

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Whether this be so or not, let us see in that "go" an urgency ever pointing to regions beyond; and then, while there will be no failure of real care that all things should be done decently and in order, there will be seen the comparative unimportance of what belongs to outward ceremonial in our worship, then the true use and the misuse of ritual will hardly need to be insisted on, then our dangers from sacerdotal ceremonialism will cease to trouble, and our deluding ritualism will die of atrophy.

N. DIMOCK.



ART. IV.—THE LATE D. L. MOODY AS A PREACHER.

A GREAT preacher has recently passed from amongst us. Indeed, if the greatness of a preacher is to be measured by his capacity of attracting crowds to listen to his message, the candid historian will have to assign to D. L. Moody the very foremost place. More human ears have doubtless been reached by this simple and almost unlettered man than by any of the most gifted orators of ancient or modern times. And there is something surely very encouraging to us Christians, amidst the prevalence of unbelief and indifferentism all around us, in the fact that the man who in the nineteenth century has been able to catch the ear of the public more effectually than any other man was not a great statesman, nor a social reformer, nor even a temperance orator, but a simple, honest, earnest preacher of the Gospel.

It seems to me unquestionable that this man must have preached to a larger number of his fellow-men than any other preacher that ever lived. What other man during these nineteen centuries has continued to address day by day for a period covering more than a quarter of a century evening congregations varying in size from five thousand to fifteen thousand, and afternoon congregations varying from two thousand to five? What other man can have preached to

number of these converts are earnest and successful propagandists, and the very large increase in the number of Christians during the last five years is mainly owing to the zeal, earnestness, and devotion of Christian converts" ("Yangtze Valley and Beyond," p. 521). She mentions that in Che-kiang the number of converts through the work of Chinese is estimated at 80 per cent. of the whole. And she expresses the opinion that "if China is to be Christianized, or even largely leavened by Christianity, it must inevitably be by native agency under foreign instruction and guidance" (*ibid.*), adding (p. 522): "It is in the earnest enthusiasm of the Chinese converts for the propagation of the faith that the great hope for China lies."

between two and three millions of auditors each year for some twenty-six years, and to an aggregate of auditors not falling short of the entire population of the United States at the last census?

But true greatness in a preacher must be estimated by something more trustworthy than mere outward success in collecting crowds. The object of all preaching is to induce real spiritual results; and the mere popular preacher who attracts a crowd by his gifts of rhetoric, but, having done so, sends them away very much as they came, scarcely deserves to be called a great preacher. Here we are dealing, however, with facts that are beyond the reach of human statistics, though they may be duly tabulated in those "archives of eternity" which even science tells us must exist, although it may be only God can read their mysterious hieroglyphics. Yet, measured even by this standard, at once the highest and the truest, it would seem difficult to avoid the conclusion that this preacher's place must be in the foremost rank. When one thinks of the hundreds that week by week used to seek for spiritual help and counsel, as the result of his preaching; when one considers the long lists, containing usually some thousands of names, that he used to leave behind him, at each place visited, so that those who had been conversed with might receive all possible help from their own pastors; or when one reflects on the number of earnest working Christians up and down through the land, foremost to-day in every good work, who look back upon one of his visits as the turning-point in their lives, it will not be surprising if we find ourselves wondering whether there ever has been a more successful soul-winner than D. L. Moody was.

If, again, we estimate the greatness of a preacher by his command over the attention of his audience, and his capacity of printing his thoughts on the minds and hearts of his hearers, this man of plain and homely speech has surely had but few rivals. One of the most impressive things in those marvellous gatherings, the like of which, I suppose, we are scarcely likely to behold in our time again, was the sight from the platform of that sea of eager upturned faces, every eye fixed and every mind apparently attent, catching all the speaker's points, and delighting in his illustrations, smiling at the smart or humorous passages in his discourses, and not unfrequently responding to his pathos with their tears. Surely few preachers have ever been so successful in maintaining from beginning to end that complete rapport between speaker and hearers on which all must feel the value of a public utterance to a great extent depends.

