is involved in the degree of sincerity with which the recoil is, if I may so say, carried out by the whole man. When it is genuine it means the resolute standing back from the occasion of sin, and, as far as possible, from the thought of it. There is an obligation upon the tempted man to ignore the occasion of sin, to reckon himself indeed *dead* unto sin. He must not dwell upon it in thought, or talk much of it. All forms of morbid experience, physical and moral, run to garrulousness. Some of us have been nearly lost because we talk so much about sin—talk not only to others, but to ourselves. But we are to be dead unto sin. *Now the dead do not talk.* Oh, there are Christians enough who babble of their weaknesses, and their struggles, and the fierceness of their temptations! Let us be honest men, and be silent: resolutely endeavouring to exclude what allures to evil even from our thoughts.

(2) *The Method of Recollection of God.*—The second step in resistance is obviously the reaching for and grasping one's weapon. First the mind recoils, next the mind recalls. Opposite the alluring suggestion it places the steadying word from the mind of God. 'Shall I say, Father, save me from this hour?' said our tempted Lord. But His recoiling mind recalls, 'For this cause came I unto this hour.' Now, what shall *we* recall? For us all the mind of God is gathered up in Christ; the full glory of that mind shines in the face of Christ. In a moment we may recall the loving-kindness, holy purity, strong sympathy, and present grace of the Supreme. For the Christian man, for the man who believes in the ubiquitous, ready presence of 'grace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,' the claim of goodness is instantaneously recalled, the help of Divine strength instantaneously summoned, by one single gesture of the spirit.

(3) *The Method of Preoccupation.*—But now this positing over against the temptation of the counter-claim of goodness must be a genuine act. Beginning in the mind, it must go out into the life. And carried out into the life, following God's thoughts thither—*they* never stay in the realm of ideas, but are all deeds and programmes—this recollection of God becomes preoccupation with His interests. To follow after God's thought, to pursue it through the mazes of human interests and enterprises, to be absorbed in the desire for its realization, to chase it for a clearer sight of it, to work for its translation into redeemed lives of men and redeemed nature—that is the last part of successful resistance of temptation. It is the hardest bit of all, for it means thinking of others' needs as much as of one's own. Now all of us tend to be egocentric in our view of life, but when a man is hard beset by temptation his egoism is nearly egomania. It is hard to escape into interest in others' lives. Yet see how it is in sorrow: reeling under the blow, it is a man's instinct to retreat within himself, nursing his grief alone. Yet it is notorious that for real healing he must come forth and step out into sympathy with others, and in that kindly preoccupation discover the secret of a quiet spirit. So it is in temptation: the field of victory is the field of battle for others' good.[1]

[1] G. A. Johnston Ross in *Youth and Life*, 175.

Plato to the Preacher.

A GREEK PHILOSOPHER ON THE ART OF PUBLIC SPEAKING.

By the Rev. Arthur F. Taylor, M.A., St. Cyrus.

It is not to a Greek philosopher that we should instinctively turn to find helpful suggestions on the art of public speaking, yet Plato has some delightfully suggestive things to say about it. After all, this is not so very surprising; for, philosopher though he be, and first master of the art of written prose, Plato was, nevertheless, more characteristically a teacher than a writer, and as a teacher he ever valued the spoken above the written word. Curiously enough (from our modern standpoint) he compares a book to thoughts written in water, while the spoken word is like a seed sown in the ground; there is vitality in it, and it is not unfruitful. '*Only in principles* of justice and goodness and nobility taught and communicated *orally* for the sake of instruction, and *graven on the soul*, which

Downloaded from ext.sagepub.com at The University of Iowa Libraries on July 12, 2015

is the true way of writing, is there clearness and perception and seriousness.' Prime encouragement this for the preacher who still relies upon the spoken word!

It is in the dialogue of Phædrus that Plato has most to say on this art of teaching, preaching, or public speaking, but students of that dialogue do not seem to have done justice to this particular element in it. Collecting together then the suggestions on this particular topic, and ignoring, for the present, all else in the dialogue, we find ourselves in possession of a very interesting and illuminating little treatise on the art of preaching.

For the sake of those who have not read Phædrus recently—or perhaps, alas! have never read it at all—a few sentences are necessary by way of introduction, and to carry us on to the point where our particular topic emerges. There are only two characters in the dialogue—the Greek philosopher Socrates and his friend Phædrus. The scene of the dialogue is a grassy slope on the banks of the Ilissus, where the two friends are reclining under the shade of a conspicuous plane tree, and we must first of all accompany them to this delightful spot.

