LECTURE VIII.

CARDINAL REQUISITES OF THE SERMON.

MOVEMENT, saith Vinet, is the royal virtue of style. But it is a quality belonging both to structure and style, characterizing the oration as a whole. Indeed, it may be said, without exaggeration, that it is this which makes discourse eloquence. Cicero asks in one place, *Quid aliud est eloquentia, nisi motus animæ continuus?* This discriminating question suggests the true nature of the quality. The oration has movement, because the soul, whose progeny it is, has movement. The impression of eloquence is not merely a communication of conceptions, opinions, mental convictions, facts; but it is the communion of the speaker's soul, in all its powers, with the souls of his hearers. It is an impulse communicated from the one to the others. Have we not defined eloquence as the emission of the soul's energy through speech? There is no work of the mind which so nearly possesses the attributes of life as the oration, for the living soul pours its own energies directly into its discourse. Motion is the sign, the test of life. The form which moves not is dead; it may be beautiful, but it has only the beauty of the corpse. And when we remember that the practical object of the oration is to impel the hearers to some action of soul through the incitement of their

own rational emotions, we see the necessity of movement in such discourse. If it does not succeed in transferring the hearer's soul to a new position or a new practical conclusion, or, at least, in causing it to travel afresh to a position once occupied before, it has failed of its work. Now, bodies pass from place to place by motion. The impelling body must move through this interval in order that the body impelled may do so.

I have stated these thoughts in order to disclose both the nature and necessity of movement. Reflection will show you that it is a broad and fundamental trait of discourse, extending to the thought, the logic, the emotion and the language. Continuity must manifestly belong to it. Movement is not a blow or shock, communicating only a single or instantaneous impulse, but a sustained progress. It is, in short, that force thrown from the soul of the orator into his discourse, by which the soul of the hearer is urged, with a constant and accelerated progress, toward that practical impression which is designed for the result. If in any part the discourse is narrative or descriptive, incident must follow incident as fast as they can be clearly exhibited to the hearer's apprehension. If it is explanatory or didactic, the expansion of the idea, or the addition of thought to thought, must be constaut. If it is demonstrative, a stronger proof must urge the mind, immediately after each preceding one, toward the goal of conviction. In its emotional character, the discourse must sustain and perpetually raise the emotion inspired to its proper culmination at the change or the end. But every true oration, whether narrative or didactic or argumentative, is also virtually emotional. The

speaker must remember that man feels as he sees, and because he sees: mental conviction or apprehension is in order to emotion and volition. Hence movement will require that the two elements—the didactic or logical and the emotive—however interfused through the progress of the oration, shall always be related to each other in the order of their nature. The definition of a duty will precede the incentives to it. The appeal to the mental convictions will ground the application of the motives. The contrary order would be unnatural and would interrupt movement. Again, that the movement may be continuous, it is necessary not only that a thought, image or argument shall succeed a previous one without dallying, but that the successor shall be coherent with its predecessor; for otherwise, instead of furthering the impression begun, it would institute a movement in a new direction and give a shock to the mind. We are thus led back to the maxim which demands thorough unity. And in one sense the vigour or force of the incoherent thought which intruded itself would only render the sin against movement greater, because it would impel the hearer farther aside from the proper line of the progress. In style, movement requires a certain economy of words. Amplification will not be excluded from its proper place; but it will never be carried beyond the real expansion of the thought and addition of new ideas. Indeed, the best mark of legitimate amplification is, that it shall be a real progress of the ideas, and, in a certain sense, climactic. Nothing is more wearying to the hearer than that amplification which merely revolves the same thought, or which proceeds from the concrete back to

the abstract, and from the definite to the general, in an anti-climactic order. The language of the orator must possess, in all its flow, a nervous brevity and a certain well-ordered haste, like that of the racer pressing to his goal.

