

Attention!

windows could not be opened? Would any of you hire such a dwelling? Yet Gothic architecture and silly pride make many persons renounce the wholesome sash window for little holes in the ceiling, or bird traps in the windows, and so places are made far less comfortable than Nebuchadnezzar's furnace was to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Provided all such chapels were properly insured, I could not pray for their preservation from fire. Even where the windows will open they are often kept closed by the month together, and from Sunday to Sunday the impure atmosphere is unchanged. This ought not to be endured. I know some people do not notice such things, and I have heard it remarked that foxes are not killed by the stench of their own holes; but I am not a fox, and bad air makes me dull, and my hearers dull too. A gust of fresh air through the building might be to the people the next best thing to the gospel itself; at least it would put them into a fit frame of mind to receive the truth. Take trouble on week days to remove the hindrance arising from foul air. In my former chapel, in Park Street, I mentioned to my deacons several times my opinion that the upper panes of the iron-framed windows had better be taken out, as the windows were not made to open. I mentioned this several times, and nothing came of it; but it providentially happened one Monday that somebody removed most of those panes in a masterly manner, almost as well as if they had been taken out by a glazier. There was considerable consternation, and much conjecture as to who had committed the crime, and I proposed that a reward of five pounds should be offered for the discovery of the offender, who when found should receive the amount as a present. The reward was not forthcoming, and therefore I have not felt it to be my duty to inform against the individual. I trust none of you will suspect *me*, for if you do I shall have to confess that I have walked with the stick which let the oxygen into that stifling structure.

SOMETIMES THE MANNERS OF OUR PEOPLE ARE UNFIT TO ATTENTION; they are not in the habit of attending; they attend the chapel but do not attend to the preacher. They are accustomed to look round at every one who enters the place, and they come in at all times, sometimes with much stamping, squeaking of boots, and banging of doors. I was preaching once to a people who continually looked round, and I adopted the

LECTURES TO MY STUDENTS

expedient of saying, 'Now, friends, as it is so very interesting to you to know who comes in, and it disturbs me so very much for you to look round, I will, if you like, describe each one as he comes in, so that you may sit and look at me, and keep up at least a show of decency.'

I described one gentleman who came in, who happened to be a friend whom I could depict without offence, as 'a very respectable gentleman who had just taken his hat off', and so on; and after that one attempt I found it was not necessary to describe any more, because they felt shocked at what I was doing, and I assured them that I was much more shocked that they should render it necessary for me to reduce their conduct to such an absurdity. It cured them for the time being, and I hope for ever, much to their pastor's joy.

We will now suppose that this is set right. You have let the foul air out of the place, and reformed the manners of the people. What next? *IN ORDER TO GET ATTENTION, THE FIRST GOLDEN RULE IS, ALWAYS SAY SOMETHING WORTH HEARING.* Most persons possess an instinct which leads them to desire to hear a good thing. They have a similar instinct, also, which you had better take note of, namely, that which prevents their seeing the good of attentively listening to mere words. It is not a severe criticism to say that there are ministers whose words stand in a very large proportion to their thoughts, in fact, their words hide their thoughts, if they have any. They pour out heaps of chaff, and, perhaps, there may be somewhere or other an oat or two, but it would be hard to say where. Congregations will not long attend to words, words, words, words, and nothing else. Amongst the commandments I am not aware of one which runs thus: 'Thou shalt not be verbose', but it may be comprehended under the command, 'Thou shalt not steal', for it is a fraud upon your hearers to give them words instead of spiritual food. 'In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin', even in the best preacher. Give your hearers something which they can treasure up and remember; something likely to be useful to them, the best matter from the best of places, solid doctrine from the divine Word. Give them manna fresh from the skies; not the same thing over and over again, in the same form *ad nauseam*, like workhouse bread cut into the same shape all the year round. Give them something striking, something that a man might get up in the middle of the night to hear and which is worth his walking fifty miles to listen to. You are