

Has any alienation sprung up between our sermons and our church activities? This may be traced either to the sermon or to the age. Perhaps the sermon has failed to stimulate the hearer's mind and heart. It has failed to furnish him with the enthusiasm and to indicate to him the opportunity for Christian labor. It has been too exclusively a voice. It has said what it had to say and come away. It has suffered the congregation to remain almost passive, recalling the mediæval accommodation of the text in Job: "The oxen were ploughing and the asses feeding beside them." Or, again, the sermon may have had a directly contrary effect. It may have roused within the heart of the hearer a passion for work, so that too impatient to listen long he has hurried forth, and left the sermon to finish itself as best it can in comparative solitude.

Perhaps—and this is more likely—the character of our age is not the most friendly to sermons. Christian aggression is now the motto of the church. Not an hour too soon have we recognized that unless we get hold of the world the world may get hold of us. The pulpit was formerly much more than it is now the prominent means for bringing religion to men. The sermon remains to us indeed, but it is like the ruins of the abbey in which the venerable Bede labored in the North of England centuries ago, now a heap of stones fallen and forgotten in the midst of huge foundries, lit with the demoniac glare from blast furnaces, and lying day and night under the pall of manufacturing smoke. The motionless axle of the wheel, our sermons are fastened in the centre of the hundred agencies which we now consider essential to a full-furnished church. Only the two sermons remain unchanged, and, alas! only the one minister. What are they among so many? So the church has come, unconsciously, no doubt, to look with some degree of intolerance upon the brief moments which the preacher still claims at the eager hands of the societies, the institutions, the bands, the circles, the missions, the associations which tax the letters of the alphabet to furnish them with titles, and the resources of the membership to furnish them with officers, and the hours of the week to furnish them with time. Among all these the sermon barely obtains a hearing.

Look now on the other side of the subject. Have sermon and service come into conflict? Do our congregations find in the service an interest which they fail to find in the sermon? Again we are bound to enquire whether our sermons have not been to blame for this. Has the sermon become remote? Has it failed to remain true to the kindred points of heaven and of home? The voice of Chrysostom could crowd the great church of St. Sophia at midday and in mid-week. The discussions of the theatre and of the market places and of the council chamber sent their echoes into Savonarola's pulpit. Homely Hugh Latimer was quoted on London 'change, and Mr. Beecher's