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with earnest invitation, it might be best for the conclusion to speak frankly of the difficulties of discipleship to Christ, so as to discourage a hasty profession. The preacher must judge in every case, whether this combination will deepen the general impression, or whether the two will neutralize each other in the hearer's mind, and leave him unaffected by either. It may be added that warnings, and all that is alarming in gospel truth, should be uttered not as if we delighted in denunciation, but with especial tenderness, showing that we speak in the faithfulness of love.

The length of the conclusion, like that of the introduction, is dependent on circumstances, and no rule can be laid down. But there is great danger of making it too long, especially in hortatory appeals. The feeling of the speaker inclines him to continue, but the feelings of the hearers cannot be long kept up to a high point. If the sermon has been long, the conclusion should certainly be brief, save in very peculiar cases. Sometimes the close of the last division really brings the whole train of thought to an end, and gives it a practical turn; any separate conclusion is then unnecessary, and commonly undesirable. Sometimes an abrupt conclusion is very effective, when well managed, with good taste and unaffected solemnity. Sometimes the preacher will be overcome by emotion, and then tearful silence will be more powerful than speech. "Excessive length is a common fault of the conclusion of extemporaneous preachers and writers; in fact, of all who do not govern themselves both in the preparation and delivery of sermons by well-defined plans. New thoughts occur to them, and they are hitched on to what has gone before. What is worse, sometimes the preacher becomes conscious that he has failed to accomplish the object of his discourse, or to awaken the degree

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of interest he ought to have excited, and he struggles on in the vain endeavor to compensate the fault, until at last he is forced to terminate further from his object than when his conclusion began."¹ Most of all is it unwise to give indication that one is about to conclude, and then start again, or keep dragging on.

The general character of the conclusion ought to be determined before the detailed composition (whether written or unwritten) of the discourse is begun. Then the development of the details may be suitably limited and directed by the use which it is proposed to make of the whole in concluding. If the other materials have been provided and arranged, and no conclusion has yet suggested itself—a thing which will not often happen—we may look again over the train of thought drawn out, asking ourselves distinctly the question what will be the most suitable conclusion to all this. Or perhaps a renewed examination of the text, or of its connection, or of parallel passages, will furnish something suitable. The problem is not to find some conclusion, but that which will be most appropriate and effective. It is plain that the conclusion cannot be composed in detail, till we reach it in composing the discourse. In fact, some better conclusion than was originally contemplated may have presented itself in the course of composition, which it is proper to substitute. And the same thing may happen in the course of delivery. The great requisite is, that the body of the discourse and the conclusion shall each be adapted to the other; and this may be accomplished by fixing the general contents and design of the conclusion when laying out the plan of the discourse; and then allowing the style and tone of the conclusion to be modified, or its very character changed, in any way that may have

¹ Kidder, pp. 229, 230.