

LECTURE IX.

CONSTITUENT MEMBERS OF THE SERMON.

WE find, then, that order in discourse is invaluable to the speaker himself, in giving accuracy and fruitfulness of mind, and in communicating clearness, strength, unity, point and beauty to his oration. It is equally important to the hearer to assist his remembrance of what is spoken. Now that we are agreed upon the value of the end, let us consider its means, *division*.

Vinet treats of this subject separately, under the two heads of logical disposition and rhetorical disposition. The former divides and arranges the matter of discourse according to the just logical connections of thought. It has reference only to the production of mental conviction. The latter divides and arranges with reference to persuasion of the heart, and aims at progress from the weaker to the stronger, from understanding to feeling, and from motive to action. Such is substantially his account of the distinction. I do not adopt it. No such separation is ever made in the actual structure of any oration, for we never have those which are exclusively logical or those which are exclusively emotional, but every true oration is both in one. Nor, as Vinet himself shows, can there ever be a discrepancy in the dictates of the two principles of division. Whatever is most truly logical is also most truly rhetorical. Nothing is really

rhetorical that is not based on right logic. The emotions to which the preacher appeals are only the rational. They can be incited only through the understanding. The warmth which characterizes them is but the temperature of the logical thought. Last, the remarks which need to be made upon the special management of the hearer's emotions can be properly made under the head of persuasion.

Approaching, then, the particular topic of *division*, we find, first, a question as to the *constituent parts* which should compose the regular discourse. These I account to be the *Exordium*, or introduction, the *Exposition*, the *Proposition*, the *Main Argument*, and the *Conclusion*.¹

¹ Aristotle, b. iii., chap. 14, Rhetoric, says that discourse naturally divides itself into two parts, *proposition* and *demonstration*, because one naturally tells us first what he wishes to talk about, and then states what he has to confirm his assertion about it. But a subdivision of the matter will class them as *proem*, *proposition*, *demonstration* and *peroration*.

Cicero states the current teaching of the masters of his time thus (De Orat. L. ii., c. 19, § 80): "Jubent enim exordiri ita, ut eum, qui audiat, benevolum nobis faciamus et docilem et attentum; deinde rem narrare, ita ut verisimilis narratio sit, ut aperta, ut brevis; post autem dividere causam aut proponere; nostra confirmare argumentis et rationibus; deinde contraria refutare. Tum autem alii conclusionem orationis et quasi perorationem collocant: alii jubent, antequam pereretur, ornandi aut augendi causa digredi; deinde concludere ac perorare."

His own distribution is given (L. ii., c. 76, § 307): "Nam ut aliquid ante rem dicamus; deinde ut rem exponamus; post ut eam probemus nostris præsiidiis confirmandis, contrariis refutandis; deinde ut concludamus atque ita peroremus, hoc dicendi genus natura ipsa præscribit."

Quintilian, L. iv. Proœmium, § 6: "Sequitur enim, ut judicialium causarum (quæ sunt maxime variæ et multiplices) ordo explicetur; quod proœmii sit officium; quæ ratio narrandi; quæ probation-

I shall define each of these, give my reasons for regarding them as essential members of the sermon, and add some instructions for composing them. The argument, which after all is the body of the sermon, will then require us to return to it, that we may consider its divisions and rules. Many preachers demur against the uniform requirement of all these parts as necessary members of a sermon. They would claim a discretion to omit all of them except the argument, and perhaps the conclusion. They say our requirement is mischievously formal, and dictates a tiresome sameness. They depreciate such sermons as "casts all run in the same mould." Let me then, in advance, explain. Their sarcasm suggests an unjust analogy. Sermons are not dead casts run into any mould, changeable or fixed. Give a new mould for each attempt, to be demolished when once used; I still reject and resent the illustration. Sermons should be living growths, like plants or trees; none of them indeed monsters, none maimed, but each one modified within the bounds of the rudimental laws of its nature, by its own circumstances of growth; so that they together present an endless and charming variety. Every natural tree must needs have certain constituent parts—its roots, its stem, its branches, its foliage, its fruit. But how end-

um sit fides, seu proposita confirmamus, seu, contra dicta dissolvimus; quanta vis in perorando," etc. He thus, like Cicero, makes four instead of five parts, proem, narration, argument (including refutation of objections) and peroration.

