Open-Air Preaching

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Open-Air Preaching

Charles H. Spurgeon

Contents

Open-Air Preaching is adapted from two chapters of *Lectures to My Students* entitled "Open-Air Preaching and Its History" and "Open-Air Preaching—Remarks Thereon." Charles H. Spurgeon delivered his *Lectures to My Students* to men preparing for the ministry at his Pastor's College. He founded the college to provide a place where men called to preach could study at low cost and with a clear focus on preparation for ministry rather than scholastic achievement.

CHAPEL LIBRARY
2603 West Wright Street
Pensacola, Florida 32505 USA

Phone: (850) 438-6666 • Fax: (850) 438-0227
chapel@mountzion.org • www.ChapelLibrary.org

Open-Air Preaching

A Sketch of Its History

1. Early Times

There are some customs for which nothing can be pleaded, except that they are very old. In such cases antiquity is of no more value than the rust upon a counterfeit coin. It is, however, a happy circumstance when the usage of ages can be pleaded for a really good and scriptural practice, for it invests it with a halo of reverence. Now, it can be argued, with small fear of refutation, that open-air preaching is as old as preaching itself. We are at full liberty to believe that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, when he prophesied, asked for no better pulpit than the hill-side, and that Noah, as a preacher of righteousness, was willing to reason with his contemporaries in the ship-yard wherein his marvellous ark was builded. Certainly, Moses and Joshua found their most convenient place for addressing vast assemblies beneath the unpillared arch of heaven. Samuel closed a sermon in the field at Gilgal amid thunder and rain, by which the Lord rebuked the people and drove them to their knees (1Sa 12:18). Elijah stood on Carmel, and challenged the vacillating[1] nation, with "How long halt ye between two opinions?" (1Ki 18:21). Jonah, whose spirit was somewhat similar, lifted up his cry of warning in the streets of Nineveh, and in all her places of concourse gave forth the warning utterance, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jon 3:4). To hear Ezra and Nehemiah "all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate" (Neh 8:1). Indeed, we find examples of open-air preaching everywhere around us in the records of the Old Testament.

It may suffice us, however, to go back as far as the origin of our own holy faith, and there we hear the forerunner of the Saviour crying in the wilderness and lifting up his voice from the river's bank. Our Lord Himself, who is yet more our pattern, delivered the larger proportion[2] of His sermons on the mountain's side, or by the seashore, or in the streets. Our Lord was to all intents and purposes an open-air preacher. He did not remain silent in the synagogue, but He was equally at home in the field. We have no discourse of His on record delivered in the chapel royal, but we

---

[1] **vacillating** – indecisive; hesitating.

[2] At least as we have it recorded in the Gospels.

have the Sermon on the Mount, and the sermon in the plain; so that the very earliest and most divine kind of preaching was practised out of doors by Him Who spake as never man spake (Joh 7:46).

There were gatherings of His disciples after His decease, within walls, especially that in the upper room; but the preaching was even then most frequently in the court of the temple, or in such other open spaces as were available. The notion of holy places and consecrated meeting-houses had not occurred to them as Christians; they preached in the temple because it was the chief place of concourse, but with equal earnestness "in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Act 5:42).

The apostles and their immediate successors delivered their message of mercy not only in their own hired houses, and in the synagogues, but also anywhere and everywhere as occasion served them. This may be gathered incidentally from the following statement of Eusebius:[3]

> The divine and admirable disciples of the apostles built up the superstructure of the churches, the foundations whereof the apostles had laid, in all places where they came; they everywhere prosecuted the preaching of the gospel, sowing the seeds of heavenly doctrine throughout the whole world. Many of the disciples then alive distributed their estates to the poor; and, leaving their own country, did the work of evangelists to those who had never yet heard the Christian faith, preaching Christ, and delivering the evangelical writings to them. No sooner had they planted the faith in any foreign countries, and ordained guides and pastors, to whom they committed the care of these new plantations, but they went to other nations, assisted by the grace and powerful working of the Holy Spirit. As soon as they began to preach the gospel the

[3] **Eusebius of Caesarea** (c.264-c.340) – Bishop, philologist, and scholar who is remembered most for being the first major historian of the church. Eusebius was born in Palestine and educated in Caesarea…He was elected bishop of Caesarea in 313, in which position he played an important role for some 30 years. Eusebius was involved with the outbreak of the Arian controversy. He appears to have initially supported Arius, although he did not fully share his ideas. In 325 he was excommunicated by the Council of Antioch for refusing to condemn Arius' teachings. However, he still took part in the Council of Nicaea (325) where he ultimately subscribed to Arius' condemnation. Yet after the council he continued to work on behalf of Arius and cooperated with Eusebius of Nicomedia in deposing bishops Eustathius of Antioch, Athanasius of Alexandria, and Marcellus of Ancyra, defenders of the Nicene position. (http://www.fourthcentury.com/eusebius-chart/)

people flocked universally to them, and cheerfully worshipped the true God, the Creator of the world, piously and heartily believing in His name.[4]

2. The Middle Ages

As the dark ages lowered, the best preachers of the gradually declining church were also preachers in the open air; as were also those itinerant[5] friars and great founders of religious orders who kept alive such piety as remained. We hear of Berthold of Ratisbon,[6] with audiences of sixty or a hundred thousand, in a field near Glatz in Bohemia. There were also Bernards, and Bernardines, and Anthonys, and Thomases of great fame as travelling preachers, of whom we cannot find time to speak particularly. Dr. Lavington, Bishop of Exeter, being short of other arguments, stated, as a proof that the Methodists were identical with the papists,[7] that the early friar preachers were great at holding forth in the open fields. Quoting from Ribadeneira,[8] he mentions Peter of Verona,[9] who had "a divine talent in preaching; neither churches, nor streets, nor market-places could contain the great concourse that resorted to hear his sermons." The learned bishop might have easily multiplied his examples, as we also could do, but they would prove nothing more than that, for good or evil, field preaching is a great power.

---

[4] *The Church History of Eusebius*, Chapter XXXVII – "The Evangelists that were still Eminent at that Time."

[5] **itinerant** – traveling from place to place, especially on a circuit.

[6] **Berthold Ratisbon** – Franciscan monk, and one of the most powerful preachers that ever spoke in the German tongue. He is supposed to have been born about 1225 in Regensburg, where he died in 1272…His first public appearance, as far as we know, was in in the year 1246…No church was large enough to hold the multitudes that flocked to hear him; from a pulpit in the fields he often addressed 60,000 hearers. He fearlessly rebuked sinners of all ranks. He was especially severe against the preachers of indulgences, whom he styled "penny preachers" and "the devil's agents." (*Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, John M'Clintock and James Strong, p. 767)

[7] **papists** – Roman Catholics.

[8] **Ribadeneira** – our author likely is referring here to Pedro a Ribadeneira (1527-1611), the author of *Life of Loyola* (see *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1911).

[9] **Peter of Verona** (c.1205-1252) – inquisitor, vigorous preacher, and religious founder who, for his militant reformation, was assassinated. Our author is not holding forth this man as an unqualified positive example.

When Antichrist[10] had commenced its more universal sway, the reformers before the Reformation were full often open-air preachers, as, for instance, Arnold of Brescia,[11] who denounced papal usurpations[12] at the very gates of the Vatican.

It would be very easy to prove that revivals of religion have usually been accompanied, if not caused, by a considerable amount of preaching out of doors, or in unusual places. The first avowed[13] preaching of protestant doctrine was almost necessarily in the open air, or in buildings which were not dedicated to worship, for these were in the hands of the papacy. True, Wycliffe[14] for a while preached the gospel in the church at Lutterworth; Huss[15] and Jerome Savonarola[16] for a time

---

[10] **Antichrist** – Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 25, Section 6: "There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God." Though all may not agree that the pope is *the* antichrist, yet insofar as he is opposed to the biblical gospel, he certainly is *an* antichrist (1Jo 2:18).

[11] **Arnold of Brescia** (c.1090-c.1155) – monk from Italy who called on the Catholic church to renounce ownership of property, led the Commune of Rome's temporary overthrow of papal rule, and was later hanged by the Church for treason…Although his political cause ultimately failed, Arnold's teachings on apostolic poverty continued to be influential after his death among the Waldensians and the Spiritual Franciscans. Catholic tradition condemns him as a rebel and sometimes as a heretic, but Protestants rank him among the precursors of the Reformation. (*New World Encyclopedia*)

[12] **usurpations** – wrongful or illegal encroachments, infringements, or seizures.

[13] **avowed** – acknowledged; declared.

[14] **John Wycliffe** (c.1331-1384) – an English Scholastic philosopher, theologian, lay preacher, translator, reformer, and university teacher at Oxford in England. His followers were known as Lollards, which preached anticlerical and biblically-centered reforms. The Lollard movement was a precursor to the Protestant Reformation. He has been characterized as the Morning Star of the Reformation.

[15] **John Huss** (or Jan Hus, c.1370-1415) – Reformer of Bohemia (Czechoslovakia) and advocate of the theology of English Reformer John Wycliffe, condemned by the Council of Constance and burned at the stake.

[16] **Girolamo (Jerome) Savonarola** (1452-1498) – Italian Dominican friar and preacher active in Renaissance Florence, became known for his prophecies of civic glory, destruction of secular art and culture, and calls for Christian renewal. He denounced clerical corruption, despotic rule, and the exploitation of the poor. Savonarola differed from Wycliffe, Hus, and Luther in that he never quarreled with the theology of the Roman Catholic Church. He was more of a moral reformer than a theologian. Yet, as seen in the following quote, he grasped the biblical understanding of justification by faith that would be more fully developed by later Reformers: "God remits the sins of men, and justifies them by his mercy. There are as many compassions in heaven as there are

delivered semi-gospel addresses in connection with the ecclesiastical arrangements around them; but when they began more fully to know and proclaim the gospel, they were driven to find other platforms. The Reformation when yet a babe was like the new-born Christ, and had not where to lay its head; but a company of men comparable to the heavenly host proclaimed it under the open heavens, where shepherds and common people heard them gladly.

Throughout England we have several trees remaining called "gospel oaks." There is one spot on the other side of the Thames known by the name of "Gospel Oak," and I have myself preached at Addlestone, in Surrey, under the far-spreading boughs of an ancient oak, beneath which John Knox[17] is said to have proclaimed the gospel during his sojourn in England. Full many a wild moor,[18] and lone hillside, and secret spot in the forest have been consecrated in the same fashion; and traditions still linger over caves, and dells,[19] and hill tops, where of old time the bands of the faithful met to hear the word of the Lord. Nor was it alone in solitary places that in days of yore[20] the voice of the preacher was heard, for scarcely is there a market cross[21] which has not served as a pulpit for itinerant gospellers. During the lifetime of Wycliffe his missionaries traversed the country, everywhere preaching the word. An Act of Parliament of Richard II[22] (1382) sets it forth as a grievance of the clergy that a number of persons in frieze[23] gowns went from town to town, without the license[24] of the ordinaries,[25] and preached not only in churches, but in churchyards, and market-places, and also at fairs. To hear these heralds of the cross the country people flocked in great numbers; and the soldiers mingled with the crowd, ready to defend the preachers with their swords if any offered to molest them. After Wycliffe's decease his

---

justified men upon earth; for none are saved by their own works. No man can boast of himself." (from Wikipedia.org and Ken Curtis, *Savonarola's Preaching Got Him Burned – 1498*)

[17] **John Knox** (c.1510-1572) – Scottish clergyman and a leader of the Protestant Reformation; founder of the Presbyterian denominations. Learned from John Calvin at Geneva while in exile, and, on his return to Scotland, led the Protestant Reformation there.

[18] **moor** – tract of open, peaty wasteland, often overgrown with heath.

[19] **dells** – small valleys, usually wooded; vales.

[20] **yore** – time past.

[21] **market cross** – monument in shape of a cross in a town market.

[22] **Richard II** (1376-1400) – King of England.

[23] **frieze** – heavy, napped woolen cloth.

[24] **license** – official permission.

[25] **ordinaries** – *English Ecclesiastical Law*: bishops, archbishops, or other ecclesiastics acting in capacity as official ecclesiastical authority.

followers scrupled[26] not to use the same methods. It is specially recorded of William Swinderby[27] that

> being excommunicated, and forbidden to preach in any church or churchyard, he made a pulpit of two mill stones in the High-street of Leicester, and there preached "in contempt of the bishop." "There," says Knighton,[28] "you might see throngs of people from every part, as well from the town as the country, double the number there used to be when they might hear him lawfully."

3. The Reformation

In Germany, and other continental[29] countries, the Reformation was greatly aided by the sermons delivered to the masses out of doors. We read of Lutheran preachers perambulating[30] the country proclaiming the new doctrine[31] to crowds in the marketplaces, and burial grounds, and also on mountains and in meadows. At Goslar, a Wittenberg student preached in a meadow planted with lime trees, which procured for his hearers the designation of "the Lime Tree Brethren." D'Aubigné[32] tells us that at Appenzel, as the crowds could not be contained in the churches, the preaching was held in the fields and public squares; and, notwithstanding keen opposition, the hills, meadows, and mountains echoed with the glad tidings of salvation. In the life of Farel[33] we meet with incidents connected with out-of-doors ministry; for instance, when at Metz he preached his first sermon in the churchyard of the Dominicans,[34] his enemies caused all the bells to be tolled, but his voice of thunder overpowered the sound. In Neuchâtel we are told that

---

[26] **scrupled** – hesitated.