Prolixity, therefore, is a sin against movement. Every epithet should be retrenched which adds nothing to the true rendering of the thought. This virtue is violated, of course, by all needless repetitions, by all digressions and episodes which lead away from the true path of the discussion, by tedious or superfluous explanation and definition. It is marred also by useless subdivisions, and by every formal appendage to the method of the discourse which is not necessary to make its order clear. This remark will explain to you the excessive dryness which you have doubtless felt in reading the multiplied subdivisions of some of the Puritan divines. It is as though the progress of the mind toward its goal were arrested at every third step for some useless formality. What can be more wearisome to the eager mind than such a journey? Once more, although the structure and the style may be free from these faults, a slow and hesitating enunciation may weaken the impression of movement in discourse. The speaker should utter his words, not indeed in a hurried or huddling manner, yet with such deliberate readiness as shows that his own soul is not halting for them in its career. But let me here caution you, that the attempt to escape the charge of prolixity or tediousness by means of undue haste of utterance always disappoints itself. Our estimate of duration is relative to our consciousness of the mental processes which have occupied

us in the interval. Hence a marked rapidity suggests the feeling of protracted time. Moreover, the speaker, by this expedient, makes a public confession of the conviction that he is wearying his hearers by unreasonable length; and nothing is more natural than that they should regard him as guilty of that of which he so obviously feels guilty. But if the movement is real and not merely mechanical, and the appropriate and pleasing utterance of the thoughts beguiles the consciousness away from its own labours, the discourse appears shorter than it is, and the hearer regrets that it is ended so soon.

The importance of movement in public speaking can scarcely be exaggerated. Among those who really have matter to present, and who possess the fundamental quality of perspicuity, I am persuaded that the difference of impressiveness is chiefly due to their movement. Without it there is neither animation, force nor beauty. Horace mentions it first among the virtues of his great epic model, Homer: "*Semper ad eventum festinat.*"[1] Discourses should be like the river; sometimes it flows more rapidly than at others, but it is never stagnant. Now it glides quietly between grassy banks. Anon, it ripples with cheerful music over its pebbly bed. Again it rushes like an arrow, flashing sunlight down its straight channel. Sometimes it clothes its mighty waves in foam as it dashes against opposing rocks. At last, it sweeps with deep and silent force through its delta. But it flows onward always, never pausing, toward its destined ocean. Should the voyager be anchored at the loveliest spot in all its course, it would soon become

---

[1] Ep. ad Pisones, line 149.

irksome. But he descends the current with an interest and pleasure ever new.

Of the virtue of *point* the remark must also be made that it is a quality both of structure and style. Unless the former be pointed, no art of language can make the latter so. Perhaps the single word, "point," conveys as distinct an idea of this excellence in discourse as any definition can. The thought must be incisive. There must be, in order to this, first, a chief truth, practical and important, distinctly apprehended by the speaker in its relation to the action of soul which he would excite. And the whole matter of the discourse must be so arranged as to make this proposition salient. Next, the speaker must have a clear comprehension of the relations between proposition and proof, and between knowledge and emotion, so that the means of conviction and incitement shall be properly subordinated to these ends. The result will be, that with the help of perspicuous language, this relation will be clearly apprehended and felt by the hearer. The cardinal thoughts and conclusions of the sermon will then impinge upon him with the aggregate force of the whole proofs and motives.

Let me here resort to an illustration very diverse from the one used of the last topic, but only in appearance inconsistent with it. The pointed or incisive discourse may be likened as to its framework to the ancient war-ship. Its weapon of offence was its beak. Let us suppose that the architect had left the ponderous mass of pointed metal which formed this beak lying in some accidental position amidst the timbers of the ship, and all those timbers a disorderly heap of rubbish merely

