

LONG SERMONS.

Whatever difference there may be between preachers of the olden times and of the present, there is certainly a very great difference in the taste of hearers. There was a time,—some of us who are not very old can remember it,—when a congregation could, without complaint, wait on a service of from two to three hours,—yea when, on a Communion Sabbath, they could listen to services and table addresses for a good many hours. Now, many are ready to complain if the sermon exceeds forty or forty-five minutes, and if the whole service exceeds an hour and a half. We are not going to say that in this respect the former times were better than these. We do not mean to say that the excellency of a sermon or religious service is in proportion to its length. But we think there is a tendency to carry matters too far in the way of brevity, and to be too exacting as to the style of a preacher's sermon and services. We lately read a short communication from the pen of an able minister of the English Presbyterian Church, one who lately held the position of Moderator of Synod in that church, in which we thought there was a great deal of common sense. We accordingly give our readers the benefit of it.

"LONG SERMONS." How do you measure them? By the clock? I venture to submit that a clock is about the most imperfect measure of a sermon you could fix on. Suppose a man complains of an ordinary dinner, and affirms querulously that it was too long! What should we infer? Three things are possible. First, it might mean that he had a surly, or a stupid, or a niggardly host; second, that the viands were bad, or badly cooked, or badly served; third, that he himself, the guest, had a bad stomach, or a bad appetite. A fourth supposition might be that the guests were badly chosen, strangers to each other, or were dull, dry, unsociable.

Mutatis mutandis, all this applies to the complaint of long sermons. If the hearer feels that a sermon is long, the minister may be in fault. The cure is, not shorten the sermon, but, so to say, lengthen the minister. The sermon may be of poor, thin, flimsy materials; if so, it will seem long. The cure is, thicken it, rather than shorten it. The sermon may be badly "served"—delivered; the cure is, "mend the delivery;" put more heart, more soul in it.

But what of the hearer? Is his stomach degenerating? Is his appetite gone? Has he ceased to hunger any more for the bread, and to thirst any more for the water of life? Does his soul loathe this heaven-sent food, and does he hunger mightily after the fleshpots of Egypt? The cure is—he must get cured himself. He is dying, if not dead; and he sorely needs a direct application to the Physician of Souls, and to his healing medicine.

Or, is the fault in the guests at the banquet? Is it that each individual feels himself solitary at the table—the food there, and all the rest there, but this want of sympathy with those at the table beside him? The cure is, know, love, your fellow-worshippers; and the longest sermon, if it be what a sermon ought to be, will become suddenly short.

The clock is a poor sermon-measure. I once heard Dr. Chalmers preach. By the clock, the sermon was an hour and a quarter long; measured by my appetite for more, it was about ten minutes. I once heard a Suffolk clergyman, in a small country parish; measured by my watch, the length of his sermon was exactly twelve minutes; by my feeling, it was a month long, or at least, a fortnight. The subject was, "repentance;" but it was a repentance that needed to be repented of. I once heard Hugh Stowell, of Manchester. What a feast it was! I cannot tell you how