

How He Looks to the Outside

How the "Billy" Sunday Campaign in Omaha Strikes the Man Who Takes a Bird's-Eye View Without Getting Into It Will Interest Our Readers. A Week Ago, the Kansas City Star Sent A. B. McDonald of Its Staff to Size up the Tabernacle Doings, and Here is the Story that He Turned Into His Paper:

A GOOD many books, and thousands of columns and pages in newspapers and magazines have been written about "Billy" Sunday, and one may read it all and then fail to have a true impression of him. To get that you must see him at work, and sit under the spell of his cyclonic preaching. The one outstanding impression he gives is that he is sincere, that he believes himself consecrated by God to carry on the work he is doing; that he is "God's man," with a message for mankind, drifting away from God. You hear him preach and you know for a surety that "Billy" Sunday "knows" that he has been commissioned of God to go out into the highways and byways and shout to humanity.

"Stop! Stop! You're on the way to hell." No one who hears "Billy" Sunday doubts his sincerity. People who scoff at religion, and at the personal devil and the brimstone hell preached by "Billy" Sunday, admit that he believes it. "He's sincere, all right; he believes it," they say. He calls himself "God's messenger." When he prays he talks with God as you would talk with a very dear friend; no "theeing" nor "thouing."

Those "Billy" Sunday Prayers

Those prayers. At first they shocked the church-going people of Omaha, but they made a great hit with the un-churched throng. It suited them. If Jesus was a man's best friend, and had saved him from death and hell, why shouldn't he talk with him informally?

And now all Omaha delights in "Billy's" prayers.

He has been preaching for nearly an hour, the sweat spattering from his face and neck like drops of water from the back of a wet dog when he shakes himself. His clothing is soaked, wet as a rag held under a pump nozzle. He has been on top of the pulpit and down again, on a chair and off again a half-dozen times. He has thrown himself prone, and leaped up again, agile as a cat. He has raced and whirled and leaped and gyrated, and shouted. Down in the great audience women are sobbing fitfully, and you see a man here and there lift a hand and brush the tears from his eyes, and as you peer from the platform down into that level sea of 10,000 faces under the glaring electric lights the expression and the attitude of each is the same. The 10,000 faces seem to merge into one great face, and one great pair of eyes fastened upon the preacher, solemnly listening, filled with tense emotion, hanging upon each word.

And suddenly, without a pause, "Billy" shuts his eyes and says:

"Well, Jesus, when I came here tonight I didn't know whether I'd be able to pull through or not. This cold I caught in Lincoln, Jesus, it's bothering me some. But you helped me, dear Lord, just like you always have. You never failed me yet.

"Help old Omaha, God, throw your arms around her, Lord, and help her. Go into the barber shops, Lord, into the court house and city hall, into hotels and stores, factories and saloons, Lord. Help the down-and-out, Lord. Help the man in the street, the floater and drunkard. He's on the ropes, and GROGGY, Lord. The devil has him almost out; one more stiff uppercut would finish him. Help him, Lord, to square his shoulders, raise his dukes and cry: 'Come on, old devil, there's one more good punch in me yet.'

"Billy's voice trembles with feeling. He leans over, his eyes still shut tight, his wet face gleaming in the electric light, and slaps the side of his pine desk with the flat of his hand, and he shouts:

But No One Laughs

"Help me, oh Jesus, help me to save all in Omaha that are rushing pell-mell to hell so fast you can't see them for the dust."

No one laughs. It does not sound irreverent. Not when "Billy" Sunday says it. There is a solemn hush on the great audience.

"Help me, Lord, and give me strength to do your work. And you know, Lord, that as long as I can stand on two feet, and as long as I have voice enough to be heard, I'm going to do your work, and when you see fit to call: 'Three strikes and out, Bill, go to bed,' I'll keep at it.

"Help me, Lord, to make the people see the semaphores of danger. Help them to hear me crying: Stop! Stop!!! Help us all."

Suddenly his tone changes to one of defiance.

"Say, you old devil! You old reprobate! Haven't you done enough harm? Aren't you satisfied? You've had your heel on the neck of Omaha for many years, you've sent thousands to drunkards' graves. You miserable whelp, you've sent young men to hell, to the penitentiary down here at Lincoln; young women to hell. Aren't you ready to stop?" This at the top of his voice.

"With the help of God and the church, I defy you. I am going to lick you, right here in Omaha. I'm going to whip you to a frazzle, with the help of the Lord, hallelujah."

It may read irreverent in cold type. But not from the lips of "Billy" Sunday.