As is usual in Plato's dialogues no time is wasted in introduction. We are plunged at once *in medias res*. Socrates meets Phædrus in the city and asks him where he has been and whither he is going. Phædrus replies that he has just had an interview with Lysias, the great teacher of rhetoric, and that he is going for a stroll in the country. 'Ah,' says Socrates, 'I should like to know what Lysias has been saying to you.' 'Then come along with me,' says Phædrus. Socrates affirms that he is prepared to walk all the way to Megara and back if Phædrus will promise to retail to him the lecture of Lysias. Phædrus protests that that would be impossible, especially for a man like himself of unpractised memory. With a gleam of humour in his eye Socrates suggests that perhaps Phædrus has got a copy of the lecture hidden under his cloak, and that he is stealing off to study it in private. Phædrus has to confess that Socrates has guessed his secret, and so the two friends set out to look for a quiet spot where they may read and discuss the lecture undisturbed.

'I am fortunate,' says Phædrus, 'in not having my sandals on, and as you, Socrates, never have any, I think we may go along the brook and cool our feet in the water.'

Phædrus leads, Socrates follows, and they come at last to a grassy bank where stands a spreading plane tree. The description of the spot is charming, in Plato's happiest style, and one cannot resist the temptation to transcribe it.

'By Herè, a fair resting-place, full of summer sounds and scents. Here is this lofty and spreading plane tree, and the *Agnus castus* high and clustering in the fullest blossom and the greatest fragrance; and the stream which flows beneath the plane tree is deliciously cold to the feet. Judging from the ornaments and images, this must be some spot sacred to Achelous and the nymphs. How delightful is the breeze!—so very sweet; and there is a sound in the air shrill and summerlike, which makes answer to the chorus of the cicadæ. But the greatest charm of all is the grass, like a pillow gently sloping to the head. My dear Phædrus, you have been an admirable guide.

'*Phædrus*: What an incomprehensible being you are, Socrates; when you are in the country, as you say, you really are like some stranger who is led by a guide. Do you ever cross the border? I rather think that you never venture even outside the gates.

'*Socrates*: Very true, my good friend; and I hope that you will excuse me when you hear the reason, which is, that I am a lover of knowledge, and the men who dwell in the city are my teachers, and not the trees or the country. Though I do indeed believe that you have found a spell with which to draw me out of the city into the country, like a hungry cow before whom a bough or a branch of fruit is waved. For, only hold up before me in like manner a book, and you may lead me all round Attica and over the wide world. And now, having arrived, I intend to lie down, and do you choose any posture in which you can read best. Begin.'

Phædrus reads. The lecture of Lysias, which is a short one, does not much concern us. It was, of course, composed by Plato as a subtle satire upon the disquisitions of the sophists and rhetoricians of the day. The lecture ended, Socrates pretends to have been tremendously impressed—quite ravished, indeed, by its subtilty and eloquence. Phædrus is cute enough to perceive that this is irony, and he presses Socrates for an honest opinion. Socrates then modestly suggests that as to the substance of the lecture he doubts whether that could have been defended even by Lysias himself,

Downloaded from ext.sagepub.com at The University of Iowa Libraries on July 12, 2015

and as to the language, that it appeared to him that Lysias repeated himself unnecessarily, either from want of words or want of pains, and that he seemed to exult in showing how well he could say the same thing in two or three ways. Phædrus tries to defend his master, and Socrates retorts that he has heard many a better speech and thinks that he could make as good a one himself. Phædrus replies, 'This is grand,' and he promises to set up a golden image of Socrates at Delphi, as large as life, if Socrates will promise to make another better oration on the same subject equal in length to that of Lysias, but—*entirely new.* Socrates responds, 'You are a dear golden ass if you suppose me to mean that Lysias has altogether missed the mark and that I can make a speech from which all his arguments are to be excluded. *The worst of authors will say something which is to the point. There are the commonplaces of the subject which must come in, for what else is there to be said, and must be allowed and excused; the only merit is in the arrangement of them, for there can be none in the invention, but when you leave the commonplaces then there may be some originality.*'

