

Street Preaching

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I AM persuaded that the more of open air preaching there is in London the-better, if it should become a nuisance to some it will be a blessing to others, if properly conducted. If it be the gospel which is spoken, and if the spirit of the preacher be one of love and truth, the results cannot be doubted: the bread cast upon the waters must be found after many days. At the same time it must be *the gospel*, and be preached in a manner worth the hearing, for mere noise-making is:in evil rather than a benefit. I know a family almost driven out of their senses by the hideous shouting of monotonous exhortations, and the howling of "Safe in the arms of Jesus" near their door every Sabbath afternoon by the year together. They are zealous Christians, and would willingly help their tormentors if they saw the slightest probability of usefulness from the violent bawling; but as they seldom see hearer, and do not think that what is spoken would do any good, even if it were heard, they complain that they are compelled to lose their few hours of Sabbath quiet because two good men think it their duty to

perform a noisy but perfectly useless service. I once saw a man preaching with no hearer but a dog, who sat upon his tail and looked up very reverently while his master orated. There were no people at the windows nor passing by, but the brother and his dog were at their post whether the people would hear or whether they would forbear. Once also I passed an earnest declaimer, whose hat was on the ground before him, filled with papers, and there was not even a dog for an audience, nor anyone within hearing, yet did he "waste his sweetness on the desert air." I hope it relieved his own mind. Really it must be viewed as an essential part, of a sermon that somebody should hear it: it cannot be a great benefit to the world to have sermons preached *in vacuo*.

As to *style in preaching out of doors*, it; should certainly be very different from much of that which prevails within, and perhaps if a speaker were to acquire a style fully adapted to a street audience he would be wise to bring it indoors with him. A great deal of sermonizing may be defined as saying nothing at extreme length; but out of doors verbosity is not admired, you must say something and have done with it, and go on and say something more, or your hearers will let you know. "Now then," cries a street critic, "let us have it, old fellow." Or else the observation is made, "What are you driving at? You'd better go home and learn your lesson." "Cut it short, old boy," is a very common admonition, and I wish the presenters of this advice gratis could let it be heard inside Bethel and Zoar and some other places sacred to long-winded orations. Where these outspoken criticisms are not

employed, the hearers rebuke prosiness by quietly walking away. Very unpleasant this, to find your congregation dispersing, but a very plain intimation that your ideas are also much dispersed.

In the street, a man must keep himself alive, and use many illustrations and anecdotes, and sprinkle a quaint remark here and there. To dwell long on a point will never do. Reasoning must be brief, clear, and soon done with. The discourse must not be labored or involved, neither must the second head depend upon the first, for the audience is a changing one, and each point must be complete in itself. the chain of thought must be taken to pieces, and each link melted down and turned into bullets: you will need not so ranch Saladin's sabre to cut through a muslin handkerchief as Coeur de Lion's battle-ax to break a bar of iron. Come to the point at once, and come there with all your might.

Short sentences of words and short passages of thought are needed for out of doors. Long paragraphs and long' arguments had better be reserved for other occasions. In quiet country crowds there is much force in an eloquent silence, now and then interjected; it gives people time to breathe, and also to reflect. A solemn pause prepares for that which is coming and has a great power over an audience. Do not however, attempt this in a London street, there you must go ahead, or someone else may run off with your congregation. In a regular field sermon pauses are very effective, and are useful in several ways both to speaker and listeners, but to a passing company who are not inclined for anything like worship, quick, short, sharp

address is most adapted.

In the streets a man must from beginning to end be intense, and for that very reason he must be condensed and concentrated in his thought and utterance. It would never do to begin by saying, "My text, dear friends, is a passage from the inspired word containing doctrines of the utmost importance, and bringing before us in the clearest manner the most valuable practical instruction. I invite your careful attention and the exercise of your most candid judgment while we consider it under various aspects and place it in different lights, in order that we may be able to perceive its position in the analogy of the faith. In its exegesis we shall find an arena for the cultured intellect and the refined sensibilities. As the purling brook meanders among the meads and fertilizes the pastures, so a stream of sacred truth flows through the remarkable words which now lie before us. It will be well for us to divert the crystal current to the reservoir of our meditation, that we may quaff the cup of wisdom with the lips of satisfaction." There, brethren, is not 486 that rather above the average of word-spinning, and is not the art very generally in vogue in these days? If you go out to the obelisk in Blackfriars Road, and talk in that fashion, you will be saluted with "Go on, old buffer," or "*Ain't he fine!* MY EYE!" A very vulgar youth will cry, "What a mouth for a rarer!" and another will shout in a tone of mock solemnity, "AMEN!" If you give them chaff they will cheerfully return it into your own bosom. Good measure, pressed down and running over will they mete out to you. Shams and shows will have no mercy from a street gathering; but have something to say, look them in

