

of preaching, this matter is vital. Broadcasting has brought right into the homes of the nation distinguished voices speaking on all manner of subjects—literature, politics, science, religion: and people who have thus grown accustomed to well-articulated and effective speech are less likely to be indulgent to a preaching manner that is ponderous or mumbling or uncouth, or to the dull tedium of that hateful thing, the “pulpit voice.” The message entrusted to the preacher is not less but far more important than any wireless talk however fascinating on a literary, scientific or sociological theme. That a message of such vast consequence should be delivered in a manner which virtually denies its urgency is witless and inexcusable.

Now here there inevitably arises the question of the relative merits of read and spoken sermons. This is an old debate and it is not necessary to rehearse all the “pros” and “cons.” Let me rather make one or two **general suggestions on the main issue, and then draw attention to three specific points which have been singularly overlooked.**

You will be well advised, whichever method of delivery you are proposing to adopt, to begin by writing out your sermons fully. During the first ten years of your ministry—and perhaps over a much longer period than that—there is no substitute for this essential discipline. It will safeguard your work against diffuseness, ambiguity and redundancy. It will make for clarity of thought and perspicuity of style. Therefore establish it as a rule that one of your two sermons each week—some would go further and say both—shall be, not merely drafted, but wrought out in full from beginning to end.

But having your sermon thus completely written, what are you to do with it? Are you to take the manu-

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script into the pulpit and read it word for word? That this method has manifest advantages is not to be denied. Thus, for example, it ensures that the balanced presentation of a subject, for which the preacher has laboured in his study, shall not be lost. Moreover, it defends a helpless congregation from the worst evils of extemporaneous padding and prolixity! It defends the preacher from the nightmare experience of floundering in the morass, and fumbling in vain for the right word and the telling phrase. Joseph Parker once asked R. W. Dale of Birmingham why he read his sermons; to which Dale frankly replied, "If I spoke extemporaneously I should never sit down." "My command of words," he confessed, "is such that as a young man I could preach standing on my head. To be condensed is my object in writing my sermons." It is eminently desirable that a sermon should be compact, clean-cut and as far as possible free from literary aberrations and logical anacoloutha: herein lies the virtue of the read sermon. Nor ought we to be influenced by what Phillips Brooks once called "the general impression of the piety of extemporaneousness": a crude, erroneous notion, based on a naïve doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Have we not all heard sermons delivered without a scrap of paper which moved us not a whit, and merely left us feeling "The Lord was not in the wind?" And have we not listened to read discourses which were memorable in the deepest sense and charged with spiritual power?

[There is, however, another side to this matter. The preacher who suffers himself to be tied slavishly to his manuscript is surrendering something—a quality of directness and pointedness, of versatility and verve and liveliness—which he can ill afford to lose. There is the ever-present danger that the typed or written sermon on

the pulpit-desk in front of him may act as a barrier between himself and those to whom he speaks. Christian preaching strikes notes of challenge and appeal which are almost bound to sound muffled and unnatural where bondage to the written word holds sway. The minister of the Gospel is essentially a herald of the most magnificent and moving tidings that ever broke upon the world; but how shall he make the world feel the living urgency of the message if he is perpetually fettered and shackled by the tradition of the read discourse? If you dispense with your manuscript, and preach freely from a single page of notes, your sermon may indeed lose something of artistry and literary expression; there may be gaps and broken sentences—occasionally even murdered grammar. "Brethren," cried Father Taylor, the sailor-preacher, finding himself entangled in a sentence from whose labyrinthine subordinate clauses there seemed to be no exit, "I have lost the nominative of this sentence, and things are generally mixed up, but I am bound for the Kingdom anyhow!" You may lose some polished idiom or nicely rounded phrase; you may perpetrate many an abrupt and violent anacolouthon. What matter if you do? Take courage: you are in good company. Are there no anacolouthistic sentences in the New Testament, beginning one way, ending another? In any case what you stand to lose is more than compensated by the gain in personal grip, in directness and urgency and reality, in the immediate impact of mind upon mind and the living encounter of heart with heart. Do you remember Jeanie Deans, in *The Heart of Midlothian*, telling Reuben Butler of her decision to make the long journey to London and plead in person for Effie's life before the king and queen? "Writing winna do it—a letter canna