The current of modern writers on sacred oratory concur in making the five constituent parts which I have given in the text of my lecture.

lessly diversified is the development of these members! They cannot any of them be wholly absent, but the individuality of each tree determines their relative size; so that we have every graceful difference of form and stature, from the humble shrub to the tapering and lofty pine. But this illustration I am willing somewhat to relax. I will admit that circumstances may justify the preacher in reducing some of these constituent members to the extent of an apparent suppression. When I assign them all to the regular sermon as essential parts, I intend that all will be present in the complete type, and that this is the model toward which every sermon, even the most informal, must tend.

The *Exordium* is that prefatory matter which precedes the direct business of the discourse. The mind seems naturally to demand such a preparation. Says Cicero,¹ "There is, in fine, nothing in all nature which pours itself wholly out and bursts forth on a sudden; but Nature herself has prepared all things which are effected, even those which are effected with the most violence, by gentler beginnings." And again: "If in that gladiatorial struggle of life, in which men contend with the actual steel, many things are done before they come hand to hand, which seem meant not to wound but to make a show, how much more is this to be looked for in the oration, where it is not so much force as delectation which is required?" Aristotle tells us² that the proem, like a prelude in

¹ Cicero de Orat., L. ii., c. 78, § 317.

² Aristotle, Rhet., b. iii., ch. 15. See also Quintil., L. iv., c. 1., § 5. "Causa principii nulla est alia, quam ut auditorem, quo sit nobis in cæteris partibus accommodatior, præparemus. Id fieri tribus maxime

music or a prologue to a drama, introduces the main discourse, and that its ends or objects are to unfold the purpose of the main discourse, to produce attention, to secure the favour of the hearers to the speaker, as well disposed, well informed and honest, and last and least, to give elegance to the beginning. If the speaker has done his duty to himself and his subject, he has mastered it by previous study, and comes to the pulpit with his soul inspired and warmed with it. He cannot assume that his hearers are in this animated state. It may even be true that they are ignorant what his subject is to be. Now, this contrast between their state of feeling and his is unfavourable, at the beginning, to the institution of an active sympathy. When he is all fire and they as yet are ice, a sudden contact between his mind and theirs will produce rather a shock and revulsion than sympathetic harmony. His emotion is, to their quietude, extravagance. He must raise them first a part of the way toward his own level. Another reason for the *exordium* is, that some initial misconception, indifference or prejudice is usually to be expected in the hearer. While this continues, his hearty attention and favour will not be given. If the preacher then introduce his main proposition, and proceed immediately to deal with it, something at the beginning will be lost to the hearer. The loss of this must prejudice his comprehension of all the rest, and only the more, if the discourse is methodical throughout. The

rebus, inter auctores plurimos constat, si *benevolum, attentum, docilem* fecerimus: non quia ista non per totam actionem sint custodienda, sed quia initiis præcipue necessaria, per quæ in animum iudicis, ut procedere ultra possimus, admittitur."

pupil who fails to attend while the alphabet is taught will be unable to go along with his class as they advance to words and sentences. Hence it is well that some preface shall precede the main subject, which will awaken attention and allay prejudice. The hearer should be approximated to the speaker's level of thought and emotion before the main subject is presented. But it is obvious that an *exordium* protracted beyond the attainment of this object would be an excrescence hostile to unity and to the purpose of the body of the discourse.

Our ordinary conversation does not usually introduce itself absolutely without preface; but often that introduction is virtually made for us before we begin to speak, by the remark of our interlocutor, by a question, by an event occurring in our presence, by a gesture, by an act. So if a similar circumstance has removed the supposed apathy or prejudice of your hearers and put them already in relation with your subject, the need of an *exordium* is already met. This may sometimes be done by the occasion itself, or by the devotional services preceding the sermon, or by the annunciation of the text. If any of these put you in possession of the attention of your audience, why may you not direct it at once to your main subject? A formal *exordium* is therefore not to be too much insisted on.

The *exordium*, as to its matter, must be, first, pertinent to the main subject of the sermon. It should be composed of an idea lying next thereto. If that idea is transferable to a different discourse and may introduce the second as well as the first, it is unfit to be the *exordium* of either. That which does not lead us up to

our subject is, in fact, no introduction to it.¹ This member of discourse is the last in which the preacher should indulge in vague commonplaces; for it is now that he is seeking to make a good first impression and to stir the sluggish interest of his hearers. But indulgence in disconnected introductions will incline him to these trite generalities; and the final issue will be, that he will be found commencing every discussion, however different the subjects, with the same stale ideas. Some preachers infringe the rule requiring a connected *exordium*, by affecting to begin with some topic which appears as remote as possible from the text, in order that they may exhibit their ingenuity by establishing an unexpected line of connection between them. While the audience are wondering how in the world he is to get around from his introduction to his text, he astonishes them by a gyration about the little circle of his knowledge, which leads him to the desired point. Every sensible hearer detects vanity as the motive of this display. Let the *exordium* never be far-fetched.²

