

THE SEVERAL PARTS OF A SERMON. 299

The conclusion ought to have moved like a river, growing in volume and power, but instead of that, the discourse loses itself in some great marsh, or ends like the emptying of a pitcher, with a few poor drops and dregs.

Let us lay down the rule, then, that the conclusion, or at least *some* conclusion, should be carefully prepared. If it is to comprise any impassioned personal appeal, we shall often find occasion to modify it in delivery, according to the state of feeling which has then been reached by ourselves and the hearers. But one can usually determine, when preparing, precisely the thoughts with which the sermon ought to conclude, though he may leave the mode of stating them to be controlled by the feelings of the moment. He ought in every case to have ready, and well prepared, something that will make an appropriate and effective conclusion, even though leaving himself free, if the moment should so prompt, to strike in a different direction, or rise to a higher level. Where the subject will naturally lead to passionate exhortation, we can almost always foresee a certain range within which such exhortation must be restricted, if it is to be kept in relation to the subject, and can commonly fix some point beyond, towards which this emotional expatiation shall tend, and where we may close with some comprehensive statement or final appeal. The difficulty thus encountered as to the conclusion is only a higher degree of that which everywhere presents itself in the best forms of speaking, and which we must learn to overcome, namely, how shall we combine the most thorough possible preparation with the largest liberty in delivery?¹

¹ Comp. on the different methods of preparation and delivery, Part IV. chap. i.