thrown together and set adrift upon the sea as a raft. The impact of this shapeless pile, instead of piercing the opposing trireme, would only have dissolved itself into fragments; and the intended prow would probably have sunk out of sight without even coming into the feeblest contact with the enemy's hull. The architect, therefore, commits no such folly. He places the beak at the forefront of his structure. He causes the chief beams of his framework to converge to its base, and frames them into it. He adjusts the ribs and braces to support these in turn, so that there is not one piece of timber in the whole ship which does not lend its strength, either directly or remotely, to sustain the prow immovably in its place. And now, when the triple banks of rowers raise their chant and strain at their oars all in concert, they launch the pointed beak into the adversary's side with the *momentum* of the whole ship's weight. In like manner, the impression made by an oration depends upon its point, and this, in turn, depends upon the prominence of the cardinal thoughts and the perspicuous subordination of the rest to their support. The style which best seconds this structure is that which is lucid, compact and nervous, which individualizes the hearer and addresses him in the second person, which prefers the special statement to the general and the concrete to the abstract.

Many sermons are deficient in point. They either have no valuable and practical truths of cardinal weight, or these are not made to stand out to the apprehension of the hearers. No decided impression can be expected from such addresses. No lodgment is made in the conscience of the people; they go away with the vague

feeling that they have been only listening to a strain of goodish but aimless talk. This failure of pointed effect is due sometimes to a sickly nicety of style, which shrinks from the directness of oral address and affects the delicacy of the essay. But more often it is the result of weakness and confusion of thought. And this, in turn, proceeds from indifference of heart. Earnest purpose and desire are always pointed. The distressed beggar needs no rhetoric to teach him how to make the point of his petition prominent. The children of this world never fail to press their points plainly when the objects of their natural desires are involved. Let the preacher, then, cultivate that faith which makes the ruin and the rescue of sinners dread realities to him; let him share the constraining love of Christ in its power; let him feel a consuming zeal to save souls. Then he will not go into the pulpit aimless, except with the grovelling object of satisfying decency and filling the allotted hour with the expected pious talk. He will have a definite and absorbing purpose, a message to deliver, and a result to effect, which he cannot leave unaccomplished without grief. This holy passion, and this alone, will give his sermon true point. The true cause of the vapid and aimless discourses, which are heard from so many pulpits, is that the preachers are not under the active influence of faith and love for souls. Thus we learn again that true and fervent piety is the prime qualification for sacred eloquence.

The last of the general attributes of good discourse is *Order*. This is the result of *Disposition*, and we are thus led to this department, which the text-books on rhetoric make the second division of their science. The

order which disposition aims to produce is so important, and the subjects which claim our attention here are so numerous, that I must proceed more deliberately and fully than I have upon the previous kindred points.

Disposition includes both order and division. These are inseparably connected. Order is the proper arrangement of the parts among themselves; division discriminates the parts.[1] Division, therefore, bears to order the relation of means to ends. We divide in order that we may arrange. What right order is can scarcely be better defined than in the words of Horace.[2]

> "Ordinis hæc virtus erit et venus, aut ego fallor,
> Ut jam nunc dicat jam nunc debentia dici,
> Pleraque differat et præsens in tempus omittat."

It requires that each thing be said in its right place. This quality Vinet very properly declares to be "the character of true discourse." He declares that there is no discourse without it. Every one has heard the line of the English poet: "Order is heaven's first law." There is a truth contained in these words, and it has an important relation to this subject. The plan and work of our Creator are methodical in all their parts. Law rules everywhere; all the powers of nature are so constituted that they cannot customarily act at all, save in accordance with their law. This is true of the powers of the human spirit. And this fact points us at

---

[1] Quinctil., L. vii., § 1, preface: "Sit igitur (ut supra significavi) *divisio* rerum plurium in singulas; *partitio* singularum in partes discretus ordo . . . *dispositio* utilis rerum ac partium in locos distributio."

