

LECTURE XVII.

PERSUASION.

3. **T**HE phenomenon of instinctive sympathy is the orator's right arm in the work of persuasion. To sympathize is to be affected with our fellow-man, and because we see him affected. It is, as it were, a spiritual infection by which he impregnates us with his feeling. It is the secondary rainbow more faintly reflecting the glow of the first. The effect is immediate and instinctive: we feel simply because we see our fellow-creature feeling. Now, then, if you would make others feel, you must feel yourself. "*Si vis me flere, dolendum est primum tibi ipsi.*"¹ Let the preacher's own soul be fully penetrated and aroused by sacred emotion. The heavenly flame must be kindled first in

¹ Horace, Ep. ad Pisones, line 102.

Cicero de Orat., L. ii., c. xlv., § 189. "Non mehercule unquam apud iudices aut dolorem, aut misericordiam, aut invidiam, aut odium excitare dicendo volui, quin ipse, in commovendis iudicibus, iis ipsis sensibus ad quos illos adducere vellem, permoverer." C. xlvi., § 191: "Ipsa enim natura orationis ejus quæ suscipitur ad aliorum animos permovendos, oratorem ipsum magis etiam quam quenquam eorum qui audiunt, permovet."

Quintil., L. vi., c. ii., § 26. "Summa enim (quantum ego sentio) circa movendos affectus in hoc posita est, ut moveamur ipsi. Nam et luctus et iræ . . . etiam ridicula fuerit imitatio."

your own bosom, that by this law of sympathy it may radiate thence into the souls of your hearers.

I waru you emphatically, moreover, that this emotion in the speaker's soul must be genuine and not simulated. The mere appearance of ardent feeling, however artfully it may be imitated, will fail of producing the effect. There is an infallible intuition in man's heart by which he detects the reality or falsehood of the appearances of emotion; and those whose feelings are least sophisticated by artificial culture, even children and ignorant persons, have this insight only the more fully, perhaps, for that reason. Sympathy is a species of spiritual contagion. The painted automaton, when seen at a distance, may appear to glitter and to move itself like a living man; but when we touch it, we perceive at once that there is no life. I am so persuaded the rule is universal, that only genuine emotion can propagate a sympathetic effect, I do not doubt it is true even of the mimic eloquence of the stage. The consummate actor moves the spectators only because he has so realized to himself the sentiments and passions natural to the part he is acting, that his own proper personality is, for the time, merged in and superseded by that of the hero whom the poet's imagination has created. He actually feels and lives the history as his own.¹ The great

¹ Some distinguished actors, in mimic combats, fight *ex animo*. One was known, in a suicide scene, actually to stab himself. The charm of Garrick's acting was in his perfect and sincere realization of his character: he was, indeed, for the time, not an actor, but a real agent. It is related that a countryman was taken by his London friends to see Garrick in his favourite part of *Hamlet*. The city people were curious to learn the opinion of their unsophisticated friend concerning the entertainment. He was loud in his praise of the miuor actors,

classic authorities with one voice assert both the possibility and necessity of this sincere passion. Cicero quotes Democritus and Plato as declaring that no one can be a good poet without ardour of the spirits and, as it were, a divine afflatus of passion. We have seen his testimony above, that "this kind of oration which is designed to move the spirits of others moves the orator himself even more than them who listen."¹

but greatly surprised them by his silence as to the great star. They asked him at length if he did not admire the representation of *Hamlet*. "What," said he—"of the young man whose father was poisoned? I thought nothing strange of his taking on greatly at such a crime, of course." The plain man had not apprehended that Garrick was acting at all, but supposed that he alone was a real character among the mimics, so complete was the assumption of the natural passions of the part.

See also Cicero de Orat., L. ii., c. xlvi., § 193. "Quid potest esse tam fictum quam versus, quam scena, quam fabula? Tamen in hoc genere sæpe ipse vidi quum ex persona mihi ardere oculi hominis bistrionis viderentur e sponda illa dicentis:

'Segregare abs te ausus, aut sine illo Salamina ingredi
Neque paternum adspectum es veritus?'

Nunquam illum '*adspectum*' dicebat, quin mihi Telamon iratus furere luctu filii videretur."

M. Bautain (*Art of Extempore Speech*, ch. iv., § 3) expresses an opposite view, not unnatural to one who only knew the intensely shallow and artificial stage of modern Paris. Says he: "The actor, in a word, is obliged to grimace morally as well as physically; and on this account, even when most successful, when most seeming to feel what he impersonates, as he in general feels it not, something of this is perceptible," etc.

This may be true of French actors; but if it is, it proves them poor actors. The true power of the drama is only felt when the scenic passions are real for the time.

¹ See previous note, and De Orat., L. ii., c. xlvi., §§ 191, 194. Quintil., L. vi., c. i., §§ 44, 45.