[27] **William Swinderby** (1382-1392) – preacher among the followers of Wycliffe (Lollards).

[28] **Henry Knighton** (died c. 1396) – ecclesiastical historian.

[29] **continental** – on the European continent.

[30] **perambulating** – walking through, about, or over; traveling through.

[31] **new doctrine** – biblical doctrine of the Reformation era in contrast to the false teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

[32] **Jean Henri Merle d'Aubigné** (1794-1872) – popular church historian of the nineteenth century.

[33] **Guillaume Farel** (1489-1565) – important leader of the Reformation in France and Switzerland, often remembered for persuading John Calvin to remain in Geneva in 1536 and to return in 1541 after they had been expelled.

[34] **Dominican** – Roman Catholic order of preachers.

the whole town became his church. He preached in the marketplace, in the streets, at the gates, before the houses, and in the squares, and with such persuasion and effect that he won over many to the gospel. The people crowded to hear his sermons, and could not be kept back either by threats or persuasions.

From Dr. Wylie's *History of Protestantism* I borrow the following:

It is said that the first field-preaching in the Netherlands took place on the 14th of June, 1566, and was held in the neighbourhood of Ghent. The preacher was Herman Modet, who had formerly been a monk, but was now the reformed pastor at Oudenard. "This man," says a Popish chronicler, "was the first who ventured to preach in public, and there were 7,000 persons at his first sermon."…The second great field-preaching took place on the 23rd of July following, the people assembling in a large meadow in the vicinity of Ghent. The "Word" was precious in those days, and the people, eagerly thirsting to hear it, prepared to remain two days consecutively on the ground. Their arrangements more resembled an army pitching their camp than a peaceful multitude assembled for worship. Around the worshippers was a wall of barricades in the shape of carts and waggons. Sentinels[35] were placed at all the entrances. A rude[36] pulpit of planks was hastily run up and placed aloft on a cart. Modet was preacher, and around him were many thousands of persons, who listened with their pikes,[37] hatchets, and guns lying by their sides ready to be grasped on a sign from the sentinels who kept watch all around the assembly. In front of the entrances were erected stalls, whereat pedlars offered prohibited books to all who wished to buy. Along the roads running into the country were stationed certain persons, whose office it was to bid the casual passenger turn in and hear the gospel…When the services were finished, the multitude would repair to other districts, where they encamped after the same fashion, and remained for the same space of time, and so passed through the whole of West Flanders. At these conventicles[38] the Psalms of David, which

[35] **sentinels** – guards, lookouts.

[36] **rude** – of rough construction.

[37] **pikes** – shafted weapons having a pointed head, formerly used by infantry.

[38] **conventicles** – secret or unauthorized meetings, especially for religious worship.

had been translated into Low Dutch from the version of Clement Marot,[39] and Theodore Beza,[40] were always sung. The odes of the Hebrew king, pealed forth by from five to ten thousand voices, and borne by the breeze over the woods and meadows, might be heard at great distances, arresting the ploughman as he turned the furrow, or the traveller as he pursued his way, and making him stop and wonder whence the minstrelsy[41] proceeded.[42]

It is most interesting to observe that congregational singing is sure to revive at the same moment as gospel-preaching. In all ages a Moody has been attended by a Sankey.[43] History repeats itself because like causes are pretty sure to produce like effects.

It would be an interesting task to prepare a volume of notable facts connected with open-air preaching, or, better still, a consecutive history of it. I have no time for even a complete outline, but would simply ask you, where would the Reformation have been if its great preachers had confined themselves to churches and cathedrals? How would the common people have become indoctrinated[44] with the gospel had it not been for those far wandering evangelists, the colporteurs,[45] and those daring innovators who found a pulpit on every heap of stones, and an audience chamber in every open space near the abodes of men?

---

[39] **Clement Marot** (1496?-1544) – French poet. His translation of the Psalms was condemned by the Sorbonne; he finished the translation in refuge at Geneva with John Calvin.

[40] **Theodore Beza** (1519-1605) – French Protestant Christian theologian and scholar who played an important role in the early Reformation. He was a disciple of John Calvin and lived most of his life in Switzerland.

[41] **minstrelsy** – minstrels' songs, ballads.

[42] James Aitken Wylie, *The History of Protestantism*, Vol III, Chapter 10 "The Field-Preachings."

[43] **Moody…Sankey** – Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) and Ira D. Sankey (1840-1908), American preacher and singer/composer respectively who attempted large evangelistic campaigns in Britain and America. Of their work in Britain, Spurgeon had this assessment: "The movement in London had (comparatively) no link with the Churches, and fostered a rival spirit, and hence it did not bring a permanent blessing of increase to the Churches. Still, it brought a great blessing to the Church universal, and revived and encouraged us all. I would warn Churches against *trusting* in spasmodic effort, but at the same time against refusing such special help as the Lord puts in their way. There is a medium. In any case, I am not *against* Evangelistic effort, but heartily its advocate" (in a letter to Ben Nicholson, Esq., April 1, 1882).

[44] **indoctrinated** – informed; taught.

[45] **colporteurs** – people who travel to distribute or publicize Bibles, religious tracts, etc.

Among examples within our own highly favoured island[46] I cannot forbear mentioning the notable case of holy Wishart.[47] This I quote from Gillie's Historical Collections:

> George Wishart was one of the early preachers of the doctrines of the Reformers, and suffered martyrdom in the days of Knox. His public exposition of the Epistle to the Romans especially excited the fears and hatred of the Romish ecclesiastics, who caused him to be silenced at Dundee. He went to Ayr, and began to preach the gospel with great freedom and faithfulness. But Dunbar, the then Archbishop of Glasgow, being informed of the great concourse of people who crowded to his sermons, at the instigation of Cardinal Beaton, went to Ayr, with the resolution to apprehend him, but first took possession of the church, to prevent him from preaching in it. The news of this brought Alexander, Earl of Glencairn, and some gentlemen of the neighbourhood immediately to town. They wished and offered to put Wishart into the church, but he would not consent, saying that "the Bishop's sermon would not do much hurt, and that, if they pleased, he would go to the market cross," which he accordingly did, and preached with such success, that several of his hearers, formerly enemies to the truth, were converted on the occasion.
>
> Wishart continued with the gentlemen of Kyle, after the archbishop's departure; and being desired to preach next Lord's day at the church of Mauchline, he went thither with that design; but the sheriff of Ayr had, in the night time, put a garrison of soldiers into the church to keep him out. Hugh Campbell, of Kinzeancleugh, with others in the parish, were exceedingly offended at this impiety, and would have entered the church by force; but Wishart would not suffer it, saying, "Brethren, it is the word of peace which I preach unto you; the blood of no man shall be shed for it this day; Jesus Christ is as mighty in the fields as in the church; and He Himself, while He lived in the flesh, preached oftener in the desert and upon the sea side than in the temple of Jerusalem." Upon this the people were appeased, and went with him

---

[46] **highly favoured island** – Britain, as favored by great gospel mercies.

[47] **George Wishart** (c.1513-1546) – famous member of the Pitarrow family, martyr, Protestant preacher, confidant and mentor of John Knox. While preaching the Protestant Reform in 1546 he was betrayed and imprisoned in the bottle dungeon at the Castle in St. Andrews. Subsequently he was tried for heresy, condemned to death, and burnt at the stake outside the Castle. (The University of St. Andrews, http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/georgewishart /history /)

> to the edge of the moor, on the south-west of Mauchline, where having placed himself upon a ditch-dike,[48] he preached to a great multitude. He continued speaking for more than three hours, God working wondrously by him insomuch that Laurence Ranken, the Laird of Shield, a very profane person, was converted by his means. About a month after the above circumstance, he was informed that the plague had broken out at Dundee, the fourth day after he had left it, and that it still continued to rage in such a manner that great numbers were swept off daily. This affected him so much that he resolved to return to them, and accordingly took leave of his friends in the west, who were filled with sorrow at his departure. The next day, after his arrival at Dundee, he caused intimation to be made that he would preach, and for that purpose chose his station at the head of the east gate, the infected persons standing without, and those that were whole, within. His text on this occasion was: "He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions" (Psa 107:20). By this discourse he so comforted the people that they thought themselves happy in having such a preacher, and entreated him to remain with them while the plague continued.

What a scene must this have been? Seldom has preacher had such an audience, and, I may add, seldom has audience had such a preacher. Then, to use the words of an old author,

> Old time stood at the preacher's side with his scythe,[49] saying with hoarse voice, "Work while it is called today, for at night I will mow thee down." There, too, stood grim death hard by the pulpit, with his sharp arrows, saying, "Do thou shoot God's arrows and I will shoot mine."

This is, indeed, a notable instance of preaching out of doors.

4. The Puritan Era

I wish it were in my power to give more particulars of that famous discourse by John Livingstone[50] in the yard of the Kirk[51] of Shotts, when not less than five

---

[48] **ditch-dike** – an embankment made of earth excavated for and placed alongside a ditch.

[49] **scythe** – tool with a curved blade and handle used for mowing and/or reaping.

[50] **John Livingstone** (1603-1672) – Scottish Presbyterian preacher. On this occasion, he was asked to preach at the Kirk of Shotts at short notice; he was 27 years old and virtually unknown.

[51] **kirk** – church.

hundred of his hearers found Christ, though it rained in torrents during a considerable part of the time. It remains as one of the great outdoor sermons of history, unsurpassed by any within walls. Here is the gist of what we know about it:

> It was not usual, it seems, in those times, to have any sermon on the Monday after dispensing the Lord's Supper. But God had given so much of His gracious presence, and afforded His people so much communion with Himself, on the foregoing days of that solemnity, that they knew not how to part without thanksgiving and praise. There had been a vast confluence[52] of choice Christians, with several eminent ministers, from almost all the corners of the land. There had been many of them there together for several days before the sacrament,[53] hearing sermons, and joining together in larger or lesser companies, in prayer, praise, and spiritual conferences.[54] While their hearts were warm with the love of God, some expressing their desire of a sermon on the Monday, were joined by others, and in a little the desire became very general. Mr. John Livingstone, chaplain to the Countess of Wigtoun (at that time only a preacher, not an ordained minister, and about twenty-seven years of age), was with very much ado[55] prevailed on to think of giving the sermon. He had spent the night before in prayer and conference; but when he was alone in the fields, about eight or nine in the morning, there came such a misgiving of heart upon him under a sense of unworthiness and unfitness to speak before so many aged and worthy ministers, and so many eminent and experienced Christians, that he was thinking to have stolen quite away, and was actually gone away to some distance; but when just about to lose sight of the Kirk of Shotts these words, "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness?" (Jer 2:31) were brought into his heart with such an overcoming power as constrained him to think it his duty to return and comply with the call to preach; which he accordingly did with good assistance for about an hour and a half on the points he had meditated from that text: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also

---

[52] **confluence** – coming together of people or things; concourse.

[53] **sacrament** – the Lord's Supper.

[54] **conferences** – discussions.

[55] **ado** – fuss; bustle; busy activity.

will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Eze 36:25-26). As he was about to close, a heavy shower coming suddenly on, which made the people hastily take to their cloaks and mantles, he began to speak to the following purpose: "If a few drops of rain from the clouds so discomposed[56] them, how discomposed would they be, how full of horror and despair, if God should deal with them as they deserved, and thus He will deal with all the finally impenitent. That God might justly rain fire and brimstone upon them, as upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and the other cities of the plain. That the Son of God, by tabernacling in our nature,[57] and obeying and suffering in it, is the only refuge and covert[58] from the storm of divine wrath due to us for sin. That His merits and mediation are the only screen from that storm, and none but penitent[59] believers shall have the benefit of that shelter." In these or some expressions to this purpose, and many others, he was led on for about an hour's time (after he had done with what he had premeditated) in a strain of exhortation and warning, with great enlargement and melting of heart.[60]

We must not forget the regular out-of-doors ministry at Paul's Cross,[61] under the eaves of the old cathedral. This was a famous institution, and enabled the notable preachers of the times to be heard by the citizens in great numbers. Kings and princes did not disdain to sit in the gallery built upon the cathedral wall, and listen to the preacher for the day. Latimer[62] tells us that the graveyard was in such an unhealthy condition that many died through attending the sermons; and yet there was never a lack of hearers. Now that the abomination of intra-mural burial[63] is done away with, the like evil would not arise, and Paul's Cross might be set up again;

---

[56] **discomposed** – disturbed the composure of; agitated; perturbed; unsettled.

[57] See John 1:14: the word translated "dwelt" in the English (AV) version can mean, according to *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, to fix one's tabernacle, have one's tabernacle, abide (or live) in a tabernacle (or tent).

[58] **covert** – covering; hiding place.

[59] **penitent** – repentant; having a change of mind about God and sin.

[60] John Gillies, *Historical Collections Relating to Remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel*.

[61] in London.

[62] **Hugh Latimer** (c.1485/90-1555) – famous Anglican reformer and martyr.

