

triumphs of intellect, as seen in the widow's mite cast into the treasury, in the box of ointment broken by the hand of prescient love on the Saviour's person, in the tears of penitence washing His feet; the mystery of human sorrow, the boundlessness of human aspiration, the blending grandeur and beauty of the Saviour's character, the power which belongs to the heart—to love—to apprehend and to verify the Gospel; these supply him with the lofty themes on which he discourses with marvellous force and eloquence. Without being formally and directly an argument for Christianity, these sermons are only the more really an apologetic of the most effective kind; one by which the faith of many a hesitating believer has been greatly strengthened. A brief quotation will be of more service than any description in enabling you to understand and appreciate this characteristic of the discourses of Vinet. "Humanity hath separated itself from God. The storms of passion have broken the mysterious cable which retained the vessel in port. Shaken to its base, and feeling itself driven upon unknown seas it seeks to rebind itself to the shore; it endeavours to renew its broken strands; it makes a desperate effort to re-establish those connections without which it cannot have either peace or security. In the midst of its greatest wanderings humanity never loses the idea of its origin and destiny; a dim recollection of its ancient harmony pursues and agitates it; and without renouncing its passions, without ceasing to love sin, it longs to re-attach its being full of darkness and misery to something luminous and peaceful and its fleeting life to something immovable and eternal. In a word, God has never ceased to be the want of the human race. Alas! their homage wanders from its proper object, their worship becomes depraved, their piety itself is impious; the religions which cover the earth are an insult to the unknown God, who is their object. But in the midst of these monstrous aberrations a sublime instinct is revealed; and each of these false religions is a painful cry of the soul, torn from its centre and separated from its object. It is a despoiled existence which in seeking to clothe itself seizes upon the first rags it finds; it is a disordered spirit, which, in the ardour of its thirst, plunges all panting into fetid and troubled waters; it is an exile, who in seeking the road to his native land buries himself in frightful deserts."

But these discourses are much more than a powerful argument for the Gospel; they are a singularly beautiful exhibition of its contents and of its spirit. They are the former mainly, indeed, in virtue of being the latter. They are not less adapted to transform a cold, inert faith into a devout and living homage than to conquer doubt or to replace unbelief by faith. They are distinctly evangelical, brimful of Gospel truth, but it is Gospel truth in its great principles rather than in its minute details—Gospel truth on its ethical more than on its doctrinal side, in its spirit more than its letter. And they are instinct throughout with warm Christian feeling. The emotion, indeed, is not loud and vehement, it is calm and repressed rather than stimulated; but it is there all the same; now tender and regretful, now elevated and joyous, always deep and healthful. The reader of these discourses feels himself to be in contact throughout with a man of broad views and of warm human sympathies. The harsh and narrow dogmatism which so often repels the enquirer on the threshold is conspicuously absent; but it is not replaced in Vinet's case, as in that of many preachers of liberal culture, by mere humanitarian ethics or weak sentiment. The cross, with all its offence, if with all its mysterious power of attraction, is there and is central, as it should be. "Stripped of the great fact of expiation," says Vinet, "and all that cluster of ideas connected with it, what I ask is Christianity? For ordinary minds, an ordinary morality; for others, an abyss of inconsistencies." Again: "It is not so much the Gospel that has preserved the doctrine of the cross, as the doctrine of the cross that has preserved the Gospel." "All the might, all the reality of Christianity in each Christian is there and only there. Even the lessons and examples of Jesus Christ, in order to become living and fruitful, require a ray darted from the cross."

But these discourses, marked by such uncompromising devotion to the distinctive truths of the Gospel, are worthy of our attention not only because of what they say, but even because of what they do not say. Their reticence itself is instructive. Rather desiring complete agreement with D'Aubigne, Gaussen and others of the Geneva school, in the details of Christian doctrine than actually attaining it, the preacher scrupulously abstains from statements which might present the appearance of a greater degree of accord with these distinguished exponents of evangelical thought than he had really reached. Indeed there is scarcely any feature in these sermons more marked, as there is none more worthy of imitation than their severe truthfulness, their prudent reserve, the determination of the speaker everywhere manifest to keep utterance well within the limits of conviction and of feeling. "We have forbidden our words," he says, "to transcend the limits of our personal emotions; an artificial heat would not be salutary." "Feeble, I address myself to the feeble, I give to them the milk which has nourished myself. When some of us become stronger than the rest, we will together demand the bread of the strong." Hence the entire freedom from cant, the naturalness, the wise and attractive reasonableness of the discourses composed in such a spirit; contrasting, oh, how strongly, with the wild extravagance, the vulgar exaggeration, the frank egotism which is displayed by more than one prominent pulpit of our day. Surely popu-

larity is purchased at too great a cost when it involves the sacrifice at once of the sacredness of the sanctuary and the self-respect of the preacher.

