

BILLY SUNDAY AMONG THE PREACHERS.

By Rev. J. Gregory Mantle.

An opportunity to hear Billy Sunday talk to the preachers of New York was too good an opportunity to lose. Admission was by ticket, but I made up my mind, if refused admittance, to appeal to the famous evangelist himself, as hailing from a city which was down on his programme for a Billy Sunday campaign. I was not refused admission; I was simply inspected by the policeman whose business it was to keep out all doubtful characters. He eyed me up and down; concluded I was not bent on any disturbance, and suffered me to make my way to the gallery of the spacious Calvary Baptist Church in 57th street.

What an assemblage of preachers. It was estimated that there were between two and three thousand present, many being obliged to stand. There were the old preachers; the veterans who were reluctant to relinquish their place in the van, but who were unable any longer to bear the burden and heat of the day. There were the middle-aged preachers; virile, brainy, intellectual; the leaders of the religious life of the Metropolis. There were the young preachers, fresh from Theological Seminaries where they had been trained to question much, that with magnificent dogmatism, Billy Sunday insisted upon an absolutely necessity to a preacher's success.

From the audience I turned to the platform and closely eyed the man who was able to bring together on a Monday morning this host of preachers of the gospel. He moved restlessly in his seat, as if realizing the magnitude of the task that lay before him, and I liked him all the more because he evidently felt "Who is Sufficient."

When the preachers had been made to sing "Brighten the Corner where you are," under the leadership of "Rodey" and his trombone, the famous evangelist proceeded to explain that he was not there to seek an invitation to New York. "I wouldn't walk across the street to get one," he exclaimed. "I have found out after twenty years of service that I can't walk ahead of God, and when He wants me to come to New York I shall come, and no power on earth or hell will prevent it."

Having thus delivered himself, Billy Sunday plunged into his subject, and in five minutes he had arrested the attention of his vast audience who adapted themselves to the mood and message of the evangelist.

He first explained and then denounced the self-complacent spirit that is the heart-break of all faithful preachers. "Because people warm about seventeen inches of a pew once a week, and pay their debts they think they will be saved." "Well," said Billy, with tremendous emphasis, "if that's all they do, they'll go to hell." "This business of being saved by character is mere tommyrot spouted out in orthodox pulpits. The people who sit in the pews are so self-satisfied, their minds are so filled with business and society that it would take forty thousand Gabriels with trumpets to awaken them. The end of this self-complacent spirit is that we have seven million people in this country who are not church members. I don't wonder the old world is going to hell so fast."

Then Billy turned his 42 centimeter guns upon the "isms" and "schisms" that have attained such notriety and displaced the gospel of Jesus Christ. "This negative preaching

that has characterized the pulpit utterances of the last fifty years must come to an end. I've got no time to spend on this higher criticism, advanced thought and new theology. You listen to a lot of preachers spouting the evolution at you today, and you can't tell whether man came from a zoological garden or from the Garden of Eden. I have never tried to go off on a tangent, reiterating theological views culled out by some old professors over a mug of beer and amid the fumes of tobacco in Leipzig or Heidelberg. We should write just one new article in our creed and that is: I believe in Hell. Hell—plain old hell—H-e-double-l—that's what I mean."

For the benefit of the young preachers and theological students, the evangelist imitated a young preacher who, after a short ministry in a small town, called the members of his flock together and said: "My brethren, I have been with you only a few weeks, but I have noticed that you are departing widely from the precepts laid down in the Christian faith. Unless you decide to accept some other standard of conduct, I very much fear that you will ultimately arrive at a certain place, the name of which is too terrible to mention."

This monologue was recited in an exaggerated tone of precise lady-like exhortation. Then, bang, went Billy's fist on the pulpit, and instead of the lady-like curate there was a baseball player, delivering his familiar twirl, like a pitcher winding up to shoot over a strike, and yelling at the top of his voice: "I would have told them they were going plumb to Hell."