[63] **intra-mural burial** – burial "within the walls," i.e., within a community or building; refers to the common practice of burying on church property.

perhaps a change to the open space might blow away some of the Popery which is gradually attaching itself to the services of the cathedral.[64] The restoration of the system of public preaching of which Paul's Cross was the central station is greatly to be desired. I earnestly wish that some person possessed of sufficient wealth would purchase a central space in our great metropolis,[65] erect a pulpit, and a certain number of benches, and then set it apart for the use of approved ministers of the gospel, who should there freely declare the gospel to all corners without favour or distinction. It would be of more real service to our ever-growing city than all its cathedrals, abbeys, and grand gothic edifices. Before all open spaces are utterly swept away by the ever-swelling tide of mortar and brick, it would be a wise policy to secure "gospel fields," or "God's-acres-for-the-living," or whatever else you may please to call open spaces for free gospel preaching.

All through the Puritan times there were gatherings in all sorts of out-of-the-way places, for fear of persecutors. "We took," says Archbishop Laud,[66] in a letter dated Fulham, June, 1632, "another conventicle of separatists in Newington Woods, in the very brake[67] where the king's stag was to be lodged, for his hunting next morning." A hollow or gravel pit on Hounslow Heath sometimes served as a conventicle, and there is a dell near Hitchin where John Bunyan was wont[68] to preach in perilous times. All over Scotland the straths,[69] and dells, and vales,[70] and hill-sides are full of covenanting memories[71] to this day. You will not fail to meet with rock pulpits

---

[64] **Popery…attaching itself to the services of the cathedral** – the tendency of Anglicanism to revert to some elements of Roman Catholism.

[65] **our great metropolis** – London.

[66] **William Laud** (1573-1645) – Archbishop of Canterbury and religious adviser to Charles I. He became a privy councilor in 1627 and bishop of London in 1628, devoting himself to combating Puritanism and enforcing strict Anglican ritual.

[67] **brake** – thicket; a place overgrown with shrubs and brambles.

[68] **wont** – in the habit of.

[69] **straths** – wide valleys.

[70] **vales** – valleys.

[71] **covenanting memories** – The story of religious covenanting in Scotland covers a long period, beginning in 1557 when certain men covenanted to maintain "the trew preaching of the Evangell of Jesus Christ"…The National Covenant of 1638…declared the firm determination of its Presbyterian authors and subscribers to resist to the death the claims of the King and his minions to override the Crown Rights of the Redeemer in His Kirk [Church]…In the ultimate issue the question at stake, in all its stark nakedness, was whether a temporal monarch or the Lord Jesus Christ was to be "Head over all things to the Church"…The scaffold could not daunt them; instruments of torture could not make them quail; the sufferings and discomforts of cave or moor or prison-cell could not

whence the stern fathers of the Presbyterian church thundered forth their denunciations of Erastianism,[72] and pleaded the claims of the King of kings. Cargill and Cameron and their fellows found congenial scenes for their brave ministries mid the lone mountains' rents[73] and ravines.

Long ere the dawn, by devious ways,[74]
O'er hills, through woods, o'er dreary wastes, they sought
The upland moors, where rivers, there but brooks,
Dispart[75] *to different seas: fast by such brooks,*
A little glen[76] *is sometimes scoop'd, a plat*[77]
With greensward gay,[78] *and flowers that strangers seem*
Amid the heathery wild, that all around
Fatigues the eye: in solitudes like these
Thy persecuted children, Scotia,[79] *foil'd*
A tyrant's and a bigot's bloody law.
There, leaning on his spear...

---

move them to act and speak against conscience. Behind and above covenants subscribed with their hands and witnessed to by their hearts, and in an even truer sense subscribed in their blood, was "the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure," itself sealed with the blood of the Mediator, and itself the pattern of all lesser covenants. Faith gave buoyancy to the Covenanters' resolution; hope was the anchor of their souls; the love of Christ shed abroad in their hearts ever spurred them on to do and to suffer; "outside the camp" they bore His reproach; and before them ever loomed large "the recompense of the reward" and the gates of the city of God. (S. M. Houghton, *An Outline of Scottish Covenanter History in the 17th Century*)

[72] **Erastianism –** doctrine that the state is superior to the church in ecclesiastical matters. It is named after the 16th-century Swiss physician and Zwinglian theologian Thomas Erastus, who never held such a doctrine. He opposed excommunication as unscriptural, advocating in its stead punishment by civil authorities…The power of the state in religious matters was thus limited to a specific area. Erastianism acquired its present meaning from Richard Hooker's defense of secular supremacy in *Of the lawes of ecclesiasticall politie* (1593–1662) and as a result of debates held during the Westminster Assembly of 1643. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com)

[73] **rents** – openings.

[74] **devious ways** – ways off the main road; small, hidden paths.

[75] **dispart** – separate.

[76] **glen** – valley.

[77] **scoop'd plat** – piece of ground like a hollow in appearance as if formed by scoop or shovel.

[78] **greensward gay** – ground covered with brightly colored green grass.

[79] **Scotia** – Scotland.

The lyart[80] *veteran heard the word of God*
By Cameron thunder'd, or by Renwick[81] *pour'd*
In gentle stream: then rose the song, the loud
Acclaim of praise; the wheeling plover[82] *ceased*
Her plaint;[83] *the solitary place was glad,*
And on the distant cairns,[84] *the watcher's ear*
Caught doubtfully at times the breeze-borne note.
But years more gloomy follow'd; and no more
The assembled people dared, in face of day,
To worship God, or even at the dead
Of night, save when the wintry storm raved fierce,
And thunder-peals compell'd the men of blood
To couch within their dens; then dauntlessly
The scatter'd few would meet, in some deep dell
By rocks o'er-canopied, to hear the voice,
Their faithful pastor's voice: he by the gleam
Of sheeted lightning opened the sacred Book,
And words of comfort spake: over their souls
His accents soothing came, as to her young
The heathfowl's plumes, when at the close of eve
She gathers in, mournful, her brood dispersed
By murderous sport, and o'er the remnant spreads
Fondly her wings; close nestling 'neath her breast
They cherish'd cower amid the purple blooms.[85]

At the risk of being prolix[86] I feel I must add the following touching description of one of these scenes. The prose picture even excels the poet's painting.

> We entered on the administration of the holy ordinance,[87] committing it and ourselves to the invisible protection of the Lord of hosts, in whose name we

---

[80] **lyart** – streaked or spotted with gray or white.

[81] **Donald Cargill…Richard Cameron…James Renwick** – courageous preachers during the time of the Scottish Covenanters. For more of this important history see John Howie, *Scots Worthies* and Jock Purves, *Fair Sunshine*.

[82] **plover** – common name of several species of birds that frequent the banks of rivers and the sea shore.

[83] **plaint** – lamenting cry.

[84] **cairns** – heaps of stones.

[85] James Grahame, *The Sabbath*.

[86] **prolix** – extended to great, unnecessary, or tedious length; long and wordy.

were met together. Our trust was in the arm of Jehovah, which was better than weapons of war, or the strength of the hills. The place where we convened was every way commodious, and seemed to have been formed on purpose. It was a green and pleasant haugh,[88] fast by the water side (the Whittader). On either hand there was a spacious brae,[89] in the form of a half round, covered with delightful pasture, and rising with a gentle slope to a goodly height. Above us was the clear blue sky, for it was a sweet and calm Sabbath morning, promising indeed to be "one of the days of the Son of man." There was a solemnity in the place befitting the occasion, and elevating the whole soul to a pure and holy frame.[90] The communion tables were spread on the green by the water, and around them the people had arranged themselves in decent order. But the far greater multitude sat on the brae face, which was crowded from top to bottom—full as pleasant a sight as ever was seen of that sort. Each day at the congregation's dismissing, the ministers with their guards, and as many of the people as could, retired to their quarters in three several country towns, where they might be provided with necessaries. The horsemen drew up in a body till the people left the place, and then marched in goodly array behind at a little distance, until all were safely lodged in their quarters. In the morning, when the people returned to the meeting, the horsemen accompanied them: all the three parties met a mile from the spot, and marched in a full body to the consecrated ground. The congregation being all fairly settled in their places, the guardsmen took their several stations, as formerly. These accidental volunteers seemed to have been the gift of Providence, and they secured the peace and quiet of the audience; for, from Saturday morning, when the work began, until Monday afternoon, we suffered not the least affront[91] or molestation from enemies, which appeared wonderful.

At first there was some apprehension, but the people sat undisturbed, and the whole was closed in as orderly a way as it had been in the time of

---

[87] **holy ordinance** – here referring to the Lord's Supper.

[88] **haugh** – stretch of sandy, muddy land forming part of a river valley; bottom land.

[89] **brae** – slope; hillside.

[90] **frame** – condition; attitude.

[91] **affront** – personally offensive act or word; deliberate act or display of disrespect.

Scotland's brightest noon. And truly the spectacle of so many grave, composed, and devout faces must have struck the adversaries with awe, and been more formidable than any outward ability of fierce looks and warlike array. We desired not the countenance of earthly kings: there was a spiritual and divine Majesty shining on the work, and sensible evidence that the great Master of assemblies was present in the midst. It was indeed the doing of the Lord, who covered us a table in the wilderness, in presence of our foes, and reared a pillar of glory between us and the enemy, like the fiery cloud of old that separated between the camp of Israel and the Egyptians—encouraging to the one, but dark and terrible to the other. Though our vows were not offered within the courts of God's house, they wanted not sincerity of heart, which is better than the reverence of sanctuaries. Amidst the lonely mountains we remembered the words of our Lord, that true worship was not peculiar to Jerusalem or Samaria (Joh 4:20-21)—that the beauty of holiness consisted not in consecrated buildings or material temples. We remembered the ark of the Israelites which had sojourned for years in the desert, with no dwelling place but the tabernacle of the plain. We thought of Abraham and the ancient patriarchs, who laid their victims on the rocks for an altar, and burnt sweet incense under the shade of the green tree.

The ordinance of the Last Supper, that memorial of His dying love till His second coming, was signally countenanced[92] and backed with power and refreshing influence from above. Blessed be God, for He hath visited and confirmed His heritage when it was weary. In that day Zion put on the beauty of Sharon and Carmel (Isa 35:2); the mountains broke forth into singing, and the desert place was made to bud and blossom as the rose. Few such days were seen in the desolate Church of Scotland; and few will ever witness the like. There was a rich effusion[93] of the Spirit shed abroad in many hearts; their souls filled with heavenly transports seemed to breathe a diviner element and to burn upwards as with the fire of a pure and holy devotion. The ministers were visibly assisted to speak home to the conscience of the hearers. It seemed as if God had touched their lips with a live coal from off His altar (Isa 6:6): for

[92] **signally countenanced** – notably approved.

[93] **effusion** – pouring forth.

they who witnessed declared they carried themselves more like ambassadors from the court of heaven than men cast in earthly mould.

The tables were served by some gentlemen and persons of the gravest deportment.[94] None were admitted without tokens as usual, which were distributed on the Saturday, but only to such as were known to some of the ministers or persons of trust to be free of public scandals. All the regular forms were gone through. The communicants entered at one end and retired at the other, a way being kept clear to take their seats again on the hillside. Mr. Welsh preached the action sermon[95] and served the two first tables, as he was ordinarily put to do so on such occasions. The other four ministers, Mr. Blackadder, Mr. Dickson, Mr. Riddell, and Mr. Rae, exhorted the rest in their turn; the table service was closed by Mr. Welsh with solemn thanksgiving, and solemn it was, and sweet and edifying to see the gravity and composure of all present, as well as of all parts of the service. The communion was peaceably concluded, all the people heartily offering up their gratitude, and singing with a joyful voice to the Rock of their salvation. It was pleasant as the night fell to hear their melody swelling in full unison along the hill, the whole congregation joining with one accord, and praising God with the voice of psalms.

There were two long tables and one short across the head, with seats on each side. About a hundred sat at every table. There were sixteen tables in all, so that about three thousand two hundred communicated that day.[96]

Perhaps the most remarkable place ever chosen for a discourse was the centre of the river Tweed, where Mr. John Welsh[97] often preached during hard frosts, in order that he might escape from the authorities of either Scotland or England, whichever might interfere. Prize-fighters have often selected the borders of two counties for their performances, but their prudence would seem to have been anticipated[98] by the children of light.

---

[94] **gravest deportment** – most serious behavior.

[95] **action sermon** – message delivered immediately before the observance of the Lord's Supper.

[96] Thomas Wright, *The History of Scotland from the Earliest Period*.

[97] **John Welsh (or Welch) of Irongray (1612-1681)** – Covenanter preacher; grandson of John Welch of Ayr and Elizabeth Knox.

[98] **anticipated** – preceded.

It is amusing also to read of Archbishop Sharp's commanding the militia to be sent to disperse the crowd who had gathered on the hillside to hear Mr. Blackadder, and of his being informed that they had all gone an hour before to attend the sermon.

5. The Methodist Era

What the world would have been if there had not been preaching outside of walls, and beneath a more glorious roof than these rafters of fir, I am sure I cannot guess. It was a brave day for England when Whitefield[99] began field preaching. When Wesley[100] stood and preached a sermon on his father's grave, at Epworth, because the parish priest would not allow him admission within the (so-called) sacred edifice, Mr. Wesley writes: "I am well assured that I did far more good to my Lincolnshire parishioners by preaching three days on my father's tomb than I did by preaching three years in his pulpit."

The same might be said of all the open-air preaching that followed, as compared with the regular discourses within doors.

