

a large window and throw out the whole mess." To concentrate too much into one miscellaneous masterpiece—whether it be a salad or a sermon—is the surest way to fail. All sermons should indeed be crammed with the Gospel, and it is nothing less than "the whole counsel of God" that you are commissioned to declare; but to say that all sermons should comprise every facet of Christian doctrine is absurd. "There are those highly illuminated beings," complained Joseph Parker, "who expect a whole scheme of theology in every discourse. I trust," he added, "they will be starved to death."

There is, however, another sense in which the thought behind the title *If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach* may prove salutary; and Richard Baxter's injunction—"preach as a dying man to dying men"—is not simply to be discounted as morbid hyperbole. For every gathering of God's people for worship is a quite distinctive event; and though a congregation may meet twice a Sunday all the year round, no such event ever exactly repeats itself. Always there are differentiating circumstances; always "Now is the accepted time." One thing at least is clear: we have no right in our preaching to waste time on side-issues and irrelevances. In other words, if we are not determined that in every sermon Christ is to be preached, it were better that we should resign our commission forthwith and seek some other vocation. [Alexander Whyte, describing his Saturday walks and talks with Marcus Dods, declared: "Whatever we started off with in our conversations, we soon made across country, somehow, to Jesus of Nazareth, to His death, and His resurrection, and His indwelling"; and unless our sermons make for the same goal, and arrive at the same mark, they are simply beating the air. It was

a favourite dictum of the preachers of a bygone day that, just as from every village in Britain there was a road which, linking on to other roads, would bring you to London at last, so from every text in the Bible, even the remotest and least likely, there was a road to Christ. Possibly there were occasions when strange turns of exegesis and dubious allegorizings were pressed into service for the making of that road; but the instinct was entirely sound which declared that no preaching which failed to exalt Christ was worthy to be called Christian preaching. This is our great master-theme. In the expressive, forthright language of John Donne: "All knowledge that begins not, and ends not with His glory, is but a giddy, but a vertiginous circle, but an elaborate and exquisite ignorance."

I

But what does it mean—to "preach Christ"? The phrase calls for definition. I suggest that you should go, for the true touchstone in this matter, to the preaching of the early Church. When Henry Ward Beecher began his ministry, he was baffled by a disappointing absence of results and an almost total lack of response. The chariot wheels dragged; there were no signs of an awakening; the indifferent remained sunk in their indifference. But one day the thought gripped him: "There was a reason why, when the apostles preached, they succeeded, and I will find it out if it is to be found out." That was sound strategy, and it had an immediate reward. It would be well for us if a similar experience should drive us back to the New Testament, to search for the secret of the first generation of preachers of the Word. What was

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