

OPEN AIR PREACHING.

BY REV. G. W. MCCREE.

I have great faith in open-air preaching. I think it requires the choicest men of the Christian Church. I think any man who becomes an open-air preacher, through whatever agency, should be a man of wisdom, of pleasant temperament, a man of ability, large knowledge, profound tenderness of heart, of impressive speech, with a great fund of anecdote, story, illustration, and poetry at command. One who has a thorough knowledge of and sympathy with the poor, who is well versed in ancient and modern scepticism, who understands his Bible, a man of prayer, who knows how to keep his temper when opposed, who has the zeal of an apostle, who is full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. I believe the Gospel, when preached in the open-air and in connection with prayer and faith, is sure to be the power of God unto salvation, as in the days of Pentecost. I believe in Christ Jesus as a living Saviour. I believe the Holy Ghost is given in answer to prayer, as in days of old. If a man will baptise his sermons with tears, and go forth in the name of God, he shall not have to return and say, "Who hath believed our report?" But he shall see souls converted to God round about him, and years afterwards shall gather golden sheaves to the everlasting garner. I honour the man—I love the man—who preaches the gospel in the open air. So much by way of explaining my position. Suffer me to say that you have not much open-air preaching of that kind, and that a large number of brethren who preach in the open air are not always the men who ought to do it. I think clergymen and Non-conformist ministers ought to undertake a part of this great work. I think Christian merchants, and tradesmen, and workmen of superior intelligence and eloquent power, and great piety, should do their part in this glorious work. I think the best man a Christian Church has who may happen to possess qualifications for this work should go and do it, because you may preach the gospel to your hundreds and thousands in your churches and chapels, but you often preach that everlasting gospel to those who have heard it hundreds and thousands of times, whereas the masses beyond your church and chapel are without God and hope in the world, and you ought to go and seek the lost sheep, and gather them into the fold. Therefore I honour my dear friend Mr. Spurgeon when he goes to preach in the open air, and I give great honour to the Bishop of London because he perched upon an omnibus for the same purpose; and I give equal honour to any brave working man who will give up a week night or part of Sunday to preach the gospel to his fellow-workers. Many do it who ought to go and fall asleep in bed. I do wish they were all married men, and their wives could keep them at home. I am serious in this matter. I have studied it for twenty-five years, but it is only within the last year or two I have trusted myself to speak about in public; I have never done so without having testimony to the truth of what I say. Many of these open-air preachers are mere boys, but there is not one boy in ten thousand who ought to preach the gospel thus. You may have them if you think proper, but not one in ten thousand is qualified to do it. I have seen them again and again in London, and have been a boy-preacher myself, having preached my first sermon when I was sixteen; therefore I have no prejudice against them. Although a lad working for his living, I never preached a sermon. I had not thoroughly studied. I was often up till two o'clock in the morning studying. I saved my money to buy the best books in our language, to educate myself for this great work.

By the time I was eighteen I was devoted to preaching the gospel, and walked over two counties, seldom sleeping two nights in the same bed. Let the boy-preacher study his sermon before he preaches it, and don't let him call this preaching.—"Come to Jesus; this is the time to come to Jesus; now, then, come to Jesus; now's the time to come to Jesus; if you come, He will save you just now." Then, turning to another boy, he says, "It is your turn now." That is not the kind of preaching that will conciliate the artisans of London. These boys ought to be got into a Bible class and prepared for their work.

It is not every man of older age who ought to preach the gospel. I have several photographs of open-air preachers. Here is one. A thin, tall man, six feet high, dressed in black—rusty black, I should think his black cloth suit formerly belonged to a clergyman, then to a waiter, after that to a cheap undertaker's man, and then he got hold of it. He wears a white choker, very yellow in its hue; he never seems to cut or pare his finger nails; he keeps a greasy Bible in his hand, great spectacles over his nose—a Roman nose; and there he stands, with his elbows fastened to his side, to preach, and when Sir Oracle opens his mouth, let no dog bark. If a man laugh he loses his temper, and looks over his spectacles in such a frightful fashion. Now, don't you think such a man will rather repel men than draw them to Christ?

