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E. W. TAYLOR,

South Side Queen Square, City.

What a Reporter Remembered of Forty Sermons*

It is told of a priest of the Boston diocese, who is now no more, that he was complimented by one of his parishioners on a sermon. The priest was curious to know what truth it was that made so deep an impression, but all his questioning elicited no reply. Finally the parishioner admitted that he remembered nothing of what was said. "But you see, Father," he urged in defence, "it's just like this. My wife puts my shirt in water, soap and blaine, and though none of those articles remain when the washing is finished, the shirt is far better off for it all. And so am I for your sermon, though I don't recall anything of it."

In many cases it must be sadly confessed that the Sunday morning sermon is like the Monday morning washing. The effects remain for some time in both cases, but the causes have evaporated. Yet the preacher is a teacher as well as a stimulant and is eager to have his lessons abide while they should also impart life and vigor in their delivery. Can one find out what it is in a sermon which will outlive the day of its preaching? Not fully, of course, because there are many strange survivals in memory as well as outside of it which seem to have no particular fitness entitling them to old age.

Still a voyage of discovery into the regions of the memory will disclose here and there some bit of land whether a tiny island of precarious volcanic origin or a more solid and greater continent not yet submerged by the waters of forgetfulness.

For several years, with a view to discovering the constituents of the surviving lands, a teacher of rhetoric has had his pupils write out three of their earliest recollections of sermon truths. The experiment showed much variety and yet some marked uniformity in the traits of remembered truths. Those interested may perform the experiment for themselves and see whether it corresponds with the results obtained by the study of a reporter's memory. Mr. Douglas made the rounds of the London churches and published his impressions of their preachers in the London Morning Leader. He afterwards gathered his remarks into a book called "The Man in the Pulpit." Here we may study the survival of the memory's fittest.

The material for the experiment is not wholly suitable. Mr. Douglas was not a normal listener. He stands on the sidelines, we may say. He has not thrown himself into the excitement of the game. He enters the church as the school-inspector does the class-room, not to learn with the docility and eager curiosity of a child but to examine and test and approve with the cold aloofness of a judge. Mr. Douglas is a journalist critic, and that renders him less suitable still as a listener. The journalist looks for the striking and arresting points, the spice for his readers. Mr. Douglas finally is a stylist of a pronounced type.

Maccusally offered up sacrifices to truth on the altar of balance. Mr. Douglas looks as though he would be equally unmerciful for the sake of a metaphor. It is certainly interesting and extremely diverting to watch him working and weaving a city, a church, a voice, a face, a person into the devious pattern of a metaphor. The result is fascinating; it is Swinburne in prose (Mr. Douglas intensely admires Swinburne); it holds the reader entranced as the man does who keeps some half a dozen sharp, gleaming knives whirling through the air, but when the breathless performance is over, the reader is tempted to say, "juggling."

The following passage gives us one out of many instances of the way Mr. Douglas likes to reduce a man or a scene to a common denominator: "Canon Barker's smile is a sermon, and his sermon is a smile. You realize that his face is carved out of joyous quietude. Its smooth surfaces are genial, untroubled. The small eyes twinkle contentment. The nose juts out with jovial bilisity. Every gesture is an incitement to a cheerful acceptance of life. The strained mouth drawn tight as a bowstring to battle with an inner tide of laughter that surges for relief. The man is an incarnation of optimism." Such writing is indeed stimulating and diverting, but it is fanciful and often strained. We admire the ingenious dexterity of Mr. Douglas; we are not convinced of the embodied risibility of Canon Barker or that his photograph would serve as a substitute for a joke column.