> The thought of preaching in the open air was suggested to Whitefield by a crowd of a thousand people unable to gain admission to Bermondsey church, where he preached one Sunday afternoon. He met with no encouragement when he mentioned it to some of his friends; they thought it was a "mad notion." However, it would have been carried out the next Sunday at Ironmongers' Almshouses had not the preacher been disappointed in his congregation, which was small enough to hear him from the pulpit. He took two sermons with him, one for within and the other for without.

The idea, which had thus ripened into a resolve, had not long to wait before it was carried into execution. The Chancellor of the Diocese having put impediments in the way of Whitefield's preaching in the churches of Bristol on behalf of his Orphan-house, he went to preach to the colliers[101] at Kingswood for the first time on a

---

[99] **George Whitefield** (1714-1770) – the best-known evangelist of the 18th century and an itinerant preacher greatly used by God in England and the American Colonies during the "Great Awakening."

[100] **John Wesley** (1703–1791) – Anglican minister; largely credited with founding the English Methodist movement with his brother Charles; it began when he took to open-air preaching in a manner similar to George Whitefield's.

[101] **colliers** – coal miners.

Saturday afternoon, taking his stand on Hannan Mount. He spoke on Matthew 5:1-3, to as many as came to hear; upwards of two hundred attended. His only remark in his journal is, "Blessed be God that the ice is now broke, and I have now taken the field! Some may censure me. But is there not a cause? Pulpits are denied; and the poor colliers ready to perish for lack of knowledge." Now he was the owner of a pulpit that no man could take from him, and his heart rejoiced in this great gift. On the following day the journal relates,

> All the church doors being now shut, and if open not able to contain half that came to hear, at three in the afternoon I went to Kingswood among the colliers. God highly favoured us in sending us a fine day, and near two thousand people were assembled on that occasion. I preached and enlarged on John 3:3 for near an hour, and, I hope, to the comfort and edification of those that heard me.

Two days afterwards he stood upon the same spot, and preached to a congregation of four or five thousand with great freedom. The bright sun overhead, and the immense throng standing around him in awful silence formed a picture that filled him with "holy admiration." On a subsequent Sunday, Bassleton, a village two miles from Bristol, opened its church to him, and a numerous congregation coming together, he first read prayers in the church, and then preached in the churchyard. At four he hastened to Kingswood. Though the month was February the weather was unusually open and mild; the setting sun shone with its fullest power; the trees and hedges were crowded with hearers who wanted to see the preacher as well as to hear him. For an hour he spoke with a voice loud enough to be heard by every one, and his heart was not without joy in his own message. He writes in his journal: "Blessed be God, the fire is kindled; may the gates of hell never be able to prevail against it!"

It is important to know what were his feelings when he met those immense field congregations, whose numbers had grown from two hundred to twenty thousand, and what were the effects of his preaching upon his audience. His own words are,

> Having no righteousness of their own to renounce, the colliers were glad to hear of Jesus who was a friend to publicans, and came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. The first discovery of their being affected was, to see the white gutters made by their tears, which plentifully fell down their black cheeks, as they came out of their coal pits. Hundreds and hundreds of them were soon brought under deep convictions, which (as the event proved) happily ended in a sound and thorough conversion. The change

was visible to all, though numbers chose to impute it to anything rather than the finger of God.

As the scene was quite new, and I had just begun to be an extempore[102] preacher, it often occasioned many inward conflicts. Sometimes, when twenty thousand people were before me, I had not, in my own apprehension, a word to say, either to God or them. But I was never totally deserted, and frequently knew by happy experience what our Lord meant when he said, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (Joh 7:38). The open firmament above me, the prospect of the adjacent fields, with the sight of thousands and thousands, some in coaches, some on horseback, and some on the trees, and, at times, all affected and drenched in tears together, to which sometimes was added the solemnity of the approaching evening, was almost too much for, and quite overcame, me.

Wesley writes in his journal,

Saturday, 31 [March, 1731]. In the evening I reached Bristol, and met Mr. Whitefield there. I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set me an example on Sunday; having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if had it not been done in a church.

Such were the feelings of a man who in after life became one of the greatest open-air preachers who ever lived!

I shall not tarry to describe Mr. Whitefield on our own Kennington common among the tens of thousands, or at Moorfields early in the morning, when the lanterns twinkled like so many glow-worms on a grassy bank on a summer's night; neither will I mention the multitudes of glorious scenes with Wesley and his more renowned preachers; but a picture more like that which some of you can easily copy has taken a strong hold upon my memory; and I set it before you that you may never, in times to come, despise the day of small things:

Wesley reached Newcastle on Friday, the 28th of May. On walking out, after tea, he was surprised and shocked at the abounding wickedness. Drunkenness and swearing seemed general, and even the mouths of little children were full

[102] **extempore** – on the spur of the moment; without premeditation or preparation.

> of curses. How he spent the Saturday we are not informed; but, on Sunday morning at seven, he and John Taylor took their stand near the pump, in Sandgate, "the poorest and most contemptible part of the town," and began to sing the Old Hundredth Psalm and tune. Three or four people came about them, to see what was the matter; these soon increased in number, and, before Wesley finished preaching, his congregation consisted of from twelve to fifteen hundred persons. When the service was ended, the people still stood gaping, with the most profound astonishment, upon which Wesley said, "If you desire to know who I am, my name is John Wesley. At five in the evening, with God's help, I design to preach here again."[103]

Glorious were those great gatherings in fields and commons which lasted throughout the long period in which Wesley and Whitefield blessed our nation. Field-preaching was the wild note of the birds singing in the trees, in testimony that the true springtime of religion had come. Birds in cages may sing more sweetly, perhaps, but their music is not so natural, nor so sure a pledge of the coming summer. It was a blessed day when Methodists and others began to proclaim Jesus in the open air; then were the gates of hell shaken, and the captives of the devil set free by hundreds and by thousands.

Once recommenced, the fruitful agency of field-preaching was not allowed to cease. Amid jeering crowds and showers of rotten eggs and filth, the immediate followers of the two great Methodists continued to storm village after village and town after town. Very varied were their adventures, but their success was generally great. One smiles often when reading incidents in their labours. A string of packhorses is so driven as to break up a congregation, and a fire-engine is brought out and played over the throng to achieve the same purpose. Handbells, old kettles, marrow-bones and cleavers, trumpets, drums, and entire bands of music were engaged to drown the preachers' voices. In one case the parish bull was let loose, and in others dogs were set to fight. The preachers needed to have faces set like flints, and so indeed they had. John Furz says,

> As soon as I began to preach, a man came straight forward, and presented a gun at my face; swearing that he would blow my brains out, if I spake another word. However, I continued speaking, and he continued swearing, sometimes putting the muzzle of the gun to my mouth, sometimes against my ear. While

---

[103] L. Tyreman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Founder of the Methodists*.

> we were singing the last hymn, he got behind me, fired the gun, and burned off part of my hair.[104]

After this, my brethren, we ought never to speak of petty interruptions or annoyances. The proximity of a blunderbuss[105] in the hands of a son of Belial is not very conducive to collected thought and clear utterance, but the experience of Furz was probably no worse than that of John Nelson, who coolly says,

> But when I was in the middle of my discourse, one at the outside of the congregation threw a stone, which cut me on the head: however, that made the people give greater attention, especially when they saw the blood run down my face; so that all was quiet till I had done, and was singing a hymn.

6. The Nineteenth Century

The life of Gideon Ouseley, by Dr. Arthur, is one of the most powerful testimonies to the value of outdoor preaching. In the early part of the present century, from 1800 to 1830, he was in full vigour, riding throughout the whole of Ireland, preaching the gospel of Jesus in every town. His pulpit was generally the back of his horse, and he himself and his coadjutors[106] were known as the men with the black caps, from their habit of wearing skull caps. This cavalry ministry was in its time the cause of a great revival in Ireland, and gave promise of really touching Erin's[107] deep-seated curse—the power of the priesthood, and the superstition of the people.

Ouseley showed at all times much shrewdness, and a touch of common-sense humour; hence he generally preached in front of the apothecary's[108] window because the mob would be the less liberal with their stones, or next best he chose to have the residence of a respectable Catholic in his rear, for the same reason. His sermon from the stone stairs of the market house of Enniscorthy was a fair specimen of his dexterous method of meeting an excited mob of Irishmen. I will give it you at length, that you may know how to act if ever you are placed in similar circumstances:

> He took his stand, put off his hat, assumed his black velvet cap, and, after a few moments spent in silent prayer, commenced to sing. People began to

---

[104] Thomas Jackson, *The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, Volume I, 1875.

[105] **blunderbuss** – short musket with expanded muzzle to scatter shot at close range.

[106] **coadjutors** – assistants.

[107] **Erin's** – Ireland's. "Erin" is a personification for the country.

[108] **apothecary's** – pharmacist's.

gather round him, and, during the singing of a few verses, were quiet, and apparently attentive, but soon began to be restless and noisy. He then commenced to pray, and quietness for a short time followed; but presently, as the crowd increased, it became uneasy, and even turbulent. He closed his prayer, and began to preach; but evidently his audience were not disposed to hear him.

Before many sentences had been uttered, missiles began to fly, at first not of a very destructive character, being refuse: vegetables, potatoes, turnips, etc.; but before long harder materials were thrown, brickbats[109] and stones, some of which reached him and inflicted slight wounds. He stopped, and, after a pause, cried out, "Boys dear, what's the matter with you today? Won't you let an old man talk to you a little?" "We don't want to hear a word out of your old head," was the prompt reply from one in the crowd. "But I want to tell you what, I think, you would like to hear." "No, we'll like nothing you can tell us." "How do you know? I want to tell you a story about one you all say you respect and love." "Who's that?" "The blessed virgin."[110] "Ooh, and what do you know about the blessed virgin?" "More than you think; and I'm sure you'll be pleased with what I have to tell you, if you'll only listen to me." "Come then," said another voice, "let us hear what he has to say about the holy mother." And there was a lull, and the missionary began: "There was once a young couple to be married, belonging to a little town called Cana. It's away in that country where our blessed Saviour spent a great part of his life among us; and the decent people whose children were to be married thought it right to invite the blessed virgin to the wedding feast, and her blessed Son too, and some of His disciples; and they all thought it right to come. As they sat at table, the virgin mother thought she saw that the wine provided for the entertainment began to run short, and she was troubled lest the decent young people should be shamed before their neighbours; and so she whispered to her blessed Son, "They have no wine." "Don't let that trouble you, ma'am," said He. And in a minute or two after, she, knowing well what was in His good heart, said to one

---

[109] **brickbats** – pieces of broken brick, especially ones used as missiles.

[110] Ouseley uses the terms familiar to his audience for Mary Jesus' mother. However, since Jesus had siblings (Gal 1:19, Mat 12:46-50; Mar 3:31-35; Joh 7:5) and it is said of Joseph her husband that he knew her not "till she had brought forth her firstborn son" (Mat 1:23-25), we should not think of Mary as a perpetual virgin.

> of the servants that was passing behind them, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Accordingly, by-and-by, our blessed Lord said to another of them—I suppose they had passed the word among themselves—"Fill those large water pots with water." (There were six of them standing in a corner of the room, and they held nearly three gallons apiece, for the people of those countries use a great deal of water every day.) And, remembering the words of the holy virgin, they did His bidding, and came back, and said, "Sir, they are full to the brim." "Take some, then, to the master, at the head of the table," He said. And they did so, and the master tasted it, and lo and behold, it was wine, and the best of wine too. And there was plenty of it for the feast, ay, and, it may be, some left to help the young couple setting up house-keeping. And all that, you see, came of the servants taking the advice of the blessed virgin, and doing what she bid them. Now, if she was here among us this day, she would give just the same advice to every one of us, "Whatsoever He saith to you, do it," and with good reason too, for well she knows there is nothing but love in His heart to us, and nothing but wisdom comes from His lips. And now I'll tell you some of the things He says to us. He says, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will strive to enter in, and shall not be able."[111]

And straightway the preacher briefly, but clearly and forcibly, expounded the nature of the gate of life, its straitness, and the dread necessity for pressing into it, winding up with the virgin's counsel, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." In like manner he explained, and pressed upon his hearers, some other of the weighty words of our divine Lord. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (Joh 3:5), and, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luk 9:23), enforcing his exhortation in each instance by the virgin's counsel to the servants at Cana. "But no," at last he broke forth, "no, with all the love and reverence you pretend for the blessed virgin, you won't take her advice, but will listen willingly to any drunken schoolmaster that will wheedle[112] you into a public-house,[113] and put mischief and wickedness into your heads." Here he was interrupted by a voice, which seemed to be that of an old man, exclaiming, "True for you, true for ye. If you were tellin' lies all

---

[111] William Arthur, *Life of Gideon Ouseley*.

[112] **wheedle** – to flatter; to entice by soft words.

[113] **public-house** – bar.

the days of your life, it's the truth you're tellin' now." And so the preacher got leave to finish his discourse with not a little of good effect.

The history of primitive Methodism might here be incorporated bodily as part of our sketch of field-preaching, for that wonderful mission movement owed its rise and progress to this agency. It is, however, a singular reproduction of the events that attended the earlier Methodism of eighty or ninety years before. The Wesleyans[114] had become respectable, and it was time that the old fire should burn up among another class of men. Had Wesley been alive he would have gloried in the poor but brave preachers who risked their lives to proclaim the message of eternal love among the depraved, and he would have headed them in their crusade. As it was, other leaders came forward; and it was not long before their zeal called forth a host of fervent witnesses who could not be daunted by mobs, or squires,[115] or clergymen, nor even chilled by the genteel[116] brethren whose proprieties[117] they so dreadfully shocked.

