

“One Sunday I sauntered into the cathedral an hour too soon, and seated myself within six yards of the pulpit. Before Dr. Liddon had spoken three sentences I saw that he was making a tremendous effort. Every sentence, clause, word, was hurled as from a catapult across the vast void above the countless faces below; and the preacher’s ear and eye were alike strained to catch whether each word hit the point in the distance on which both eye and ear were bent. So it began, and so it continued during the sermon, and during the whole the muscles of the orator’s face as well as his body were working like cordage, till the dark features were bathed in pitiless perspiration. The sermon was a fine one, and labor was no doubt partly imaginative and moral. But that it was chiefly the mere physical exertion necessary to make himself heard, seemed to me to be proved by one thing. He read every word; but again and again, with the manuscript before him, he made obvious blunders in grammar—blunders which a schoolboy could correct, but which the great preacher never noticed. He was like a man working a park of artillery on the actual battle-field—too immersed in hurling his words across the vast intervening space to notice what the projectiles consisted of, or how they were chained together.”

The destiny was a cruel one, but Canon Liddon’s destiny it was, and, in necessary result, it is with a pulpit orator, not defeated indeed, but not overwhelmingly triumphant, that we have in this paper to deal.

Yet almost it ought to be reckoned overwhelmingly triumphant in oratory, not to be disastrously defeated, if you have to achieve your result by preaching in St. Paul’s Cathedral. It is not simply that your audience is broken from its mass as a whole into several instalments of audience; not simply that the immense dome, lofty as well as large like a sky, seems to make the voice volatile and dissipate it in the upper air; not simply that angles and arches and pillars intercept and shatter your words. This would be bad enough, but besides all this, there is a multiplex murmurous echo which, refracted around the angles, running under the arches, and reflected from the pillars, retreats in a prolonged low multitudinous diminuendo, to vanish from the ear which tries to follow *that*, in the remote recesses of the building. Meantime the ear that tries to follow the voice of the speaker instead, can hardly well define the sound from the perplexed polyglot penumbra of echo that incessantly mocks and confuses it.

It was mainly by preaching under such conditions as have thus been inadequately described, that Canon Liddon became the celebrated preacher that during so many years he was; for he preached mainly in the Cathedral of St. Paul’s. Let us boldly say, then, that after all he triumphed overwhelmingly, that he did achieve a resplendent success.

Mainly, I say, by preaching in St. Paul’s Cathedral; but by no means exclusively in that way. For Canon Liddon was, one memorable season—a season made memorable by his own memorable exploit—Bampton lecturer before the University of Oxford. He then—it was in 1886—delivered a series of lectures, eight in number, which, together