the face, say what you mean, put it plainly, boldly, earnestly, courteously, and they will hear you. Never speak against time or for the sake of hearing your own voice, or you will obtain some information about your personal appearance or manner of oratory which will probably be more true than pleasing. "Crikey," says one, "wouldn't he do for an undertaker! He'd make 'em weep": this was a compliment paid to a melancholy brother whose tone is peculiarly funereal. "There, old fellow," said a critic on another occasion, "you go and wet your whistle. You must feel awfully dry after jawing away at that rate about nothing at all." This also was specially appropriate to a very heavy brother of whom we had afore-time remarked that he would make a good martyr, for there was no fear of his burning well, he was so dry. It is sad, very sad, that such rude remarks should be made, but there is a wicked vein in some of us, which makes us take note that the vulgar observations are often very true. and "hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature." As a caricature often gives you a more vivid idea of a man than a photograph would afford you, so do these rough mob critics hit off an orator to the life by their exaggerated censures. The very best speaker must be prepared to take his share of street wit, and to return it if need be; but primness, demureness, formality, sanctimonious long-windedness, and the affectation of superiority actually invite offensive pleasantries, and to a considerable extent deserve them. Chadband or Stiggins in rusty black, with plastered hair and huge choker, is as natural an object of derision as Mr. Guido Fawkes himself. A very great man in his own esteem will pro-yoke immediate opposition, and the affectation of supernatural

saintliness will have the same effect. The less you are like a parson the more likely you are to be heard; and if you are known to be a minister the more you show yourself to be a man the better. "What do you get for that, governor?" is sure to be asked, if you appear to be a cleric, and it will be well to tell them at once that this is extra, that you are doing overtime, and that there is to be no collection. "You'd do more good if you gave us some bread or a drop of beer, instead of those tracts," is constantly remarked, but a manly manner, and the outspoken declaration that you seek no wages but their good, will silence that stale objection.

The *action* of the street preacher should be of the very best. It should be purely natural and unconstrained. No speaker should stand up in the street; in a grotesque manner, or he will weaken himself and invite attack. The street preacher should not imitate his own minister, or the crowd will spy out the imitation very speedily, if the brother is anywhere near home. Neither should he strike an attitude as little boys do who say, "My name is Norval." The stiff straight posture with the regular up and down motion of arm and hand is too commonly adopted, but it is not worthy of imitation: and I would even more condemn the wild raving maniac posture which some are so fond of. which seems to be a cross between Whitefield with both his arms in the air, and Saint George with both his feet violently end-aged in trampling on the dragon. Some good men are grotesque by nature, and others take great pains to make themselves so. Clumsy, heavy, jerky, cranky legs and arms appear to be liberally dispensed. Many speakers don't know what upon earth to do with these limbs, and so they stick

them out, or make them revolve in the queerest manner. The wicked Londoners say, "What a cure!" I only wish I knew of a cure for the evil.

All mannerisms should be avoided. Just now I observe that nothing can be done without a very large Bagster's Bible with a limp cover. There seems to be some special charm about the large size, though it almost needs a little perambulator in which to push it about. With such a Bible, full of ribbons, select a standing in Seven Dials, after the pattern of a divine so graphically described by Mr. McCree. Take off your hat, put your Bible in it, and place it on the ground. Let the kind friend who approaches you on the right hold your umbrella. See how eager the dear man is to do so! Is it not pleasing? He assures you he is never so happy as when he is helping good men to preach to the poor sinners in these wicked places. Now close your eyes in prayer. When your devotions are over, *somebody will have profited by thee occasion* Where is your affectionate friend who held your umbrella and your hymn-book? Where is that well-brushed hat and that orthodox Bagster? Where? Oh where? Echo answers, "Where?"

The catastrophe which I have thus described suggests that a brother had better attend you in your earlier ministries, that one may watch while the other prays. If a number of friends will go with you and make a ring around you it will be a great acquisition; and if these can sing it will be still further helpful. The friendly company will attract others, will help to secure order, and will do good service by sounding forth sermons in song.

It will be very desirable to speak so as to be heard, but

there is no use in incessant bawling. The best street preaching is not that which is done at the top of your voice, for it must be impossible to lay the proper emphasis upon telling passages when all along you are shouting with all your might. When there are no hearers near you, and yet people stand over the other side of the road and listen, would it not be as well to cross over and so save a little of the strength which is now wasted? A quiet, penetrating, conversational style would seem to be the most telling. Men do not bawl and holloa when they are pleading in deepest earnestness; they have generally at such times less wind and a little more rain; less rant and a few more tears. On, on with one monstrous shout and you will weary everybody and wear yourself out. Be wise now, therefore, O ye who would succeed in declaring your Master's message among the multitude, and use your voices as common sense would dictate.