

NO CHANCE TO DODGE.

One evening, a few years ago, Dr. John Hall preached in a large city across the lines. The church was crowded and the Doctor was at his best. The sermon was intensely practical and sent the truth right home. In the closing part he took up the current excuses that men make for not believing on Christ, and fairly tore them to tatters. Iron logic and strong common sense, mingled with an occasional gleam of humour and the least touch of sarcasm, made the excuses, or at least some of them, appear supremely absurd. The great audience were visibly impressed. At the close of the service a rather careless looking American citizen made this remark to a friend: "The old man gives a fellow no chance to dodge, does he?" Probably that Yankee unconsciously paid Dr. Hall the highest compliment that has ever been paid to him. What better thing can be said of a preacher than that he gives careless sinners no chance to dodge? That style of criticism is so seldom heard that it is both fresh and refreshing. We hear a great deal about the preacher's manner, his voice, his style, his delivery, especially if we worship in a church that is hearing candidates, but we rarely hear it said of preachers that they give sinners no chance to dodge. Perhaps the critics are not in search of those qualities that prevent dodging. Possibly, they don't admire such qualities. There is a remote possibility that some of them would not care to call a man who gave no chance to dodge. And yet what higher encomium could be passed upon a preacher than to say that he gives his hearers no chance to dodge.

"His elocution is simply perfect. His tones are pure, his articulation distinct, his emphasis well timed, his inflections perfect, his pitch just right, his gestures graceful, his delivery faultless." Good! Good elocution is a great thing. The Lord's message should be delivered in the best possible style. A man ought to be ashamed to deliver the glorious doctrines of grace in a slovenly, slipshod manner. But to say that a preacher is a first-class elocutionist is not half as good a thing to say of him as that he *gives sinners no chance to dodge*.

"The sermon was well composed, the diction chaste, the sentences well rounded, the logic faultless, the illustrations well chosen and light-giving, in fact, the literary execution was high." Capital! It is a good thing to have high literary work on a sermon occasionally. At all events it is a good thing for a preacher to be able to do good literary work if he wishes to. But did this well written sermon give the *hearers a chance to dodge*? That is the main question.

"As a piece of homiletic work, the sermon was simply perfect. The introduction was suitable and of the right length. It led naturally up to the subject. The division was faultless. The discussion would have gratified Shedd or Dabney. The unity and

progress would have satisfied even Dr. Proudfoot. The application was a model. It gathered up the truth discussed, increased in strength and ended in a fine climax. It was just such an ending as would have pleased Phelps." Splendid! That is the kind of sermon one likes to hear. But listen: Did this model of homiletic art give the sinners a *chance to dodge*?

One characteristic of good preachers is that they never give hearers a chance to dodge. Nathan didn't give David a ghost of a chance to dodge when he said, "Thou art the man!" Elijah gave his congregation on Carmel no chance to dodge when he rang out the challenge: "How long halt ye between two opinions?" Peter gave the Jerusalem sinners no chance to dodge in his Pentecostal sermon. Paul gave Felix no chance for dodging. Spurgeon never gives any one a chance to dodge. The man who can dodge Talmage must be a very artful dodger. Of course any hearer can dodge if he tramples down conscience, truth and the strivings of the Spirit; but if he does so the responsibility rests on him. The great problem is to present the Gospel in such a manner as to make dodging impossible unless the hearer deliberately takes the responsibility upon himself. That American citizen felt in his heart of hearts that if he dodged, the fault was his own—not Dr. Hall's.

Dodging began when sin began. Adam dodged when he hid among the trees of Eden, and too many members of the Adam family have been dodging the truth ever since. One of the surest ways of dodging the sermon is to go asleep every Sabbath. If a man can get himself soundly asleep he has no further trouble. A man who goes asleep in the early part of the service gives his minister no chance. An unfortunate preacher who had a number of sleepers of that kind in his congregation, addressed them in this way: "Brethren, this is not fair. You go to sleep before I begin. Can't you wait and see whether the sermon is worth hearing or not? Give a man a chance." That brother was right. You have no sort of chance if a hearer dodges you by going to sleep before you begin.

But a hearer may be asleep for all the purposes of the sermon without having his head down or his eyes closed. He may dodge the truth by thinking about his farm, or his office, or his store, or his election, or any one of a hundred other things. The problem the preacher has to solve is to keep him from dodging in that way. It is no easy problem. A ship-builder said he could lay the keel of a vessel while listening to any preacher in Scotland but Guthrie. Guthrie, he declared, would not allow him lay a *single plank*. He meant precisely the same thing as the American citizen did when he said John Hall would not let him dodge. Without the slightest disposition to find fault, may it not be asked if the art of bringing divine truth to bear directly on the hearts and consciences of men is sufficiently taught in our theological halls? An essay