

## LECTURE XIII.

### *RULES OF ARGUMENT.*

**T**HE first precept which I shall state, in fulfilment of the promise of the last lecture, is little more than a repetition of our second maxim. Sermons should ever be rich in Scripture. The testimony of the Word should be cited with a certain boldness and authority expressive of the preacher's confidence, not in himself, but in God, who there speaks. The manner in which this supreme umpire is ushered in should seem to say, "This is necessarily the end of controversy." Some preachers were accustomed to speak disdainfully of the human reason, as though it were the enemy of faith, and to resist the application of its powers to examine religious truth, in a manner which suggested fear and jealousy. Others, on the contrary, were perpetually taking so much pains to make revealed truth appear reasonable to the hearers, that they gradually taught them to feel they were under no obligation to believe, unless they could comprehend the reasonableness of what God declared. Both these errors are to be avoided. Let the preacher apprehend the proper functions of reason in revealed theology, and the harmony between this faculty and faith. Let him show his confidence in revelation by cheerfully inviting Reason to apply its

severest examinations, provided it be fairly done. Let him so challenge the willing obedience of the mind for the Word as to show that the most humble and implicit submission is the highest wisdom.

The proof-texts cited should be pertinent, and they should be applied only in the precise sense which the Holy Spirit intended them to bear. What that sense is, the preacher must ascertain by a diligent and faithful study of them, before he ventures to use them. I would enjoin the same sacred integrity here which I urged when speaking of the use and exposition of the text. He who quotes the Scriptures in a sophistical spirit will gradually produce this impious result: the people will be taught to regard them as a sophistical book. Some will always be observant and acute enough to note and remember your inconsistencies of logic. You will find that you have taught them at once, to despise your arguments, to use the same weapons against you, and to treat the word of God with diminished reverence. But the highest reason against a disingenuous use of Scripture evidence is, that it offends God. How can we dare to pretend that we shall promote his holy ends by unholy means?—that we shall advance truths by falsehood?

When an important statement is made, other proof-texts may be well added to the first. While one word of God should be enough to silence doubt for ever, yet the concurrence of several satisfies the mind, by evincing a wider harmony between the proposition advanced and the sacred Scriptures, and by extinguishing any lingerings of doubt whether the first testimony was fairly applied. But proof-texts should not be multi-

plied to weariness ; this would weaken instead of strengthening the impression, and would arrest the movement of the discourse. The relevancy of these testimonies may not be obvious without some exposition, or their bearing, while valid, may be inferential only, or they may suggest some interesting side-view of truth kindred to the main subject of the sermon. Shall the preacher pause upon citing such texts to expound, to apply, to deduce? I reply, he may pause, but it must be under the restraints of a severe judgment. He must see to it, that he turns aside no more than is absolutely necessary to cause his proof-texts to yield a full support to his text. Otherwise, the unity and movement of discourse will be fatally marred ; his sermon will be a crude bundle of little sermons.<sup>1</sup>

2. My second rule is little more than an application of the principle, that all reasoning should recur as closely as possible to the original sources of conviction in self-consciousness and intuitions. When you have occasion to argue, in addition to your appeal to proof-texts, endeavour so to put your propositions, as to bring their truth directly to the test of these original powers of the mind. Where there is really but one step of deduction from first truths, this may always be done, and often where the steps are more than one. It is effected

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Conrad Speece once compared this kind of preaching to a Christmas-hunt in Virginia, where the boys took a rabble of untrained hound-whelps into the old fields to chase hares. A warm trail was soon found, and hotly pursued until another scent happened to cross it. The pups were sure to take this and run upon it until a third was met a little fresher. Thus there was a mighty cry and race all the day, and not a single hare caught at night.

by putting the case in a concrete instance, so stated as to present the true point of the argument palpably for the intuitive verdict of the mind. For example, let the proposition to be established be this: "The sinner's inability is no excuse for his irreligion." This might be argued metaphysically by defining inability, analyzing its elements, and showing that they are such as do not supersede our responsibility. I do not say that such analysis is never proper in the pulpit, but you will gain your point much more effectively and plainly by appealing at once to the sinner's consciousness, and compelling him to testify against himself that in each act of impenitency, omission and transgression (the aggregate of which makes up his irreligion) he acts his own preference. In every one he exercises his conscious free-agency. But now he also has a moral intuition, which tells him that there is responsibility wherever there is free-agency. This argument is self-evident to him. And, besides, it really defines to him the nature of his inability more clearly than any analysis.

