

**GREAT MODERN
PREACHERS, SKETCHES
AND CRITICISMS**

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Great Modern Preachers, Sketches and Criticisms by William Dorling

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WILLIAM DORLING

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GREAT MODERN PREACHERS.

PREFACE.

THE following papers are intended to include a careful survey of the ablest preaching of our time. To this end an attempt has been made to regard it in its representative aspects. There are diversities of preaching as of literature. These diversities have been cheerfully recognised and appreciated according to their respective claims. It was not intended to use these pages for caustic and trenchant criticism. It has been sought to portray such preaching as may be thankfully commended, rather than to furnish entertainment for those who take pleasure in the detection and publication of faults. It is not denied that criticism of the most severe and detailed nature may be of essential service at times; such, however, is not the purport of these sketches.

The greatness of a preacher has not been determined by the size of his congregation. But due regard has been had to the effect produced by the preaching which is here described. It is with acknowledged, rather than with obscure talent, that this book is concerned. There are great preachers in remote and unfrequented places whose merits fame has not

and may never acknowledge. Their work and claims wait for higher recognition and an ampler reward than the world can bestow.

No review of the theological opinions of the several preachers was contemplated; therefore, they have been selected from various churches. Sometimes it has been necessary to remember the relation of certain portions of the preaching under examination to particular doctrinal or ecclesiastical opinions; but only so far as such considerations might help in the better understanding of the preaching itself.

It only remains to add an expression of the hope that these essays towards a fair comprehension of the true sources and secrets of the best pulpit power of the present age may be of some service to both preachers and hearers.

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GREAT MODERN PREACHERS.

The Rev. Alexander Maclaren, B. D.,

MANCHESTER.

THE Baptist Church has been able to boast of many eminent preachers. It is partly to be accounted for, perhaps, through the intensity of conviction which is generally to be associated with the religious life and opinions of the Baptist people. They have less than other religious sects, taken up with their profession from any slight preferences which may have been conceived for some interesting phase of truth. What they hold, they hold with the firm grasp of the whole mind. From the time of their earliest history as a separate and recognised religious community, they have been known for their tenacious reverence for the opinions which they have professed. Let the fact cover a large space; it is fair to say that such tenacity of conviction will materially contribute to the production of unusual pulpit power. Far fewer in numbers, they have yet greatly surpassed the Wesleyan Methodist Church in this respect. They have had in their pulpits some of the ablest preachers of this century. Robert Hall has, perhaps, had no equal in it in respect of what may be called, with a special signification, pulpit eloquence. The whole religious world has heard of him; and to any person who has ever had the slightest conception of the relation of this eloquent man to the preaching of his time, it is a pleasure to meet with any one who used to listen to his sermons in the towns which are associated with his memory. He was a remarkable pulpit phenomenon. Whether it is to be justified or not, those who speak of

him with any amount of enthusiasm generally assign to him the first place among all modern preachers. They have "never heard any one who was his equal." He was unlike all other preachers. There was something about him which cannot be described, which beggars description. John Foster remarked that, "as a preacher, none of those contemporaries who had not seen him in the pulpit, or of his readers in another age, would be able to conceive an adequate idea of Mr. Hall." It will be safe to admit, on the part of those who never saw the greatest preacher of his day, but who can accept the testimony which many consenting witnesses have borne in respect to him, that he was without doubt a preacher whose eloquence centuries would hardly eclipse.

But in our own day the Baptists have had a preacher whose fame has been even more widely spread and acknowledged than that of Mr. Hall. Mr. Spurgeon has addressed a vast audience, and continues to maintain his influence over that order of mind which his preaching has always been designed to affect. A wide interval separates Mr. Spurgeon from Robert Hall. But the former in his way has as strong a claim upon the historian of the pulpit of the nineteenth century as the latter. The stately diction of Hall, and the robust and simple speech of Spurgeon, have each their uses for the Church; and the Church has in neither case been reluctant to acknowledge the use. So long as there are simple people by thousands in our midst to whom ornate eloquence might give pleasure, but could hardly impart profit, it is right that way should be made for and honour done to the man who can utter simple words of wisdom and power to his fellow-men.

Mr. Maclaren, of Manchester, comes between these two eminent preachers. He is unlike them both. Physically he has not the "large built, robust figure," which Foster describes as Mr. Hall's bodily characteristic, nor the burly and capable structure which we all know to be owned by the preacher of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. He is a weak, delicate man, who looks too fragile to bear much of the strain which affects so painfully the life of a popular preacher. His oratory—for