

The Trial Sermon.



OCCASIONALLY, when the need for a revision of the creed and other kindred subjects are being vigorously discussed about the Hall, we hear it said that the time-honored custom of demanding a trial sermon from each member of the final year should be modified. The popular sermon, as it is sometimes called, is decidedly unpopular with some of the stu-

dents. At Queen's, once during his course, the student conducts the entire devotional service in one of the city churches. On that occasion two fellow students in the class in Homiletics, with the professor, attend. One of the students reports to the class on the way in which the devotional exercises were conducted. The other takes as his field for criticism the content of the sermon.

In lieu of this, in past years some have urged that the trial sermon should be preached in the lecture-room with the class for a congregation. Advocates of this method hold that the student would feel more natural in speaking before his class-mates and would not be so sensitive to criticism. Others have expressed themselves in favor of having several sermons written out and handed in by each student to the professor of Homiletics, for correction and class discussion. In support of this method it is pointed out that the men in training would get more practice in sermon building.

The trial sermon certainly has its disadvantages. No one will deny that. To take the experience of one who recently preached his trial sermon, he had quite made up his mind that he would not allow himself to become nervous and that he would forget all about anyone in the congregation to criticize him. In spite of this determination, before the congregation was half through singing the first hymn, he had located three professors, both students who were delegated to criticize and many intimate friends. The knowledge that it is a trial sermon and that scores of people are there to see and hear how it is done so absorbs the mind that one cannot really get away from it throughout the service. When the experienced minister prays or preaches, he does so as if he were not thinking of himself or the way he is doing it but only of the petition or the message. That is what the student aims at. But can he attain to that aim in a trial sermon under existing conditions? He can not wholly forget himself. He cannot be free and natural.

On the other hand, the average student after the trial will admit that there are several advantages in this method. The experience of the "victim" must repeat itself once at least and possibly several times in candidating for a "call." The trial sermon, unique among others which he preaches, has many features in common with preaching for a call. Sometimes we say with meaning:—

"O wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursel's as ithers see us."
It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
And foolish notion."