If we sought for any further proof of Moody's greatness as

a preacher, we might find it in his marvellous capacity of reaching hearers of every social grade and of all degrees of intelligence. I remember a piteous appeal to my sympathies made by a friend of mine, who was a country parson, long years ago. "Just imagine the difficulties of my position as a preacher," he exclaimed: "there is Squire — sitting in the big pew in the transept, who was a high wrangler at Cambridge. In the opposite transept Squire —, who is an Oxford double-first; and there is Mr. —, who is also a first-class man; and all the rest are the very densest clod-hoppers." Judging from what he actually did, I can't help thinking that in his place D. L. Moody would have solved this problem. In spite of his lack of education, and the extreme simplicity of his style, he seemed to attract the rich quite as much as the poor; and he stirred the West End of London as it has never been stirred either before or since. In his famous campaign of '75 he used first to preach at Bow Hall in the East at half-past seven, and then drive across London to preach to the "upper ten" at Her Majesty's Opera House at nine. The scene in the Haymarket at this time baffles description. It was literally blocked with the carriages of the aristocracy and the plutocracy of the land; and the struggle for admission was perhaps even more severe in the West than in the East. Not unfrequently some of the leading men of the time might be seen in his audience, and such men as Gladstone, Cairns, and Dean Stanley felt and acknowledged his power. Yet, I suppose there hardly ever fell from his lips a word that the humblest of his hearers did not understand; nor could any of them have gone away feeling that the message was intended for "the toffs," and not for "the like of us."

That there must have been something unique in preaching that attracted all sorts and conditions of men to this extraordinary extent goes without saying; but it is much more difficult to explain what it was that rendered it so unique. Again and again I have been asked what I considered to be the secret of Moody's amazing power and success as a preacher; but I don't think that I have ever felt that any answer I may have given was at all complete, or expressed the whole truth on this point. No doubt it was not one characteristic, but a rare combination of characteristics, that rendered his preaching the success it was; and it is because it seems to me that there is a good deal to be learnt from the consideration of these characteristics that I am writing this paper. It is impossible to imitate him, and it would be most undesirable to attempt to do so; yet surely we may gain something from the consideration of those features in his ministry which seemed specially to contribute to its success; nay, it is possible that

the examination of these may induce some more or less useful modification of our own modes of procedure.

In illustration of this possibility, I feel tempted to repeat a good story that I heard some years ago from a prominent Wesleyan preacher. He told me that there was a certain minister in their connexion whose supreme ambition, during the earlier years of his ministry, was to imitate Morley Punshon. We all know that Mr. Punshon was a man of genius, and stood in the very front rank amongst the orators of his time. His somewhat florid style was his own, and he used it to excellent purpose, as the remarkable results of his work in Canada testify to-day. But it is one thing to be a Morley Punshon, and quite another thing to attempt to imitate him. This worthy man took enormous pains to make his imitation a success, but somehow the thing would not, as we say, "come off." He wrote out his sermons in full, polished up his periods, weighed and balanced his sentences, and laboriously committed his carefully-prepared compositions to memory. But it would not do. He felt more like a school-boy giving a recitation, and giving it very badly, than a messenger of Christ pleading with men. With all his industrious efforts his ministry was a grievous failure. He could not even succeed in filling his chapel, and spiritual results there seemed none.

In the year 1884 Mr. Moody paid a visit to this country, and this unsuccessful labourer was eager to see and hear one whose ministry in its apparent results contrasted so favourably with his own. On his return his wife was keen to know what he thought of the great preacher. "Preacher!" he exclaimed, "why, he doesn't preach at all! He just stands there on the platform and talks to the people, as I might talk to you. And there they sit listening to him, feeling that he means every word he says, until before you know what's happening the work is done, and any number of them are won for Christ. I tell you what it is, wife: I've done with the Morley Punshon business. From this time forward I'm going to talk to the people out of the fulness of my heart, by God's help, just as Moody does, and I don't see why God should not bless me as He blesses him." And the sequel was indeed wonderful. The very next Sunday the work began in his own chapel, and some six years later, when my informant had this talk with me, this man had been the means of starting some fifteen distinct "mission causes," as they are called, amongst the poorest and the lowest, in each of which a definite evangelizing work was at that time going forward, and hundreds of souls were being won for God.

In considering D. L. Moody as a preacher, and the remark-

able work effected by his preaching, it may be as well to begin by referring to his spiritual qualifications. No one could know him without recognising his sterling Christian character and his high moral tone; but he was not, I should say, one of those men (their number is but small) whom you cannot meet without being impressed with the influence of their personal holiness. The spiritual qualification in which he seemed to me to excel was faith, and to this the success of his work was no doubt very largely to be attributed. His faith was that of a little child rather than that of a reasoning man. Its strength and simplicity were all the more wonderful because he had been brought up under Unitarian influences, and because his intellect, although not carefully trained, was of that robust and observant type which doubt most naturally assails. He was by no means naturally credulous or disposed to bow to authority, and yet probably few men of intelligence have ever accepted the Bible with a more simple, and even uncritical, faith. Perhaps this was rendered all the easier in his case by the constant witness which his own work bore to the power of the simple Gospel message as he delivered it. In this he ever reposed the most absolute confidence. He took it for granted that God would confirm His own word with spiritual signs following, and so far from being surprised at success, as some preachers seem to be, nothing would have surprised him more than even the appearance of failure.