Here, then, is one first hint on the art of preaching. It may be called, I think, a counsel of modesty. A man inexperienced in the art of public speech is apt to suppose that because he has something to say he must be a mighty clever fellow, and, of course, if a man is to speak or preach he must have something to say, but it does not follow that what he has to say has the least trace of originality in it—or that it is at all worth saying—unless he can impart to the saying of it some fresh beauty or power. While, on the other hand, there are those who fail in the art of preaching because in their eagerness to find something original to say they overlook the fact that, from the point of view of the art of public speaking, 'the arrangement' or, as we should say, 'the treatment' is often of more importance than the matter. On every topic there are certain things that fall to be said. They just *must* be said. There is no merit in saying them, and yet they may not be omitted. A large part of the art of preaching consists in imparting interest to the commonplaces of life and religion; in saying the inevitable thing, but not in any inevitable way. The theological student is perhaps too much inclined to look down upon the art of preaching and somewhat despise the popular preacher. How often has one come away from church or from a public meeting saying to oneself, 'Well, there was nothing very new in what he said after all? Anyone might have said it.' Precisely! but the art of oratory consists not in saying *new* things so much as imparting new interest and power to familiar and commonplace truths by skilful arrangement, by apt illustration, and by graceful or forcible expression. It is the neglect of this first principle of oratory—as I suppose we may venture to call it—which accounts for the alarming fact that good students are often poor preachers—almost invariably so to begin with. They have accumulated knowledge; they have learned how to think. They have not, as a rule, paid much attention to, or had much practice in, the art of public speaking. Perhaps they do not even wish to preach well—for a season. They think that familiar and commonplace thoughts are unworthy of utterance, and so they try to fill their sermons with abstruse and scholastic thoughts—ideas and ideals which stand in almost no kind of relation to the daily life of their hearers. They are too academic. Of course, originality—true originality of thought—counts for a great deal, but it is a *rara avis*, and a man may be a very effective preacher without being a very original thinker, or he may be a very original thinker without being a very effective preacher.

But to return to Plato. Socrates professes, at first, to be very unwilling to accede to Phædrus' request for a speech. 'My dear Phædrus,' he says, 'how ridiculous it would be of men to compete with Lysias in an extempore speech! He is a master in his art and I am an untaught man.'

'*Phædrus*: You see how matters stand; and therefore let there be no more pretences, for indeed I know the word that is irresistible.

'*Socrates*: Then don't say it!

'*Phædrus*: Yes, but I will, and my word shall be an oath. I say, or rather swear—but what god will be the witness of my oath?—by this plane tree I swear that unless you make the discourse here, in the face of this very plane tree, I will never tell you another lecture—never let you have word of another!

'*Socrates*: Villain! I am conquered.'

Then there follows a long disquisition by Socrates in two parts, the first part after the style of Lysias, the second part a more serious discourse after the style of Plato himself. This second part contains the famous passage in which the human

Downloaded from ext.sagepub.com at The University of Iowa Libraries on July 12, 2015

soul is compared to a chariot drawn by two horses, one black, fiery, untamed, the other white, gentle, and disciplined, but this part of the discourse, famous and beautiful though it be, we must pass by as having nothing to do with our present subject. The whole discourse being ended, the dialogue is resumed, and this brings us to the part thereof that most concerns us, for Socrates presently suggests that he and Phædrus should discuss the rules of writing and speech. Phædrus having agreed, Socrates opens the conversation with the following question:—

'*In good speaking should not the mind of the speaker know the truth of the matter about which he is going to speak?*'

'But, Socrates,' says Phædrus, 'I have heard that he who would be an orator has nothing to do with [justice or truth], but only with that which is likely to be approved by the many who sit in judgment; nor has he anything to do with the truly good or honourable, but only with opinion about them, and that from opinion comes persuasion and not from truth.'

'Well,' says Socrates, 'suppose I persuaded you to buy a horse and go to the wars. Suppose that neither of us knew what a horse was like, but *I* knew that *you* believed a horse to be, of tame animals, the one that has the longest ears. . . . Suppose, further, that in sober earnest I, having persuaded you of this, went and composed a speech in honour of an ass, whom I entitled a horse, beginning, "A noble animal and a most useful possession, especially in war; you may get on his back and fight and he will carry baggage or anything."'

'How ridiculous!' exclaims Phædrus.

'Precisely!' says Socrates, 'but when an orator, instead of putting an ass for a horse, or a horse for an ass, puts good for evil, or evil for good—what will be the harvest which rhetoric will be likely to gather after the sowing of such seed? and so I maintain *that there never is and never will be a real art of speaking which is divorced from the truth*.'

Here, then, is a second suggestive thought upon this subject, namely, that the art of oratory is bound up with a love and knowledge of the truth; that oratory, the object of which is *only to persuade* and not also *to persuade of the truth*, can only attain to the position of sophistry or rhetoric, and can never be oratory of the highest type; or, as Socrates puts it a little further on in the dialogue, 'He who, being ignorant of the truth, aims at appearances will only attain an art of rhetoric which is ridiculous and no art at all.'

