minds of the Christian community, as any letters that have ever appeared in the world. We see in them, as we pass in review the progress of the years which they cover, the change in the sentiment and discussions of believers or unbelievers, as clearly as we do when we move along the course of our

## II.—HOMILETIC ILLUSTRATIONS FROM SHAKESPEARE.

BY PROF. J. O. MURRAY, D.D., PRINCETON, N. J.

APT quotation is a great aid in all forms of public address. It illustrates a point or clinches an argument. It brings to the enforcement of the truth the wisdom of other men, and sometimes in forms so striking or so beautiful that the quotation is the barb to the arrow, which makes it stick in the mark, after it has flown swift and strong from the hand of the bowman.

In the pulpit, of course, a cardinal rule for its use would be that it be never profuse and always pertinent. If it be too frequent it becomes pedantic. If it be far-fetched, or be inapt, too general or too commonplace, it loses its power for want of definite aim to justify its insertion. Literary quotation in sermons should be held under severe control. The moment a literary air is given to sermons, their strength as preaching is sapped.

What a weapon such command of apt quotation may become in the hand of a master in pulpit discourse will be seen by examining Dr. Wm. M. Taylor's volume of sermons "The Limitations of Life." It contains twenty-five discourses, of which the author in his fitting preface has said "there is not a discourse here reproduced which has not been useful to some souls." Quite possibly the quotations in these sermons may have arrested the attention or helped to lodge the truth in the heart. They are taken mainly from the English poets and are marked by appositeness, variety and beauty, and may stand as models in the art of felicitous quotation. The following authors are represented in the volume by one or more quotations: Wordsworth, Gray, Coleridge, Keble, Goldsmith, Milton, Cowper, Moore, Macaulay, Pope, Longfellow, Hood, Faber, Whittier, Burns, and Miss Proctor. If inspired authority for use of pointed illustrations in enforcement of Christian truth is asked for, it is easily given. The apostle Paul quotes three times from the Greek poets in his epistles. Once from Aratus (Acts xvii., 28), again from Menander (I. Cor. xv., 33), and yet again from Epimenides (Titus i., 12).

The modern preacher will find a rich storehouse of illustrative quotation in Shakespeare. No poet has sounded the depths of our moral nature as he has done. The moral, yes, the Christian element in Shakespeare is one of his distinguishing characteristics. And it is proposed in this article to give an outline or hint of what may be gained from this source for the modern pulpit. The dramas of Shakespeare—specially his great tragedies, like *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Lear* and *Hamlet*—should themselves be closely studied for the most effective handling of quotations from them. But there are two books which

may be wisely used as helps. One is "Shakespeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible," by Bishop Wordsworth (London, Smith, Elder & Co.), the other is "Shakespeare's Morals," by Mr. Arthur Gilman (New York, Dodd, Mead & Co.).

Two suggestions may be in place here as to the way in which such quotations may be best introduced.

1. Some are most effectually employed without any note or comment. This is specially true of the briefer sort. Passages like these need nothing but a point in the sermon to illustrate or enforce :

"Heaven doth with us, as we with torches do,  
Not light them for themselves: for if our virtues  
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike  
As if we had them not."—*Measure for Measure*, Act 1, Sc. 1.

"That we would do,  
We should do when we would; for this *would* changes,  
And hath abatements and delays as many,  
As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents."—*Hamlet*, Act 4, Sc. 7.

"We are oft to blame in this.—  
'Tis too much proved, that, with devotion's visage,  
And pious action, we do sugar o'er  
The devil himself."—*Hamlet*, Act 3, Sc. 1.

2. At times Shakespearian quotations gain in power when a short explanation is given of the dramatic situation in which they occur. As in *Hamlet* when the whole scene of the king at prayer (Act 3, Sc. 4) brings out so powerfully the meaning of the Psalmist's words, "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me." Or, as in the *Merchant of Venice*, when the speech of Portia (Act 4, Sc. 1) so beautifully unfolds the Divine attribute of forgiveness, when "mercy seasons justice."

The homiletical illustrations from Shakespeare now to be given fall under the following classes: Those which illustrate the subjects of *temptation and sin, conscience and retribution*; those which illustrate *Divine attributes and Christian virtues*; those which illustrate *vices of private and public life*. It would be easy to extend the list, but this our limits forbid.