We have all read an excellent illustration of the argument, from our intuition of cause and effect, for the existence of God, in the supposition that one should propose to account for the production of the *Paradise Lost* by the accidental falling together of a multitude of printers' types. We feel intuitively that this cannot be, because accident cannot be the adequate cause of all the varied order and beauty of that poem, in orthography, grammar, metre, euphony, invention, imagination and reasoning. How, then, can anything less than God have been the adequate cause of this wondrous universe?

Take one more instance. The proposition, "Concupiscence is sin," may be argued theologically. But the convincing argument is to appeal to the hearer's self-consciousness, and to the impartial and intuitive verdict of his conscience. Let it be supposed that he is harbouring an inclination or entertaining a temptation to do an unrighteous act against his neighbour, or even that a feeling of unjust resentment against him is allowed to brood in his heart. He can truly say that no matured volition exists in his soul to do the wrong; no definite purpose has been formed. Why has he an instinctive unwillingness to have his neighbour know the adverse feeling? Why does he blush at the thought that others divine it? This proves that the feeling is not innocent; the immediate judgment of the reason is disclosed, condemning it as sin.

Under my second precept I may correctly place the commendation of experimental reasoning. For this, as we have seen, brings the proposition which you assert under the purview of the intuition, that like causes must produce like effects. The popular mind loves the experimental argument. It is to this kind of intelligence, practical and plain: it seems to bring the truths you advance within its own actual and even its sensible knowledge. It should therefore be much used in the pulpit.

3. If deductive processes are used, let the steps be few. The object of this rule is to bring the conclusion as near the first truth as possible. Some one has well said that if a chain of argument consists of more than two or three links, it is worthless for the public speaker. The people have a just suspicion of ratiocina-

tion in long-drawn trains. However carefully you may conduct it from the beginning to the end, they remain doubtful of the result. They desire to be able to look back after the journey is completed, and to comprehend all the steps at one view; they wish to see, not only that they have passed over from first premise to last conclusion, but also how they passed over. Now, where the steps are numerous, the recollection of them all is fatiguing: none but thoroughly-trained minds are capable of it. When we remember also whence logical fallacies usually arise, we shall appreciate the justice of the popular dislike for long trains. The source of these sophisms is commonly in some misapprehension or transition in the meaning of terms. Now, each syllogism presents us with four separate terms, each of which must be distinguished and remembered, as well as their relations. As we multiply syllogisms, we multiply the chances of fallacy in at least a quadruple ratio. If we suppress a member of a syllogism for the sake of brevity and of diminishing the number of terms, we only increase the intricacy of the reasoning, by thus compelling the mind to supply the missing link.

You can now understand the popular prejudice against "reasoning preachers." They are regarded as dry and fatiguing. But, in truth, he who does not reason is no preacher: he establishes no conviction. The dry preacher is one who should be called just the opposite of a "reasoning preacher," for he reasons unskilfully, and therefore tediously. The attractive preacher is the true reasoner, for he argues skilfully and tersely. He is interesting, not because he gives

the understanding no logical grounds, but because he gives them aright: he who should do the former would make no impression whatever and would be supremely uninteresting.

4. Use many illustrations of your arguments. A brief caution, I trust, will be enough to remind you that mere illustration is not argument, and that he who substitutes the one for the other is a dishonest logician. When I say this, I except those obvious cases, where the illustration is expressed and the argument implied; because the latter is made, by the help of the former, perfectly obvious, and does not now need an express statement to set it forth. The mind of the hearer grasps it validly without further words. Such are some of the illustrated arguments of our Saviour. But in these instances illustration is not made a substitute for argument: it is well understood by the hearer, that its only value is to lead to the reasoning which it suggests, and, in suggesting, explains. It must also be conceded that there are illustrations which are at the same time true analogies: they present a real parallelism of relations to those of the argument illustrated, in that respect wherein the force of the deduction resides. In such a case there is more than the force of mere illustration: there is analogical argument—a species of experimental evidence which is conclusive in proportion to the perfectness of the parallelism. I may cite, for example, the Christian grace of “adoption,” the name of which suggests a beautiful illustration from the usage, as it prevailed in the civic life of the ancients. The adopted child of the Roman patrician was held of patrician rank, however vile his actual birth. This fact not only assists

