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I.—LITERARY.

YOU SHOULD BE MISSIONARY.*

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Brethren, do you understand the importance of missionary effort on the part of the church? Do you feel its importance? Do you feel that you are fully awake on this subject? Have you determined to be missionaries yourselves?

We ought all to be missionaries whatever be our local spheres of labor. Whether we are pastors, or evangelists, or professors, or editors. We ought to be missionary in heart, aiming to so spend our lives as to spread the Gospel most rapidly and fully throughout the limits of the earth. Many of us, perhaps, ought to labor on the foreign field. "My brethren, I am ashamed that there are so many of us here in this christian land. We must go to the heathen," said Dr. Wm. Armstrong to the ministers and churches of Richmond, Va. in 1833. † And Dr. Armstrong was right. He was simply awake to a great and momentous reality. There are too many ministers at home in proportion to the number in mission fields.

When Gossner said, in Berlin, in 1844, to young men starting for India, "Up, up, my brethren! The Lord is coming and to every one he will say, 'Where hast thou left the souls of the heathen? With the devil?' Oh, swiftly seek those souls and enter not without them into the presence of the Lord," ‡ he was making an exhortation tame in comparison with the requirements of the case.

* A part of a lecture from the course in Missions, 1897.

† See Thompson: Foreign Missions, p. 7.

‡ Thompson: Foreign Missions, p. 6.

THE TEXT: ITS USE AND ABUSE.

PROF. T. R. ENGLISH.

That the time honored custom of taking a text has been shamefully abused, is so patent to every one who has given the matter the least thought that the attempt to show this would be a work of supererrogation. If this abuse were confined to those who deliberately turn aside from the word of God, and seek only to entertain their hearers ; or to sensationalists, who seek to commend the truth by springing it upon their hearers in the most unexpected way ; or to the ignorant, who are doing the very best they can with their limited opportunities, we would hold our peace. But that which fills us with gravest concern is the fact that the evil prevails to an alarming extent among those who are earnest, faithful and consecrated, and who are rightfully regarded as leaders in the church, and ensamples to their brethren.

It was the writer's privilege and pleasure on a certain occasion to listen for the first time to "a master in Israel," whose reputation as a preacher is national, and whose name is one "to conjure with." The text announced was a clause of four words, which, by a flagrant act of vivisection, was taken from the sentence in which it was imbedded. The preacher did not read the chapter from which the text was taken, nor in announcing it did he so much as read the sentence of which it was a living member, nor in the whole discourse was there the most remote reference to the context, or to the real meaning of the words. The reason for this silence was very obvious, for the mere reading of the chapter, or even of the verse, would have rendered the incongruity between the text and sermon so glaring that the dullest hearer would hardly have failed to see the absurdity of such a connection.

Dr. Broadus, in his well known and valuable work, *The Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, tells the old and familiar story of the preacher who took as his text "Top-not come down" (Matt. 24:17), and proceeded to denounce a style of head-dress then in vogue. The preacher in this case was of course an ignorant man, and not very skilful in concealing the dismemberment of that passage, but his more skilful and edu-

cated congeners are found even in our own church. Let us not deal too hardly with this well-meaning brother, of an eminently practical turn of mind, and hold him up to ridicule, while there are so many, even in the front ranks of our own ministry, who lay hold upon some striking clause, or even word, leaving the balance of the sentence to mourn its loss; and not content with this act of violence, in the absence of all its friends and relatives, proceed to give it such a meaning that its former associates would never recognize it.

But it may be objected, that however difficult it may be to reconcile these practices with Homiletic rules, yet the very men who are most guilty, it may be, in this respect have the ear of the people, are the most popular preachers, and what is far more important, are successful in the work of winning souls. Now if one can be more successful in the work of the ministry by mispronouncing his words, or by violating the rules of Grammar, or by disregarding the principles of Rhetoric, we hold that he is not only justifiable in doing so, seeing that no moral wrong is involved, but it is his positive duty to do so, and a failure to make such a sacrifice would indicate a low conception of the trust committed to him. If the practice referred to involved no more than the violation of certain Homiletic rules, then we would say, violate them to your heart's content, if by so doing you can advance the cause of Christ. If one finds that he can catch more fish by disregarding the rules of the art as laid down in text-books on the subject, he would be little less than a fool to pay any attention to them. If it were only a question of methods we would lay but little stress upon it, for after all the sermon is but a means to an end; but we hold that there is a grave *moral* question involved, and it is to this aspect of the case that we now invite your attention.