### 1. *Temptation and Sin.*

The words of Othello (Act 2, Sc. 3) are a striking commentary on the words of the Apostle Paul (II. Cor. i., 14) : "For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light."

"When devils will their blackest sins put on,  
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows."

So also the words of Banquo (*Macbeth*, Act 1, Sc. 3) :

"And oftentimes to win us to our harm  
The instruments of darkness tell us truths;  
Win us with honest trifles, to betray us  
In deepest consequences."

In that powerful scene (King John, Act 4, Sc. 2) when Hubert shows the King his hand and seal for Arthur's murder, the King breaks out in the words :

“O, when the last account 'twixt heaven and earth  
Is to be made, then shall this hand and seal  
Witness against us to damnation !  
*How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds,  
Make deeds ill done !*”

*Sinful apologies for sin* are forcibly illustrated in the words of Edmund in King Lear (Act 1, Sc. 2) : “This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, (often the surfeit of our own behavior,) we make guilty of our disasters, the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity; fools, by heavenly compulsion; . . . and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on.” Here is almost an echo of the prophet Jeremiah's scathing rebuke of the men of his time who stole and murdered and committed adultery, and then came and stood before God in His house and said, *We are delivered to do all these abominations.*

So also the folly of such excuses is well set forth in these lines (King John, Act 4, Sc. 3) :

“ Oftentimes excusing of a fault  
Doth make the fault more by the excuse,  
As patches set upon a little breach  
Discredit more in hiding of the fault  
Than did the fault before it was so patch'd.”

*The deceitfulness of sin* is forcibly drawn in the speech of Bassanio (Merchant of Venice, Act 3, Sc. 2). The whole speech is a series of pregnant thoughts on

“The seeming truth which cunning times put on  
To entrap the wisest.”

But its opening words are strong enforcements of the blinding power of sin :

“In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt,  
But, being seasoned with a gracious voice,  
Obscures the show of evil? In religion,  
What damned error, but some sober brow  
Will bless it, and approve it with a text,  
Hiding the grossness with fair ornament?”

Even more pungently is the truth brought out in the lines from Anthony and Cleopatra (Act 3, Sc. 3) :

“When we in our viciousness grow hard—  
O misery on't!—the wise gods seal our eyes;  
In our own filth drop our clear judgment; make us  
Adorn our errors; laugh at's while we strut  
To our own confusion.”

And again in these from the Tempest (Act 1, Sc. 2) :

“Like one  
Who having, unto truth, by telling of it,

Made such a sinner of his memory,  
To credit his own lie."

### 2. *Conscience and Retribution.*

The whole play of *Macbeth* is a study of conscience. In the very beginning of the play (Act 1, Sc. 3) we have, as Coleridge has pointed out, a picture of conscience working through the imagination in *Macbeth's* words :

"If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,  
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
Against the use of nature? Present fears  
Are less than horrible imaginings."

What a sermon on the power of remorse is found in the sleep-walking scene (Act 5, Sc. 1), especially *Lady Macbeth's* words :

"Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh! oh! oh!"

So also in *Macbeth's* fearful confession to himself of his sufferings (Act 3, Sc. 2):

"Better be with the dead,  
Whom we, to gain our place, have sent to peace,  
Than on the torture of the mind to lie  
In restless ecstasy."

What condensed energy of expression is there in the picture of *Macbeth's* distemper'd soul given by *Menteith* (Act 5, Sc. 2):

"Who then shall blame  
His pester'd senses to recoil and start,  
When all that is within him does condemn  
Itself, for being there?"

The play of *Hamlet* is also full of teachings on conscience and retribution, of which effective homiletic use could be made. We have space only for one or two quotations:

"Conscience doth make cowards of us all."

The words of the guilty queen (Act 4, Sc. 5):

"To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,  
Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss:  
So full of artless jealousy is guilt,  
It spills itself, in fearing to be spilt."

### 3. *Divine attributes and Christian virtues.*

*Portia's* eloquent description of the *Divine mercy* in the well-known passage beginning:

"The quality of mercy is not strained."

and *Adam's* words in "As You Like It," (Act 2, Sc. 3):

"He that doth the ravens feed,  
Yea, providently caters for the sparrow,  
Be comfort to my age!"

the setting forth of God's *omniscience* in the two following passages:

“It is not so with Him that all things knows,  
As 'tis with us that square our guess with shows:  
But most it is presumption in us, when  
The help of heaven we count the act of men.”—*All's Well*, Act 2, Sc. 1.