Then came forth the old weapons in abundance. Agricultural produce in all stages of decomposition rewarded the zealous apostles—turnips and potatoes were a first course, and rotten eggs followed in special abundance, these last we note were frequently goose eggs, selected, we suppose, for their size. A tub of coal-tar was often in readiness, filth from the horse-ponds was added, and all this to the music of tin whistles, horns, and watchmen's rattles. Barrels of ale were provided by the advocates

---

[114] **primitive Methodism…The Wesleyans** – In the early decades of the 19th century there was a growing body of opinion among the Wesleyans that their Connexion was moving in directions which were a distortion of, not to say a betrayal of, what John Wesley had brought to birth in the 18th century. Eventually a Methodist preacher called Hugh Bourne became the catalyst for a breakaway, to form the Primitive Methodists. Probably "primitive" was used to clarify their self-understanding that they were the true guardians of the original, or primitive, form of Methodism. The sorts of issues which divided the Primitives and the Wesleyans were these…The Primitives focused attention on the role of lay people. The Wesleyans developed a high doctrine of the Pastoral Office to justify leadership being in the hands of the ministers…The Primitives stressed simplicity in their chapels and their worship. The Wesleyans were open to cultural enrichment from the Anglican tradition and more ornate buildings…The Primitives concentrated their mission on the rural poor. The Wesleyans on the more affluent and influential urban classes…The Primitives stressed the political implications of their Christian discipleship. The Wesleyans were nervous of direct political engagement. *The Methodist Church in Britain* (http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/history/primitive-methodism)

[115] **squires** – estate owners.

[116] **genteel** – refined; respectable.

[117] **proprieties** – commitment to conventional standards.

of "church and king" to refresh the orthodox[118] assailants, while both preachers and disciples were treated with brutality such as to excite compassion even in the hearts of adversaries. All this was, happily, a violation of law, but the great unpaid winked at the transgressors, and endeavoured to bully the preacher into silence. For Christ's sake they were content to be treated as vagrants and vagabonds,[119] and the Lord put great honour upon them. Disciples were made and the Ranters[120] multiplied. Even 'till a late period these devoted brethren have been opposed with violence, but their joyful experience has led them to persevere in their singing through the streets, camp-meetings, and other irregularities: blessed irregularities by which hundreds of wanderers have been met with and led to the fold of Jesus.

I have no time further to illustrate my subject by descriptions of the work of Christmas Evans[121] and others in Wales, or of the Haldanes[122] in Scotland, or even of Rowland Hill[123] and his brethren in England. If you wish to pursue the subject these names may serve as hints for discovering abundant materials; and I may add to the list *The Life of Dr. Guthrie*, in which he records notable open-air assemblies at the time of the Disruption,[124] when as yet the Free Church had no places of worship built with human hands.

I must linger a moment over Robert Flockhart, of Edinburgh, who, though a lesser light, was a constant one, and a fit example to the bulk of Christ's street witnesses. Every evening, in all weathers and amid many persecutions, did this brave man continue to speak in the street for forty-three years. Think of that, and never be

---

[118] **orthodox** – conforming to the approved standard; here used sarcastically of those attacking the preachers.

[119] **vagrants and vagabonds** – homeless wanderers; rogues.

[120] **Ranters** – derisive name given to some groups not belonging to the church of England; Non-Conformists, Methodists.

[121] **Christmas Evans (1766-1838)** – Calvinistic Welsh Nonconformist preacher; known as "the Bunyan of Wales."

[122] **Robert (1764-1842) and James Haldane (1768-1851)** – Scottish churchmen, evangelists, missionaries; established 85 churches in Scotland and Ireland. Churches planted by the Haldanes practiced baptism by immersion, weekly communion, and congregational polity (autonomous government).

[123] **Rowland Hill** (1744-1833) – Anglican preacher who ministered at Surrey Chapel in Southwark, London. An aristocratic convert to Evangelicalism and an enthusiastic champion of itinerant preaching. Often quoted by Charles Spurgeon.

[124] **Disruption** – of 1843, where some ministers broke away from the state Church of Scotland to plant the Free Church.

discouraged. When he was tottering to the grave the old soldier was still at his post. "Compassion to the souls of men drove me," said he, "to the streets and lanes of my native city, to plead with sinners and persuade them to come to Jesus. The love of Christ constrained me." Neither the hostility of the police, nor the insults of papists, Unitarians,[125] and the like could move him; he rebuked error in the plainest terms, and preached salvation by grace with all his might. So lately has he passed away that Edinburgh remembers him still. There is room for such in all our cities and towns, and need for hundreds of his noble order in this huge nation of London—can I call it less?

In America men like Peter Cartwright,[126] Lorenzo Dow,[127] Jacob Gruber,[128] and others of a past generation, carried on a glorious warfare under the open heavens in their own original fashion; and in later times Father Taylor[129] has given us another proof of the immeasurable power of this mode of crusade in his *Seven Years of Street Preaching in San Francisco, California*. Though sorely tempted, I shall forbear at this time from making extracts from that very remarkable work.

The camp-meeting is a sort of associated field-preaching, and has become an institution in the United States, where everything must needs be done upon a great scale. This would lead me into another subject, and therefore I shall merely give you a glimpse at that means of usefulness, and then forbear.

The following description of the earlier camp meetings in America is from the pen of the author of a *Narrative of a Mission to Nova Scotia*:

> The tents are generally pitched in the form of a crescent, in the centre of which is an elevated stand for the preachers, round which, in all directions, are placed rows of planks for the people to sit upon while they hear the word. Among the trees, which spread their tops over this forest church, are hung the lamps, which burn all night, and give light to the various exercises of religion which occupy the solemn midnight hours. It was nearly eleven o'clock at night when I first arrived on the border of the camp. I left my boat at the edge of the wood, one mile from the scene; and when I opened upon the

---

[125] **Unitarians** – those that deny the Bible's doctrine of the Trinity, stressing that God is one.

[126] **Peter Cartwright (1785-1872)** – Methodist elder, missionary, preacher, and member of the Illinois legislature.

[127] **Lorenzo Dow (1777-1834)** – Methodist itinerant preacher.

[128] **Jacob Guber (1778-1850)** – Discussed in Charles Spurgeon, *Eccentric Preachers*.

[129] **William Taylor (1821-1902)** – Methodist minister and open-air preacher.

camp ground, my curiosity was converted into astonishment, to behold the pendant lamps among the trees; the tents half-encircling a large space; four thousand people in the centre of this, listening with profound attention to the preacher, whose stentorian[130] voice and animated manner carried the vibration of each word to a great distance through the deeply umbrageous[131] wood, where, save the twinkling lamps of the camp, brooding darkness spread a tenfold gloom. All excited my astonishment, and forcibly brought before my view the Hebrews in the wilderness. The meetings generally begin on Monday morning, and on Friday morning following break up. The daily exercises are carried forward in the following manner: in the morning at five o'clock the horn sounds through the camp, either for preaching or for prayer; this, with similar exercises, or a little intermission, brings on the breakfast hour, eight o'clock; at ten, the horn sounds for public preaching, after which, until noon, the interval is filled up with little groups of praying persons, who scatter themselves up and down the camp, both in the tents and under the trees. After dinner the horn sounds at two o'clock; this is for preaching. I should have observed that a female or two is generally left in each tent, to prepare materials for dinner. A fire is kept burning in different parts of the camp, where water is boiled for tea, the use of ardent spirits[132] being forbidden. After the afternoon preaching things take nearly the same course as in the morning, only the praying groups are upon a larger scale, and more scope is given to animated exhortations and loud prayers. Some who exercise on these occasions soon lose their voices, and, at the end of a camp meeting, many of both preachers and people can only speak in a whisper. At six o'clock in the evening the horn summons to preaching, after which, though in no regulated form, all the above means continue until evening; yea, and during whatever part of the night you awake, the wilderness is vocal with praise.[133]

Whether or not under discreet management some such gatherings could be held in our country I cannot decide, but it does strike me as worthy of consideration

---

[130] **stentorian** – very loud or powerful in sound.

[131] **umbrageous** – creating or providing shade; shady.

[132] **ardent spirits** – strong, distilled liquors.

[133] Joshua Marsden, *The Narrative of a Mission to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the Somers Islands, with a Tour to Lake Ontario*, 1827.

whether in some spacious grounds services might not be held in summer weather, say for a week at a time, by ministers who would follow each other in proclaiming the gospel beneath the trees. Sermons and prayer-meetings, addresses and hymns, might follow each other in wise succession, and perhaps thousands might be induced to gather to worship God, among whom would be scores and hundreds who never enter our regular sanctuaries. Not only must something be done to evangelize the millions, but everything must be done, and perhaps amid variety of effort the best thing would be discovered. “If by any means I may save some” (1Co 9:22) must be our motto, and this must urge us onward to go forth into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in (Luk 14:23). Brethren, I speak as unto wise men, consider what I say (1Co 10:15).

Remarks on Open-Air Preaching

1. Hindrances

I fear that in some of our less enlightened country churches there are conservative individuals who almost believe that to preach anywhere except in the chapel would be a shocking innovation, a sure token of heretical tendencies, and a mark of zeal without knowledge. Any young brother who studies his comfort among them must not suggest anything so irregular as a sermon outside the walls of their Zion. In the olden times we are told, "Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets, she crieth in the chief places of concourse, in the openings of the gates" (Pro 1:20-21); but the wise men of orthodoxy would have wisdom gagged except beneath the roof of a licensed building. These people believe in a New Testament which says, "Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in," and yet they dislike a literal obedience to the command. Do they imagine that a special blessing results from sitting upon a particular deal board[134] with a piece of straight-up paneling at their back, an invention of discomfort which ought long ago to have made people prefer to worship outside on the green grass? Do they suppose that grace rebounds from sounding-boards,[135] or can be beaten out of pulpit cushions in the same fashion as the dust? Are they enamored of the bad air, and the stifling stuffiness which in some of our meeting-houses make them almost as loathsome to the nose and to the lungs as the mass-houses of Papists with their cheap and nasty incense? To reply to these objectors is a task for which we have no heart: we prefer foemen worthy of the steel we use upon them,[136] but these are scarcely worth a passing remark. One smiles at their prejudice, but we may yet have to weep over it, if it be allowed to stand in the way of usefulness.

No sort of defense is needed for preaching out of doors; but it would need very potent arguments to prove that a man had done his duty who has never preached beyond the walls of his meeting house. A defense is required rather for services within buildings than for worship outside of them. Apologies are certainly wanted for architects who pile up brick and stone into the skies when there is so much need for preaching rooms among poor sinners down below. Defense is greatly needed for forests of stone pillars, which prevent the preacher's being seen and his voice from

---

[134] **deal board** – fir or pine board.

[135] **sounding boards** – boards placed over or behind a pulpit to reflect the speaker's voice forward.

[136] **foemen worthy of the steel we use upon them** – enemies substantial enough to make it worthwhile to do battle with them.

being heard; for high-pitched gothic roofs in which all sound is lost, and men are killed by being compelled to shout till they burst their blood vessels; and also for the willful creation of echoes by exposing hard, sound-refracting surfaces to satisfy the demands of art, to the total overlooking of the comfort of both audience and speaker.[137] Surely, also some decent excuse is badly wanted for those childish people who must needs waste money in placing hobgoblins[138] and monsters on the outside of their preaching houses, and must have other ridiculous pieces of Popery stuck up both inside and outside, to deface rather than to adorn their churches and chapels; but no defense whatever is wanted for using the heavenly Father's vast audience chamber, which is in every way so well fitted for the proclamation of a gospel so free, so full, so expansive, so sublime. The usual holding of religious assemblies under cover may be excused in England, because our climate is so execrably[139] bad; but it were well to cease from such use when the weather is fine and fixed, and space and quiet can be obtained. We are not like the people of Palestine, who can foresee their weather, and are not every hour in danger of a shower; but if we meet *sub Jove*,[140] as

---

[137] R. L Dabney's description, from a visit in the late 19th century, of the building Spurgeon occupied is instructive: "The visitor finds the 'Tabernacle' simply a very large and seemly church of stone without a steeple, separated from the street by a plain, strong railing of iron, with an area of ten yards breadth, and then a portico of simple Greek architecture…Within he find a large but not vast audience-room, with plenty of windows and no stained glass, every foot of room economized skillfully, and two commodious galleries circling around the whole, one above another. The seats are fairly good, the interior sufficiently solid, neat and tasteful. One's common sense tells him that here the most has been made of the money given by God's people to provide worshipping-room for the most souls possible."

By contrast, consider Dabney's description of Westminster Abbey (Church of England): "The pile is hoary, venerable, vast, full of impressive reminiscences, with every second slab on which the worshipper treads, the grave stone of one who was famous in history; and every compartment along nave and aisle crowded with the monuments of statesmen, warriors, artists, poets, wits, actors and fiddlers. It occupies, with its deaneries, canonaries, college and chapels, whole acres of ground in the heart of London, which would now cost millions of pounds. In its lofty naves and towers, its countless pinnacles and buttresses, its labyrinths of corridors, courts and crypts, it contains probably enough cut stone to build ten (possibly twenty) such Tabernacles as Spurgeon's. Its lofty vastness so utterly surpasses the possibilities of vocal worship by any human voice, that some small part only is used at any one time." (R. L. Dabney, edited by J. H. Varner, *Christian Observer*, July 14, 1880; vol. 59:28 pp. 1-2, as appearing in *Discussions*, Vol. V, "Miscellaneous Writings.")