Let us first inquire as to what is involved in announcing a text at the beginning of a discourse.

1. Its very position creates the presumption that it is to be the key-note, the foundation of what is to follow. It is placed in the very fore-front, the place of honor, and is justly looked upon as the vanguard of the discourse. The title page of a book should fairly represent its contents. When we pick up a book entitled "Systematic Theology," we do not expect to find within a treatise on Mathematics, or a collection of jokes. It is akin to fraud to label a bottle of whiskey "Milk for Babes," or to fill the show-windows of a grocery with dry goods. We

can but experience a feeling of resentment when under some misleading caption we are intrapped into reading some advertisement. When one announces a text it is a virtual pledge to the audience that the discourse which is to follow will be in the same line; and to use a passage from God's word as a kind of decoy-duck, or as an introduction to a message which is confessedly of a different origin, savors strongly of moral dishonesty, or at least is not consistent with that candor and sincerity which ought to characterize the messenger of God.

2. Not only is it given the place of honor, but the very word itself renders that pledge more definite. The word *text* is derived from *textus* or *textum*, something woven, thus denoting the *web of discourse*. It came to be used of any connected discourse upon which a commentary was written. Thus we speak of the *text* of Homer, as distinguished from the explanations and comments of others. The earliest Christian discourses were expositions of Scripture, and the portion expounded upon any particular occasion was called accordingly "the text." Some writers, as Shedd and Hoppin, hold that the passage upon which a sermon is based is also called a text for the additional reason that it forms the *web* or *tissue* or *main thread* of the discourse. If the sermon is an exposition of the text, then the latter necessarily constitutes the main thread of the discourse, but it is somewhat doubtful whether this had anything to do with the historical origin of the term as we now use it, and we will not insist upon it in this connection. Waiving then this particular point, we insist upon it that from time immemorial the word *text* has had, and still has, a definite meaning, and denotes the portion of a writing commented upon or expounded, and hence to call a passage of Scripture which prefaces a sermon, but is not expounded in it, a *text*, is a misnomer, and should be scrupulously avoided.

It may be urged that words constantly change their meaning, and that this is a case in point. We reply that while this word is often used in an improper way, yet it is constantly used in its proper sense, and to use it in any other is confusing and misleading. What moral right has one to call himself a Calvinist when he has discarded every doctrine peculiar to the Calvinistic system? What right has one to call that a text which no longer corresponds to the legitimate and customary meaning of that term? If one has no intention of treating the portion of Scripture with which he prefaces his sermon as a

text, then it would be better to call it by some other name, and to advertise his hearers at the outset that he is not before them as a preacher of the Word.

3. Again, the very form in which the text is announced is significant. Not unfrequently it is something like this in substance : "We invite your attention to the word of God as recorded in——" What is this the preacher is saying ? Does he ask the attention of the hearer to this particular passage ? Then there is an implied pledge that he himself will give attention to it, and that he will do all in his power to fix the attention of his audience upon the truth contained in it, to the exclusion of all else. Think of the absurdity of a preacher asking the attention of his audience to a passage which he straightway ignores ! To sum up the preceding, the announcement of a text is virtually a pledge to unfold the truth contained in it. *The text is the message of God* which the preacher proposes to deliver, and the sermon is but the medium by which it is conveyed.

The pledge implied in the text is violated in several ways, two of which we will now mention.

1. A passage of Scripture is announced as a text, but in reality it serves merely as a starting point, or as an introduction to the discourse. There is no show even of anything like exegesis, and it is at once dismissed as soon as it has served its purpose in introducing the subject in an apt and striking way. How degrading it is to use the word of God in this way ! It has often occurred to us that custom of closing the Bible as soon as the text is announced is eminently fitting and appropriate in such cases. There are some indeed who do not take a final leave of the text at this stage, but the hearer is again reminded of its existence by its regular recurrence at stated intervals, especially if it happens to be a sonorous one. We recall a typical sermon of this kind, based ostensibly upon the words, "and it was night," and though many years have elapsed since, we well remember with what regularity the evening shades came on at the close of each paragraph. How often are the gems of Scripture used only to ornament an earth-born discourse, and to deck it with the livery of Heaven !

