

ROBERTSON OF BRIGHTON.

The following estimate of the cause of the popular interest in the published sermons of Frederick W. Robertson, is taken from the Rev. Dr. Dewart's essay on "Robertson of Brighton," in his "Essays for the Times," recently published. (Methodist Book Rooms, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax. Price, 75c.)

"In following the course of Robertson's outward history we discover no exceptional distinction that separates him from his contemporaries. Many, whom oblivion enshrouds in her impenetrable shades, have passed through their struggles, successes and sorrows. It is the light cast back upon his life by the blaze of fame and popularity kindled by the publication of his sermons, a few years after his death, that invests the incidents of his life and mental growth with such uncommon interest. He vindicates his right to be enrolled with the gifted sons of genius, by the fact that at the point where common names grow dim and pass away from sight for ever, his only begins to gather around it a deeper interest and to shine with clearer and more enduring light. In the history of the British pulpit no similar productions (left by their author without a thought of publication) have secured equal attention. What is the secret of this influence? To all thoughtful minds his deep, though subdued earnestness, his singular felicity of illustration, his glowing imagination, flashing light on the obscure and giving life and form to the abstract, his clear musical voice, "which seldom rose, but when it did, yielded a rich volume of sound toned like a great bell," and the force and beauty of his thoughts must have made him, in the best sense of the terms, popular and attractive as a preacher. But all this would not fully account for the interest of his sermons as read. The printed sermons of many distinguished preachers unveil no power to account for their popularity. Those who ascribe the charm of these fragmentary remains simply to beauty of style and the congeniality of their doctrinal teaching to the unrenowned heart, evince an incapacity to comprehend Robertson or grasp the secret of his intellectual power. No one cause will account for this popularity, which is the result of several distinct elements of interest combined.

He grappled manfully with some of the perplexing problems of theology which

disturb the minds of men; hence to those who had felt these difficulties his attempted solutions, whether entirely satisfactory or not, would possess a special attraction. Much also was due to the fact that his inquiries led him in the direction in which a good deal of the theological thought of Britain and America was already drifting. He had a rare capacity of sympathy with the most diverse feelings. It is a great point gained when we feel that a preacher or writer understands our doubts and can fully enter into our perplexities. His natural courage brought out in bold relief his independence as a thinker. He dared to utter whatever he believed to be true. He hurled stern words of rebuke against every form of oppression, and spoke tender words of sympathy with humanity in every condition of sorrow. His denunciations of all wrong-doing were fierce and blistering, something in which men of different creeds could unite and sympathize. But above all these is the glowing earnestness of his soul. His thoughts are on fire. His mind is a volcano, throwing out in liquid streams the mental ore that has been dissolved by its intense heat. Not the beauty of his style, though his language is often eminently felicitous and expressive; not the grandeur of his thoughts, though frequently truly sublime; not the keenness of his intellectual glance, which often, like sheet-lightning in the darkness, unveils a hidden world of thought; not the logical force of his arguments, in this they are often deficient; but above every other source of attractive interest we are disposed to place the fact that they are the utterances of one who has himself felt deeply, and struggled anxiously to solve the perplexing problems of being and truth. Every thought has been molten in the furnace of his own heart before it was coined into those burning words that quicken the pulses of the blood, and convey to the heart of the reader something of the emotional warmth in which they originated. He possessed that indefinable thing which we call genius; whose potency we feel but cannot describe. In the suggestive fragments he has left behind him it may be truly said,

"Bright-eyed Fancy, hovering o'er,
Scatters from her pictured urn
Thoughts that breathe and words that
burn."