"Some of you don't like my mannerisms. Well, I don't like yours. Some of you tell me you don't like my methods. Well, I'm not struck with yours, so we're even there. Many of you can preach the gospel better than I can, but you can't preach a better gospel. You talk of your ethics. Why they tell you not to shy your bootjack at the cat howling at night on the back fence because it's your neighbor's daughter who used to take music lessons. That's their philosophy for you. You want me to put the soft pedal on Christian Science. Shall I tell you what Christian Science is? It is three per cent. religion, three per cent. hypnotism, three per cent. hinduism, and ninety-one per cent. humbug."

The disciples of Mrs. Eddy would have been mortified had they heard the loud applause which greeted this summing up of an exceedingly popular religion.

"To hell with this twentieth century religion," cried the speaker. "It's going there anyway. You start in to rebuild the religion of Jesus Christ according to the twentieth century idea. You take a little from Buddha and some from Confucius. Your work is a little New Thought, and some Christian Science. You graft on a portion of Mohammedanism and mix in a little Mormonism for effect, and you have everything but Christ in the mixup, and everything except the good old-fashioned belief that has saved men from sin and lifted the world out of darkness. I am radically orthodox," Billy shouted, "Orthodox from top to bottom, and I am proud of it." "You say I am dogmatic, and so is the Bible."

Before he closed, Billy Sunday said he was going to say something his audience would not like. "I believe all church pews should be free," he said. "Some of you don't agree with me, of course, but I'm sorry for you." Then came a bit of the finest acting in an address which was full of dramatic power. "This is the way you act," said the speaker, "When a rich sinner comes into church with a gold chain,

a diamond ring, and a roll of notes in his pocket."

Rushing over to the other side of the platform, Billy picked up a large plush-cushioned chair, brought it close to the pulpit, bowed in the most affable manner to the imaginary wealthy churchman and with his face wreathed in smiles, begged him to be seated.

"Now here comes a Weary Willie, a sort of a bum. What do you do with him? This way, sir, right this way," and Billy has disappeared down the pulpit steps, all his smiles and affability gone, conducting the poor down-and-out to a most undesirable seat behind a pillar. This drama, in denunciation of the caste-system that is such a hindrance to the gospel, was so cleverly presented and true to life, that whether the preachers agreed or not, the building simply rang with applause.

The speaker now proposed to close, but the audience so vehemently demanded more that Billy went on again, and the harder he hit the preachers the more demonstrative they became. An evening paper in the notice of the evangelist's visit, had as its headline, "Billy Raps 'em and they like it."

"I'm going to stand right here and tell the world, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. I'm going to stick right to the old-fashioned religion, proclaim salvation through the blood of Jesus, and preach the gospel just as I get it from this book, and let the monkey preachers and the Higher Critics and the New Thinkers and the Theosophists and the Christian Scientists all go to hell on their several ways."

"Sit down," he said, "and examine yourselves. Is your church evangelistic? Any church that is not evangelistic owes both God and the world an apology for its useless existence. The church that is not evangelistic is a church on ice. A church that is evangelistic is a church on fire. There never was a time when the people were more hungry for God than they are right now, and what are you doing to lead them to Him?"

"What are you doing to shake up your congregation? Have you told that old drunken bum down there in the front pew that he's a disgrace to the church, or have you been afraid to speak to him because he's one of your leading members. Have you told that man over there who is living with another woman, breaking his wife's heart, and ruining his family, that he is an adulterer?"

"In this twentieth century religion we don't call a thief a thief any more. He's a kleptomaniac. A drunkard is a dipsomaniac. An adulterer is an affinity. You may call a polecat a guinea pig, but it stinks just the same." "I know a family of church goers who take their pews in furs and silks, and the head of that family owns two blocks of houses of ill-fame. When the pastor remonstrated with him he had to pack his bag and beat it from that church." This brought from the audience loud cries of "Shame! Shame!"

Then came a touch of pathos. We saw the speaker's mother lying desperately ill in a hospital in Chicago. And we saw her son securing the best doctors, the best nurses and the best attention. "Nothing was too good, for she was my mother. She gave me birth; she nursed me at her breast; she taught me to pray. I love the church as I love my mother, and I would die for her. I have said these things because I love her, and because I see the parasites clinging to her and draining away her life. I am not afraid of being called illiberal, I am only afraid of being untrue. Let me once again assume the ag-