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Sermoes "Dormi Secure"

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and students at your colleges and seminaries preparing to become the pastors of your children and grandchildren. It holds good as to all church-work, obeying the Savior's last charge, "Go ye and teach all nations."

What a glorious, saving Gospel, and what a glorious social Gospel!

Luther comments with vigor, "It is impossible that true Christians should permit their pastors to be pinched and in want. But because they not only permit it but also laugh in their sleeve at it, it is certain they are worse than Turks and heathen."

Again: "I do not like to treat such texts as speak in favor of us pastors. It might look as if we were greedy for money. Nevertheless, one must teach people in this matter that they may know what measure of honor and support they owe to their pastors. This is good for us pastors also, to know that we may not take our well-earned salary with an uneasy conscience, as if we had no right to our salary."

When David had gathered all material to build a house for God, he said: "All things come of Thee and of Thine own have we given Thee." 1 Chron. 29:14; 16:1-13. And we sing:

We give Thee but Thine own,
Whate'er the gift may be;
All that we have is Thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.

May we Thy bounties thus
As stewards true receive
And gladly, as Thou blestest us,
To Thee our first-fruits give.

Oak Park, Ill.

WM. DALLMANN

(To be concluded)

Sermones "Dormi Secure"

"Of course," says Emerson, "there is a portion of reading quite indispensable to a wise man." If books were not to be read and studied and the information and knowledge contained in them not to be used, there would be no purpose in writing and printing them. Books are the workman's tools. Every minister should have a good working library, a sufficient number of good books.

"But," says Emerson, "books are the best of things well used; abused, among the worst." It is of this abuse, the wrong use, of which I shall speak.

Says Bacon: "Read not to contradict nor to believe, but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be

swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested: that is, some are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly with diligence and attention. Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready, and writing an exact man." (Essay "Of Studies.") "Thinking," says Dean Brown, "maketh a creative man." It is this thinking to which books should inspire us. What we read we should weigh and consider, think it through, mentally digest it. If we retain it, it becomes our own, and we may reproduce it in our own words. Here is the line between plagiarism and honest acquisition. Plagiarism is frowned upon by good writers and speakers. The student caught at cheating is dishonorably dismissed.

It seems strange that some men who occupy the place of ambassadors of Christ have no scruples in being dishonest in their pulpit work. Their sermons are not their own. A book of sermons by John of Werdna was so popular that it had gone through twenty-five editions. Its title was *Sermones dormi secure*. Dargan in his *History of Preaching*, p. 309, quotes the brief introduction to this book, in which its title is explained. It reads: "Here happily begin the Sunday sermons with expositions of the Gospels through the year, quite well known and useful to all priests, pastors, and chaplains, which are also called by the other title of *Sleep Well*, or *Sleep without Care*, for this reason, that *without much study they may be appropriated and preached to the people*." Luther refers to this book in the preface to his Large Catechism. In a preface which Luther wrote to Spangenberg's Postil in 1542 he says: "Aber gleichwohl sind wiederum etliche faule Pfarrherren und Prediger auch nicht gut, die sich auf solch und ander mehr gute Buecher verlassen, dass sie eine Predigt daraus koennen nehmen, beten nicht, studieren nicht, lesen nicht, trachten nichts in der Schrift, gerade als muesste man die Biblia darum nicht lesen. Brauchen solcher Buecher wie die Formular und Kalender, ihre jaehrliche Nahrung zu verdienen, und sind nichts denn Sittiche und Dohlen, die unverstaendig nachreden lernen, so doch unsere und solcher Theologen Meinung diese ist, sie damit in die Schrift zu weisen und zu vermahnen, dass sie denken sollen, auch selbst unsern christlichen Glauben nach unserm Tode zu verteidigen, wider den Teufel, Welt und Fleisch. Denn wir werden nicht ewiglich an der Spitzen stehen, wie wir jetzt stehen." (St. L., XI: VI.)

Of the most deleterious effect which such practice as Luther denounces has upon preaching, Dargan says: "Always one of the signs of degenerate preaching — as of any literary production — is a slavish dependence upon others, past or present, a want of independence, originality, freshness. Copyists and imitators are found in every age, it is true; but when the masters belong chiefly to

a former generation and the small followers mostly abound, the fall is great.