No doubt this strong and definite faith obtained its reward in the presence of much spiritual power in his preaching. This is a thing that no man can define, or even describe, yet I feel sure that no spiritually-minded man could go through one of Moody's missions, as I have done, without being conscious of a distinct spiritual influence pervading his ministrations, and often making its presence felt in a very unmistakable way. But this divine unction in one form or another is the condition of all true success in preaching, and therefore it is unnecessary to enlarge on this point in considering what was distinctive in Moody as a preacher.

Nor is it necessary to say much about another condition of success which is equally indispensable, and which he possessed in no ordinary degree—earnestness. This much, however, I would like to say while touching on this point, that, while some men are in earnest, but don't seem to be, and others seem to be in earnest, but are not, no small part of the influence which Moody exercised as a preacher was due to the fact that he seemed to be in earnest *because he was*. I should say that it would have hardly been possible even for the most sceptical cynic to doubt Moody's earnestness, and any such doubt, if possible, would have been refuted by the

witness of his whole career. The man who, when hardly more than a boy, threw up a commercial position in which he was making a thousand a year to face all the hardships, and even privations, of his early life as a Christian worker, and the tremendous labours of his later years, left no honest observer any excuse for doubting either his sincerity or his earnestness. But the point that I desire to lay stress upon is that no such acquaintance with his career was necessary in order to dispose people to believe in his earnestness; it would have been distinctly difficult for any ordinary hearer to do anything else. The natural and almost conversational style, both of speech and utterance, the absence of any attempt at oratorical effect, the tears that sometimes, though not frequently, rose in his eyes, and the suppressed emotion that often betrayed itself in the very tones of the voice, even the expression of his countenance and the flash of his eye, and, indeed, sometimes the startling stamp of his foot, all alike seemed suggestive of intense reality and of an earnestness that flowed from a heart on fire with love for human souls. It might, indeed, have been said of him as of Bunyan's statue in the house of the Interpreter: "He stood as if he pleaded with men."

His intense earnestness and sincerity no doubt had much to do with that which was perhaps his most distinguishing characteristic as a preacher. He always meant business, and, because this was so, his utterances were always distinguished by a singular simplicity and directness of speech. The simplest could always understand him, while the most thoughtful would generally find something to interest them in his fresh and vivid presentation of Divine truth. It did not seem *in him* to beat about the bush, or to wrap up his ideas in a cloud of words. He left the impression on his hearers that he had a message to deliver, and he delivered it in such a way that you forgot the messenger in the message. He did not flourish his hammer about, but brought it right down on the head of the nail, and sent it home to the head with all the nervous energy of a mighty hard-hitter. He was not himself a thinker, nor had he studied systematic theology. Unlike his great predecessor Finney, he dealt but little in doctrinal definitions, yet had he so clear a head that a sophism had no chance with him, and his fund of never-failing common-sense seemed to supply him with weapons more forcible in dealing with the crowd than the careful reasoning of the dialectician. The thing that struck you most about the man was, as I have said, that he "meant business." He did not stand on that platform to ventilate a theory or to air his rhetoric. From first to last he was an advocate with a case to

win: it was Christ's case and the soul's case, and for this the verdict of mind and heart and will were confidently demanded.

Next to his directness of aim, I think, I should name what was its outward and visible sign—his absolute naturalness of manner and delivery. He preached just as he talked, only that he spoke louder. He had no preaching tone, no religious intonation. He was *himself* whether on the platform or off it, and I doubt whether he could have been affected, if he had tried. He spoke very rapidly, especially when he had thoroughly warmed to his subject; for, as he himself put it, a man can do his two hundred words a minute when his heart is full, yet he generally managed to make himself fairly well heard. He used but little action, but when he did it seemed to be perfectly spontaneous, and quite as natural as everything else about him. To some of my readers this habit of being natural may seem a small thing, but my own observation would lead me to an opposite conclusion. Alas! how often have I known an otherwise effective ministry spoilt by an unnatural and affected delivery.