[138] **hobgoblins** – mischievous spirits; fearsome mythical creatures.

[139] **execrably** – cursedly; detestably.

[140] ***sub Jove*** – *Latin*: under Jupiter; in the open air.

the Latins say, we must expect the Jove of the hour to be *Jupiter pluvius*.[141] We can always have a deluge if we do not wish for it, but if we fix a service out of doors for next Sunday morning, we have no guarantee that we shall not all be drenched to the skin. It is true that some notable sermons have been preached in the rain, but as a general rule the ardor[142] of our auditors[143] is hardly so great as to endure much damping.

Besides, the cold of our winters is too intense for services out of doors all the year round, though in Scotland I have heard of sermons amid the sleet, and John Nelson writes of speaking to "a crowd too large to get into the house, though it was dark and snowed." Such things may be done now and then, but exceptions only prove the rule. It is fair also to admit that when people will come within walls, if the house be so commodious[144] that a man could not readily make more persons hear, and if it be always full, there can be no need to go out of doors to preach to fewer than there would be indoors; for, all things considered, a comfortable seat screened from the weather, and shut in from noise and intrusion, is helpful to a man's hearing the gospel with solemnity and quiet thought. A well-ventilated, well-managed building is an advantage if the crowds can be accommodated and can be induced to come; but these conditions are very rarely met, and therefore my voice is for the fields.

2. Benefits

The great benefit of open-air preaching is that we get so many new comers to hear the gospel who otherwise would never hear it. The gospel command is, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mar 16:15), but it is so little obeyed that one would imagine that it ran thus, "Go into your own place of worship and preach the gospel to the few creatures who will come inside." "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in" (Luk 14:23)—albeit it constitutes part of a parable—is worthy to be taken very literally, and in so doing its meaning will be best carried out. We ought actually to go into the streets and lanes and highways, for there are lurkers in the hedges, tramps on the highway, street-walkers, and lane-haunters, whom we shall never reach unless we pursue them into their own domains. Sportsmen must not stop at home and wait for the birds to come and be shot at, neither must fishermen throw their nets inside their boats and hope

---

[141] ***Jupiter pluvius*** – *Latin*: Jupiter regarded as the giver of rain.

[142] **ardor** – warmth, or heat, applied to the passions and affections; eagerness.

[143] **auditors** – hearers; those who attend a discourse.

[144] **commodious** – convenient; suitable; fit; proper; adapted to its use or purpose.

to take many fish. Traders go to the markets, they follow their customers and go out after business if it will not come to them; and so must we. Some of our brethren are prosing[145] on and on, to empty pews and musty hassocks,[146] while they might be conferring lasting benefit upon hundreds by quitting[147] the old walls for awhile, and seeking living stones for Jesus (Eph 2:19-22). Let them come out of Rehoboth and find room at the street corner (Gen 26:22). Let them leave Salem and seek the peace of neglected souls (Psa 76:2). Let them dream no longer at Bethel (Gen 28:10-19), but make an open space to be none other than the house of God. Let them come down from Mount Zion, and up from Aenon (Joh 3:23), and even away from Trinity, and St. Agnes, and St. Michael and All Angels, and St. Margaret Pattens, and St. Vedast, and St. Ethelburga, and all the rest of them,[148] and try to find new saints among the sinners who are perishing for lack of knowledge.

I have known street preaching in London remarkably blessed to persons whose character and condition would quite preclude their having been found in a place of worship. I know, for instance, a Jewish friend who, on coming from Poland, understood nothing whatever of the English language. In going about the streets on the Sunday he noticed the numerous groups listening to earnest speakers. He had never seen such a thing in his own country, where the Russian police would be alarmed if groups were seen in conversation, and he was therefore all the more interested. As he acquired a little English he became more and more constant in his attendance upon street speakers, indeed, it was very much with the view of learning the language that he listened at the first. I am afraid that the English which he acquired was not of the very best, which judgment I form as much from what I have heard of open-air oratory as from having listened to our Jewish friend himself, whose theology is better than his English. However, that "Israelite indeed" has always reason to commend the street preachers. How many other strangers and foreigners may, by the same instrumentality, have become fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God we cannot tell. Romanists also are met with in this manner more frequently than some would suppose. It is seldom prudent to publish cases of conversion among Papists, but my own observation leads me to believe that they are far more common than they were ten years ago, and the gracious work is frequently

---

[145] **prosing** – speaking.

[146] **hassocks** – cushions for kneeling in prayer.

[147] **quitting** – leaving.

[148] Various church buildings in London.

commenced by what is heard of the gospel at our street corners. Infidels,[149] also, are constantly yielding to the word of the Lord thus brought home to them.

The street evangelist, moreover, wins attention from those eccentric people whose religion can neither be described nor imagined. Such people hate the very sight of our churches and meeting houses, but will stand in a crowd to hear what is said, and are often most impressed when they affect[150] the greatest contempt.

Besides, there are numbers of persons in great cities who have not fit clothes to worship in, according to the current idea of what clothes ought to be; and not a few whose persons as well as their garments are so filthy, so odorous, so unapproachable, that the greatest philanthropist and the most leveling democrat might desire to have a little space between himself and their lively individualities. There are others who, whatever raiment they wear, would not go into a chapel upon any consideration, for they consider it to be a sort of punishment to attend divine service. Possibly they remember the dull Sundays of their childhood and the dreary sermons they have heard when for a few times they have entered a church, but it is certain that they look upon persons who attend places of worship as getting off the punishment they ought to endure in the next world by suffering it in this world instead. The Sunday newspaper, the pipe, and the pot,[151] have more charms for them than all the preachments of bishops and parsons, whether of church or dissent.[152] The open-air evangelist frequently picks up these members of the "No church" party, and in so doing he often finds some of the richest gems that will at last adorn the Redeemer's crown: jewels, which, by reason of their roughness, are apt to be unnoticed by a more fastidious class of soul-winners. Jonah in the streets of Nineveh was heard by multitudes who would never have known of his existence if he had hired a hall; John the Baptist by the Jordan awakened an interest which would never have been aroused had he kept to the synagogue; and those who went from city to city proclaiming everywhere the Word of the Lord Jesus would never have turned the world upside down (Act 17:1-9) if they had felt it needful to confine themselves to iron rooms adorned with the orthodox announcement, "The gospel of the grace of God will (D.V.) be preached here next Lord's day evening."

I am quite sure, too, that, if we could persuade our friends in the country to come out a good many times in the year and hold a service in a meadow, or in a shady

---

[149] **infidels** – agnostics; irreligious people.

[150] **affect** – pretend.

[151] **pot** – in this context, perhaps a large drinking vessel.

[152] **of church or dissent** – Anglican or non-Anglican Protestants.

grove, or on the hill side, or in a garden, or on a common, it would be all the better for the usual hearers. The mere novelty of the place would freshen their interest, and wake them up. The slight change of scene would have a wonderful effect upon the more somnolent.[153] See how mechanically they move into their usual place of worship, and how mechanically they go out again. They fall into their seats as if at last they had found a resting place; they rise to sing with an amazing effort, and they drop down before you have time for a doxology at the close of the hymn because they did not notice it was coming. What logs some regular hearers are! Many of them are asleep with their eyes open. After sitting a certain number of years in the same old spot, where the pews, pulpit, galleries, and all things else are always the same, except that they get a little dirtier and dingier every week, where everybody occupies the same position for ever and for evermore, and the minister's face, voice, tone are much the same from January to December—you get to feel the holy quiet of the scene and listen to what is going on as though it were addressed to "the dull cold ear of death." As a miller hears his wheels as though he did not hear them, or a stoker[154] scarcely notices the clatter of his engine after enduring it for a little time; or as a dweller in London never notices the ceaseless grind of the traffic; so do many members of our congregations become insensible to the most earnest addresses, and accept them as a matter of course. The preaching and the rest of it get to be so usual that they might as well not be at all. Hence a change of place might be useful, it might prevent monotony, shake up indifference, suggest thought, and in a thousand ways promote attention, and give new hope of doing good. A great fire which should burn some of our chapels to the ground might not be the greatest calamity which has ever occurred, if it only aroused some of those rivals of the seven sleepers of Ephesus[155] who will never be moved so long as the old house and the old pews hold together. Besides, the fresh air and plenty of it is a grand thing for every mortal man, woman, and child. I preached in Scotland twice on a Sabbath day at Blairmore, on a little height by the side of the sea, and after discoursing with all my might to large congregations, to be counted by thousands, I did not feel one-half so much exhausted as I often am when addressing a few hundreds in some horrible black hole of Calcutta, called a chapel. I trace my freshness and freedom from lassitude[156] at Blairmore to the fact that the windows could not be shut down by persons afraid of

---

[153] **somnolent** – tired and ready to fall asleep.

[154] **stoker** – one who supplies a steam engine with coal.

[155] **seven sleepers of Ephesus** – a story about seven youths whose persecution for their Christian faith involved being sealed in a cave where they fell asleep for 180 years; cited humorously by our author.

[156] **lassitude** – condition of weariness or debility.

heights, and that the roof was as high as the heavens are above the earth. My conviction is that a man could preach three or four times on a Sabbath out of doors with less fatigue than would be occasioned by one discourse delivered in an impure atmosphere, heated and poisoned by human breath, and carefully preserved from every refreshing infusion of natural air.

3. The Place

Tents are bad—unutterably bad; far worse than the worst buildings. I think a tent is the most objectionable covering for a preaching place that was ever invented. I am glad to see tents used in London, for the very worst place is better than none, and because they can easily be moved from place to place, and are not very expensive; but still, if I had my choice between having nothing at all and having a tent, I should prefer the open air by far. Under canvas the voice is deadened and the labor of speaking greatly increased. The material acts as a wet blanket to the voice, kills its resonance, and prevents its traveling. With fearful exertion, in the sweltering air generated in a tent, you will be more likely to be killed than to be heard. You must have noticed even at our own College gatherings, when we number only some two hundred, how difficult it is to hear at the end of a tent, even when the sides are open, and the air is pure. Perhaps you may on that occasion attribute this fact in some degree to a want of attentiveness and quietness on the part of that somewhat jubilant congregation, but still even when prayer is offered, and all is hushed, I have observed a great want of traveling power in the best voice beneath a marquee.[157]

If you are going to preach in the open air in the country, you will perhaps have your choice of a spot wherein to preach; if not, of course you must have what you can get, and you must in faith accept it as the very best.

Hobson's choice[158] of that or none makes the matter simple, and saves a deal of debate. Do not be very squeamish. If there should happen to be an available meadow hard by your chapel, select it because it will be very convenient to turn into the meeting-house should the weather prove unsuitable, or if you wish to hold a prayer-meeting or an after-meeting at the close of your address. It is well to preach before your regular services on a spot near your place of worship, so as to march the crowd right into the building before they know what they are about. Half-an-hour's out-of-door speaking and singing before your ordinary hour of assembly will often fill an empty house. At the same time, do not always adhere to near and handy spots, but

---

[157] **marquee** – tent.

[158] **Hobson's choice** – choice with only one option (take it or leave it).

choose a locality for the very opposite reason, because it is far away from any place of worship and altogether neglected. Hang up the lamps wherever there is a dark corner; the darker the more need of light. Paradise Row and Pleasant Place are generally the least paradisaical[159] and the most unpleasant: thither let your steps be turned. Let the dwellers in the valley of the shadow of death perceive that light has sprung up for them.

I have somewhere met with the recommendation always to preach with a wall behind you, but against that I respectfully enter my caveat.[160] Have a care of what may be on the other side of the wall! One evangelist received a can of scalding water from over a wall with the kindly remark, "There's soup for Protestants!" and another was favored with most unsavory bespatterings from a vessel emptied from above: Gideon Ouseley began to preach in Roscoramon with his back against the gable of a tobacco factory in which there was a window with a wooden door, through which goods were hoisted into the loft. Would you be surprised to learn that the window suddenly opened, and that from it descended a pailful of tobacco water, an acrid fluid most painful to the eyes? The preacher in after years knew better than to put himself in such a tempting position. Let his experience instruct you.

If I had my choice of a pitch for preaching, I should prefer to front a rising ground, or an open spot bounded at some little distance by a wall. Of course there must be sufficient space to allow of the congregation assembling between the pulpit and the bounding object in front, but I like to see an end, and not to shout into boundless space. I do not know a prettier site for a sermon than that which I occupied in my friend Mr. Duncan's grounds at Bennote. It was a level sweep of lawn, backed by rising terraces covered with fir trees. The people could either occupy the seats below, or drop down upon the grassy banks, as best comported with[161] their comfort, and thus I had part of my congregation in rising galleries above me, and the rest in the area around me. My voice readily ascended, and I conceive that if the people had been seated up the hill for half-a-mile they would have been able to hear me with ease. I should suppose that Wesley's favorite spot at Gwennap Pit must be somewhat after the same order. Amphitheaters and hillsides are always favorite spots with preachers in the fields, and their advantages will be at once evident to you.