But the emotions which the preacher aims to propagate are the moral and spiritual. It is these, then, by which he must be possessed and animated. In other words, in order to be capable of any power of persuasion, you must be men of ardent and genuine religious affections. You must be men of faith and prayer; you must live near the cross and feel "the powers of the world to come." We thus learn again the great truth that it is divine grace which makes the true minister.

For acting through the law of sympathy upon your audience, certain practical cautions are necessary. The disclosure of your own emotion must not too far outrun the temper of the congregation, lest it should appear to them from their cooler position extravagance. The effect of such an impression would be that the chasm between them and yourself would be widened, instead of being closed by their elevation to your level. If, then, the audience is calm at the beginning, the passion of the speaker must be restrained. The disclosure of your emotion may be either a direct display or an involuntary betrayal. The happiest effect is produced in the latter case, where the orator is manifestly labouring to keep an ardent tide of passion under restraint, but it bursts somewhat over its barriers in spite of his self-command. This suggests to the auditors at once the sincerity of his feeling and the exceedingly weighty and moving nature of the subject by which he is possessed. They are thus powerfully prepared to be moved by it, even before they come to a comprehension of its moment. As the apostle declares concerning an impulse more immediately divine, "the spirits of the prophets are subject unto the prophets." The preacher

should never permit his emotion to overmaster his faculties; it should rather elevate and strengthen them. When passion becomes a helpless agitation, destroying the poise and self-command of the memory, understanding and imagination, precipitating the preacher into disorder and mental anarchy, the impression of power at once gives place to that of impotency; and his audience, instead of being wielded by him, begin to pity him or to be disgusted by him.¹ "Therefore use all gently, for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness."²

4. The highest skill of the orator is displayed in employing the great law of suggestion in his hearers' minds, to extend his power over their emotions and to give warmth to their apprehensions of sacred truth. You must remember that this law includes not only perceptions and conceptions, but emotions also. A perception or conception may suggest a separate emotion by the tie of association, or one feeling may suggest another, as truly as the sight of a *memento* may suggest the image of an absent friend. Your own consciousness will furnish you with striking instances of this fact. One has lately received some painful intelligence, by which he has been deeply afflicted. But his equanimity has been again restored by the lapse of time. His eye now falls upon some

¹ Bautain, ch. ii., § 1. "But if sensibility must be strong, it must nevertheless not be excited to excess, for it then renders expression impossible from the agitation of the mind." . . . "Christian feeling is never intemperate, never disorderly."

² Hamlet's instructions to the players.

spot, or some utensil of daily use, and forthwith his mind is tinged with sadness and pain without any conscious cause. The effect is at first unaccountable to himself, until he remembers that his attention happened to be occupied by that place or object, at the moment when the stroke of the calamity reached him. The feeble tie of association, formed by a mere, momentary juxtaposition before his mind, has so linked the perception with the emotion, that the sight of the one revives the other, even without any thought of the original and real cause of the grief. The power of mementoes and of places over the soul is to be explained by the same law. The sight of the home or playground of our childhood suffuses our hearts with a tender and pleasing melancholy, even before memory has placed before us the images of those beloved persons who peopled them.

Now this well-established fact implies another, upon which indeed the subsequent association depends—that when the soul is possessed by an ardent feeling, a part of its warmth is reflected upon any object which coexists with it, however distinct and indifferent it may otherwise be. The mind when thus heated becomes, as it were, a furnace which communicates a portion of its glow to anything which is then introduced within it. It is this fact of which the masterly orator avails himself, to quicken the feeling of his hearers toward any truths which otherwise would be uninteresting to them. He finds them callous to the spiritual affections which his message should awaken; if he leaves it thus, however perspicuous he may have made it to their understandings, it will lie cold and fruitless in their minds. What can he do? He seeks to awaken some congru-

ous natural emotion, legitimate in its moral character, and kindred to the holier feeling which he would implant, and while the soul is glowing with the former he thrusts in the sacred truth. Thenceforward it is imbued with some of the warmth which animated the hearer; it attracts the quickened attention; it begins to be impressive to the soul. Thus, for example, have I seen a skilful orator arouse the parental love of an obdurate, ugodly man, by his domestic portraiture; and when the rugged soul was all melted with this, the only soft emotion native to it, the preacher so pressed home the claims of his parental responsibility to his children's souls and the guilt of parental neglect, as to fix pungent conviction of sin in the hardened heart. So, natural fear, awakened by a graphic picture of the sinner's danger, may communicate its colouring to the timely charge of transgression, and quicken the sense of its justice into wholesome alarm of conscience. Natural grief, evoked by a touching picture of bereavement, may be made to impress the Redeemer's precept that we shall "lay up our treasures in heaven," or to make us feel the preciousness of gospel consolation and hope.