¹ Cicero de Orat., L. ii. c. 79, § 325. "Connexum autem ita sit principium consequenti orationi, ut non tanquam citharædi præcæmum affictum aliquod, sed cohærens cum omni corpore membrum esse videatur. Nam nonnulli quum illud meditati ediderunt, sic ad reliqua transeunt, ut audientiam sibi fieri nolle videantur. Atque eiusmodi illa prolusio debet esse, non ut Samnitum, qui vibrant hastas ante pugnam, quibus in pugnando nihil utuntur; sed ut ipsi sententiis, quibus proluserunt, vel pugnare possint."

² Ep. ad Pisones, Horace, lines 146-150. He says of Homer:

"Nec reditum Diomedis ab interitu Mæcæagri,
Nec gemino bellum Trojamum Orditur ab ove,
Semper ad eventum festinat, et in medias res,
Non secus ac notas, auditorem rapit, et quæ
Desperat tractata nitescere posse, relinquit."

The porch which leads into the house is in contact with it.

But, second, the introduction must not embody a thought which is essential to the main discussion. This is an error of structure to which the inexperienced and impulsive writer is prone. Approaching the work of composition with a mind fired by the subject, he finds those ideas which are cardinal to it prominent in his thoughts, and he can scarcely refrain from pouring out some one of them the moment he begins. The consequence is, that when he proceeds in earnest to deal with his proposition, he will find he has anticipated essential matter. He has now only the choice between a bald repetition of his first idea, or else a leaving of his argument fragmentary. A stone which is absolutely necessary to close his arch has been already laid in the threshold.

Third. An *exordium* should contain only one leading thought. If the first one introduced is related to the text, this leads us to it: why interpose another? If it is not, it should not enter the *exordium* at all: the second distinct thought which follows it does the real work, and the first was nugatory. There is no need of a porch to enter a porch: we desire to step at once from the porch into the house.

Fourth. While the thought of the *exordium* should by no means be trivial or uninteresting, neither should it be ambitious. It should not vie in splendour with all that are to succeed it, lest it should raise too much promise to the expectation of the hearers. The impression which they carry away from a sermon is usually that produced by its concluding parts. If you fail there to

fulfil the promise of your outset, the pleasing surprise which you gave them in commencing will not cause them to pardon you the disappointment.¹

From these rules you will easily infer that the introduction must be short, relatively to the whole sermon. A long and ambitious *exordium* is ruinous to all subsequent effect. It wastes time; it consumes the preacher's strength; it exhausts the sensibility of the people before the stage of the sermon for which it is needed. Young writers are usually inclined to dilate too much upon their preliminary topics. This is because they are zealous for thoroughness, and being inexperienced in the work of composition, they do not know how largely the whole discourse will grow upon their hands, when amplified in the same proportion. It is far better to abridge the introductory parts than to be compelled, by an ill-judged waste of time there, to mar the more important thoughts near the close. For this, as well as other reasons, it is well that the young preacher should not attempt to write his introduction until the discussion has been either written, or at least expanded in the mind.²

¹ Horace Ep. ad Pisones, lines 136-145 :

"Nec si incipies ut scriptor cyclicus olim ;
 'Fortunam Priami cantato et nobile bellum.'
 Quid dignum tanto feret hic promissor hiatu ?
 Parturiunt monotes, nascetur ridiculus mus.
 Quanto rectius hic, qui nil molitur inepte :
 'Dio mihi, Musa, virum captæ post tempora Trojæ,
 Qui mores hominum multorum vidit et urbes.'
 Non fumum ex fulgore, sed ex fumo dare lucem,
 Cogitat, ut speciosa dehino miracula promat,
 Antiphatem, Scyllamque, et cum Cyclope Charybdin."

² Cicero de Or. L. ii., c. 77, § 315. "Hisce omnibus rebus conside-

I would point out the following classes of thoughts from which an appropriate *exordium* may be taken, without claiming that my enumeration is complete :

1. The text is often introduced in the happiest manner by unfolding the *nexus* of the thoughts amidst which it stands. Such an *exordium* is always german, and it makes a substantial approach to the evolution of the main subject. It promotes fidelity to the text, by placing it before the minds of speaker and hearer in the precise scope which it had in the mind of the inspired writer.