"So was it now. We have seen how in all the Middle Ages, from the days of Gregory the Great, and notably in the age of Charlemagne and after, the preachers freely appropriated material from the past and present. In fact, the best of them did it without scruple, and the less capable were encouraged to use without stint collections of sermons and other prepared material. This plagiarism and dependence were not regarded as morally wrong, nor does the fatal effect upon preaching seem to have been appreciated. In the decadent age of which we now treat this wretched practice had full swing and was one of the worst symptoms of the prevalent decline." (*Op. cit.*, pp. 308, 309.)

In his excellent book *Preparation and Delivering of Sermons*, Broadus, speaking of the same matter, writes as follows: "The books of 'Sketches and Skeletons,' which are so often published and so widely bought, are, unless honestly and wisely used, an unmitigated evil and a disgrace to the ministry of the Gospel. And it is a fair question whether such books can be honestly and wisely used. For they are likely to prove a snare even to those who wish to be honest, and are sure to be a temptation to all who use them to depend too much on the suggestions of others rather than on their own thinking. If it be said that they may be profitably studied as specimens of sermonizing, there is the obvious answer that it would be much more profitable to analyze for ourselves the full sermons of really great men. There is no excuse for such books, and no minister should suffer one of them to remain in his library. But they are deplorably common in this country, and still more so in Germany. Nor is the practice of recent origin. As early as 1517 there appeared in Paris a Latin volume of this character, entitled *The Preacher's Gem* and styling itself 'a most excellent and divine work.' And at Amsterdam appeared *Dormi secure: vel Cynosura Professorum ac Studiosorum Eloquentiae*, etc. (Sleep without Anxiety; or, The Cynosure of Professors and Students of Eloquence, etc.) The idea appears to be that one who possesses this book need not have his sleep disturbed by anxiety about next Sunday's sermon. Coquerel, who mentions these two works, remarks that it may be doubted whether persons would awake from this sleep to be eloquent; and we may add that one who had determined to borrow a plan from such a book should be too much ashamed of himself to sleep at all." (Pp. 141, 142.)

This whole matter of sermon-stealing deserves more than a passing notice. Times of revival in the Church have been times of good preaching. But good preachers are not such as Sunday after Sunday deliver "canned" sermons to their hearers. Such preaching

does not build up the church but brings about its decline. Those preachers who have no higher ambition than to fill in half an hour, more or less, in the pulpit (although all they say may be orthodox) have a wrong conception of the great and glorious calling of a minister of the Gospel, an ambassador of Jesus Christ. Such men are not faithful ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, 1 Cor. 4:1, 2. Nor are they apt to teach, 1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:2; to say the least, they are not giving evidence of their aptness.

The purpose of preaching is to *supply the spiritual needs of the hearers*, not only in a general way but *as time, circumstances, and conditions demand*. It is a homiletical requirement that sermons be *zeitgemass*. When Felix sent for Paul, Paul did not speak to him in general terms, but very specifically did he speak of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," the very things which Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla needed to hear. Acts 24:25. When Paul preached at Athens, his approach was different from that which he used when speaking to a Jewish audience. We may well study how Jesus, the Master Preacher, in His discourses and sermons spoke in accordance with the needs of an individual, of His disciples, or of a larger audience. In these days of increased doctrinal indifferentism, of more wide-spread moral laxity and wrong moral standards, of apostasy, of a war-torn world in which there is much unrest and turmoil,—at such a time sermons which have been preached under altogether different circumstances will not supply the present needs. The great fundamentals of the Christian religion must be preached again and again; *they are fundamental*. "To write the same things unto you," says Paul to the Philippians, "to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe," Phil. 3:1. Like Paul's and Luther's preaching, all true preaching must be Christo-centric. But this very preaching must be applied to the *specific* needs of the hearers. A preacher must therefore study these needs and supply them not only in the private cure of souls but also in his pulpit.

