

LECTURES TO MY STUDENTS

In order to the holy and useful exercise of extemporal speech, the Christian minister must cultivate a childlike *RELLANCE UPON THE IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*. 'I believe in the Holy Ghost', says the Creed. It is to be feared that many do not make this a real article of belief. To go up and down all the week wasting time, and then to cast ourselves upon the Spirit's aid, is wicked presumption, an attempt to make the Lord minister to our sloth and self-indulgence; but in an emergency the case is widely different. When a man finds himself unavoidably called upon to speak without any preparation, then he may with fullest confidence cast himself upon the Spirit of God. The divine mind beyond a doubt comes into contact with the human intellect, lifts it out of its weakness and distraction, makes it soaring and strong, and enables it both to understand and to express divine truth in a manner far beyond its unaided powers. Such interpositions, like miracles, are not meant to supersede our efforts or slacken our diligence, but are the Lord's assistance which we may count upon at an emergency. His Spirit will be ever with us, but especially under severe stress of service. Earnestly as I advise you not to try purely impromptu speaking more than you are obliged to do, till you have become somewhat matured in your ministry, I yet exhort you to speak in that manner whenever compelled to do so, believing that in the selfsame hour it shall be given you what you shall speak.

If you are happy enough to acquire the power of extemporaneous speech, pray recollect that *YOU MAY VERY READILY LOSE IT*. I have been struck with this in my own experience, and I refer to that because it is the best evidence that I can give you. If for two successive Sundays I make my notes a little longer and fuller than usual, I find on the third occasion that I require them longer still; and I also observe that if on occasions I lean a little more to my recollection of my thoughts, and am not so extemporaneous as I have been accustomed to be, there is a direct craving and even an increased necessity for pre-composition.

If a man begins to walk with a stick merely for a whim, he will soon come to *require* a stick; if you indulge your eyes with spectacles they will *speedily* demand them as a permanent appendage; and if you were to walk with crutches for a month, at the end of the time they would

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be almost necessary to your movements, although naturally your limbs might be as sound and healthy as any man's. Ill uses create an ill nature. You must continually practise extemporizing, and if to gain suitable opportunities you should frequently speak the word in cottages, in the school-rooms of our hamlets, or to two or three by the wayside, your profiting shall be known unto all men.

It may save you much surprise and grief if you are forewarned, that there will be great variations in your power of utterance. Today your tongue may be the pen of a ready writer, tomorrow your thoughts and words may be alike frost-bound. Living things are sensitive, and are affected by a variety of forces; only the merely mechanical can be reckoned upon with absolute certainty. Think it not strange if you should frequently feel yourself to have failed, nor wonder if it should turn out that at such times you have best succeeded. You must not expect to become sufficient as of yourself, no habit or exercise can render you independent of divine assistance; and if you have preached well forty-nine times when called upon without notice, this is no excuse for self-confidence on the fiftieth occasion, for if the Lord should leave you, you will be at a dead stand. Your variable moods of fluency and difficulty, will by God's grace tend to keep you humbly looking up to the strong for strength.

Above all things beware of letting your tongue outrun your brains. Guard against a feeble fluency, a garrulous prosiness, a facility of saying nothing. What a pleasure it is to hear of a brother breaking down who presumed upon his powers to keep on when he really had nothing to say! May such a consummation come to all who err in that direction. My brethren, it is a hideous gift to possess, to be able to say nothing at extreme length. Elongated nonsense, paraphrastic platitude, wire-drawn commonplace, or sacred *rodomontade*, are common enough, and are the scandal and shame of extemporizing. Even when sentiments of no value are beautifully expressed, and neatly worded, what is the use of them? Out of nothing comes nothing. Extemporaneous speech without study is a cloud without rain, a well without water, a fatal gift, injurious equally to its possessor and his flock. Men have applied to me whom I have denied admission to this College because, being utterly destitute both of education and of a sense of their own ignorance, their boundless conceit