---

[159] **paradisiacal** – resembling paradise.

[160] **caveat** – warning; qualification.

[161] **best comported with** – best suited to; most agreeable with.

My friend Mr. Abraham once produced for me a grand cathedral in Oxfordshire. The remains of it are still called "Spurgeon's Tabernacle," and may be seen near Minster Lovell, in the form of a quadrilateral[162] of oaks.

Originally it was the *beau ideal*[163] of a preaching place, for it was a cleared spot in the thick forest of Witchwood, and was reached by roads cut through the dense underwood. I shall never forget those "alleys green," and the verdant walls that shut them in. When you reached the inner temple it consisted of a large square, out of which the underwood and smaller trees had been cut away, while a sufficient number of young oaks had been left to rise to a considerable height, and then overshadow us with their branches. Here was a truly magnificent cathedral, with pillars and arches: a temple not made with hands, of which we might truly say, "Father, Thy hand hath reared these venerable columns, Thou didst weave this verdant roof." I have never, either at home or on the Continent, seen architecture that could rival my cathedral. "Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood" (Psa 132:6). The blue sky was visible through our clerestory,[164] and from the great window at the further end the sun smiled upon us toward evening. Oh, sirs, it was grand indeed, to worship thus beneath the vaulted firmament, beyond the sound of city hum, where all around ministered to quiet fellowship with God. That spot is now cleared, and the place of our assembly has been selected at a little distance from it. It is of much the same character, only that my boundary walls of forest growth have disappeared to give place to an open expanse of ploughed fields. Only the pillars and the roof of my temple remain, but I am still glad, like the Druids,[165] to worship among the oak trees. This year a dove had built her nest just above my head, and she continued flying to and fro to feed her young, while the sermon proceeded. Why not? Where should she be more at home than where the Lord of love and Prince of Peace was adored? It is true my arched cathedral is not waterproof, and other showers besides those of grace will descend upon the congregation, but this has its advantages, for it makes us the more grateful when the day is propitious, and the very precariousness of the weather excites a large amount of earnest prayer.

I once preached a sermon in the open air in haying time during a violent storm of rain. The text was, "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth" (Psa 72:6), and surely we had the blessing as well as the

---

[162] **quadrilateral** – shape with four sides.

[163] ***beau ideal*** – perfect type.

[164] **clerestory** – a high section of wall with windows above eye level.

[165] **Druids** – ancient pagans of Britain, who, according to Pliny the Elder, held the valonia oak as sacred.

inconvenience. I was sufficiently wet, and my congregation must have been drenched, but they stood it out, and I never heard that anybody was the worse in health, though, I thank God, I have heard of souls brought to Jesus under that discourse. Once in a while, and under strong excitement, such things do no one any harm, but we are not to expect miracles, nor wantonly venture upon a course of procedure that might kill the sickly and lay the foundations of disease in the strong.

I remember well preaching between Cheddar Cliffs. What a noble position—what beauty and sublimity! But there was great danger from falling pieces of stone, moved by the people who sat upon the higher portions of the cliff, and hence I would not choose the spot again. We must studiously avoid positions where serious accident might be possible. An injured head qualifies no one for enjoying the beauties of nature, or the consolations of grace. Concluding a discourse in that place, I called upon those mighty rocks to bear witness that I had preached the gospel to the people, and to be a testimony against them at the last great day, if they rejected the message. Only the other day I heard of a person to whom that appeal was made useful by the Holy Spirit.

Look well to the ground you select, that it is not swampy. I never like to see a man slip up to his knees in mire while I am preaching. Rushy[166] places are often so smooth and green that we select them without noting that they are apt to be muddy, and to give our hearers wet feet. Always inconvenience yourself rather than your audience: your Master would have done so. Even in the streets of London a concern for the convenience of your hearers is one of the things that conciliates[167] a crowd more than anything.

Avoid as your worst enemy the neighborhood of the Normandy poplar. These trees cause a perpetual hissing and rustling sound, almost like the noise of the sea. Every leaf of certain kinds of poplar is in perpetual motion, like the tongue of Talkative. The noise may not seem very loud, but it will drown the best of voices. "The sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees" (2Sa 5:24) is all very well, but keep clear of the noise of poplars and some other trees, or you will suffer for it. I have had painful experience of this misery. The old serpent himself seemed to hiss at me out of those unquiet boughs.

Practiced preachers do not care to have the sun directly in their faces if they can help it, neither do they wish their hearers to be distressed in like manner, and therefore they take this item into consideration when arranging for a service. In

---

[166] **rushy** – populated with rushes, stiff plants characteristic of marshy, wet areas.

[167] **conciliates** – gains goodwill by pleasing acts; pacifies.

London we do not see that luminary often enough to be much concerned upon this point.

Do not try to preach against the wind, for it is an idle attempt. You may hurl your voice a short distance by an amazing effort, but you cannot be well heard even by the few. I do not often advise you to consider which way the wind blows (Ecc 11:4), but on this occasion I urge you to do it, or you will labor in vain. Preach so that the wind carries your voice towards the people, and does not blow it down your throat, or you will have to eat your own words. There is no telling how far a man may be heard with the wind. In certain atmospheres and climates, as for instance in that of Palestine, persons might be heard for several miles; and single sentences of well-known speech may in England be recognized a long way off, but I should gravely doubt a man if he asserted that he understood a new sentence beyond the distance of a mile. Whitefield is reported to have been heard a mile, and I have been myself assured that I was heard for that distance, but I am somewhat skeptical. Half-a-mile is surely enough, even with the wind, but you must make sure of that to be heard at all. In the country it ought to be easy to find a fit place for preaching. One of the earliest things that a minister should do when he leaves college and settles in a country town or village is to begin open-air speaking. He will generally have no difficulty as to the position; the land is before him and he may choose according to his own sweet will. The market-cross will be a good beginning, then the head of a court crowded with the poor, and next the favorite corner of the idlers of the parish. Cheap-Jack's stand will make a capital pulpit on Sunday night during the village fair, and a wagon will serve well on the green, or in a field at a little distance, during the weekday evenings of the rustic festival. A capital place for an *al fresco*[168] discourse is the green where the old elm trees, felled long ago, are still lying in reserve as if they were meant to be seats for your congregation; so also is the burial ground of the meeting-house where "the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."[169] Consecrate it to the living and let the people enjoy "meditations among the tombs."[170] Make no excuses, then, but get to work at once.

In London, or any other large town, it is a great thing to find a vacant spot where you can obtain a right to hold services at your pleasure. If you can discover a piece of ground which is not yet built over, and if you can obtain the use of it from the owner till he covers it, it will be a great acquisition, and worth a slight expense in fencing; for you are then king of the castle and disturbers will be trespassers. I suppose that

---

[168] ***al fresco*** – outdoor; in the fresh air.

[169] Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.

[170] Apparent allusion to a work of James Hervey, *Meditations Among the Tombs.*

such a spot is not often obtainable, especially by persons who have no money; but it is worth thinking about. It is a great gain when your place of worship has even a small outside space, like that at Surrey Chapel, or upon the Tabernacle steps; for here you are beyond the interference of the police or drunken men. If we have none of these, we must find street corners, triangles, quiet nooks, and wide spaces wherein to proclaim the gospel. Years ago I preached to enormous assemblies in King Edward's Road, Hackney, which was then open fields, but now not a spare yard remains. On those occasions the rush was perilous to life and limb, and there seemed no limit to the throngs. Half the number would have been safer. That open space has vanished, and it is the same with fields at Brixton, where in years gone by it was delightful to see the assembled crowds listening to the word.

Burdened with the rare trouble of drawing too many together, I have been compelled to abstain from these exercises in London, but not from any lessened sense of their importance. With the Tabernacle always full I have as large a congregation as I desire at home, and therefore do not preach outside except in the country; but for those ministers whose area under cover is but small, and whose congregations are thin, the open air is the remedy whether in London or in the provinces.

In raising a new interest, and in mission operations, out of door services are a main agency. Get the people to listen outside that they may by-and-by worship inside. You want[171] no pulpit, a chair will do, or the kerb[172] of the road. The less formality the better, and if you begin by merely talking to the two or three around you and make no pretense of sermonizing you will do well. More good may be done by personal talk to one than by a rhetorical address to fifty. Do not purposely interfere with the thoroughfare, but if the crowd should accumulate do not hasten away in sheer fright: the policeman will let you know soon enough. You are most wanted, however, where you will be in no danger of impeding passers-by, but far more likely to be in danger yourself: I refer to those central courts and blind alleys in our great cities which lie out of the route of decency, and are known to nobody but the police, and to them principally through bruises and wounds. Talk of discovering the interior of Africa, we need explorers for Frying-pan Alley and Emerald-Island Court: the Arctic regions are well nigh as accessible as Dobiuson's Rents and Jack Ketch's Warren. Heroes of the cross, here is a field for you more glorious than the

[171] **want** – need.

[172] **kerb** – curb.

Cid[173] ever beheld when with his brave right arm he smote the Paynim hosts. "Who will bring me into the strong city? Who will lead me into Edom?" (Psa 60:9). Who will enable us to win these slums and dens for Jesus? Who can do it but the Lord?

4. Opposition

Soldiers of Christ who venture into these regions must expect a revival of the practices of the good old times, so far as brickbats are concerned, and I have known a flower-pot fall accidentally from an upper window in a remarkably slanting direction. Still, if we are born to be drowned, we shall not be killed by flower-pots. Under such treatment it may be refreshing to read what Christopher Hopper wrote under similar conditions more than a hundred years ago.

> I did not much regard a little dirt, a few rotten eggs, the sound of a cow's horn, the noise of bells, or a few snowballs in their season; but sometimes I was saluted with blows, stones, brickbats, and bludgeons. These I did not well like: they were not pleasing to flesh and blood. I sometimes lost a little skin, and once a little blood, which was drawn from my forehead with a sharp stone. I wore a patch for a few days, and was not ashamed; I gloried in the cross. And when my small sufferings abounded for the sake of Christ, my comfort abounded much more. I never was more happy in my own soul, or blessed in my labors.[174]

I am somewhat pleased when I occasionally hear of a brother's being locked up by the police, for it does him good, and it does the people good also. It is a fine sight to see the minister of the gospel marched off by the servant of the law! It excites sympathy for him, and the next step is sympathy for his message. Many who felt no interest in him before are eager to hear him when he is ordered to leave off, and still more so when he is taken to the station. The vilest of mankind respect a man who gets into trouble in order to do them good, and if they see unfair opposition excited they grow quite zealous in the man's defense.

5. Proper Conduct

I am persuaded that the more of open-air preaching there is in London the better. If it should become a nuisance to some it will be a blessing to others, if properly

---

[173] ***El Cid*, Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar** (c.1043-1099) – Spanish nobleman and military leader; real but legendary hero of Castile.

[174] Thomas Jackson, *The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, Volume I, 1875.

conducted. If it be the gospel which is spoken, and if the spirit of the preacher be one of love and truth, the results cannot be doubted: the bread cast upon the waters must be found again after many days (Ecc 11:1). The gospel must, however, be preached in a manner worth the hearing, for mere noise-making is an evil rather than a benefit. I know a family almost driven out of their senses by the hideous shouting of monotonous exhortations, and the howling of "Safe in the arms of Jesus" near their door every Sabbath afternoon by the year together. They are zealous Christians, and would willingly help their tormentors if they saw the slightest probability of usefulness from the violent bawling: but as they seldom see a hearer, and do not think that what is spoken would do any good if it were heard, they complain that they are compelled to lose their few hours of quiet because two good men think it their duty to perform a noisy but perfectly useless service. I once saw a man preaching with no hearer but a dog, which sat upon its tail and looked up very reverently while its master orated. There were no people at the windows nor passing by, but the brother and his dog were at their post whether the people would hear or whether they would forbear.

Once also I passed an earnest declaimer,[175] whose hat was on the ground before him, filled with papers, and there was not even a dog for an audience, nor anyone within hearing, yet did he "waste his sweetness on the desert air."[176] I hope it relieved his own mind. Really it must be viewed as an essential part of a sermon that somebody should hear it: it cannot be a great benefit to the world to have sermons preached *in vacuo*.[177]

6. Style

As to style in preaching out of doors, it should certainly be very different from much of that which prevails within, and perhaps if a speaker were to acquire a style fully adapted to a street audience, he would be wise to bring it indoors with him. A great deal of sermonizing may be defined as saying nothing at extreme length; but out of doors verbosity is not admired, you must say something and have done with it and go on to say something more, or your hearers *will* let you know. "Now then," cries a street critic, "let us have it, old fellow." Or else the observation is made, "Now then, pitch it out or you'd better go home and learn your lesson." "Cut it short, old boy," is a very common admonition, and I wish the presenters of this advice gratis[178]

---

[175] **declaimer** – speaker.

[176] from Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, 1751.

[177] ***in vacuo*** – in a vacuum.

[178] **gratis** – for free.

could let it be heard inside Ebenezer and Zoar and some other places sacred to long-winded orations. Where these outspoken criticisms are not employed, the hearers rebuke prosiness[179] by quietly walking away.

