

**THREE DIALOGUES
ON PULPIT
ELOQUENCE**

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Three Dialogues on Pulpit Eloquence by François de Salignac de Lamoignon Fénelon

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FRANÇOIS DE SALIGNAC DE LAMOTHE FÉNELON

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ELOQUENCE**

THREE DIALOGUES
OR
PULPIT ELOQUENCE.

THREE DIALOGUES
ON
PULPIT ELOQUENCE

BY

Mgr. FRANÇOIS de SALIGNAC de LAMOTHE FÉNELON

Archbishop of Cambrai

TRANSLATED

AND

ILLUSTRATED BY QUOTATIONS FROM MODERN WRITERS

WITH AN

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

BY THE LATE

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Introductory Essay.

A GREAT French Bishop, who has not long since passed away, Mgr. Félix Dupanloup, of Orleans, speaks thus of the object set before the Christian Preacher: "Men who undertake the ministry of the Word in a serious manner do not speak in the pulpit for the mere sake of speaking, but to teach, to convert, and to save souls." That is a function which has been needful in some form in every age of human history ever since the Fall, and it is tolerably sure to continue needful to the end. There have been ministries even in the Church of Christ which have had, as time went on, to be altered in form, or even dropped altogether, because of the change in the outward circumstances of the Church, or in the minds of men (1 Cor. xii. 7-10, 28). No such change is likely seriously to affect the ordinance of Preaching, and that for two reasons: first, because it is based on a fundamental fact in human nature, which cannot in any stage of civilization, be got rid of, *i.e.*: *the influence of one human soul upon other human souls*; and next, because it employs that principle in the very simplest form possible. There are many other and more highly specialized forms of it—the drama, the orchestra, the poem, and indeed, literature in general, especially the daily and weekly press. But each of these, it will be found, either limits its own aim or is

limited by its necessary conditions. The *drama*, as presented in some crowded and brilliantly-lighted theatre, bends all the resources of art to create *illusion*. The audience is carried away to the mimic spectacle presented on the stage, and is absorbed for the moment in the personality presented before them of Hamlet or of Lear, of the "dainty Ariel" or the impassioned Juliet.

There is an illusion in the power of music, though it does indeed

"take the prison'd soul
And lap it in Elysium."

But what a mass of long and patient training in the performers, of costly and elaborate appliances of a highly scientific kind in the instruments does a powerful orchestra or band present! To a great musical performance, as to a drama fully rendered, belong, therefore, the expenditure of large pecuniary means, and of the efforts of many highly-trained and gifted performers; and the use of those great and important agencies, as a whole, is accordingly limited to the places and the occasions where and when those indispensable auxiliaries can be commanded.

Literature, again, and particularly that form of it with which we are so familiar, as the daily, weekly, or periodical press, differs from oratory in some degree as to its *functions*. It is the intellect which its conductors and its writers have principally to address. Their object is to inform, to delight, or to instruct. The calm perusal of a book occupies the mind,

rather than arouses the feelings. It produces, perhaps, a more lasting effect than an impassioned address from a living voice; but does not make so powerful an impression at the time. Besides, the voice of the speaker is far more *popular*. Not all *can* read; not all who can have the leisure to read; while lastly, not all who have the ability and the leisure to read, are willing to do so. But all are capable of being approached and influenced through the ear, and by the living voice of an earnest speaker. No elaborate apparatus or lengthy training of musical performers, no dramatic illusion, laboriously prepared by the aid of all the arts are needful for this. The means are the simplest imaginable; or rather it should be said that no means whatever are necessary for oratory to produce its fullest effect. On the one side the auditory; on the other the single voice of the speaker or preacher. That is all that is required for eloquence to "do its perfect work," and to establish over the hearts and wills of those subjected to its power, a dominion which, if it be more or less transitory and passing, is complete and perfect while it lasts.

It need not, therefore, be much feared that the orator, upon things secular, or the preacher, of things spiritual, will speedily find his "occupation gone," and himself deemed superfluous even in these times of daily newspapers and multitudinous literature; always provided that the speaker or the preacher rise

to the level of the occasion set before him, and be himself, in all points, equal to his task.

That leads us a step further to consider what is the task set before the preacher, and what does it require of him in order to its fulfilment more or less completely. Now S. Paul, when instructing Timothy, who was probably one of the earliest preachers of the Word, lays down the object of preaching to be "*godly edifying which is in faith*" (1 Tim. i. 4); and in a second reference to the subject, he bids Timothy "*reprove, rebuke, and exhort*" (2 Tim. iv. 2). The preacher is, indeed, to teach; but, in our own day especially, there are other agencies for teaching, and these are in some respects more effective than the pulpit. To read to a congregation a calm and reasoned essay, even upon some religious subject, is to trespass upon the territory of literature. A book that is under the eye, that can be read and reread, and slowly gathered, by repeated perusals, into the treasure-house of the mind, is a far more effectual instrument for detailed doctrinal teaching as such, than the *ἑκουσίου πρῆξις*, ONCE heard and fleeting, of the preacher; not to speak of the catechetical class with its teacher, which is a more powerful agency than either for the mere imparting of knowledge. The preacher has to teach, indeed; but, as it were, incidentally. The Church of Christ has no esoteric doctrines held in reserve, to be doled forth from time to time by the lips of its ministers. He has no doctrinal novelties which

it is his task to display to his hearers. He has a message to deliver, but it is the old message of the Fathers, the Faith "once delivered unto the Saints." He may not add to it, as he may not diminish aught from it in the delivering; yet he is so to deliver it that it shall come with an altogether new force and power to those who hear it. He has to evoke and call into action the imagination of his hearers by the powerful working of his own spiritual faculties, so that it shall acquire a new vision of the eternal realities; to act upon their memory, that it may bring to light the hidden things of their past experience; and most of all, upon their affections, that gratitude and remorse, and hope and fear may enlist the inert or wavering will upon the side of right, and carry the whole man away from evil, and along the paths of good. In short, it is the preacher's task to present, not religious truths in an abstract, or conventionalized, or uninteresting form; but religious truths *touched with emotion*;—winged with the energy, and power, and the dynamic force of the preacher's own mind and soul, that so they may strike other souls, and impress and influence them powerfully, and finally win them to good.

This is the task set before the preacher; and in the performance, with more or less of adequacy, of this task, lies the true power of the pulpit. It is, we maintain, the chief and most important task; not, of course, the only one. The preacher has to comfort, to warn, to