us to comprehend the proposition, that the justified believer is made co-heir with the Son, but, because we must believe that the employment of the word "adoption" suggests a true analogy, it gives us also some probable evidence that the proposition is true. But it behooves the preacher to remember that in other cases illustration is not argument, and to be jealous of himself, lest he should cheat the understandings of his hearers or his own by the exchange. The use of plausible, ingenious, pretty but not truly analogical illustrations is one of the most refined arts of the sophist, seductive to the indolence of men's minds, and exceedingly hard to expose; for while the apparent analogy is obvious and broad enough for the lazy thinker, the discrimination which proves the appearance false and the analogy deceptive is nice and laborious, requiring perhaps a more careful abstraction than the original abstract logic would have demanded without the aid of any illustration. This is therefore a weapon as dangerous as effective, and its right use demands your highest Christian integrity.

The legitimate use of illustration, then, is to assist in the right apprehension of terms and relations, in order that the logic may be really brought under the inspection of the reason. If a proposition contains a first truth, as soon as its terms are perfectly apprehended, the truth which is in the copula becomes readily obvious to the mind's intuition. We no longer need any aid to see it; we cannot help seeing it. So, if a relation between propositions includes a sound deduction, as soon as all the terms and the intended relation are rightly apprehended, the inference is seen by the

mind's inspection. We again find that aid is no longer wanted to see it; we cannot avoid it if we would. The difficulty of receiving the force of such logic as has just force is only in the precise apprehension of terms and relations, as they are meant by the reasoner. This requires fixed attention, correct abstraction, clear conceptions and faithful memory, as well as competent knowledge of words and syntax. Now attention and abstraction are most irksome to ill-trained minds, and such are those of the major part of mankind. Illustration happily relieves that pain, by assisting abstraction and alluring attention. It leads the hearer's mind easily to the designed conception of terms and relations, by setting them in a concrete form. It gives an indirect, but an exact and happy, definition of that relation of propositions in which the inference resides. It thus assists in getting the argument within the purview of the mind's inspection. The use of illustrations is, therefore, sanctioned by our first principle, which traced the elements of all mental conviction to self-consciousness and intuitions.

Another advantage is that derived from the wit of the illustration. When I mention the word *wit*, I suppose you too well informed to think that I intend something jocular. Wit is defined to be a sudden view of unforeseen but apt relations with the pleasure arising therefrom. This pleasure, while always vivid, may be elevated and altogether serious. Now a second gain of the good illustration is its serious wit,<sup>1</sup> the sudden and

---

<sup>1</sup> Many of our Saviour's illustrations, as well as those of the great uninspired masters of rhetoric, are rich in this element. See that of the two debtors, Luke vii. 41. The children playing in the market-

pleasing suggestion of a novel but truly apt relation between the concrete idea introduced and the reasoning step which is pending. The pleasure which this produces is easily reflected by association upon the reasoning itself. The hearer mingles it with the intellectual gratification derived from the intuition of the truth he has reached, and he carries away the argument and conclusion with an impression of delight.

There is still a third element of power in some illustrations—their influence over the emotions. This will be more successfully explained when I speak of the work of persuasion.

Illustration is, therefore, a potent aid to the orator. All masters of the rhetorical art have excelled in it. Our Saviour surpassed all others in the copiousness, terseness, aptitude, beauty, ingenuity, simplicity and wit of his illustrations. Hence, in part, it was that men said, "Never man spake like this man." You should humbly imitate him. You should study apt illustration and store up the materials for it from your observation and reading. The narratives of the Bible are your appropriate treasury. Another may be found in the store of known and moving contemporaneous events which an active mind collects. But in selecting an illustration you must observe two rules: one is, that it should be more simple and familiar than the thing to

---

place, Luke vii. 32. The good Samaritan, Luke x. 33. The wolf in sheep's clothing, Matt. vii. 15, etc. Some of them indeed are instinct with wit in its more biting aspects. What can be more stinging, and even humorous, than "the blind guides straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel?" Matt. xxiii. 24. Only our familiarity with them prevents our feeling the pungent wit.

be illustrated, otherwise it gives the hearer no aid; the other is, that it must not only be apt and logically fair, but of a dignity and seriousness coherent with the topics of the pulpit. An illustration which should degrade a solemn and elevated subject by its ludicrous triviality, or which should divert the emotions from their sacred channel by suggesting the unhallowed passions of the world and its strifes, would be a grievous blemish. In one sense, it would be a greater rhetorical sin, in proportion as it was more striking and ingenious.<sup>1</sup>

Although mental conviction, the subject we now have in hand, is reached through the reason, yet the speaker cannot overlook the fact that his hearers are creatures of affection and prejudice, as well as of understanding. These powerfully affect and obstruct the operations of the reason. We must, therefore, not only deal directly with the emotions in the work of persuasion, but in

---

<sup>1</sup> I trust that I shall not be charged with this vice, for the following illustration of it.

