

## LECTURE XVI.

### PERSUASION.

RHETORIC is familiarly called the "art of persuasion," and there is a popular sense in which the whole work of the orator is suasive, in that it aims to produce a practical determination of the hearer's will. But man is a creature of understanding and of affections; his soul not only sees, but feels. We infer, therefore, that the rhetorical discourse should deal not only with the intellect (to produce mental conviction), but with the affections to direct the motives.<sup>1</sup> The former part of our work we call argument, the latter, in its special sense, persuasion. While those moral emotions, to which alone the sacred orator may lawfully appeal, are all rational affections arising only upon a view of truth in the understanding, yet there are facts and laws belonging to man's emotive system which must also be regarded in dealing successfully with it. Hence the necessity for this department of our science. When we consider how man is prompted to act, we perceive that the true cause of his volition is always from him-

---

<sup>1</sup> Quintil., L. iii., c. 5, §§ 1, 2: *Facultas orandi consummatur natura, arte, exercitatione; cui quartam partem adjiciunt quidam imitationis; quam nos arti subjicimus. Tria sunt autem, quæ præstare debet orator, ut doceat, moveat, delectet. Hæc enim clarior divisio, quam eorum, qui totum opus in res et in affectus partiuntur.*

self, or from within. The objective inducement to choice is but the occasion; the soul's own view and feeling are the efficient cause of action. The activity of his nature, as guided by his own intelligence, projects itself toward its appropriate object, and this spontaneous appetency is the true *motive* of choice. The etymological relation between the words "emotion" and "motive" gives correct expression to a truth. It is the emotions which immediately move the will. To produce volition it is not enough that the understanding be convinced; affection must also be aroused. The object held before the soul must be shown to belong to the category of the true, and also to that of the good; for where the latter aspect is not present to receive the appetency of the soul, the truth of the object is as powerless to produce movement as though it were fiction. No man is induced to arise and go to the modern Ophir by the most convincing assurance that it contains abundance of waste earth or stones. This is no more to him, although admitted to be certain, than the idlest dream of Utopia. But when he has credible testimony that there is gold there, and that "the gold of that land is good," he may form the purpose of going. This is because gold is to his nature an object of desire. If you would induce your hearer to adopt a given course, you must not only prove to his wisdom that it is the proper means to its end, but you must show to his heart that the end is desirable. Hence all suasive discourse, whatever its particular topic, may be reduced to two elements—that which places the proposition in the category of the true, and that which shows it in the category of the good. Both elements are essential to the oration. The

latter may be present only by implication, but unless it is virtually present there is no rhetorical discourse.

Although this is so obvious, you will still find a general prejudice against what is popularly termed an "appeal to feeling." Men argue that truth should be the guide of the righteous man's actions, and not mere emotion. They imagine that because the understanding is the directive faculty, its decisions are always correct, and the impulses of feeling are blind. Hence they conclude that he who appeals to their understandings deals honourably and beneficially with them, while he who appeals to their feelings is seeking to abuse their natures. And especially do they judge the latter expedient unworthy of the preacher of the gospel, whose message is infallible truth, and whose professed motive is absolute disinterestedness. Let us examine this prejudice.

I think it may be accounted for by two facts. The soul is often abused by an appeal to irrelevant and improper feelings. The hearers are sinners, whose emotions are in a state of moral disease. The false orator who, to gain some end, aggravates that disease of heart in some direction, has indeed done their nature a cruel wrong. But there are also relevant and proper feelings. The strength and prevalence of these are not a fault, but a virtue of the soul; so that he who enables us to enhance them is as obviously our benefactor, as he who enlightens our understandings. If the prosecutor of a man accused of crime should urge his judges to convict him because he was their ancient enemy, appealing to hatred and the lust of revenge in their breasts, this would be most criminal; but if the advo-

