

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 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 analogous 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 a 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, supercedes 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 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, that 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 ordinary 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