"Heart to Heart" with God

One night he finished preaching and then shut his eyes and prayed:

"Well, Jesus, I don't know if there's any need of me saying any more tonight. I've tried as well as I could to point the way —" and so on.

Another time he prays:

"I wonder, Lord, that you're so patient. Lord,

I try to preach the truth the best I know how. I try to do what you want me to. You just give me the strength, Lord, and lead me, that's what I want. Lead me, and I'll follow you into a graveyard. I'll crawl into my coffin when you give me the word, Lord. Anywhere you lead me."

One night there was a great delegation of Union Pacific men at the meeting and, when Sunday came to pray he said:

"Lord, you bless Charlie Ware for sending all these men up here from the Union Pacific shops. I don't know, Lord, whether Charlie is a Christian or not, but his heart's in the right place, and if he isn't a Christian he ought to be."

Suddenly he turns to where Homer Rodeheaver, his singer, is sitting, and says:

"Rody, you send a season pass to Charlie Ware, bring him up here and let him hear a message from God. Do that tomorrow, Rody. And now, Lord, I'll think better of the Union Pacific. I used to think of it only as a two-track road going out here a ways and then branching off. Now I'll always think of it as a flesh-and-blood road because of this gathering of Union Pacific men here tonight."

"Billy" Sunday's Acrobatics

A good deal has been written about "Billy" Sunday's acrobatics. Many have said he affects all that. He is never still one moment while he is preaching. His platform is fifteen feet long and eight or ten feet wide, covered with green carpet. In the middle of the front edge is a pine box that serves as a desk. But it and the platforms are doubly re-enforced with braces and stays. If they weren't, "Billy" would knock and stamp and shake them down.

His knuckles and the palms of his hands are

covered with thick callouses from pounding and thumping that pine desk. It resounds like a sounding board with the whacks he gives it. Once in a while he leans over and slaps the side of it with his palm. You wonder he doesn't break the bones of his hand.

The people of Omaha have been wondering for three weeks when he is going to lose his balance and fall from the platform. He rushes at it, slides three feet across the carpet, brings up on the edge, leans over it, one leg behind him in the air, and you feel sure he is gone. But he never falls. He gyrates, spins like a top, leaps, stamps, his arms whirl, the cords of his neck stand out like hard-traded whip thongs, his face purples, the sweat runs down, he shucks his coat and flings it far from him, and all the time he is talking rapidly, the words coming like volleys from a machine gun.

He Is Never Quiet

And many have said this was acting, all "put on" for effect, all carefully studied out and rehearsed, as an actor rehearses his part.

One afternoon I went into his room to see him. "Farmer" Burns, an old wrestler who trained Frank Gotch, the world's champion, had just left,

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energy and fire, because his soul is on fire and his face is aglow with it, and every fiber of his being is quivering. He had to leap up there to give vent to his exploding energy.

And there's nothing irreverent in all of that, either, for Sunday is an athlete, muscled like a wild cat, graceful as an antelope, and his leaps and bounds, his lying down and gettings up seem to fit into the argument as needfully as do the words. They simply emphasize.

A Past Master at Slang

And so with his slang that so much has been written about, you listen to a sermon in rapt attention, catching his enthusiasm, keyed up to an intense pitch, leaning forward, watching every move, hearing every word, your heart beating faster, gasping for breath, swallowing back that lump that rises in your throat, sneakingly wiping the tears from your eyes so no one will see them, and when it is all over you don't remember to have heard any slang.

You do know that what he said was all true, every word of it, and that he put it up to you in a way you understood. You caught yourself nudging your neighbor and saying:

"Isn't it the truth?"

And yet, when you read the sermon in the paper next morning, some parts seem a little slangy. For instance, when he is defying the vice element of Omaha:

"Come on, you forces of hell. Come, you hog-jawed, weasel-eyed, peanut-brained gang of infamous thugs. Come on, you sponsors of barlotry. Come on, you black-hearted liars, come on."

But when you heard it you were not shocked; not at all; it was fitting to be said, and all true and applicable, and you were glad he said it.

You know, after you have heard him, that he can't preach any other way. It's natural. His

eccentricities are "Billy Sundayisms." And so they all fit in, and are pleasing.

He is talking about the evil influence of bad company and he leaps to a chair, puts his open palms each side of his mouth, forming a magazine, and shouts:

"If you turn a polecat loose in a parlor you know which will change first, the polecat or the parlor," and it doesn't sound out of place. It is good, sensible argument, and it goes home to the hearts of that vast audience like a rip-hammer blow on red-hot iron. They get his meaning like a ball hot off the bat right into the hands of the man on first.