2. This implied pledge is violated again, when scriptural truth is set forth in the sermon *as if it were contained in the text*, while confessedly it is not to be found there. For example, the text is that familiar passage from Amos, "Prepare to

meet thy God, O Israel," and the preacher, ignoring the evident meaning of the passage, proceeds to urge the duty of preparing for death by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. When reminded of the fact that this passage does not and cannot have any such meaning, the reply is ready, that this truth is clearly taught elsewhere even if it is not here, and it makes little or no difference, seeing that it is true and scriptural. Suppose that same preacher is reading as the Scripture lesson for the occasion the chapter from which the text is taken, and without a word of warning, he incorporates into the address of the prophet to those children of doom the words, "This is a faithful saying &c.," and when a startled hearer remonstrates, he coolly replies, "Well, I admit that Amos did not say this, but Paul did some centuries later." Would he not be looked upon as bereft of reason? Have we any right to put into the words of Amos, even by implication, ideas wholly foreign to him? Is it not a grave moral wrong to wrest and distort the words of Holy Writ, even though it be for the highest and holiest purpose? Is not this a species of Jesuitry? What too must be the effect upon the thoughtful hearer when he finds out, as he will sooner or later, that the message has not been faithfully transmitted? He must arrive at one of two conclusions; either the messenger does not understand the message entrusted to him, or else he has knowingly tampered with it.

On one occasion a class-mate of the writer, having given a correct exegesis of his text, said in substance to the congregation, "Now, brethren, this is the real meaning of the text, but to-day I am going to take it in this sense"—and then proceeded to give a meaning entirely foreign to it. Would that all were as candid as he was! It seems to be a canon with many that we are at liberty to assign to a passage any meaning that the words could possibly bear taken out of their connection, but what right have we to assign to words a meaning which they were never intended to convey? Here belong also the spiritualizing and allegorizing preachers, who from the Sahara of a genealogical table can bring forth things new and old, until we wonder at our own stupidity in not seeing before the richness and fulness of these Scriptures!

The approach of the season for Westminster celebrations reminds us of the fact that there are *texts* for these occasions also. A recent paper gives a glowing account of an eloquent dis-

course by an esteemed brother "whose praise is in all the churches." The text, we are told, was from the Song of Solomon, and the writer goes on to say: "In the exposition of this passage, Dr. — seemed to anticipate the anniversary of our Westminster Assembly in his defence of Presbyterianism, as in ringing words he drew a vivid pen picture of the Declaration and Testimony of the grand old Church of the Huguenot, the Covenanter and the Netherlands, as these noble martyrs of the faith stood loyal even unto death."

Westminster and Song of Solomon! The connection is so suggestive that it will not be necessary to name the chapter and verse. Indeed there are doubtless so many good texts there for such an occasion that it would be invidious to discriminate.

In view of the flagrant and widespread abuse of the text, the question has been seriously asked, whether it would not be better to discontinue the time honored custom of announcing a text. The answer to this depends upon the answer given to another question: "What shall the sermon be?" If it is the great mission of the preacher to stand as God's messenger and interpret his will to the people; if like Ezra it is his business to "cause the people to understand the law," then there is no option in the matter, and the text must be retained, or his occupation is gone. If, on the other hand, his function is simply to communicate truth which he has found out by searching, then common honesty demands that he should present that truth upon its own merits, and not demand for it acceptance on the ground that it is a *message*. If we take a text (and what is a text but a message from God?), then let us stick to it, and bend all our energies to the task of making plain and enforcing the message it contains.

While we contend that it is the business of the preacher to expound his text, it does not follow by a good deal that he must take a text whenever he gets up to speak in a religious assembly. Why cannot one discuss the Westminster Assembly for instance without pretending that he is preaching from a text. Let him simply announce his subject and go ahead. Indeed there are many subjects that might be profitably discussed in the pulpit, and yet there are no single texts for them. For example, the Bible has much to say on the duties of church members, and yet there is no single passage in which these duties are set forth.

Let the preacher simply announce his subject, and then set forth the teaching of the word of God concerning it without going through the farce of taking a "text" which is straight-way forsaken, or else made to mean something that the writer never dreamt of.