Then there was his marvellous capacity of illustration, which had been developed by a habit of industrious observation and painstaking collection. With all his originality, he was never above making a proper and perfectly legitimate use of other people's materials. If he heard a good thing said, down it went on the inside of an old envelope, and when the day's work was over it would be duly consigned to one of those larger envelopes, which, like Joseph's store cities, treasured the fat of the land. In his resting times these would be considered, and any that seemed serviceable would be woven into the tissue of fresh sermons. He was a great believer in the power of illustration; and I am sure that he was right in this feeling. Just before he began his wonderful mission to the aristocracy of London, I chanced to say to him one day, as we were sitting in the garden together, "Moody, how will your stories go down with these refined and educated West-End folk?" He paused for a moment, and then replied with his usual decision, "I don't know about the stories; but, mind you, 'lustrations will tell with any class of society, from prince to peasant." And the event proved that he was right about the illustrations, and that I was wrong in suggesting doubt about the stories. For Moody's stories were, like himself, unique; his power of telling a story and of pressing it into the service of his subject, when told, has probably never been excelled, and very rarely equalled.

Closely akin to this was his capacity of clothing an antique incident in the garments of to-day, so that his hearers forgot

that it belonged to the first century, and only saw it as if it were quite at home in the nineteenth. His inimitable description of Zaccheus' reparation was perhaps the choicest example of this that I recall; but it was only one amongst many. I give it from memory, and possibly my version of it may differ from reports that may have appeared in print. It carries, however, its own credentials with it in the fact that, after a quarter of a century, it still lingers in my memory. I should indeed be flattering myself if I were to suppose that I could have "evolved from my inner consciousness" anything so vivid and racy. But as I give it from memory, I will not use quotation marks:

I can just picture to myself Zaccheus coming down to his office the day after his conversion. "Now," says he to one of his clerks, "you overhaul the books with me while the other clerk draws up the cheques." They haven't been going into it very long before the clerk says, "There's something wrong here, sir. This gentleman's been overcharged considerable." "I know it," says Zaccheus; "I can remember there was something wrong there; how much do you make it?" "A matter of sixty pounds, sir," says the clerk. "Is that so? Well," says he to the other clerk, "you draw out a cheque." "For how much, sir," says the other, "sixty pounds?" "Why, no—for two hundred and forty pounds. It's fourfold, don't you remember?" The cheques are all drawn out before the morning's over, and in the afternoon I fancy I see one of those clerks going his rounds with his pocket full of them. He calls at the house of the first gentleman named, and happens to meet him at the door. "May I speak to you, sir, for a moment?" says he; "I come from Zaccheus' office on a matter of business." "From Zaccheus! The old usurer! Hasn't he got enough out of me yet?" "I've brought you some money from him this time, sir." "Brought me some money! What! from Zaccheus! Come inside. Now sit down. What's all this you've got to tell me about Zaccheus sending me money?" "Well, you see, sir, Zaccheus has been overhauling his books, and he finds he has overcharged you considerable." "I know he has, the old rascal; there's no mistake about that!" "Well, you see, sir, that being the case, he is desirous to make restitution. He finds that he has overcharged you about sixty pounds, and so he sends you this;" and he hands him the cheque. "Two hundred and forty pounds! What's the meaning of this?" "Why, you see, sir, it's four times sixty. The truth is, Zaccheus is restoring it to you fourfold." "You mean to tell me this is really from Zaccheus, the publican?" "I do, sir; there's no mistake about that." "What's the

matter with the man? Is he going to die?" "No, sir; so far as I know, he is in very good health." "Is he gone off his head, poor chap?" (Here the preacher tapped his forehead suggestively.) "No, sir; to the best of my belief he's still of sound mind." "Well, but how do you account for it? Whatever has taken the man?" "Well, sir, it appears that Zaccheus has been what you may call 'converted.'" "'Converted,' is he? Well, from this time forth I believe in conversion." "Yes, sir, they tell me that he was converted *suddenly* yesterday, when Jesus of Nazareth was passing by." "*Suddenly*, was he? From this day I believe in sudden conversions!" "They *do* say that he was converted up a tree." "Is that so? No conversions like conversions up a tree!"

As one reads it, perhaps one feels that the last two sentences had better have been omitted, as they savour, perhaps, a little too much of the burlesque. Indeed, I cannot absolutely vouch for them; they may have been an accretion, inevitably suggested by what had gone before. But I am quite sure that if, for a moment, carried away by his realism, Moody allowed the smiles of his hearers to develop into actual laughter, he would have pulled them together again in another moment, with some forceful words of application that would go home all the more powerfully just because an instant before he had allowed them to unbend so freely.

