

ABOUT WORDS AND PHRASES.

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IN a recent number of the ERA one of your contributors suggested as an aid to freshness and a remedy for ruts in our League meetings, that a list of hackneyed phrases might be prepared for consignment to the oblivion of disuse. Any frequenter of religious meetings might easily draw up a list such as would merit a place in the museum of verbal antiquities.

The place of honor would undoubtedly be given to our old familiar friend, "along these lines," which has for many a year had a conspicuous place on the platform, in the press, and even in the pulpit. I have heard it said that this expression came into currency at the time of the American War, when one of the Generals declared his purpose to "fight it out along this line (of the Potomac River, which separated the two armies), if it should take all summer." Whether this is the true origin and date of the phrase or not, it has certainly been over-worked for a long time and should have a rest. I have heard of "imaginary lines," but the *Christian Guardian* credits a speaker at one of the recent Conferences with the location of "certain influences along spiritual lines." What might a spiritual line be, please?

Sometimes the reporters tell us of sermons or addresses which were "on broad lines," with never a care for that definition which makes a line to consist of "length without breadth."

At another of our Conferences some were irreverent enough to wonder, when a minister, in dismissing the meeting, prayed that grace, mercy and peace, etc., might "rest, remain and abide upon us," why the good brother did not add a few more synonyms, such as continue, linger, stay, tarry, dwell, etc. If any more be needed than Paul's simple words, "Grace be with you all," why stop at only three repetitions of the one idea?

A good deal of valuable time is wasted by many a speaker at conventions and in League meetings, telling us how glad he is to be present, what a great occasion he feels this to be, what a deep sense of responsibility he feels, what an important subject he has to present, and how much he regrets that it has not been assigned to some other person—all of which information is superfluous, and quite irrelevant to the matter in hand. Then there is the brother who assures us in a tedious introduction that he has "no intention of making a speech," and after meandering over a large expanse of vacuity, comes within sight of the theme assigned him by the time he ought to take his seat. That point being reached, he either retires without contributing what he promised

to the programme or proceeds to use valuable time that belongs to some one else.

But perhaps the most objectionable of all hackneyed phrases are those quotations (or misquotations, as they frequently are) of Bible language with which many alleged testimonies or prayers are interlarded *ad nauseam*. To catalogue these would exhaust the space allotted to this article, and would, furthermore, be superfluous, for most readers of the ERA are sufficiently faithful to the class and prayer meeting to be quite familiar with a large part of the list. I knew a man who had quite a reputation for Biblical lore on account of his habit in the testimony meeting of repeating a long series of texts from various parts of the Scriptures, whose connection with each other could only be traced by reference to the mysterious workings of the laws of association. In fact this good brother was practically an automaton, for having risen to his feet, closed his eyes and opened his

at accuracy, saying simply what we mean, without trying to be eloquent, poetic or sanctimonious. In fine, let us be ourselves, let us be true.

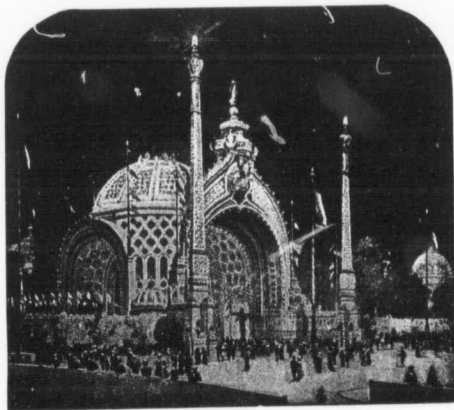
We should weigh our words in the balance of reason to find whether they are true words, or only sounds. A word is the embodiment of an idea. For instance, after a long pause in the meeting, some one rises slowly and says he is very glad to have another opportunity to take up his cross and witness for the Master, etc. Now, what does he mean? True, these sounds have broken an awkward silence—were they intended to do anything more? If our friend really feels so glad of this opportunity, why did he wait so long before embracing it? What idea underlies that word "cross"? His tone and manner certainly do not betoken suffering, any more than gladness. Is he really enduring all the tortures of crucifixion as he stands there, so calm and fluent? What does he mean by "witnessing" for Christ? Has he any idea

of what it is to witness in the New Testament sense? Does his little speech really contain any positive element of testimony? Or is he just "taking part" because he promised to do so, and doing it in the most orthodox fashion by the use of terms which long usage is supposed to have consecrated?

The terms may be all right, provided they mean something, and are fitted to convey that something from one mind to others; but if these terms are borrowed, and used because they are considered to be effective, how far is the act removed from hypocrisy? If a man uses words for which no corresponding idea lights his mind, and for which no answering emotion stirs his heart, however orthodox or unctuous the words may be,

he utters untruth. Such utterances have indeed ceased to be words, they are mere sounds, having only a semblance of thought. If we are without worthy ideas, let us be silent, for no amount of talk will fill an empty mind. If we would but acknowledge to ourselves the want of ennobling thoughts, instead of concealing our poverty with words; if we would seek instruction and cultivate our minds, we would easily override the ruts that kill so many young people's meetings.

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MAIN ENTRANCE, PARIS EXPOSITION.

lips, no one could tell, and himself least of all, where he would wander or when he would return to earth. And yet people marvel that the rising generation does not appreciate the class meeting!

I venture to suggest that this serious abuse is not to be remedied by making lists of words to be avoided, or lists of new phrases to be substituted for the old. The evil arises from a want of clear and vigorous thought. Instead of clothing some definite idea to express, and having it in the simplest and clearest words that are available, do we not often speak merely because we are expected to do so, or because we think we ought to take some part in the meeting? If so we must of course say whatever may happen to be ready at hand and memory supplies without effort the common-places which have become familiar by much repetition.

If we have anything to say that is worthy of a hearing, let us say it in truth and honesty. If we have nothing to say let us honestly admit it by silence. And in the expression of our thought, let us aim

The Methodist Episcopal Church has in all the Chinese work 144 missionaries, 380 native helpers, 24,909 in membership, and \$414,273 worth of property. All Protestantism has some 80,000 members, with as many more adherents, and quite as many others who intellectually think Christianity is the best religion. This would give over 300,000 friends of the cause of our Christ. There are some 20,000,000 Moslems in the empire.