

NOTES

Sermons that Bore

Few preachers will admit that their own sermons bore but few will deny that there are sermons that bore. If we ask why sermons are sometimes soporific we may find an answer in certain remarks made by a New York Presbyterian minister who says:

"The great curse of the country to-day is uninformed preachers. People hear things in Church that they know already, and they are bored with the same minister and practically the same congregation forty Sundays in the year. It is necessary for the preacher to be informative and interesting. Many ministers and many pastors preach from hand to mouth and do not know on Monday what they are going to say the following Sunday. The weakest point is that preachers do not go deep enough."

To put it more briefly, if preachers thought that nothing was good enough, instead of thinking that anything was good enough for their congregation, results would be different, and slumberers less. Perhaps the remark of another critic is worth meditation: "Ministers generally preach too long. A mediocre sermon is bad enough if it is short; it is insufferable if it is too long." And may we be permitted to add that a badly prepared sermon is always too long by its own length. *Dabitur vobis* was said to the Apostles but not to modern preachers.

Benson's Historical Novels

In a note on Father Benson's novels the *Bombay Examiner* pays the following tribute to the historical fiction of this illustrious convert:

"These historical novels are quite equal to Walter Scott's novels in historical presentment as well as literary quality. A thread of Catholic principle runs throughout them. But the books are neither disguised theological essays, nor disguised sermons. Besides the historical realisation they afford of the period covered, their ethical effect is to enlighten the reader about the Church and the Catholic religion, and to cause Catholics to be proud of their faith and to feel stimulated to living up to it. Moreover, the books are convincing. There is no special pleading, no artificial or one-sided picturing. The Catholics are not all paragons of perfection, nor are the Protestants all monsters of obliquity. Realism or human nature as it is and not idealistic portraits faked for edification is a characteristic. Interest begins with the first page and is sustained throughout. There is all the sensationalism of plot and problem, everything which entertains and refreshes, informs and elevates at the same time."

Benson's Priests

Many readers have been not a little displeased by Benson's caricatures of his fellow-priests. It has been said, perhaps not without reason, that the son of the Archbishop of Canterbury was somewhat of a snob and that in his superior culture he was inclined to look down on priests who had not such an expensive education as his father gave him, while they probably were, in view of their calling, really more soundly instructed in the things that matter. The *Examiner* is inclined to be more charitable than Father Benson deserves in this connection:

"Sometimes he seems almost to wish to say nasty things; makes priests look rather squalid or ridiculous; even puts a tinge of repulsiveness into Catholic enthusiasms and devotions. One sometimes feels inclined to be disedified and resentful on this account. And yet there is no malice in it; and, I believe, a hidden good purpose. He has seen such things in real life, and feels that they might be usefully corrected; and so he slyly pokes fun at them, in hope that where the cap fits the right person will wear it."

We hardly think that apology clears Benson from all guilt in the matter. A reader's impression is rather that the priests he caricatures are regarded by him as types.

John Bannister Tabb

A poet too little known is the American priest, Father John Bannister Tabb, who has given us in two little volumes verses of wonderful quality and refinement. For more than thirty years Father Tabb taught English at St. Charles College, Ellicott. At the age of nineteen he saw service in the Confederate navy during the American Civil War. When peace came he taught for a while in an Anglican school, which he soon left in order to become a Catholic. As far back as 1884 he was ordained by Cardinal Gibbons, who remained his friend until death separated them for a brief span. His life as a priest was spent as a teacher, and toward the end he lost his sight. He was a shy, retiring man, brimful of quiet humor and fun. Once, during the years of his blindness, Bishop Curtis asked him if he had any wish that the Bishop might present to the Cardinal. "Yes," he said, "ask him to give me a *see*." On another occasion when compelled to refuse an invitation from Monsignor Mackin to attend the laying of a corner-stone for St. Paul's Church in Washington, he sent the following reply:

St. Peter is the corner-stone;
And if you build on Paul,
I greatly fear ere many a year
Your church is doomed to fall.
So pray excuse if I refuse
To heed your invitation,
Or have no heart to take a part
In such a Mackin-ation.

On another occasion it fell to him to invite Cardinal Gibbons and Bishop Foley to the college, and the invitation ran thus:

Dear Cardinal Gibbons:
With all your red ribbons,
Pray, lend us the light of your face;
And bring with you holy
John Michigan Foley
"Who hopes some day to be in your place."

He had the gift of satire, like most men endowed with a sense of humor, and the American policy towards the Philippines was hit off neatly in the following quatrain:

We have come to give you Liberty
To do what's'er *we* choose,
Or clean extermination,
If you venture to refuse.

His poems are as a rule short lyrics, showing a deep understanding of humanity and a love of nature. Like Francis Thompson he loved writing verses for children, and he had a marvellous facility in rhyme. He was a true priest, and he retained the heart of a little child to the end, so that when darkness came upon him during the last two years of his life he never lost the inner light that enabled him to walk cheerfully through a world that he saw no more.

SELF-DETERMINATION FOR IRELAND LEAGUE

A meeting of the local committee of the above league was held on the 19th inst., at the Hibernian Hall, Christchurch, for the election of office-bearers for the forthcoming year, and resulted as follows:—President, Mr. T. Cahill, Christchurch; vice-presidents, Mr. P. Ryan, Lincoln; Mr. J. Connolly, Rakaia; secretary, Mr. R. Kelleher, jun., Christchurch; treasurer, Mr. T. Cahill, Christchurch; committee—Messrs. J. McAnulty, Methven; B. McKenna, New Brighton; M. Grimes, Christchurch; W. Holley, Halswell; C. Barnett, Christchurch North; J. H. Gallagher, Rangiora. All the above were elected by acclamation, and after the business was transacted a vote of thanks was passed to the chairman.