

much result from good works and noble endeavours against sin? To help him to be good and great, are you to take him back to ancient times and Oriental scenes for his examples? Well, you can do that, and that is what the orthodox preachers of sermons do. And what is the result? Dullness. A venerable divine told me a while ago that he had preached for ten years at a time without being thanked for a sermon by man, woman or child. I can very well believe it. He got just what he had stipulated for and so earned—nothing more. He had given them nothing to call out their gratitude. He had doubtless given during that time a strong moral support to the Creator, and expressed approval of creation generally; he had defended Moses, the Decalogue and Pentateuch; he had repeated the thunder of Isaiah, and unfolded the dream of Ezekiel; he had explained the personality and Godhead of Jesus Christ; he harmonised the Gospels and interpreted the Epistles; he had established the truth and beauty of all his own dogmas; he had done so much for the Church and the faith that his brethern and friends at a distance, who had no chance to hear him preach, gave him a diploma, but no man, woman nor child, during all these dreary years, took his hand and looked into his eyes and said, "Thank you; I am the stronger, and the better for that sermon." And no wonder. He had only told them what they thought they knew and had heard a thousand times before. You have heard professional guides in abbey or tower. The first time it was interesting enough, but you had to go again to take a friend, and the story was rather tame; and you had to go again to take another friend, and then you begged to be allowed to remain outside while your friend heard the story you wanted to hear no more. So it is with the general run of sermons; the much wearied hearers, metaphorically, remain outside by going to sleep, or turn the attention to something other than the preacher's subject. Speeches on politics get a hearing. I have heard most indifferent speakers loudly cheered; their logic halted just like their tongue; their argument was as disjointed as their sentences; but they were heard because they spoke to the hour and the souls there before them; they spoke of home, and not of Judea; they criticised the living; they dealt with living subjects.

There can be no really great preacher, and consequently no really great sermons, except at times of religious agitation and