But what a new and real thing from that moment forward would the conversion of Zaccheus be to that great audience, composed, no doubt, largely of the lower commercial class; where, perhaps, temptations to fraud and deception are most severely felt, and where the renouncing of the "hidden things of darkness" needs to be pressed in the most practical and forceful way. The fastidious critic may complain that the story has been robbed of its classic dignity, and is vulgarized in its new setting. But such a critic needs to be reminded that the incident was not an old-world story at the time when it transpired, but a very modern fact, and that it had its own setting, which was neither classical nor dignified, but rather commonplace, and even sordid. It is the triumph of grace that elevates the tale above the commonplace or the vulgar, whether its setting be of the nineteenth century or the first. But the average man of the nineteenth century will be all the more impressed with this when it is presented to him in its modern setting.

No doubt the very defects in Moody's education, for which he was himself in no way to blame, rendered this sort of treatment of sacred subjects more possible to him than it would have been to a more highly-educated man; but this consideration, while it must forbid any slavish imitation of

his style, does not detract from the value of the lesson taught us by the undoubted success of his homely presentations of that which we are all too apt to regard as the antique. Bible incidents in their moral aspects are both ancient and modern, and he who only thinks of them as ancient misses half their value. It is the gift of the true "seer," who will ever be a man of his time, to see the present in the past, and thus to make the past live in the present.

No description of this great preacher would do him justice that did not refer both to his humour and also to the exceeding tenderness of his pathos. He was naturally full of fun; no man ever enjoyed a good story more, or laughed more heartily at a real joke. His humour, like everything else about him, was perfectly natural, and in his sermons I never remember its jarring in the least degree on my spiritual sensibilities, nor do I ever remember its leading his hearers aside from the main issue, or weakening an impression already made. Other preachers of the very first rank have within my own observation fallen into this snare, and one has grieved over the witticism which has dissipated a spiritual impression. But Moody was always too practical to commit this error. He never seemed to forget that he was doing business for eternity, and while his use of humour relieved for a moment the tension of one's feeling, it was only that the mind and heart might be brought back to the point, and seize it with all the firmer grip. It enhanced the interest of the message without diminishing its impressiveness.

And then, if he sometimes provoked a smile, he also knew, as few have known, how to touch the heart and bring the tear to the eye. His own intensely sympathetic nature enabled him to feel the full pathos of his stories in each fresh recital, however often he might have told them before, and, with that strange magnetic influence which he possessed in no ordinary degree, he seemed to transmit his emotions to his audience. He always seemed to me to keep the emotional element in its right place, however, and I don't think that even unfriendly critics could have called him an emotional preacher. When the conscience has been roused and the judgment has been enlightened, the appeal to the emotions is often really a help to the struggling will that wants to take the decisive step, but feels the paralyzing check of hostile influences. The tidal wave of stirred emotion sweeps the ship across the bar, but only when the prow is turned in the right direction. Mr. Moody never mistook mere sentiment for conviction, or hysterical emotion for spiritual decision; but he had learnt what Aristotle teaches, that mere cold, intellectual conviction does not sufficiently stir the soul to

induce decisive moral action, and to enable it to throw off the *vis inertia* which holds so many down.

Much more might doubtless be said about the singular gifts of this remarkable man, but let this suffice. I will only add that, with all his remarkable gifts and his unprecedented success in his own line of work, I have hardly ever known a more utterly modest man. I could never detect any signs of elation in him, even in his palmiest days, and I believe it was the same to the end. Surely one cannot think of the close of that unique career without recalling the words of the Hebrew prophet: "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

W. HAY M. H. AITKEN.



ART. V.—HOSPITALS AND NATIONAL GRATITUDE.

A FRIEND of mine was talking to me the other day about his life in a great Northern city, and he said that whenever he felt put out, or worried, or cross, or vexed, or depressed, because things had not been going on as he wished, he went into one or other of the great hospitals, and what he saw there always sent him home calm, refreshed, and contented. He saw men and women racked with pain, weakened with fever, separated from their homes and all that was dearest to them by the terrible stroke of disease, unable to earn their living, and reduced to the greatest prostration, yet all of them quiet, patient, and uncomplaining, grateful for the attentions they received, trustful in the skill of physician and nurse, and hopeful that by God's mercy they would soon be restored to their friends and callings. The sight of so much privation and misery so cheerfully borne made him ashamed of being disturbed and petulant at the little daily accidental troubles of life, so infinitely less in their importance than the real tragedies which were gathered in the hospital ward. And the glimpse of the blessed and holy work of the hospital, all the able minds devoted to the alleviation of pain and the cure of illness, all the gentle hands soothing the long hours of weariness and waiting, made him realize that there were things to be done in life far nobler and more soul-satisfying than the details of business, and he understood how small and passing were the trifles that had annoyed him, and how great and eternal was the work of mercy and doing good.

And even if you cannot all pay visits to hospitals, like my