

**HINTS ON CLERICAL READING.
ESPECIALLY INTENDED
FOR YOUNG CLERGYMEN AND
CANDIDATES FOR HOLY ORDERS**

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Hints on clerical reading. Especially intended for young clergymen and candidates for holy orders by Henry Dale

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CHAPTER I.

To learn to read is usually the very first step in education. In these days, therefore, when so large a proportion of the people are being educated, it might be expected that good reading would be an exceedingly common attainment, and that not to possess it would be an exception to the general rule. And yet it must be allowed that such is by no means the case; at any rate, when we use the term "reading" in the sense of reading *aloud*, for the instruction or amusement of others. In this common signification of the word, good reading is very far indeed from being a general accomplishment, even in the most educated classes. On the contrary, men of the greatest intellectual power and the largest knowledge are often found wanting in it; and when a reader is able to charm a mixed audience by the new light which he pours over the most popular compositions, whether his own or another man's, the rareness of the gift is attested by the very powerful effect it produces. In fact

nothing is more common than to hear complaints of the bad reading of men whose education, it is thought, should exempt them from the possibility of such a charge.

But the truth is, that their inefficiency may, to a great extent, be ascribed to the faultiness of their education on this particular point. Except in their earliest years, they were scarcely ever practised in reading aloud; and it is therefore no wonder if they are incompetent to do it as they ought. In too many of our places of education implicit credence seems to be given to at least half of Dogberry's assertion, that "to read and write comes by nature." But though there is a sense in which the dictum of that sapient official may be accepted, the fact affords no excuse for the neglect now spoken of. It is true that there are certain physical endowments essential for a good public reader, such as strength of lungs, clearness of voice, richness of tone, power of varying the expression, and, perhaps, fineness of ear, on which the modulation of the voice may very much depend, as we know that the power of speaking at all does on that of hearing; so that one who was born deaf is also dumb, and one who has become deaf learns gradually to speak in strange and unnatural tones. In these different respects it may be truly said of the reader, as of the poet,

“Nascitur, non fit.” And yet this concession is far from justifying the neglect of habit and training in the matter. For it is a well-known fact, that by these means natural defects may be largely supplied, as well as artificial excellence acquired. It was by resolute, persevering practice that Demosthenes overcame the natural thickness of utterance, no less than the inelegance of action, which stamped as failures his earlier efforts in the Assembly; and though fewer qualifications are required for the reader than for the orator, a good delivery is essential for them both.

In this country, in particular, there is one class of readers for whom the subject has an especial interest—the Clergy of the Established Church. The greater part of their ministrations must, and the whole of them may, consist of reading; and indeed, as a general rule, this is actually the case. It is therefore of the greatest importance for their professional reputation, and the effect of their services on those who attend them, that they should discharge this part of their duty in the best manner possible; not impairing by any defects of their own the striking beauty of the Liturgy, in which it is their privilege to lead the prayers of their people; nor rendering their addresses from the pulpit less effective than they might be, by any of the faults which constitute a bad reader. This

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may most fairly be expected from them, considering the length of time and amount of study expended on their education, before they can enter the Ministry of the Church. And it would be a just return for the freedom they enjoy in it from the anxious thought which must often weigh heavy on the conscientious Minister in other Communion, who has no such beautiful forms provided for him, but must feel that the devotion of his hearers, as well as their instruction, depends on his own individual utterances; however impaired they may be at the time by bodily infirmity, or mental distress, or any other cause that may happen to unnerve and distract him. It is a blessed privilege to be released from such a load of anxiety as this; for the clergyman himself most certainly, and for the congregation perhaps scarcely less, in the great mass of cases. And the least he can do in acknowledgment of it is to omit no precaution, and to spare no pains, in fitting himself for the strictly definite task to which he is called; the requirements of which he knows thoroughly beforehand, and on his success or failure in which will very much depend the satisfaction of the best of those committed to his charge. The fact of so very small a demand being made on him as a speaker should make him the more determined to excel as a reader; and the more that excellence

lies in his own power, the less excuse can he claim for failing in it.

And yet it is no uncommon thing to hear complaints founded on such failure ; and in many instances it must be confessed that they are but too well founded ; and the knowledge of the fact is, happily, beginning at length to lead to the adoption of measures for its correction, by the appointment of lecturers on reading, and founding of prizes for it, in some of our colleges, in which, as well as in most of our schools, the importance of the subject was till lately almost, if not altogether, ignored. The advantages to be gained by such steps must, of course, depend on the extent to which they are appreciated by the students themselves, and supported by those in authority. In all Theological Colleges, at any rate, attendance at such lectures might well be made indispensable, if it be not already. And there seems no room for doubt that a strong impetus would be given to the movement, if the Bishops would all agree to recognize it distinctly in their examinations ; not merely choosing two of the candidates to read the Epistle and Gospel on the day of the Ordination, but previously hearing all of them read a sufficient portion of the Service, on which to form an opinion of their capacity, and to ground suggestions for their improvement, where required. Their attention to the