cate, while demonstrating by proof that the accused was a proper object of moral indignation, should appeal to that sentiment, to the love of justice, and to the benevolent desire for order and the safety of innocent citizens, to procure his condemnation, this would be legitimate; for the truth itself teaches us that these are proper motives for a magistrate, and consequently their prevalence in him is his virtue. When men condemn the incitement of right emotions because we are liable to be abused by the incitement of the wrong ones, they very strangely forget that, by the same argument, they might condemn a just appeal to the understanding; for is not the reason often abused by logical sophisms? Indeed, the appeal to logic should be regarded with even more suspicion than the appeal to feeling, when we regard the second fact, which is the following: The sophism imposed on the understanding is far less likely to be detected by the victim. By the very reason that it has been successfully imposed, he remains unconscious that it is a fallacy; he makes no effort to apply the logical *criteria* by which its falsehood would be exposed; because, having accepted it as sound argument, he does not dream that there is any cause for desiring to test it. But those *criteria* do not usually apply themselves without his volition. The conscience, on the other hand, is an intuitive and imperative faculty: she pronounces her unchangeable verdict, and as soon as the diu of passion subsides, it is heard, and it recalls the heart at once to a sense of the right. Thus, the sophistical appeal to emotion is in most instances unavoidably and speedily detected; while the sophistical appeal to the understanding is likely to escape discovery just in the

degree it is mischievous. Does not this fact, while it naturally accounts for men's jealousy of the former, show that there is more reason to be jealous of the latter? There are two thieves: the first steals frequently, and he is always so maladroit as to be detected and punished; hence he has an execrable reputation. The second steals far more frequently, but he is so skilful a knave that he is not even suspected; whence his name is very fair; but he is the more dangerous rogue of the two. The truth, then, lies in this simple question: Granting that the understanding is the directive faculty of the soul, I ask, to what does it direct? You answer: To man's proper good. True; and this good is the object of desire. Whence it appears that desire is what the understanding has to guide. Without the movement of right desire, its directive function is as vain as that of the needle on a ship which is becalmed.

The attempt to propagate suitable emotions is, then, lawful for the speaker; yea, there is no argument which does not implicitly do it. You will reason with men: "This conduct is for your interest." You may profess to have restricted yourself to simple evidence; but just in the degree in which your argument is conclusive, you make a virtual appeal to self-love. You demonstrate: "This course is for the good of our neighbour." You have made an appeal to benevolence. You show: "This act is dangerous." You resort to your hearer's fear. Again, every man practices this rhetoric of persuasion upon himself. We are continually aware that our right affections are too low for their proper objects. We feel that it is not only right, but obligatory, to use expedients for their enbancement, and we

recognize him as our moral benefactor who assists us to effect it.

Since the legitimacy of the art of persuasion depends upon our resorting to the appropriate feelings, the first question to be answered is: To what class of emotions may the preacher appeal? I reply, only to the moral and spiritual. If the emotions of taste and of social life are evoked, it must be only for the purpose of reaching the former by their means. Only one word of argument is required to show that the sensual and malignant passions must never be aroused; for this would be to do positive evil under the pretence "that good may come." The damnation of such teachers is just. But, more, the one ulterior end of preaching is the holiness of the hearers. Now, moral motive alone leads to moral volition, whence it is clear that the preacher who satisfies himself with stimulating the natural sensibilities of taste and social affection has really done nothing toward his proper task; while he runs an imminent risk of deluding men with the vain counterfeit of natural emotions about religion, in place of true religious emotion.

In dealing with the moral and spiritual affections, the preacher has one capital advantage and disadvantage. His disadvantage is that he finds all these affections perverted in fallen man. The susceptibilities for love of God, legitimate self-love, love of man, love of holiness, repentance, hope, fear, moral complacency, are not destroyed (they are fundamental traits of his constitution as a rational and responsible creature), but they are radically corrupted in all their actings. His feeling toward God is either open enmity, or a deceitful,

sentimental admiration for his natural perfections. His desire of well-being is inordinate self-love. His repentance is guilty remorse. His fear is the fear of hatred. His moral complacency is degraded into pride. His hope is selfish delusion. Conscience alone, God's witness in the soul, retains her integrity, although the *medium* of her vision is partially obscured, and her verdicts often unheeded. The preacher's chief hope, then, is to deal with the conscience and to arouse her action. How can he successfully employ the other affections, which, if awakened, will act only in a perverse direction? His suasive work, then, would be hopeless without his capital advantage. This is the promised power of the Holy Ghost, quickening the dead soul and new-creating its diseased affections. Here is the sacred and glorious distinction between the posture of the true, gospel minister, and of the secular orator—that this spiritual agency is real and almighty, and that the objective truth and good which the servant of the gospel places before the perverted heart are made the instruments of this promised, divine inworking. Whenever the Spirit breathes, the icy bonds of spiritual death are dissolved, and the hearer's soul is thus enabled to respond legitimately to its proper, spiritual inducements. Human skill in the work of persuasion must obviously be in strict subordination to this divine agency, and in strict conformity to its instrument, divine truth.