[2] Ep. ad Pisones, line 42, etc.

once to the general consequence, that if we wish a fellow-creature's soul to apprehend and feel a group of thoughts and motives, these must have their method, and that, a method conformed to the law by which his spirit acts. Accordingly, we find that it is a spontaneous demand of the human mind that there shall be order in what it views. Disarray is displeasing to it. A heap of stone and timber is not an architectural structure, but an unsightly mass of rubbish. A mixture of brilliant gems is not a mosaic picture, but a quantity of pebbles, and the richer their colours the more dark and confused is the mass. A mob of men is not an army. The atoms of this mighty universe, without an orderly connection, would be only a vast nebula of dust. Have not the poets, ancient and modern, found in *chaos* the strongest conception of that which is repulsive and abhorrent in matter?[1]

But, to be more specific, I would show that order promotes the recollection[2] of a discourse both by the preacher and hearer. That the preacher should be able to recall the parts of his sermon with ease while pronouncing it is of great importance; and to the extempore preacher it is absolutely necessary. To the hearer, recollection of the discourse is almost equally essential for edification. If he cannot recall what he has heard, he can receive no other benefit from it, than the slight accession made to his right habitudes of feeling by the evanescent impression of the moment. Now,

---

[1] Paradise Lost, book ii.

[2] Cicero de Orat., B. II. c. 86, § 353: "Hac tum se admonitus invenisse fertur (Simonides) ordinem esse maxime qui memoriæ lumen afferret."

what is called memory is one of the processes of suggestion. We only recollect what has passed out of our conscious knowledge, for the time, in virtue of some tie of association connecting it with some other idea in the mind. But these ties connect things according to a regular law. The bonds of association are such as these: previous juxtaposition or proximity, or else some relation of resemblance, contrast, causation, or the connection of premise and proof. The tie established by mere previous juxtaposition before the mind is far the feeblest. Let one attempt, for instance, to commit perfectly to memory a hundred names, having no other previous relation than that they composed the same muster-roll: he will find the task greatly harder than that of learning a huudred words formed iuto sentences expressive of a certain sequence of facts or thoughts. He will even find that the drudgery of learning the list of names is diminished by placing together those beginning with the same letters of the alphabet. Why is this? It is because the slight clue of a similarity in one letter (with the well-known order of the alphabet to aid) gives a stronger tie of association than mere juxtapositions before the mind at a previous time. In speaking, you address to your hearer a series of thoughts which he is to remember. Now, do you not see that every trait of natural order in the ranking of these thoughts diminishes his labour? The memory takes them up with ease, because their connection with each other presents them to her ready grasp. The more exactly they are arranged under their several proper heads, and the more correctly their sequence is conformed to the logical order of nature, which proceeds from premise

to proof and from conviction to action, the easier it is for your hearer to regain them.[1]

That discourse should be perspicuous is too plain to need words; for if it cannot be apprehended, why utter it? Horace has fixed the connection between order and perspicuity in a single phrase (*lucidus ordo*) so felicitous that it can never be forgotten. The reason why method aids perspicuity has been already given in part: it is because it aids memory. And it cannot but be, that the mind will grasp the materials of thought presented to it in those relations which are conformable to its own laws, better than if their order is deranged.

Correct method is essential to strength. "*Tantum series juncturaque pollet.*"[2] It is the orderly framing of the beams of the ship together which gives strength to its hull and impact to its beak. Without methodical juncture, all the timber and metal might be present, and yet have no more coherence than a mass of drift-wood. The arch is firm only when the stones are placed in their order. The confused multitude of men

---

[1] See Cecil's homely but expressive instance, in his *Remains*. He says, "Send your maid into the streets to make a dozen separate purchases, and she will forget a third of them; but give her a clue of arrangement, and she will easily remember all. Thus, you say to her, 'Betty, remember that to-morrow is washing-day, and that this evening your mistress will entertain a few friends at tea; so we wish you to buy, for the first, soap, indigo and starch, and for the latter, tea, sugar, coffee, crackers, bread, cakes, this and the other fruits, and butter.' This principle of natural classification so relieves the difficulty of recollection that she easily performs all the commissions exactly."