There is still another characteristic of Vinet's sermons too striking to be passed over even in this brief estimate; they are marked by a certain tinge of sadness—marked, not marred; it is in part even the secret of the charm which they have for the sensitive reader. For the tone of melancholy, if one must designate it by such a term, which pervades them, is that of a pure and gentle spirit saddened and chastened by the sight of human sin and human suffering. One has only to listen to its strains to confess their spell. "Every soul, doubtless, carries within itself a treasure of sorrow. It is even a condition of our nature that in all our joys, even the most intense, I know not what sorrow ever mingles, as in a song of gladness, a hollow murmur or a stifled groan. It might be said that the very voice of joy awakens in the depths of the soul a slumbering grief;" or again: "Life is passed amid temptations to joy incessantly repressed. Joy has moments, sorrow the whole of life. That is a moment of joy when a cherished hope is realized, that is a life of sorrow when we feel that the successive realization of all our hopes has not filled the infinite abyss of the soul. That is a moment of joy which gives us the smile of a beautiful day, the sun so pleasant to behold, the free development of any of our powers, the feeling of existence in the plenitude of health; that is a life of sorrow which hurries promiscuously to the abyss before us our good and our evil hours, our pains and our pleasures, nay more, our soul itself; for the thoughts and affections of which it is composed precede us to the tomb, while of all that we possess and all we have been we can retain nothing, no, not even our most cherished griefs. Or once more: "From the very sources of our happiness spring forth bitter sorrows. Our most tender attachments arm death with some of his sharpest darts; for although St. Paul has said with truth that the sting of death is sin, it is true that this sting multiplies itself and makes sharp points of all the flowers with which we deck our heads. Every crown of flowers, sooner or later, becomes a crown of thorns." And what depth of reflective thought, as well as tenderness of plaintive sorrow have we not in these words: "To blunt the sting of grief, time is better than pride; for time wears out everything. But it wears out the soul as well as all the rest. The power of forgetting is only a weakness. Life thus becomes less sorrowful, but it also becomes less serious, less noble."

It is almost unnecessary to add, after what has been said and what has been quoted that Vinet has found warm admirers in every country which his works have reached; not only in his native Switzerland, but in Germany, in France, in England and in America. His sermons are not indeed popular in the ordinary sense of the term. They are for the most part religious essays or meditations. They are made to be read and re-read. That is perhaps their defect as sermons. They have to seek and to select their audience, but they hold it without difficulty when once found. How indeed could it be otherwise with discourses which exhibit so rare a union of intellectual and moral excellence, such originality of conception, such depth of insight, such elevation of sentiment, such precision and beauty of expression, such wealth of imagination, such warmth of affection, such tenderness, such humility. Add to this a personality singularly bright and gentle, enriched with the best culture of France and Germany and adorned with "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," and it cannot surprise us that Vinet has won a very high place in the esteem and affection of thoughtful Christians in Europe and America. Years before I made my first visit to the continent of Europe he had passed out of life, but at one point and another—in a lovely chateau, the home of a refined Christian family, on the slopes of the Jura, and in the midst of a quiet Moravian community in Germany—I met those who had known the man as well as waited on his teaching, and had cause to note the warm and reverend affection with which they cherished the memory of his blending genius and goodness. For myself (if I may be permitted a personal allusion on this occasion) I confess I owe more to Vinet for intellectual stimulus and spiritual help than to any uninspired teacher.

LIDDON.

In passing from Vinet to Liddon we encounter many striking contrasts; the one philosophic and critical, the other authoritative and dogmatic; the one timid and self-distrustful, without the courage to open his mouth even once in the beautiful and spacious cathedral of his native city, the other to the last filling with his ringing voice and his stately periods the far larger St. Paul's; the one carrying conciliation to the verge of compromise, the other dogmatism to the verge of defiance. Each was in a manner true to his nationality; in the one the light touch, the airy brilliance of the Frenchman, in the other the vigorous directness, the robust self-assertion of the Englishman. In Liddon we miss the philosophic insight, the subtle beauty, the sweet persuasiveness of Vinet, but we find in him, on the other hand, a massiveness of thought, a grandeur of statement and an authoritativeness of utterance which Vinet cannot claim. Enquirers after truth will linger over the pages of the one—the mass, even of the thoughtful, craving, above all else, certainty in regard to spiritual things, will hang on the lips of the other, or, as death has now sealed these, will turn to the writings in which the author expresses his unshaken faith in the great Christian verities.

In addition to his great Bampton lecture on "The Divin-

ity of Christ," Liddon published from time to time several volumes of sermons, some of them preached in Oxford before the University, and others in St. Paul's Cathedral. Those in which, so far as my acquaintance goes, he is seen at his best are found in the two volumes entitled, "University Sermons" and "Some Words for God." But while naturally of unequal merit, they are all strong, and bating their sacerdotalism, true to Scripture teaching and strengthening to faith.