But indisputable as this principle surely is, it is not always very easy to live up to it. Seriously laid to heart it means some searchings of soul alike for the lawyer and the preacher. It also sets us a-thinking on a distinction which does seem to exist between the principles—or at least the artifices—of secular and sacred oratory. When Phædrus maintained that the sole aim of oratory was persuasion, quite apart from truth or justice, it is quite evident that he was thinking of oratory of the forensic type—a kind of oratory which was very fascinating to the Athenian. But forensic oratory still survives amongst us, and will continue to do so, as long as men continue to go to law with one another, or by violating the law, lay themselves open to legal prosecution; and of forensic oratory one might still maintain that it seems to be more concerned with persuasion than with truth. What are the feelings of a barrister, I wonder, when he is using his best endeavour to convince the jury of the innocence of a prisoner whom he knows to be guilty? How does he justify a *suppressio veri* which he knows would make all the difference between a condemnation and an acquittal? Does much practice at the Bar really tend to produce the highest type of oratory? And by what discipline of the mind does the barrister safeguard his reverence for truth apart from persuasion?

And the preacher also has some troublesome questions to deal with in view of this same principle. I think I have known men who were very heretical in the study and unimpeachably orthodox in the pulpit. At what point does loyalty to truth require one to throw discretion to the winds? A theological professor is supposed to expound the doctrines of his church's creed, but it is scarcely to be supposed that he is in agreement with *all* these doctrines. Obviously one must not affirm what one does not believe, but need one affirm all that one does believe, or deny? Loyalty to truth is doubtless a first principle of the highest oratory, but does this forbid all reservation of knowledge?

The next point which Socrates makes is that an ideal public speaker must have clearly and distinctly present to his mind the things about which men are agreed and which, therefore, do not

Downloaded from ext.sagepub.com at The University of Iowa Libraries on July 12, 2015

need to be defined or argued about, and the things about which they disagree and with regard to which it is very necessary to define one's terms. He argues, for instance, that Lysias in his discourse had said a great deal about Love, but had never clearly defined what he meant by Love. The true orator will never pause to define a word which does not need definition, nor will he ever fail to define a word which does need definition. He will never explain what does not need to be explained, nor will he ever fail to explain what does need to be explained. The ideal orator must possess the intellectual quality of perspicacity. From perspicacity come definiteness and precision in speech. The man who is devoid of the intellectual quality of perspicacity will be confused in his thinking and may easily lead his hearers into a fog. I have heard scholars complain of the 'clerical vagueness' of the pulpit, by which they meant that we preachers often seem to them to use words and phrases with an indefiniteness, a looseness, and a something like dishonesty, which would not be tolerated among men of science; and indeed one has sometimes heard a preacher use phrases in such a way that one got the impression that he had not clearly faced what the phrases meant either for himself or his hearers. It is rather a temptation to some ministers to use religious phrases which they know will satisfy their hearers, even though the hearers do not understand them in the same sense in which the speaker uses them. Sometimes this vicious habit amounts to actual dishonesty; sometimes it is just a 'clerical vagueness' due to a lack either of perspicacity or of intellectual sincerity.

Having pointed out that the discourse of Lysias bore no trace of this discernment or perspicacity, Socrates goes on to maintain that it was also disorderly. He complains that the topics of the discourse had been thrown down anyhow. 'Is there any principle in them?' he asks. 'Why should the next topic follow next in order, or any other topic? I cannot help fancying in my ignorance that Lysias wrote off boldly just what came into his head, but I daresay that you would recognize a rhetorical necessity in the succession of the several parts of the composition.' Phædrus confesses that he had not given much attention to the subject, whereupon Socrates lays down a third principle as to the art of public speaking in the following terms: '*Every discourse ought to be a living creature having a body of its own and a head and feet. There should be a beginning, middle, and end adapted to one another and to the whole.*'

Perhaps we should express this now by saying that a speech or sermon ought to be a unity—a closely knit unity. The speaker should set before himself a definite purpose. He should introduce it, expound it, develop it, clinch it, and then—be done with it. His introduction must not begin too far away from his subject—a common fault with young preachers. He must not introduce conceits or illustrations or digressions, however interesting they may be in themselves, that have no connexion, or only a very remote one, with his subject. His discourse must not drag aimlessly on when he has made his point, or finished what he has to say about it. He must keep his theme in view and hunt it down in as straight a line as possible, only exercising art enough to carry his audience with him.

