

LECTURE XI.

CONSTITUENT MEMBERS OF DISCOURSE.—CONTINUED.

ARGUMENT AND CONCLUSION.

THE fourth and most extended member of the regular sermon is the *Argument*. This indeed constitutes the main body of the discourse. I have already said, more than once, that it may often consist of a didactic discussion, which is not a formal demonstration. It may be a convergent series of illustrative or explanatory remarks. It may be a series of historical instances. Yet, as the intent is always demonstrative, and as the affirmation of resemblance in each illustration or instance is usually a brief tract of demonstration, the name of "Argument" is not inappropriate to this *main* discussion, in any case. As this is what constitutes the body of the sermon, the consideration of it must be extended and important. The larger part of all that falls under the head of "*Disposition*" will obviously pertain to this topic. I therefore postpone the farther treatment of it until our synoptic view of the constituent members of discourse is completed, lest I should be led to separate the remaining one too widely from the first four.

This last member is, of course, the "*Conclusion*." The reasons for its introduction correspond to those

which required an *exordium*. As the approach to the main subject without any preparation would be abrupt and unskilful, so to relinquish it without conclusion would be awkward and incomplete. As a transition stage of sentiment was found necessary to raise the hearer, from his ordinary apathy, to the tone of the sacred truth to be discussed, so a transition is desirable, to consign him to the state of sacred meditation and conviction in which the sermon is designed to result. Again: the aim of all rhetorical discourse is to produce a practical determination of the hearer's will. To this end, the truths discussed should be so applied, after they have been explained and demonstrated, as to connect the force of the whole in one effect. "A threefold cord is not quickly broken." Each several head of discussion may be likened to one strand. It is the conclusion which twines them all together, combining their strength and drawing the convinced hearer irresistibly to his duty. The separate branches of argument are the parallel rays of the sun of truth; the conclusion is the lens which refracts them into one burning focus. Once more: these several parts of the argument must be presented by the speaker, and considered by the hearers, singly in detail; for to mingle the discussion of them together could result only in confusion and obscurity. The preacher must lay aside the first in order to take up the second head; he dismisses the second in order to introduce the third. He must, in a certain degree, call his hearers away from the previous point to attend to the one in hand: he must require them temporarily to exclude it, in order to give full attention to the next. If, then, there were no con-