

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

FORSYTH ON PREACHING.

By Rev. R. G. MacBeth, M.A.

The great book by Principal Forsyth, "Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind," being the Yale lectures for 1907, has been in the hands of readers for several months. Many have, doubtless, read it and put it aside for the claims of some more recent volume. Of making many books there is no end and no one can hope to read them all. A great number of them are not worth reading. But there are some books that have to be read more than once if we are to get the real good out of them and this book of Forsyth's on Preaching is one of these deep works. Those who have heard him and those who have read him before, would be prepared for something the opposite of superficial. And in the preface to this book he frankly warns the mere skimming reader of this fact. "I confess," says the Principal, "I have kept in view rather students than mere readers—those who do not resent an unfamiliar word, who are attracted rather than impatient towards a dark saying, who find the hard texts the mighty ones, and who do not grudge stopping the carriage to examine a mysterious cave or to consider a great prospect." This prepares us for a book that we must read with all our faculties on the alert and which we will do well to keep on the desk for a second or even a third study before we put it on the shelf. Even there one would suggest putting it in the "reference" shelf, for it will pay rich dividends to the persistent miner. In the meantime, we say to every minister that it is worth his while to get the book if he has not long ere this secured it.

The general position of Principal Forsyth in relation to what is commonly but somewhat vaguely called "modern thought," is well enough known. He is progressively conservative. He discards some of the views of the Bible which once obtained and accepts many of the positions reached by advanced critics. But on the other hand he holds unwaveringly to the great central doctrine of the cross of the Divine Redeemer and refuses to be moved from the supreme fact of his own experience by any human theory of any kind. In this connection he says, for instance, as to the virgin birth: "Was such a mode of entry into the world indispensable for Christ's work of redemption? If it was otiose to that work we can leave it to the methods of the critics. But if it was essential to that work we must refuse them the last word. If it was essential to the perfect holiness of Christ's redeeming obedience, then it must stand whatever the critics say. I am not here called on to decide that question. I only quote it as an illustration of method, to show what is meant by saying that there is a dogmatic criticism of the Bible higher than what is called the higher." This is not a final statement, but it shows the point past which the Principal refuses to be moved by any man-made theory. He is a whole-hearted believer in the central facts of the life and work of Christ, he refuses to minimize the awfulness of sin, and he sees no hope for a lost world other than Christ and Him crucified. The Cross is ever the centre of his thought and one who reads the book recalls how Dr. Forsyth a few years ago at a Boston convention gave such a passionately powerful address on that theme that the vast audience, thrilled by the grandeur of its conception, rose and sang, "When I Survey the Wond-

rous Cross." This much we say as to Principal Forsyth in his relation to "Modern Thought."

As he opens his book the lecturer declares his belief that for the churches of the Reformation preaching must always remain as the most distinctive institution in Christianity. This is because the starting point and source of preaching is the Bible. The Bible is the preacher's charter and he must always come back to it or be driven with the wind and tossed. He advocates strongly Biblical preaching in the best sense of that expression, but deprecates the fact that the disuse of the Bible by the laity makes it in many cases difficult. Speaking of the authority of Christianity, he holds it to be the authority of Christ as Redeemer and elaborates this with great power.

Coming to the subject of the Church, Principal Forsyth warns against making the Church synonymous with organized work of a merely philanthropic kind. He presses strongly the view that a minister's first duty is to his Church and not to the world. He must make it a Church that acts on the world, but the minister acts at its head, and not in its stead. This is practically saying that the Church is the minister's force by which he is to influence the world; and he speaks rather scathingly of the people who make use of the Church but evade its responsibilities. The preacher must study his age, but he must take his theology from the Bible. That is the real source of light, the preacher must "take the sun" for himself, for what is the use of captains who are more at home entertaining the passengers than guiding the ship.

The whole book is full of these striking sayings, but space forbids any further review. Our aim was to call attention to the book rather than to discuss it at length. In view of the present discussion of Church Union, it is interesting to note what Dr. Forsyth says in one place and with this we must close. He is speaking of the value of vitality and says: "We interpret men and movements diversely, according to our supreme interest in life. No doubt sects and parties thus arise. But they are better than a unanimity of frozen thought like the Greek Church, or of imperious thought like the Roman."

Paris, Ont.

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We needn't be bothering our heads and troubling our minds about what our future is going to be. If we are wholly given up to God, he will lead us. Paul never marked out the path he was going to tread. Hold your reins loosely, and God will guide you.—D. L. Moody.

If we must have heroes and wars wherein to make them, there is no war so brilliant as a war with wrong, and no hero so fit to be sung as he who has gained the bloodless victory of truth and mercy.—Horace Bushnell.

AMENDED HYMNS.

By Rev. Joseph Hamilton, Author of "The Spirit World."

In the introduction to the Methodist Hymn Book John Wesley used to scathe all pretenders to emendation of his own or his brother's hymns. As a rule, such emendations are not fair, especially when the original author has gone. In some cases, however, a word—makes a wonderful improvement in the rhythm or the sense. Let me give two illustrations. Some days ago I was reading that fine old hymn commencing:

"When rising from the bed of death,"

The last verse struck me as very tender and sublime, yet in one important word as not being good English. The verse runs thus:

"For never shall my soul despair,
Of mercy at thy throne,
Who knows thine only Son has died,
Thy justice to atone."

The faulty word is "atone." Justice is not atone, it is propitiated. But the exigencies of rhyme required a word to rhyme with "throne," and so the author had to take the word "atone." But the verse on the whole struck me as being so good that I tried my hand at revising it without giving it a new identity. But the effort was fruitless, though I pursued the subject—or rather, it pursued me—into the silent hours of the night. But a surprise awaited me on the next morning. Not thinking of the hymn at all, I took up a hymn book, and opening it at random, I was confronted by the same hymn, with the imperfect verse amended exactly as I wanted it. The verse as revised runs thus:

"For never shall my soul despair,
Thy mercy to secure,
Who knows thine only son has died,
To make my pardon sure."

Now was this a coincidence—or what? The other case I would refer to requires only the alteration of a word. It is a child's hymn, and two lines of it are these:

"Guard the sailor tossing,
On the deep blue sea."

Here we have simply to deal with a matter of fact. The fact is that the sea, though normally deep blue, is not deep blue when the sailor is tossing on it. It is then foaming white, as anyone can attest who has been at sea in a storm. So the correct word is "foaming." Just see how the lines read with the substitution of this one word:

"Guard the sailor tossing,
On the foaming sea."

Lindsay, Ont.

We are bound to do the best we know, otherwise we are doomed to live with a consciousness of defeat. To ignore the "voice of the Highest is to walk in the way of death. As we rise to a realization of what is best in life, and as we have power and opportunity to do that best, then duty becomes fixed, and the ways of life and death part before us. It is just here that the matchless character of Jesus claims our choice: "I lived as man and tasted deepest tragedies, but in it all I found the worth and meaning of life. Come thou unto me and live." The life of Jesus challenges the race to live the overcoming life. Not from his lips alone, but from his masterful presence comes the vital imperative: "To love because he loved, and to give our lives for others because he gave his life for us." And this fact of Jesus Christ remains.—American Friend.