

*The Preparation of the Preacher*

told the questioner would begin to smile, because he had also been listening to much the same thing. There were slight variations of course, but essentially it was the same sermon! These poor men had become dependent upon books for their ideas.

I remember another minister, who was a good preacher, telling me on one occasion when I happened to be travelling in the same compartment in a train and found him reading Robert Bridges' *Testament of Beauty* that he 'got' much more from 'these fellows' than he did from anybody else. What he meant was that he got more ideas and preaching material there. There are men who get their ideas from books and journals, indeed from all sorts of strange places.

I maintain that this is not the primary object of reading. What then is its main purpose and function? It is to provide information; but still more important, it is because it is the best general stimulus. What the preacher always needs is a stimulus.

In a sense one should not go to books for ideas; the business of books is to make one think. We are not gramophone records, we are to think originally. What we preach is to be the result of our own thought. We do not merely transmit ideas. The preacher is not meant to be a mere channel through which water flows; he is to be more like a well. So the function of reading is to stimulate us in general, to stimulate us to think, to think for ourselves. Take all you read and masticate it thoroughly. Do not just repeat it as you have received it; deliver it in your own way, let it emerge as a part of yourself, with your stamp upon it. That is why I emphasise the general principle that that is the chief function of learning. It is tragic when men become mere gramophone records, or tape-recording machines with the same thing being churned out and repeated endlessly. Such a man will soon become barren; he will soon be in difficulties; and his people will have recognised it long before he does.

\* \* \*

One further remark about reading. General reading is also important. Why? Well, if there were no other reason—merely for the sake of