1. The most essential maxim of the art is thus suggested to us in a light which requires no further argument. Study the structure of man's religious emotions as portrayed in the Bible. No human knowledge of the human heart can approach the value of this divine dis-

closure of its workings under the application of the truth. And we discover here, doubtless, a part of God's purpose in giving us in Scripture so many pictures of the religious affections of renewed and of unrenewed men. He designed to instruct his ministers how to deal with those affections. Ponder these pictures. Discover the springs of motive there disclosed. Apply those incentives to feeling which are there represented as effective. Expect men to be rightly moved, as you see them moved there, and no otherwise.

2. You must remember these two facts, that an increase of the moral emotions cannot be made a direct and immediate object of volition, and that their deficiency is a moral defect, implying reproach against him who exhibits such lack. These two statements, when explained, will together teach us some important rules. First, then, it is plain that a man cannot by a mere, direct act of volition, cause himself to love what he does not love, or to regret what he does not regret. This is sufficiently evident from the fact that these emotions are themselves related to volition as cause to effect. The effect cannot determine its own cause. The emotion of love, in some degree, must be *a priori* to a volition to seek its object in love. Only an existing regret for a fault can prompt a wish to feel regret for it. It is, therefore, unreasonable to make a direct preceptive demand upon the emotions, as we do upon the attention. When we wish to establish conviction of a proposition in our hearer's understanding, we directly challenge his attention to our proofs. This is reasonable, for attention may be immediately directed by his volition. But it is with the emotions as with the nerves of involun-

tary motion in the body. If the labourer strikes amiss in wielding his instrument, we properly command him to direct his blows differently; they are guided by his will. If the physician finds that his patient's heart beats too rapidly, and is consequently wearing out his life with a nervous fever, it is simply foolish to bid him quiet its beats by his will; for the nerves by which it acts belong to another system, on which volition does not act. What, then, can the physician do? He can command his patient to employ the voluntary muscles of his hand, mouth and throat, to receive and swallow a potion of *veratrum*, or some such drug, which by its medical virtue stills the over-action of the heart. It is thus, only indirectly, that the patient can employ his will to control the organ. So, the pulsations of man's spiritual heart do not obey a direct volition of his will; he can only bend his attention to the consideration of those truths and facts which, through the healing touch of the divine Physician, occasion a healthy beat of the soul.

The other fact is, that deficient or wrong moral emotions are proper subjects of reproach, for they are sins. When the preacher proposes to communicate to his hearer the proofs of a given proposition, he thereby implies an imputation of ignorance; the very undertaking assumes that the hearer is less informed of this evidence than himself. But this is no just reproach against the hearer, because it is the preacher's business to be better informed than he of sacred truth. If the religious teacher is not, he is unfit for his profession. To assume such deficiency of knowledge and opinion, and to announce expressly the purpose of correcting it,

are therefore no discourtesy to his audience. So, likewise, it is reasonable to make a direct requisition upon their attention. But to advertise your hearer that you design to make him feel more adequately is to accuse him of delinquency. To announce to him that you aim to enhance his gratitude is to charge him with ingratitude. It is not unnatural that he should repel the accusation, and steel himself against your appeal. It appears hence, that while the purpose to convince the understanding may be pre-announced, the design of moving the heart may not be. You will not misconceive me as denying here the sinfulness of wrong affections, and the duty of testifying against these, as against all other sins. When your design is reprehension, that which is wrong must of course be reprehended, whatever may be the offence. I intend only to show you the indiscretion of beginning an attempt to conciliate and allure right affections with what is necessarily felt as an implied assault.

Hence I draw these rules: That the purpose of persuading should not be pre-announced: Let the work be done, and not advertised.<sup>1</sup> And that it is useless to urge right feeling by mere hortation: Let the preacher present, instead, those truths which are the objects of moral emotion.

The presentation of the objects of right affection is both by argument and by description. Since the soul's

---

<sup>1</sup> Cicero de Orat., L. ii., c. 77, § 310. "Et quoniam (quod sæpe dixi) tribus rebus omnes ad nostram sententiam perducimus, aut docendo, aut conciliando, aut permovendo, una ex omnibus his rebus res præ nobis est ferenda, ut nihil aliud nisi docere velle videamur," etc.

seeing is in order to its feeling, and it only feels as it sees, no foundation can be validly laid for an appeal to the emotions without argument; and the evidence alone is often enough to set before the soul that which becomes the object of its emotion, in the most vivid light. Accordingly, there is a species of moral and religious argument which, while severely logical, affects the intelligent hearer with profound feeling. Such was the preaching of Jonathan Edwards and of Thornwell; and such spiritual logic is the noblest basis upon which to build all the other parts of sacred eloquence.

