

LECTURES TO MY STUDENTS

ploughmen and herdsmen take up graceful attitudes without any idea that they are doing so. I think it is also true of the Italians, for wherever I have seen a Roman man or woman – no matter whether they are sleeping upon the Spagna steps, or sitting upon a fragment of the baths of Caracalla, or carrying a bundle on their heads, or riding a mule, they always look like studies for an artist; yet this is the last thing which ever crosses their minds. Those picturesque peasants have never taken lessons in callisthenics, nor do they trouble their heads as to how they appear to the foreigner; pure nature, delivered from mannerism, primness, and affectation, moulds their habits into gracefulness. We should be foolish to imitate Greeks or Italians, except in their freedom from all imitation, but it were well if we could copy their unconstrained and natural action. There is no reason why a Christian should be a clown, and there are a great many reasons why a minister should not be a boor. As Rowland Hill said that he could not see why Satan should have the best tunes, so neither can I see why he should have the most graceful speakers!

Now, leaving posture, let us more distinctly notice *ACTION* in preaching; this also is a secondary and yet an important item. Our first observation shall be, *IT SHOULD NEVER BE EXCESSIVE*. In this matter bodily exercise profiteth little. We cannot readily judge when action is excessive, for what would be excessive in one man may be most fitting and proper in another. Different races employ different action in speaking.

Two Englishmen will talk very quietly and soberly to one another compared with a couple of Frenchmen. Notice our Gallic neighbours: they talk all over, and shrug their shoulders, and move their fingers, and gesticulate most vehemently. Very well, then, we may allow a French preacher to be more demonstrative in preaching than an Englishman, because he is so in ordinary speech. I am not sure that a French divine is so as a matter of fact, but if he were so it could be accounted for by the national habit. If you and I were to converse in the Parisian fashion we should excite ridicule, and, in the same way, if we were to become violent and vehement in the pulpit we might run the same risk; for if Addison be an authority, English orators use less gestures than those of other countries. As it is with races so is it with men: some naturally gesticulate more than others, and if it be really natural, we have little fault to find.

Posture, Action, Gesture, etc.

For instance, we cannot censure John Gough's marvellous gesticulation and perambulation, for he would not have been Gough without them. I wonder how many miles he walks in the course of one of his lectures! Did we not see him climb the sides of a volcano in pursuit of a bubble? How we pitied him as we saw him ankle deep in the hot ashes! Then he was away, away at the other end of the platform at Exeter Hall, apostrophizing a glass of water; but he only stopped there a moment, and anon made another rush over the corns of the temperance brethren in the front row. Now, this was right enough for John Gough; but if you, John Smith or John Brown, commence these perambulations you will soon be likened to the wandering Jew, or to the polar bear, at the Zoological Gardens, which for ever goes backwards and forwards in its den.

Martin Luther was wont to smite with his fist at such a rate that they show, at Eisenach, a board – I think a three-inch board – which he broke while hammering at a text. The truth of the legend has been doubted, for it has been asserted that those delicate hands, which could play so charmingly upon the guitar, could hardly have been treated so roughly; but if the hand be an index of its owner's character, we can well believe it, for strength and tenderness were marvellously combined in Luther. There was much delicacy and sensitiveness about Luther's mind, yet these never diminished, but rather increased, its tremendous energy. It is by no means difficult to believe that he could smash up a plank, from the style in which he struck out at the Pope; and yet we can well imagine that he would touch the strings of his guitar with a maiden's hand; even as David could play skilfully upon the harp, and yet a bow of steel was broken by his arms.

John Knox is said at one time to have been so feeble that, before he entered the pulpit, you would expect to see him drop down in a fainting fit; but once before the audience he seemed as though he would 'ding the pulpit in blads', which, being interpreted, means in English that he would knock it into shivers. That was evidently the style of the period when Protestants were fighting for their very existence, and the Pope and his priests and the devil and his angels were aroused to special fury: yet I do not suppose that Melancthon thought it needful to be quite so tremendous, nor did Calvin hammer and slash in a like manner. At any rate, you need not try to break three-inch boards, for there might be a