[2] Horace, Ep. ad Pisones, line 242.

is helpless before a disciplined detachment of soldiers in battle-array, because the latter have the force of union. So, confused discourse can never make a forcible impression. When trains of thought are relinquished before they are pursued to their full results, and are then resumed and intruded into the midst of other thoughts; where those things are anticipated which should have been postponed until the hearer was prepared to apprehend them; where the order of time, dependence and inference is reversed, each incipient impression is neutralized by the succeeding, or else none is made, because the matter could not be apprehended. Order is the means of strength, because it is essential to unity and point. Let me ask you to recall what was said upon these topics. Unity consists in a methodical juncture of parts into one whole. The elements are many, perhaps diverse; the resultant effect is one. What except order can secure this? Again, we saw that it is the proper subordination of proofs to cardinal propositions which made these salient and incisive.

The mind intuitively apprehends beauty in method, while confusion is always unsightly to it. And let us not disdain this element as unworthy the gravity of sacred discourse. No innocent means are unworthy which assist even in a slight degree in commending saving truth. Moreover, I avow that when I observe how our Maker has framed our laws of taste, so that the sentiment of intellectual beauty always waits most instinctively on those sequences which are most true and just, I cannot depreciate it. It is a noble thing to make the TRUTH beautiful!

We have anticipated, in one particular, the good in-

fluence of sound method upou the preacher's own faculties when we showed how it promotes recollection. I can claim other excellent effects for it. It is greatly conducive to accuracy. In order to arrange we must analyze. Disposition requires careful inspection. Let a mingled mass of flowers be brought to the botanist, for example, to be classified. How does he proceed? He must examine their organs of reproduction minutely, that he may know to what species each belongs. Then he is prepared to group them according to their resemblances. And this botanist thus gains, in one morning, a more minute acquaintance with the parts of all these flowers, than the peasant who was accustomed to sweep them down together under his scythe has gained in a lifetime. It is thus of your thoughts: you find that as soon as you attempt to reduce them to a true order you are compelled to accuracy. The same labour also abbreviates and compacts your discourse by showing you what is superfluous. Vain repetitions are usually the result of confusion.

Just method is equally promotive of the fruitfulness of the mind. Men are usually better supplied with ideas than with distinct views of the relations between them. But a relation is often a new idea, and it may prove a very valuable one. When we would discuss any subject, our first glance at our own mental furniture usually gives us but few thoughts concerning our theme. On the one hand, it is impossible that the forgotten and absent conceptions can be called up by a direct act of our volition; for, in order to be made the objects of this act, they must be already present in conception. On the other hand, the impressions once made on the

memory are not so thoroughly obliterated as they seem to be. This faithful guardian of knowledge preserves in her chambers many a treasure which we supposed to be lost, but she does not reveal them at her threshold without a summons. Your experience may furnish many instances in which ideas once learned, but withdrawn out of view in your memories, have been reproduced by yourselves without external aid. This proves that your minds still retained them in their memories, but not consciously. The question is, How may we regain our hold of these reserved stores of our own knowledge, when we wish to apply them to a given discussion? I answer, by proceeding, so far as we have any thoughts concerning it, to think systematically. Let the ideas which already present themselves be contemplated in their relations, and arranged in the mind according to them. Other connected ideas will speedily arise and rank themselves beside them, which, when they are subjected to the methodizing law of the mind, will, in turn, suggest others. The explanation is, that by ranking the thoughts you already have according to connections natural to the mind, while you do not, indeed, enable the will to make a thought absent from your conception the object of your volition, while it is still absent, you do direct the voluntary powers of the attention along those lines of association which call up the new matter by the force of suggestion. Thus the mind is placed in that posture in which memory can exert her fullest control over her unconscious stores. Thus the suggestive faculty is brought to its most fruitful state. And now the materials which these faculties present are ready for the endless combinations of imagi-

nation—comparison and judgment. If this explanation is true, it is obvious how much the fecundity of the mind must be increased for future efforts by the gradual formation of the habit of methodical thinking.