But in many other cases, descriptive painting must be employed to present to the soul affecting images of the truth. It is in this work especially, that the faculty of imagination must be employed. And now that I have uttered this much-abused word, let me protest at once against your receiving it in the perverted, popular sense. By imagination I do not mean the miserable facility of clothing commonplace thoughts in borrowed tropes. This habit, instead of evincing imagination, is more frequently an indication of its absence, and of a mind weak and beggarly in its creative power. Nor do I mean that trait of mind sometimes denominated by the word "fancy"—an aptitude for seeing picturesque resemblances between ideas and the visible objects of nature. This also is no index of constructive power. The imagination is rather the recreative faculty: it is the power of combining the elements of conception furnished by the memory into organic forms which, as wholes, are new. It is that faculty by which the soul constructs complex images out of the separate parts, with truth and distinctness. The constituent parts are

indeed old, being ideas derived from perception; but the wholes are, for that mind, proper creations. While the complex images are only couceived, and not seen with the senses, they are, to the vigorous imagination, life-like; they have, to the consciousness and emotions of the soul which forms them, all the force of realities. It is by the force of this representative faculty that noble and strong souls affect themselves, by anticipation or by retrospect, with powerful moral emotions. For instance, the wise and magnanimous patriot, by forecasting the distant but certain dangers of his country, affects himself in advance with a zeal and grief and desire, as ardent as those which duller souls can feel under the actual experience of the present calamity. It is this anticipative passion, kindled through the imagination, which nerves his soul to prepare, to watch, to strive, to bleed for his country's defence, while others are as yet unconcerned, and are perhaps accusing him of extravagance. It was thus that St. Paul's masculine and sanctified imagination painted to him a picture of the future but unseen ruin of souls, so moving as to fire his heart with that love and zeal which, to meaner and colder uatures, appeared lunacy.<sup>1</sup> It is from this emotion, in view of absent and future objects, that all man's virtuous activities as a being of forecast proceed. And the sentiment of beauty at beholding a smiling landscape is not more immediately the æsthetic effect of visual perception, than is rational emotion concerning absent objects the effect of imagination.

Such is the nature and such are tbe value and power

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 13; Luke xix. 41-43.

of this imperial faculty of the soul. The descriptive power is but an application of it. In this work the poet or orator only translates into words that picture which is bodied forth before his own conception. This remark justifies the following practical precept, that in order to describe well the speaker must first conceive well to himself. If you would cultivate this power, you should first represent to yourself the faithful and exact and lively image of that picture which you wish to convey to your hearers; and then, holding it fixed before the conception, merely recite to them in true and vivid terms the essential outlines of what you see. Your task is simply that of Rebecca the Jewess, when she stood looking from the loophole to describe to the prostrate knight, Ivanhoe, the assault which was passing before her eyes. Looking into the window of your own conception, you merely read to the listeners without what you see written there by the pencil of the imagination.

Descriptive eloquence must combine perspicuity of images, definiteness of outline and brevity. Tediousness or prolixity is more fatal to movement and effect here than anywhere else. Description is a species of substitute for mental vision; like vision, it must be rapid, almost instantaneous. Yet a certain particularity is requisite, for general outlines are ever vague, and vagueness cannot affect the soul. The master-hand, therefore, usually constructs its pictures by selecting a few particular traits which are suggestive of the whole filling up, and drawing them with a rapid and yet definite stroke. It is thus the sacred historian portrays the horrors of famine in Samaria.<sup>1</sup> Having stated

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings vi. 24-29.

briefly the extravagant prices paid for two repulsive articles of food, he rapidly details the horrid compact of the famished women for devouring their own children, and its breach. This ghastly incident at once unveils to us, without other description, all the woes which filled the famine-stricken city. Still more forcibly does He who "spake as never man spake" reveal to us in a single sentence the outline of the siege of Jerusalem by Titus.<sup>1</sup> We seem to stand upon the western declivity of Olivet and see the verdant zone of vineyards which encircled the city, blackened with the Roman circumvallation, the streets resounding with the clangour of faction and the wails of dearth and pestilence, the final assault, the defenders crushed beneath the falling ramparts, the foundations upturned by the ploughshare, and then the brooding silence of desolation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke xix. 43, 44.