Very unpleasant this, to find your congregation dispersing, but a very plain intimation that your ideas are also much dispersed. In the street, a man must keep himself alive, and use many illustrations and anecdotes, and sprinkle a quaint remark here and there. To dwell long on a point will never do. Reasoning must be brief, clear, and soon done with. The discourse must not be labored or involved, neither must the second head depend upon the first, for the audience is a changing one, and each point must be complete in itself. The chain of thought must be taken to pieces, and each link melted down and turned into bullets: you will need not so much Saladin's[180] saber to cut through a muslin handkerchief as Coeur de Lion's[181] battle-ax to break a bar of iron. Come to the point at once, and come there with all your might.

Short sentences of words and short passages of thought are needed for out of doors. Long paragraphs and long arguments had better be reserved for other occasions. In quiet country crowds there is much force in an eloquent silence, now and then interjected; it gives people time to breathe, and also to reflect. Do not, however, attempt this in a London street; you must go ahead, or someone else may run off with your congregation. In a regular field sermon pauses are very effective, and are useful in several ways, both to speaker and listeners, but to a passing company who are not inclined for anything like worship, quick, short, sharp address is most adapted.

In the streets a man must from beginning to end be intense, and for that very reason he must be condensed and concentrated in his thought and utterance. It would never do to begin by saying, "My text, dear friends, is a passage from the inspired Word, containing doctrines of the utmost importance, and bringing before us in the clearest manner the most valuable practical instruction. I invite your careful attention and the exercise of your most candid judgment while we consider it under various aspects and place it in different lights, in order that we may be able to perceive its position in the analogy of the faith. In its exegesis we shall find an arena for the cultured intellect, and the refined sensibilities. As the purling brook meanders among the meads and fertilizes the pastures, so a stream of sacred truth

---

[179] **prosiness** – dullness.

[180] **Saladin** – 12th century sultan of Egypt and Syria.

[181] **Coeur de Lion** – King Richard I of England, called "Richard the Lionheart" (1157-1199).

flows through the remarkable words that now lie before us. It will be well for us to divert the crystal current to the reservoir of our meditation, that we may quaff the cup of wisdom with the lips of satisfaction." There, gentleman, is not that rather above the average of word-spinning, and is not the art very generally in vogue in these days? If you go out to the obelisk[182] in Blackfriars Road, and talk in that fashion, you will be saluted with "Go on, old buffer," or "Ain't he fine? My eye!" A very vulgar youth will cry, "What a mouth for a tater!" and another will shout in a tone of mock solemnity, "AMEN!" If you give them chaff they will cheerfully return it into your own bosom. Good measure, pressed down and running over will they mete out to you. Shams and shows will have no mercy from a street gathering. But have something to say, look them in the face, say what you mean, put it plainly, boldly, earnestly, courteously, and they will hear you. Never speak against time or for the sake of hearing your own voice, or you will obtain some information about your personal appearance or manner of oratory that will probably be more true than pleasing. "Crikey," says one, "wouldn't he do for an undertaker! He'd make 'em weep." This was a compliment paid to a melancholy brother whose tone is peculiarly funereal. "There, old fellow," said a critic on another occasion, "you go and wet your whistle. You must feel awfully dry after jawing away at that rate about nothing at all." This also was specially appropriate to a very heavy brother of whom we had aforetime remarked that he would make a good martyr, for there was no doubt of his burning well, he was so dry. It is sad, very sad, that such rude remarks should be made, but there is a wicked vein in some of us, which makes us take note that the vulgar observations are often very true, and "hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature." As caricature often gives you a more vivid idea of a man than a photograph would afford you, so do these rough mob critics hit off an orator to the life[183] by their exaggerated censures.

The very best speaker must be prepared to take his share of street wit, and to return it if need be; but primness,[184] demureness,[185] formality, sanctimonious[186] long-windedness, and the affection of superiority, actually invite offensive pleasantries, and to a considerable extent deserve them. Chadband[187] or Stiggins[188] in rusty black,

---

[182] **obelisk** – monument; tapered stone pillar with four sides.

[183] **hit off an orator to the life** – describe the speaker accurately.

[184] **primness** – excessive formality.

[185] **demureness** – shyness; reserve.

[186] **sanctimonious** – hypocritically devout; condescendingly self-righteous.

[187] **Chadband** – offensively flattering clergyman in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*.

[188] **Stiggins** – a hypocritical "reverend" from Charles Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*.

with plastered hair and huge choker, is as natural an object of derision as Mr. Guido Fawkes[189] himself. A very great man in his own esteem will provoke immediate opposition, and the affectation of supernatural saintliness will have the same effect. The less you are like a parson the more likely you are to be heard; and, if you are known to be a minister, the more you show yourself to be a man, the better. "What do you get for that, governor?" is sure to be asked, if you appear to be a cleric,[190] and it will be well to tell them at once that this is extra, that you are doing overtime, and that there is to be no collection. "You'd do more good if you gave us some bread or a drop of beer, instead of them tracts," is constantly remarked, but a manly manner, and the outspoken declaration that you seek no wages but their good, will silence that stale objection.

The action of the street preacher should be of the very best. It should be purely natural and unconstrained. No speaker should stand up in the street in a grotesque[191] manner, or he will weaken himself and invite attack. The street preacher should not imitate his own minister, or the crowd will spy out the imitation very speedily, if the brother is anywhere near home.

Neither should he strike an attitude as little boys do who say, "My name is Norval." The stiff straight posture with the regular up and down motion of arm and hand is too commonly adopted: and I would even more condemn the wild-raving-maniac action which some are so fond of, which seems to be a cross between Whitefield with both his arms in the air, and Saint George with both his feet violently engaged in trampling on the dragon.

Some good men are grotesque by nature, and others take great pains to make themselves so. The wicked Londoners say, "What a Cure!" I only wish I knew of a cure for the evil.

All mannerisms should be avoided. Just now I observe that nothing can be done without a very large Bagster's Bible with a limp cover. There seems to be some special charm about the large size, though it almost needs a little perambulator[192] in which to push it about. With such a Bible full of ribbons, select a standing in Seven Dials,[193] after the pattern of a divine[194] so graphically described by Mr. McCree. Take

---

[189] **Guido (Guy) Fawkes** (1570-1606) – failed attempt to assassinate King James I of England (in the "Gunpowder plot"), burned in effigy by tradition.

[190] **cleric** – minister.

[191] **grotesque** – unnatural, bizarre.

[192] **perambulator** – baby stroller.

[193] **Seven Dials** – area in London where seven roads come together, thus a populated area.

off your hat, put your Bible in it, and place it on the ground. Let the kind friend who approaches you on the right hold your umbrella. See how eager the dear man is to do so! Is it not pleasing? He assures you he is never so happy as when he is helping good men to do good. Now close your eyes in prayer. When your devotions are over, somebody will have profited by the occasion. Where is your affectionate friend who held your umbrella and your hymn-book?

Where is that well-brushed hat, and that orthodox Bagster? Where? Oh, where? Echo answers, "Where?"

The catastrophe which I have thus described suggests that a brother had better accompany you in your earlier ministries, that one may watch while the other prays. If a number of friends will go with you and make a ring around you it will be a great acquisition, and if these can sing it will be still further helpful. The friendly company will attract others, will help to secure order, and will do good service by sounding forth sermons in song.

It will be very desirable to speak so as to be heard, but there is no use in incessant bawling. The best street preaching is not that which is done at the top of your voice, for it must be impossible to lay the proper emphasis upon telling passages when all along you are shouting with all your might.

When there are no hearers near you, and yet people stand upon the other side of the road and listen, would it not be as well to cross over and so save a little of the strength which is now wasted? A quiet, penetrating, conversational style would seem to be the most telling. Men do not bawl and holler when they are pleading in deepest earnestness; they have generally at such times less wind and a little more rain: less rant and a few more tears. On, on, on with one monotonous shout and you will weary everybody and wear out yourself. Be wise now, therefore, O ye who would succeed in declaring your Master's message among the multitude, and use your voices as common sense would dictate.

In a tract published by that excellent society "The Open Air Mission," I notice the following:

QUALIFICATIONS FOR OPEN-AIR PREACHERS.

1. A good voice.

2. Naturalness of manner.

3. Self-possession.[195]

---

[194] **divine** – theologian.

[195] **self-possession** – confidence; composure.

4. A good knowledge of Scripture and of common things.

5. Ability to adapt himself to any congregation.

6. Good illustrative powers.

7. Zeal, prudence, and common sense.

8. A large, loving heart.

9. Sincere belief in all he says.

10. Entire dependence on the Holy Spirit for success.

11. A close walk with God by prayer.

12. A consistent walk before men by a holy life.

If any man has all these qualifications, the Queen had better make a bishop of him at once, yet there is no one of these qualities that could well be dispensed with.

7. Disturbances

Interruptions are pretty sure to occur in the streets of London. At certain places all will go well for months, but in other positions the fight begins as soon as the speaker opens his mouth. There are seasons of opposition: different schools of adversaries rise and fall, and accordingly there is disorder or quiet. The best tact will not always avail to prevent disturbance; when men are drunk there is no reasoning with them, and of furious Irish Papists we may say much the same. Little is to be done with such unless the crowd around will cooperate, as oftentimes they will, in removing the obstructer. Certain characters, if they find that preaching is going on, will interrupt by hook or by crook.[196] They go on purpose, and if answered once and again they still persevere. One constant rule is to be always courteous and good tempered, for if you become cross or angry it is all over with you. Another rule is to keep to your subject, and never be drawn into side issues. Preach Christ or nothing: don't dispute or discuss except with your eye on the cross. If driven off for a moment always be on the watch to get back to your sole topic. Tell them the old, old story, and if they will not hear that, move on. Yet be adroit,[197] and take them with guile.

Seek the one object by many roads. A little mother-wit is often the best resource and will work wonders with a crowd. *Bonhommie*[198] is the next best thing to grace on such occasions. A brother of my acquaintance silenced a violent Romanist by offering him his stand and requesting him to preach.

---

[196] **by hook or by crook** – by whatever means necessary, good or bad.

[197] **adroit** – very skillful and quick.

[198] *bonhommie* — *French:* cheerful friendliness; geniality.

The man's comrades, for the very fun of the thing, urged him on, but, as he declined, the dog in the manger fable[199] was narrated and the disturber disappeared. If it be a real skeptic who is assailing you it is prudence to shun debate as much as possible, or ask him questions in return, for your business is not to argue but to proclaim the gospel. Mr. John McGregor says,

> Skeptics are of many kinds. Some of them ask questions to get answers, and others put difficulties to puzzle the people. An honest skeptic said to me in a crowd in Hyde-park, "I have been trying to believe for these ten years, but there is a contradiction I cannot get over, and it is this: we are told that printing was invented not five hundred years ago, and yet that the Bible is five thousand years old, and I cannot for the life of me see how this can be." Nay! The crowd did not laugh at this man. Very few people in a crowd know much more than he did about the Bible. But how deeply they drank in a half-hour's account of the Scripture manuscripts, their preservation, their translations and versions, their dispersion and collection, their collation and transmission, and the overwhelming evidence of their genuine truth!

I remember an infidel on Kennington Common being most effectually stopped. He continued to cry up the beauties of nature and the works of nature until the preacher asked him if he would kindly tell them what nature was. He replied that everybody knew what nature was. The preacher retorted, "Well, then, it will be all the easier for you to tell us." "Why, nature—nature," he said, "nature, nature is nature." Of course, the crowd laughed and the wise man subsided.

Ignorance when it is allied with a coarse, voluble[200] tongue is to be met by letting it have rope enough. One fellow wanted to know "how Jacob knew that Esau hated him." He had hold of the wrong end of the stick that time, and the preacher did not enlighten him, or he would have set him up with ammunition for future encounters.

Our business is not to supply men with arguments by informing them of difficulties. In the process of answering them, ministers have published the sentiments of infidels more widely than the infidels themselves could have done. Unbelievers only "glean[201] their blunted shafts, and shoot them at the shield of truth again." Our object is not to conquer them in logical encounters, but to save their souls. Real difficulties we should endeavor to meet, and hence a competent

---

[199] from *Aesop's Fables*.

[200] **voluble** – talkative.

[201] **glean** – in this context, to pick up a weapon, like an arrow, after shooting it.

knowledge of the evidences is most desirable; but honest objectors are best conversed with alone, when they are not ashamed to own themselves in the wrong, and this we could not expect of them in the crowd. Christ is to be preached whether men will believe in Him or no. Our own experience of His power to save will be our best reasoning, and earnestness our best rhetoric. The occasion will frequently suggest the fittest thing to say, and we may also fall back on the Holy Spirit who will teach us in the selfsame hour what we shall speak.[202]

The open-air speaker's calling is as honorable as it is arduous,[203] as useful as it is laborious. God alone can sustain you in it, but with Him at your side you will have nothing to fear. If ten thousand rebels were before you, and a legion of devils in every one of them, you need not tremble. More is He that is for you than all they that be against you.

By all hell's host withstood,
We all hell's host o'erthrow;
And conquering them, through Jesus' blood.
We still to conquer go.[204]

[202] Allusion to Christ's words to the Twelve in Matthew 10:19, regarding their defense before their persecutors. Caution should be used in applying this passage to contemporary preachers.

[203] **arduous** – difficult.

[204] Charles Wesley, *Hymns for Divine Worship. Compiled for the use of the Methodist new Connexion, founded A.D. 1797*, Hymn 681.