Do you ask how occasion is to be found for arousing these appropriate natural emotions? I answer, this must be done by the preacher's descriptive power. The passages which present these moving pictures may often be legitimate developments of his subject. Or else they may be introduced as illustrations of logical thought or definition, presented in the course of his argument. And here is the last element of value in well-chosen illustrations, which I promised, when speaking of them, to unfold to you. They not only define to the mind

the point of the argument, and so facilitate its comprehension—they not only associate the light of its evidence with the vivid pleasure of an apt but unforeseen resemblance—they awaken congruous emotion, from which the coëxisting truth borrows to itself warmth and colouring. And this is the crowning reason why the power of happy illustration makes its possessor eloquent. Your own good sense will tell you that if your descriptive pictures are disconnected with the thread of the discourse, if they are thrust violently into the course of your argument, if they arouse irrelevant or discordant emotions, you will wholly fail of your intended effect. They will be felt to violate unity, and to dislocate instead of welding the discourse. They must come in naturally and easily, and without betraying a set purpose of assault upon the hearers' hearts.

But it is now my duty to impose strict limits upon the use of this means. I have already taught you to distinguish between the moral and spiritual affections on the one hand, and the natural and æsthetic emotions on the other. The preacher's suasive work terminates exclusively upon the former. It is the propagation of them which constitutes sanctification. The enthusiasm of social passions or gratified taste is not Christianity, and has no tendency in itself to purify the soul. But he who substitutes it for real, spiritual culture is cheating immortal souls with a mischievous illusion. I beg you to note also that an object which is really religious in another of its aspects may be so presented to the natural taste or passions, that the interest excited by it shall be as godless and as merely carnal, as though it were utterly foreign to sacred truths. The rational attributes

and providence of God, or the glories and terrors of the judgment-day, are so painted by some preachers, that the sentiments awakened are no more Christian in fact, than if they had been excited by the description of a cataract or an ocean in tempest. Thoughtless men fancy that, because they are speaking about religious things,¹ they are speaking religion. Remember, then, that these emotions are only means to a better end; we must employ them merely as steps to rise to the emotions of the conscience. The only purpose which can justify an appeal to them in religious discourse is that of forthwith attaching them to sacred truth, which the preacher faithfully presents along with them. If he fails to give them this direction, if he allows his hearers to expend themselves in the mere luxury of natural sentiment and sympathy, he is both deluding and abusing their hearts; for he assists them to deceive themselves with a substitute for true spiritual affection, which is worse than worthless, while he deteriorates and expends their susceptibility by an excitement which is unwholesome, because fruitless. The practical result of this perversion of the art of persuasion is always moral corruption.

The mischievous error of addressing the taste and social sentiments, instead of the affections of conscience, is illustrated by the effects of the Romish worship. Its

¹ Pilgrim's Prog., Part i, ch. xix. *Ignorance*. "I am always full of good motions that come into my mind to comfort me as I walk." *Christian*. "What good motions? pray tell us." *Ign*. "Why, I think of God and heaven." *Chr*. "So do the devils and damned souls." *Ign*. "But I think of them and desire them." *Chr*. "So do many that are never like to come there. 'The soul of the sluggard desires and hath nothing.'"

great purpose is to substitute the enthusiasm of the imagination for the culture of moral principles. It must be confessed that this effect is produced with consummate skill. The experience of ages of paganism and of corrupt Christianity has been applied, by the most accomplished cunning, to devise the means for stimulating the superstitious fancy and intoxicating the senses. All the imposing and alluring charms of architecture, music and pantomime are employed for these ends. And everything in the gospel story which can awe or delight the natural sensibilities is ingeniously displayed in the most dramatic forms: the corporeal anguish of the Redeemer, the pitying love of woman typified in her sweetest ideal as the "Mother of God," the stern heroism of apostles, the awful might of miracles and ghostly principalities and powers, the material flames of purgatory and hell; but the great, spiritual truths by which the soul lives or dies, of which this history is but the shell, are carefully left out of view. Existing facts teach us what has been the effect of this gorgeous ritual upon piety and morals. While the taste is cultivated, the conscience is plunged into foul delusion. The most splendid rites of worship and the blackest vices have dwelt together under the same consecrated roofs; and the communities which are most accomplished in the pomps of their ceremonial are the most debauched.