One moist, sunny afternoon, as I was coming from my house to this place, to give one of these lectures on Sacred Rhetoric, I saw the pertest possible little dog making most intent and anxious efforts to catch something, which seemed to be flitting before him upon the ground. I found, upon watching him, that the object was the *shadow* of an ephemeral, yellow butterfly, which was fluttering a yard above his head unseen by him! He was fatiguing himself to catch the shadow of an insect which was itself too unsubstantial to satiate his hunger if eaten by the hour. What an illustration, said I to myself, of the sinner "who walketh in a vain show and is disquieted in vain," living for the deceitful hopes of sinful joys which, if won, would be empty!

But would this incident be fit for the pulpit? No; the scene was too petty and too farcical, although startlingly analogous, to paint an error so momentous and tragical as that of the worldly soul.

our argument we must endeavour so to use logic as to evade these obstructions and obtain for evidence its best light. One great end of judicious arrangement is here indicated. Arrangement is also determined by a clear perception of the conditions of the question to be debated and the attitude of the parties. As the success of the military commander depends on the disposition of the several arms, so that each shall be brought into action where it will be most efficient, so the triumph of the reasoner results often from the skilful ranking of his arguments. These thoughts show the propriety of the following remarks :

5. Determine correctly on which side the "burden of proof" justly lies. If the preliminary presumption is in your favour, claim it, and throw the burden of proof upon your antagonist, that you may have to stand only on the defensive. This discreet position may make the difference between overthrow and victory. Sir Walter Scott in the "Crusaders" represents Count Raymond Berenger as refusing to stand on the defensive within his castle, which he might easily have made impregnable against the whole Welsh host. By rashly attacking them in the open field he incurred defeat and destruction, despite his skill and heroism ; he fatally threw away his vantage-ground. The law allows every accused person the presumption of his innocence until he is convicted. It is, therefore, the duty of his advocate to assume the defensive, and throw upon the prosecutor the burden of proving guilt. If the defence should undertake to show that the accused did not commit the act charged, it would find itself committed to the arduous and perhaps impossible task of proving a negative. This neg-

ative might be true, and the man really innocent, and yet its demonstration in that form might be impossible. Here the folly of assuming a logical obligation which did not belong to them would convert a triumphant defence into an abortive attack. Let an instance be also taken from our own science, theology. In a theodicy, or vindication of the divine attributes as concerned in the evils prevalent among creatures, those who assert that the perfections of God are consistent with these adverse appearances are entitled to the presumption; for "the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." The initial probabilities are in our favour. Let those who assert the opposite assume the burden of proof, as is fair. Our defensive task then becomes comparatively easy; for the arduous thesis which our assailants have to maintain is this: that there can be no good reason, known to an infinite mind, why God should permit these evils, and be still omniscient, benevolent and almighty. This presumptuous assertion rebutted, our victory is won, and the fact that, within the limited circle where we comprehend God's providence, we see him regularly bringing good out of these evils is sufficient for that result. But if we undertook the *onus* of explaining fully how God is benevolent in the permission of all these evils, which his omniscience foresaw, and which his omnipotence might have excluded, we should find ourselves overwhelmed with difficulties; the task is beyond human ken. These examples may exhibit the usefulness of our rule.

6. The prejudices of hearers must be consulted in the order of introducing your proposition and proofs. If the truth to be established is not repugnant to your

hearers, you may consult other considerations exclusively ; but if it is obnoxious to misunderstandings and prejudices, the form of proposition chosen should be one which, while perspicuous and not uncandid, shall state the truth in its least offensive phase. The aspects of it which especially assail their previous ideas may be better asserted in the conclusion, after those adverse conceptions have been removed by explanation and argument. Further, I would recommend that the discussion begin, in such cases, with *a priori* arguments ; for these, proceeding from cause to effect, both show that your proposition is true, and how it comes to be true, thus removing the incredulity and appearance of paradox ; afterward, the other evidences may be introduced with better effect.