Attention can be procured and held only by interesting the audience. Unless we have attention, we cannot put over our message. Sanford and Yeager in their excellent book *Principles of Effective Speaking* devote three chapters to "Elements of Interestingness." Why? They say: "Every speech, to be effective, must be interesting. Just as the airplane and the automobile become useless collections of material without the engine, so a speech lacking in interestingness becomes a mass of ineffective words. The speaker who cannot interest his audience cannot secure its attention and therefore cannot succeed. You cannot hope for your speaking to inform, to persuade, or to entertain if you cannot get other people to listen to you." "Dull as a sermon" is a proverbial

saying that is not very complimentary to preachers. Many sermons are uninteresting; they do not grip the hearts of the hearers. A preacher who merely parrotlike repeats what others have produced cannot himself be much interested in his subject. Such interest is only aroused by a consciousness of responsibility, by earnest prayer, by a careful and thorough study of the text, by original planning, and by painstaking writing of the sermon, giving due attention to language, illustrations, etc. We can interest others only in that in which we ourselves are interested. Dean Brown says: "You will find that the sermons you enjoy preaching the most and the ones which actually accomplish the most good in the lives of your people will be those sermons which you take most largely out of your own interiors. They are bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh, the children of your own mental labor, the output of your own creative energy. The sermons which are garbled and compiled will always have a kind of second-hand, warmed-over flavor about them. The sermons which live and move and enter into the temple walking and leaping and praising God, the sermons which enter into the hearts of men, causing them to mount up with wings like eagles and to walk in the way of duty and not faint—these real sermons are the ones which are actually born from the vital energies of the man who utters them." (*Art of Preaching*, pp. 71, 72.)

A preacher should be interested in the subject of his sermons for the sake of the people whom the Lord, who has purchased them with His own blood, has put into his spiritual care. It was a burning love for the salvation of the Jews which made Paul write to the Romans: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh," Rom. 9:1-3. Such love in the heart of the preacher will keep him from preaching merely for the sake of preaching, of holding a job, of making sure of his pay-check. He will rather devote much time to his sermon work and not follow the path of least resistance by preaching other men's sermons. His preaching will be original and always fresh. His people will gladly hear him and be spiritually benefited.

Referring to my opening remarks, it is not the use, but the abuse of books against which I am directing myself. It would be a mistaken desire for originality and independence to abstain from reading. Preachers should indeed make diligent use of homiletical helps. But at the *right time* and in the *right way*. The right time is given by Richter's dictum "First think yourself empty; then read yourself full." After a preacher has done careful original work by

studying his text and making the outline, he should consult one or more *good* commentaries. He may compare his outline with other outlines, read one or more sermons on his text, etc. *Good thoughts he should use, expressing them in his own language.* He may find statements or even entire paragraphs so well written that he desires to have his congregation get them just that way; let him quote and give due credit. Words, mere phrases, and proverbial sayings taken from books need no acknowledgment.

Finally, in this connection, it may be well to say that great demands are made upon the preaching of our day, not only because of the changed conditions in the world to which I previously referred, but also because we are preaching to people of a higher educational standard. Not so many years ago we had few, if any, high-school graduates, not to speak of college and university men and women, in our audiences. But while in 1890 there were only 200,000 students in all the high schools of the United States, today there are 6,750,000. The total enrolment of college students in 1900 was 114,372, today over 1,200,000. Formerly our audiences seldom heard a speaker other than their own pastor; today they hear many—over the radio, when on automobile tours through the country, at political meetings, etc. We have people in our audiences—our own and visitors—who know whether a sermon is well constructed, offers good spiritual food, is given in good, simple, understandable English, and is well delivered. People, as a rule, will not speak to the preacher himself after hearing him deliver a poor sermon, but will go away dissatisfied and disgusted and complain to others. We must also bear in mind that during the past forty or fifty years religious illiteracy has much increased. (Even we have perhaps been guilty of receiving members into our churches by the shortcut method.) So much the more must we give attention to our sermon work, especially to doctrinal preaching.

Preachers should perform their arduous but glorious duty of preparing sermons, as all their ministerial duties, not merely *ex officio*, but *ex conscientia officii*. That will make for good preaching and good church attendance, build up our congregations, and glorify God.

JOHN H. C. FRITZ