Another photograph: he is a young man, especially in the brain. He seems to think he combines in himself the characteristics of Mr. Spurgeon, Mr. Punshon, Mr. J. B. Gough, and himself—himself being the noblest of them all. He stand upon a chair on a Sunday morning. He begins in the "My name is Norval" style. He says, "This way—now, listen, listen to me," and stamps his foot. "I am going to say to you—now, hear, what I was going to say is this—." But then he does not say it. And then, in a voice of thunder, this gesticulation goes on until a poor drunken carpenter, who has been leisurely smoking his pipe, looks at him. Jack can stand a great deal, but he cannot stand this. The youth proceeds: "Now, then, I tell you—," and Jack chimes in,—"How's your poor feet?" And so Jack perseveres, and by asking that question he puts down "Norval." If that young man had known how to preach the gospel he would have been modest, and he would have been quiet and solemn, and he would have remembered the saying of one greater than himself. "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." When poor Jack said, "How's your poor feet?" he would have stopped; though to a right man Jack would not have said it. The right man would have said: "How are you this morning? My poor feet are quite well, thank you; how is your poor head this morning? How is your poor pocket, how are your poor shoes, and your poor wife, and your poor kids? Jack, come along and shake hands; I know you when you are sober; shake hands; sit down here." Now everybody would be ready to listen.

Another sketch: I preach at Seven Dials every Sunday morning at ten—to thieves, soldiers, unfortunate women, navvies, passers-by, blacksmiths, tailors, Irish tailors, lots of them—to little boys and girls; and they are just as orderly as you are. When I had gone away on one occasion, there came up Seven Dials a good man, who happens to have leetle legs, which knock together as he walks; he has a werry large hat, on a werry small head; a pair of spectacles on his leetle nose; a very big choker, which comes under his ears; a ghee-ingham umbrella under his leetle arm, and he carries a Bible in his leetle hand. He comes up Seven Dials to preach to one of the shrewdest congregations in the

world. Some thieves saw him, and they thought to have a bit of fun, and do some business on their own account. One said, "You are going to preach this morning?" and the leetle man said, "Yes." "I hold your hat?" And the leetle man gave him his hat. Another said, "I hold your umbrella?" And the leetle man gave him his ghee-ingham umbrella. "You pray before you preach?" Mr. McCree always does. "Y-e-s," said the little man. "Rough lot 'bout here, sir; I'll stand behind you and take care of you." So the little man prayed, but when he opened his eyes his hat was gone, umbrella (the ghee-ingham) was gone, and the man who stood behind him had picked his pocket; and the little Jeremiah was quite woe begone. That was his farewell sermon. Don't you think his wife had better have locked him up? I dare say I should see some of this stamp in this delightful neighbourhood. And I should find men of whom the world is not worthy. You have got the right men—only would to God they were all right men.

ON A MINISTER'S QUALIFYING HIMSELF FOR HIS OFFICE.

When a young minister sets out, he should sit down and ask himself HOW HE MAY BEST QUALIFY HIMSELF FOR HIS OFFICE.

How does a physician qualify himself? It is not enough that he offers to feel the pulse. He must read, and inquire, and observe, and make experiments, and correct himself again and again. He must lay in a stock of medical knowledge before he begins to feel the pulse.

The minister is a physician of a far higher order. He has a vast field before him. He has to study an infinite variety of constitutions. He is to furnish himself with the knowledge of the whole system of remedies. He is to be a man of skill and expedient. If one thing fail, he must know how to apply another. Many intricate and perplexed cases will come before him. It will be disgraceful to him not to be prepared for such. His patients will put many questions to him: it will be disgraceful to him not to be prepared to answer them. He is a merchant embarking in extensive concerns. A little ready money in the pocket will not answer the demands that will be made upon him. Some of us seem to think it will, but they are grossly deceived. There must be a well-furnished account at the banker's.