At this point of his discourse Socrates admits that the art of oratory is not solely an art that may be learned; partly it comes by nature; nevertheless it may be much assisted by art. The gift of nature, the oratorical temperament, must be enlarged and ennobled by high study and serious thought. Apart from such high equipment, preaching or teaching can only degenerate into vapid rhetoric—a kind of sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. A sound argument this for study, and painstaking study, on the part of the preacher, even though such study may seem to be of no immediate help for homiletical purposes.

'*All great arts*,' says Socrates, '*require discussion and high speculation about the truths of nature, hence come loftiness of thought and completeness of execution*.'

A really great speech or sermon owes something to its theme and something to its occasion, but it owes still more to the mind or soul which the speaker brings to the theme or occasion. He may bring a full mind, a disciplined mind, a soul conversant with great ideas and great enthusiasms. Such a mind will impart interest and largeness to every topic it touches. The study of history, of philosophy, of science, of art—all these should be of inestimable value to the preacher, for they will provide his mind with a spacious atmosphere.

Then also the preacher should have some knowledge of psychology—not necessarily of academic psychology, but of what we may venture to call

Downloaded from ext.sagepub.com at The University of Iowa Libraries on July 12, 2015

practical psychology. He must understand human nature. He must know by study and observation the things which interest men and the things which do not interest them. He must understand the human heart and know what appeals to it. He must know the soul. '*For his whole effort is directed to the soul; in that he seeks to produce conviction.*'

And he must understand not merely the soul in general, but also the souls of men individually in their differences. What interests one man does not necessarily interest his neighbour, and the kind of argument which will appeal to one man will not so much as enter the thick skull of another. And so the orator must learn to distinguish between different types of men and must try to adapt himself to his audience.

'*Such and such persons*,' he will say, '*are affected in this or that way, and he will tell you why. The pupil must have a good theoretical notion of them first, and then he must have experience of them in actual life and be able to follow them with all his senses about him* or he will never be able to get beyond the theoretical precepts of his masters. But when he understands what persons are persuaded by what arguments and sees the person about whom he was speaking in the abstract actually before him, and knows that it is he, and can say to himself, "This is the man or this is the character who ought to have a certain argument applied to him in order to convince him of a certain opinion"; he who knows all this and also when he should speak and when he should refrain and when he should use pithy sayings, pathetic appeals, sensational effects, and all the other modes of speech which he has learned; when, I say, he knows the times and seasons of all these things, then, and not till then, he is a perfect master of his art.'

True, O philosopher! but we begin to say to ourselves, Who is sufficient for these things? So far as preaching is an art to be learned this is perhaps the most difficult part of it—taking the measure of one's hearers and knowing how to adapt oneself to them. Some men have almost no such adaptability. They can only express themselves in their own language, and too often it is the language of the study or of the class-room. They are wholly unaffected by their audience. They *have* to preach, but they are really students, not preachers, even to the end. They have been conversant with books, but not with men. They and their hearers live in different worlds. Alas, this is too true of most of us stereotyped ministers. We have passed from school to college and from college to the pulpit, but we are poor in the experience of the world-life. We have missed that 'experience of men in actual life' which Socrates so much desiderated as part of the equipment of the ideal preacher. An experimental knowledge of human nature has too often to be acquired by us after we have begun our ministry, and even then we perhaps never learn to know human nature so intimately and accurately as the doctor or the lawyer. Herein lies much of our weakness. We preach, it may be, really good sermons so far as the real substance of them is concerned, but they somehow fail in their impact upon the minds of our hearers. To most of us preaching is hard and often disappointing work. For our comfort let us note that Plato at least would have understood that, for was it not in respect of this same art of oratory and the difficulty of mastering it that he spoke the memorable and consoling words that 'even to fail in an honourable object is honourable'?

But Plato carries us even further than that. Behind all the art of teaching and preaching as inspiration and sustaining motive to it all he sets a very high and spiritual ideal.

'Unless a man,' he says, 'estimates the various characters of his hearers and is able to divide all things into classes, and to comprehend them under single ideas, he will never be a skilful rhetorician, even within the limits of human power; and *this skill he will not attain without a great deal of trouble, which a good man ought to undergo, not for the sake of speaking and acting before men, but in order that he may be able to say what is acceptable to God and always to act acceptably to Him as far as in him lies.*'

These words need no comment, for higher than this it is impossible to go.

Downloaded from ext.sagepub.com at The University of Iowa Libraries on July 12, 2015