Now, there is a species of Protestantism, existing to some extent among all denominations, which is obnoxious to the same accusation. Its preachers substitute for the rites of a superstitious worship the pomp of a sentimental eloquence. They descant, indeed, upon

the facts and doctrines of the Bible, but they omit all that is awakening and purifying to the conscience; they display only that which is beautiful to the taste, or pathetic, or sublime. The type of sensibility which they evoke is merely human and fanciful, and their preaching is but a rhetorical mimicry of the more candid and more impressive machinery of Rome. It cannot be denied that the images, in which the sacred principles of spiritual religion are clothed, are capable of being developed into a magnificence and beauty transcending all the imaginings of superstition; and it is not difficult for the ambitious and selfish mind to overlook the radical truth, that it is not the æsthetic grandeur, but the moral and spiritual principles in these pictures, which alone make them doctrines of salvation. We are told, for instance, "that it is appointed unto men once to die, and after death the judgment." What imaginative painting could more fascinate and harrow the fancy, than that which describes the accessories of a death-bed? The shuddering listener may be made to thrill at the thought of the pangs by which the silver cord is loosed, unimagined by living man and indescribable by mortal tongue; the irrevocable sundering of ties of love from which the worldly heart has drawn its very life; the spirit's plunge into the dread mystery of the nether world; the aspect of the living man frozen into a ghastly corpse; the gloom, the chill and the corruption of the grave, with its loathsome worm and dust. But what have you done when you have spell-bound your hearer's fancy with these terrors? You have but stimulated the instinctive love of life—a passion at best only social or selfish, in its prevalent element merely animal,

and common to him with the beast that writhes and shrieks under the hunter's steel. All this is naught unless you make it the introduction to the truth that "the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law," and to that victory over the grave given through our Lord Jesus Christ; for it is the latter which teaches us the whole significance of death to the rational soul.

But "after death is the judgment." To depict the grandeur of this final consummation, the Scriptures array material images whose terror and majesty infinitely transcend all the phenomena of nature and the uninspired imaginings of man. The preacher may suppose that he finds here a precedent, which authorizes him to stimulate the natural fear and fancy to their utmost tension. He therefore exerts all his pictorial power, and brings forth his most pompous stores of language to represent the vast and astounding events which will usher in that great day. He so paints the opening graves and gathering hosts of quickened dead, the paling sun, the blushing moon and decadent stars, the ocean of fire which floods the continents and exhales the seas, and so makes them hear the echo of the archangel's trump, that their blood runs chill with delicious horror. They are the entranced spectators of the catastrophe of this world's drama. But, I ask, is this the whole intent of God in this apocalypse of the final consummation? If these material images are all destined to be literally fulfilled, what are they but symbols of solemn moral facts? of the quickening of the slumbering conscience, of the voice of the accusing *Law*, of the unveiling of that divine holiness and glory before which the world with its vanities will shrivel into an atom,

and sin will stand unmasked in its hideous blackness? Such a material portraiture has not even poetic truth; for it leaves out the chief elements of the dread transaction, and misrepresents its true impression on the real actors. When the justice of God, like a spirit of burning, shall have taken hold upon the awakened conscience of the sinner, and when eternity with all its issues shall be set before the eyes of his resurrection body, it will be the great conceptions of sin and of righteousness, of a broken law and a divine satisfaction, and of the just awards of infinite rectitude, which will occupy and overpower his mind. These images of material magnificence and terror will then be cast out of the place which they have usurped. "In that day it will be SIN, and not a flaming world, which shall appal the soul."¹

To awaken the enthusiasm of taste or of instinctive passion is only legitimate, then, where we employ it as means for infusing heat into sacred truth, and thus arousing the moral emotions. The ulterior aim of the sacred orator must be at the conscience alone. Unless these natural affections which his rhetoric awakens are speedily superseded and eclipsed by the spiritual, to which he makes them subservient, they are only mischievous counterfeits. Not only the ambition and vanity of preachers, but the temper of the hearers seduce them into this error; for man naturally loves excitement for its own sake, and there is nothing which he so much hates as to be challenged to forsake his sin. He is grateful, therefore, to the orator who at once provides for him the sentimental luxury, and who suggests this

¹ Nat. Hist. Enthusiasm, p. 57.

substitute for the abhorred duty of *repentance*. You will ever, I trust, resist this temptation, and keep these appeals to the natural but unregenerate affections in their proper place.

Of all this art of persuasion he is the greatest master who seems to have none. Let your aim be to persuade men in Christ's name, and not to be praised for skill in persuading. These two distinct ends many preachers confound. You saw that the power over others' hearts depends upon your own disinterested and genuine emotion. You must so hunger for the salvation of the souls before you, that you shall desire to make the effect of sacred truth fill them, to the exclusion of yourself. You must be willing to be nothing in their eyes, and to let your effect be everything. He is not the true preacher who sends his hearers home exclaiming, "How eloquent the minister to-day; how beautiful his imagery; how artful his arrangement; how skilful his argument and his persuasion!" But he is the true sacred orator, who dismisses them so possessed and overpowered by God, that they have forgotten the creature who was the channel of the truth. The message should hide the messenger. To make you masters of the emotions of others, then, self-seeking must be annihilated, and self-renunciation must have its perfect work. It is divine grace which makes the effective minister.