2. Akin to this is a form of introduction which may also be made exceedingly fresh and pleasing. It consists of a narration of the events, or a description of the place and times amidst which the text was uttered by the sacred writer. Thus, should the preacher discuss the Saviour's compassion for reprobate Jerusalem (as described in Luke xix. 41-44), he may begin by describing the scenery of the city and its environs, as they appeared to our Lord from Mount Olivet the morning these memorable words were uttered. This picture should be rapid, truthful and graphic, but without the pedantries of topography. He may then superinduce upon this smiling landscape the vision of the Roman circumvallation and the ravages of the siege, as they doubtless appeared to the prophetic eye of Jesus. Thus he has both *exordium* and exposition. Or would he present for our imitation the forbearance of David toward

ratis, tum denique id quod primum est dicendum, postremum soleo cogitare, quo utar exordio. Nam si quando invenire id primum volui, nullum mihi occurrit, nisi aut exile aut nugatorium, aut vulgare atque commune."

King Saul, in 1 Sam. xxiv., let him relate briefly the history of the provocation the former had endured.

3. The text may be introduced by the recital of some incident or history from real life, which strikingly exemplifies the principles to be established. But such incident must have a dignity and gravity congruous with the sacred subject which it introduces. And this kind must be used under the restraints of a severe taste, lest the narrative should cause an interest too romantic for the didactic or argumentative sequel. A New Year's sermon on the text, "This year thou shalt die," was impressively introduced by the statement, that both Jonathan Edwards and Samuel Davies preached from this passage at the beginning of the years in which they were unexpectedly cut off by death.

4. A legitimate *exordium* may often be made by placing alongside of the text some related principle familiar and admitted among the hearers. If the text contains the general truth, some obvious application of it in a specific case or class may introduce it. If it contains the species, then it may be introduced by referring it to its more general principle. Thus the doctrine of the text has its *locus* given it in the thinking of the audience, which prepares them to consider it. Or else the principle cited for comparison may be related to the text by some agreement or difference, by examination of which it will be defined.

5. A striking introduction may also be made by citing some usage or opinion prevalent among the hearers, which is opposed to the doctrine or precept of the text. The Apostle Paul tells us (Acts xx. 35) that Christ taught: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

The world regards the recipient as the more fortunate party. This beginning gives something of the vividness of paradox. It is, moreover, advantageous in making up the issue for discussion sharply. The affirmation of the opposite is then plain.

6. Sometimes the *exordium* is skilfully formed by a hypothesis, putting in a concrete form the unexpected doctrine to be proved. The preacher begins thus: "Let us represent to ourselves a man who in the following circumstances acted in the following way," etc. Such an introduction is not only graphic, but it gives the people, as it were, before they are aware, a concrete and distinct definition of that which is to be the subject of the discussion.

In style and manner the *exordium* should surpass all the remainder of the discourse by its correctness.¹ The preacher should remember that he is then making his first impression upon the hearers, and if this is untoward, it will be difficult afterward to repair it. But this accuracy aims rather at negative than at positive results in its first movement; it seeks to avoid offending the taste by errors of expression, rather than to make an immediate disclosure of the full powers and graces of the speaker. The latter should be progressive to the end.

Hence, second, the beginning should be unambitious, lest it should promise too much. It should embody no laboured argument, and make no display of learning or

¹ Cicero de Or. L. ii., c. 78, § 315. "Principia autem dicendi semper quum accurata et acuta et instructa sententiis, apta verbis, tum vero caussarum propria esse debent. Prima est enim quasi cognitio et commendatio orationis in principio, quæ continuo eum qui audit permulcere atque allicere debet."

subtlety. Its matter should be clothed with a certain modesty of dress, excluding florid figures and chary of every ornament. The sentences should incline toward brevity, especially those which compose the first paragraph. The speaker should take care that he does not yield to the temptation to display his most brilliant stores in the *exordium*. That would be a most unfortunate impression, and fatal to the movement of his discourse, which should cause his audience to say, none of his subsequent ideas were as fine as the first.

Third. In warmth of tone the introduction should bear a due relation to the state of feeling which, at the beginning, prevails among the hearers. It should not be in strong contrast with theirs, so as to place the speaker out of sympathetic harmony with them, and yet it should suggest at once a progress toward a higher stage of emotion. The rule given by some rhetoricians, that the *exordium* must always be calm, needs modification. Sometimes the events which assemble the congregation give it, from the first, an elevated and excited tone. Why should the speaker causelessly forfeit this advantage? Why seek to lower that feeling which he must immediately endeavour again to raise? A cold beginning at such a time would be a sin against the sympathies of his audience. But usually they assemble in a quiet if not an indifferent temper. He who in such circumstances should begin in that strain of exalted animation which *Massilon* properly adopted in his funeral oration for the king of France, or *Fléchier* in his *eulogium* for Marshal Turenne, would so transcend the grade of emotion in his hearers that he would seem to them extravagant or fantastic. The law of movement