At the time of his death, a few weeks ago, Liddon stood by almost universal consent at the head of the English pulpit. Whenever it was known that he was to preach, the great cathedral was filled with an audience embracing indeed all classes, but in which there were sure to be found many men of liberal culture, and among them some of the leading intellects of the day. Young men of education waited with eagerness on his ministrations. Many Londoners had for years never missed an opportunity of hearing him; and his popularity seems to have continued without diminution to the last. What was its secret? No single explanation, we may be sure, will suffice. There must have been more than one element of power in the preacher who could attract and retain through so many years an audience so large and of such a character.

In accounting for this success we are safe in giving a foremost place to the prominence which the great and supernatural facts of redemption, and the doctrines which grow out of these facts, received in his preaching. These are not simply pre-supposed, argued, defended; they are proclaimed, and proclaimed with an authority which comes not from the speaker, but from God who has put His word into his mouth and with an enthusiasm which is born of his own assured faith in their verity. He is not a philosopher propounding a theory, not a critic enquiring into the truth of a system, not a mere moralist enforcing a code of ethics; he is first, and before all else a preacher, a man with a message which he has received, in which he believes, which it is his to expound and apply, but in any case to proclaim, and to proclaim in the very terms in which it has been given and with all the marvellous significance attaching to it. Not his to reduce by a single hair's breadth the vast proportions of the truth, not his to tone down the dimensions of the supernatural, whether as displayed in the Saviour's incarnation and Godhead or in the sinner's regeneration to newness of life; his rather to assert and to emphasize it, wherever Holy Scripture teaches him to find its presence, whether in creation or in redemption; sometimes, perhaps, as in its sacramentarian views to discover and assert its presence where it is not.

Liddon's preaching is thus distinctively doctrinal, even dogmatic. The great common places of religion,—God and eternity, sin and grace, redemption and atonement, death and judgment, are neither ignored nor thrown into the background. On the contrary they are constantly upon his lips. They form the staple of his discourse. The only effect on the preacher of the destructive criticism or of the impudent denials of the time—and it is unmistakable—is to compel a deeper and truer conception of these essential and eternal verities, to stiffen the grasp with which they are held, and to intensify the emphasis with which they are proclaimed. It should be added, as all important to an understanding of his success, that these verities, so often superficially viewed, assume a deeper significance, become invested with a more solemn grandeur, in the hands of this great preacher. Set in the light of his powerful intellect and glowing imagination, they are seen to possess larger proportions, to have deeper and wider implications in the principles of human reason and the facts of human experience, than had been previously discerned; while ever and anon there flashes out some allusive phrase, or some flaming metaphor, which at once widens and illumines the spiritual horizon, or opens out in it new and boundless vistas for thought and fancy to explore. As the result, the hearer is both confirmed in his faith in revealed truth and made to feel its possession to be a more than ever inestimable treasure.

I cannot doubt that these qualities in the sermons of Canon Liddon supply the main explanation of their wonderful power. Something no doubt was due to the speaker's fine presence, to his powerful and melodious voice heard distinctly at the farthest point in that vast building, to his passion born of deep conviction, to his massive and stately oratory, and to the unique and attractive personality, which was behind the words and lent them weight; but after due allowance has been made for all these it still remains true that what more than all else gave this far-famed preacher the power to attract and to retain his crowding audiences, was his strong grasp of the fundamental verities of the Gospel, his deep and devout insight into their meaning and the assured and assuring confidence with which he never ceased to proclaim them.

One point more, and we take farewell of Liddon. I have spoken of the vein of melancholy which is so frequently met with in the sermons of Vinet. A similar tinge of sadness appears, though perhaps less obtrusively, in those of Liddon. With all the strong, personal faith which they express, they cannot be spoken of as predominantly hopeful. There are frequently forthcoming in them, not only the sad vicissitudes of human life, its insupportable griefs, but also the weary struggle of the faith, its dark outlook, the possibility of partial and temporary defeat even, before the hour of final triumph. The sorrow, the unrest, the oft baffled endeavour of the age is again and again sympathetically reflected in the words and the tones of the great preacher; and just therein lay a part of his charm. You know the spell which is exercised over us by the pathos of the plaintive song, by the notes of the minor tune, even by the hues of the fading year. You know that that joy is ever the most attractive in which is heard a faint undertone of sadness, as that beauty is the most fascinating in which is seen a tinge of melancholy, such as all the great painters, therefore, have thrown into the face in which they sought to embody their highest conception of female beauty, that of the mother of our Lord. In any case, whether a part of their charm or not, a shade of gloom is an unmistakable feature in the sermons of Liddon, as it is indeed, also, in those of his great compeer; who does not feel its spell in his hymn, "Lead kindly light, amid the encircling gloom?" To him we now turn for a very brief period.

(To be continued.)