To give an example of the London reporter as a stylist, like Swinburne, we quote his description of the Man in the Pulpit. By James Douglas, London: Methuen & Co.

burne in his alliteration, like the Pickwickian jingle in his sentences, we may quote his description of Father Vaughan. The criticism is better than the style. "The sermon is simple, sensuous, passionate. Glowing eloquence poured hot from the heart. No notes, no manuscript. Well-built withal. A noble edifice of emotion harmoniously balanced and richly decorated with spontaneous phrase. No taint or trace of a metaphysical microbe, no pulpity, no pedantry. Lyrically free from the disease of thought. Throughout it throbs with the poignant pathos of Christ and Christians crucified. It is a bacchanal of repletuous agony and ecstatic anguish, a psalm of passion, joyous saturation of sorrow."

But to come to the question of what was remembered by Mr. Douglas. Despite his drawbacks as a listener, it might be said because of them, the experiment is worth making. Undereath the critic, the journalist and the stylist is human nature and the man in the pulpit found in this man in a pew, a heavenly armored, yet not impronogable listener. Even a reporter may on occasion be human and forget his profession.

Professors of the art of teaching tell us, and experience confirms their statements, that the teacher will make his pupils remember by repetition and novelty, or interesting presentation. Mr. Douglas confirms this truth. Rev. Silas Hooking had "reiterative amplifications of a simple phrase." "With the hammer of a phrase, he drives the nail of instruction into the board," says Mr. Douglas. Much of Father Vaughan's sermon too was hammered in by a refrain.

The first of the type of interesting presentation is the story. The example of this London reporter is hardly needed to prove that the story is a memory survival. Akin to the story are the facts and examples of history. Rev. R. J. Campbell, Father Vaughan, Monsignor Croke Robinson and others get parts of their sermons in the Morning Leader by their historical facts. Comparisons save others from forgetfulness and in that point the reporter's memory is like the more fallible memories of ordinary mortals. Comparisons are the next help for the memory. The simile is indispensable in the art of remembering sermons. "We have powder in our breasts," said Pastor Thomas Spurgeon, and we should probably never have known that way of describing our inflammable passions, had not the flattering wings of the truth been fixed in a distracted memory by the shining point of an epigram, here crowned with the jewel of a comparison. Rev. Archibald Brown combines epigram, example and comparison and has succeeded in being very much remembered. On the page of his text "he hangs a whole wardrobe of racy apophorems, quaint quips and homely parables." Canon Newbolt is an "epigrammatist" and proves his fitness to survive by many "flashing phrases," like "castles in the air for the imagination to dwell in are better than pig styes on the earth for sensuality to wallow in." Rev. J. H. Jowett unites many of the qualities already mentioned. His "delightful characteristic is his rich fertility of allusion and illustration, symbol and simile. He tells an anecdote with pungent humor, but his anecdotes are always apt and apposite."

So far, it might be said, it is external qualities which make the truth survive in the journalist memory. More important as preservers of truth are the internal qualities, Personality and sincerity, directness, absence of mere phrases, avoidance of rhetorical flourishes, these are qualities which the reporter brings on again and again, as qualities too which set the truth living and quivering into his memory with vital vigor enough to survive the crash at the door after the services. Here is one statement out of a hundred very like it: "Just as his eyes save his face from insignificance, so his enthusiasm saves his oratory from conventionality. Personality can remove mountains and there is a flame in Hensley Benson's voice which sets his words on fire. He believes in his religion, his Church, and in himself. That is the one thing that completes the circuit between the pulpit and the pew. Without it sermons are corpses."

Personality, however, has its dangers for remembering and Mr. Douglas has repeatedly fallen victim to them. He remembers the man better than what he said. Is not that true of most of us? Emotion is better than personality as a fixer of thoughts. Dr. Lorimer, the "famous New York preacher," is conspicuous for true feeling. "He does not read his sermons, and here I may say," writes Mr. Douglas, "that read sermons ought to be abolished. No, he preaches with fresh, not stale, emotions, and his words fall molten from his lips." Mr. Douglas is generous to the several American preachers he heard in London.

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Charlottetown, P. E. I., April 21, 1909—41

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48 Brook Road, Quincy, Mass.
Jan. 5, 1910—41