“If powers divine  
Behold our human actions, (as they do,)  
I doubt not then, but innocence shall make  
False accusation blush, and tyranny  
Tremble at patience.”—*Winter's Tale*, Act 3, Sc. 2.

are all illustrations of how forcibly Shakespeare can portray divine attributes.

Christian morals and graces are abundantly set forth in words apt for quotation viz.:

*Moral courage:*

“He's truly valiant, that can wisely suffer  
The worst that man can breathe; and make his wrongs  
His outides; wear them like his raiment, carelessly;  
And ne'er prefer his injuries to his heart,  
To bring it into danger.”—*Timon of Athens*, Act 3, Sc. 5.

*Self-restraint:*

“Let's teach ourselves that honorable stop,  
Not to out-sport discretion.”—*Othello*, Act 2, Sc. 3.

*Repentance:*

On this the entire speech of the King in Hamlet (Act 3, Sc. 4) beginning:

“What if this cursed hand,”

should be carefully considered.

*Sincere prayer:*

“My words fly up, my thoughts remain below;  
Words, without thoughts, never to heaven go.”—*Hamlet*, Act 3, Sc. 3.

“When I would pray and think, I think and pray  
To several subjects. Heaven hath my empty words,  
Whilst my intention, having not my tongue,  
Anchors on Isabel.”—*Meas. for Meas.*, Act 2, Sc. 4.

*Forgiving spirit:*

“Why dost not speak,  
Think'st thou it honorable for a noble man  
Still to remember wrongs?”—*Coriolanus*, Act 5, Sc. 3.

(“O, see, the monstrousness of man  
When he looks out in an ungrateful shape!  
Religion groans at it.”—*Timon of Athens*, Act 3, Sc. 2.

4. *Vices of private and public life.*

Shakespeare wields a pitiless lash on these, and his plays are a treasury of pungent quotations to illustrate pulpit teachings on them.

*Slander:*

“No, 'tis slander;  
Whose edge is sharper than the sword; whose tongue  
Outvenoms all the worms of Nile; whose breath  
Rides on the posting winds, and doth belie  
All corners of the world: kings, queens, and states,

Maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave  
This viperous slander enters."—*Cymbeline*, Act 3, Sc. 4.

"No might nor greatness in mortality  
Can censure 'scape; back-wounding calumny  
The whitest virtue strikes: What king so strong,  
Can tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue?"—*Meas. for Meas.*, Act 3, Sc. 2.

*Avarice:*

"This avarice  
Sticks deeper; grows with more pernicious root  
Than summer-seeding lust; and it hath been  
The sword of our slain kings."—*Macbeth*, Act 4, Sc. 3.

"What is here? Gold? \* \* \* \*

This yellow slave  
Will knit and break religions; bless the accursed;  
Make the hoar leprosy ador'd; place thieves,  
And give them title, knee, and approbation,  
With senators on the bench."—*Timon of Athens*, Act 4, Sc. 3.

*Hypocrisy:*

"The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.  
An evil soul, producing holy witness,  
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek;  
A goodly apple rotten at the heart;  
O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!"—*Mer. of Venice*, Act 1, Sc. 3.

"Do not \* \* \* \*

Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,  
Whilst like a puff'd and reckless libertine,  
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads  
And recks not his own rede."—*Hamlet*, Act 1, Sc. 3.

*Official corruption:*

"Thieves for their robbery have authority,  
When judges steal themselves."—*Meas. for Meas.*, Act 2, Sc. 2.

"Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear,  
Robes, and furr'd gowns, hide all."—*King Lear*, Act 4, Sc. 6.

"O, that estates, degrees, and offices,  
Were not deriv'd corruptly! and that clear honor  
Were purchas'd by the merit of the wearer!  
How many then should cover, that stand bare?  
How many be commanded, that command?  
How much low peasantry would then be gleaned  
From the true seed of honor? and how much honor  
Pick'd from the chaff and ruin of the times  
To be new varnish'd?"—*Merchant of Venice*, Act 2, Sc. 9.

The range of illustration from Shakespeare is wider than the instances quoted show. Any preacher who will make a study of his plays, with this end in view, will soon discover this for himself. The aim of this article will have been secured if it shall lead our clergy to research in this direction. Such study will answer two good ends. It will rest the jaded mind, and will furnish its armory with effective weapons in the struggle to maintain the right and make war on the wrong.