in discourse has been strongly enforced by me already. According to this law, the animation of both speaker and hearers should tend continually toward its culmination in the *terminus* or change of the discussion. Now, exalted emotions cannot be long sustained at their height, neither can they be so easily excited a second time, after they have been once raised and allowed to decline. Hence the speaker should beware of appealing too prematurely to the powers of emotion in himself and in his audience. The happiest tone with which an *exordium* can be imbued is that of a latent or suppressed animation. The speaker does not too far outrun the interest of his hearers. But he is evidently curbing himself by an effort, and the partial flashes of heat which escape amidst the calmer progress of his introduction stimulate their expectation and awaken their sympathies.

Fourth. The *exordium* should disclose unaffected modesty.¹ Indeed, I should not be unwilling to require that degree of diffidence which produces at first a positive embarrassment. But it should be not only the *exordium*, but the orator himself, who is modest;

¹ Cicero de Orat., L. i., c. 26, §§ 119-121. "Mihī etiam, qui optime dicunt, quique id facillime atque ornatissime facere possunt, tamen, nisi timide ad dicendum accedunt, et in exordiēda oratione perturbantur, p̄ne impudentes videntur; tametsi id accidere non potest. Ut enim quisque optime dicit, ita maxime dicendi difficultatem, variosque eventus orationis, expectationemque hominum pertimescit. . . . Quem vero non pudet (id quod in plerisque video) hunc ego non reprehensione solum, sed etiam p̄na dignum puto. Equidem et in vobis animadvertere soleo, et in me ipso s̄pissime experior, ut exalbescam in principiis dicendi, et tota mente atque omnibus artibus contremiscam."

and while he is diffident for himself, he should be bold for his cause. This quality of diffidence should manifest itself to the hearer, but should never be the subject of the speaker's own remark; for whenever he begins to descant on his own modesty and embarrassment, every sensible hearer will conclude at once that they are assumed. Indeed, preachers should never utter anything personally apologetic, and rarely should they make any allusion to their own circumstances. If a minister begins by informing his audience that his preparation has been sadly abridged by events beyond his control, or that he is about to preach while suffering from sickness, he will be likely to make two impressions, each of which will be lamentable. He will be suspected of a secret design to make the people, at the end, applaud him for speaking so brilliantly under circumstances so adverse. It will appear also that, however this may be, he is more solicitous about his personal credit than about the glory of his divine Master and the success of his message. An ostentatious avowal of diffidence is always understood as a betrayal of secret pride. Again, the preacher should never attempt to play the sycophant to his audience. He should not tell them how much he finds himself embarrassed by having to address so numerous or so respectable an assemblage. Such professions are ever distasteful and deceitful in the eyes of intelligent persons: they see clearly that, if there is any real trepidation, it proceeds from the speaker's overweening self-esteem, and not from any respect for them or for God.

But a genuine diffidence, which is felt and not spoken of, is exceedingly favourable to the effect of the subse-

quent discourse. Its influence over the speaker himself is happy, not only by repressing those manifestations of conceit which outrage the hearers' taste and sense of devotion, but by arousing his own powers. The necessary effort to overcome his embarrassment gives warmth from the very friction, and *momentum* from the resistance subdued. Perfect self-possession is ever cold. This unaffected diffidence is a tribute to the audience more acceptable to them than any other, because it is spontaneous and honest. As a true woman feels more secret pleasure at the sight of a man of real merit and bravery abashed by her presence, than at the hearing of the neatest compliments ever turned by a *nonchalant* fopling, so every assembly is more gratified by this unwilling tribute of the speaker than by fluent professions of respect. It disarms criticism and opposition; it sets them at once in sympathy with the speaker; it assures them, better than any words, of his ingenuousness; it shows equally his profound sense of the gravity of his topic, and thus establishes, at the outset, appreciation and attention.

The remark already twice made, that this modesty must be real and not simulated, is self-evident. But the only source of such an emotion is God's grace, producing true and deep humility, reverence, faith and zeal for souls. Thus we are again led to the practical truth, that the prime qualification for the pulpit orator is eminent piety.

It has been much debated among teachers, at what stage of the preparation the *exordium* should be composed. I would recommend that it be done after the matter of the sermon has been selected and digested in

the mind, but before the body of the discourse is actually written. The former part of this rule is necessary to secure in the introduction appropriateness of matter, the latter to secure harmony and movement in the composition of the whole.