But it is not all gold that glitters. A young minister must learn to separate and select his materials. A man who talks to himself will find out what suits the heart of man: some things respond; they ring again. Nothing of this kind is lost on mankind. It is worth its weight in gold, for the service of a minister. He must remark, too, what it is that puzzles and distracts the mind: all this is to be avoided: it may wear the garb of deep research, and great acumen, and extensive learning; but it is nothing to the mass of mankind.

One of the most important considerations in making a sermon is to disembarrass it as much as possible. The sermons of the last century were like their large, unwieldy chairs. Men have now a far more true idea of a chair. They consider it as a piece of furniture to sit upon, and they cut away from it everything that embarrasses and encumbers it. It requires as much reflection and wisdom to know what is not to be put into a sermon, as what is.

A young minister should likewise look round him, that he may see what has succeeded, and what has not. Truth is to be his companion, but he is to clothe her so as to gain her access. Truth must never bow to fashion or prejudice; but her garb may be varied. No man was ever eminently successful in his ministry who did not make truth his friend.

Such a man might not see her, indeed, in all her beauty and proportions; but certainly he saw and loved her. A young minister should remember that she does not wear the dress of a party. Wherever she is, she is one and the same, however variously men may array her. He who is ignorant of her prominent and distinguishing features, is like a musician who plays half score: it grates on every well-formed ear; as fatal error finds no corresponding vibration in the renewed heart. Truth forms an immediate acquaintance with such a heart, by a certain fitness and suitableness to its state and feelings. She is something different from the picture which a Churchman draws of her. A Dissenter misses her perfect figure. A Frenchman distorts her features one way, and an Englishman in another. Every one makes his own cast and colour too essential to her.

Knowledge then, and truth, are to be the constant aim of a young minister. But where shall he find them? Let him learn from a fool, if a fool can teach him anything. Let him be everywhere and always a learner. He should imitate Gainsborough. Gainsborough transfused nature into his landscapes, beyond almost any of his contemporaries; because Gainsborough was everywhere the painter. Every remarkable feature or position of a tree—every fine stroke of nature—was copied into his pocket-book on the spot; and, in his next picture, appeared with a life and vivacity and nature, which no strength of memory or imagination could have supplied.

There is a certain wise way, too, in which he should accustom himself to look down on the pursuits of all other men. No man of eminence in his profession is destitute of such a partial feeling for his profession; though his judgment may remonstrate with him thereon, as an unfounded partiality. The Minister, however, is REQUIRED so to view all other pursuits. He alone is the man, whose aim is eternity. He alone is the man, whose office and profession, in all their parts, are raised into dignity and importance by their direct reference to eternity. For eternity he schemes, and plans, and labours.

He should become a philosopher also. He should make experiments on himself and others, in order to find out what will produce effect. He is a fisherman; and the fisherman must fit himself to his employment. If some fish will bite only by day, he must fish by day: if others will bite only by moonlight, he must fish for them by moonlight. He has an engine to work, and it must be his most assiduous endeavour to work his engine to the full extent of its powers: and, to find out its powers, is the first step toward success and effect. Many men play admirably on the organ, if you would allow to them that there is no difference between an organ and a harpsichord; but they have utterly mistaken its powers. Combination is the unrivalled excellence of the organ; and therefore he only can display its powers, who studies the chords and stops in all their infinite variety and resolution and composition, rather than the rapid motion of his fingers only.

But all the minister's effort will be vanity, or worse than vanity, if he have not unction. Uction must come down from heaven, and spread a savour and relish and feeling over his ministry. And, among all the other means of qualifying himself for his office, the Bible must hold the first place, and the last also must be given to the word of God and prayer.—Richard Cecil.

—The gospel of Christ is going literally to the ends of the earth. The Missionary ship, *Morning Star*, in a recent trip to Micronesia, took out 3,278 volumes in the language of the Gilbert Islands, of which 678 were New Testament.